Forgiveness Research in Africa: The Present Status and Future Prospects

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Abstract
The African continent has an extensive history of conflicts as some reports of unrest continue to plaque the continent. Given that much harm has been inflicted and the source of forgiveness through spirits of collectivism and ubuntu and through religious renewal is necessary. We conducted a qualitative review of the empirical research on forgiveness that has taken place in Africa between 1996 and 2014 uncovering 61 articles. We considered the authors of the articles (mixtures of Africans and western researchers), distribution of dates of publications (accelerating toward the mid-2000s, when it leveled off), methods (about half quantitative, half qualitative research), findings, and future prospects for continued studies of forgiveness in Africa. Generally, we found that no reviews of research existed. We also found that a high number of studies involved the South African Truth and Reconciliation process. In analyzing individual studies, few studies focused on historic wrongs, colonial oppression and fallout from colonial rule, tribal differences and perceived tribal injustices, religious conflicts (despite strong Christian, Muslim, and native religious involvement), and civil wars. In addition, few studies of in-group transgressions specific to African nations existed. We concluded that forgiveness research in Africa is in its infancy, and the doors are wide open to examining exactly what needs forgiving, how people have gone about it and are going about it, and how to promote forgiveness within different parts of Africa.

(175 words)

Keywords: forgiveness, Africa, conflict, peace, intragroup conflict, intergroup conflict
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Over the years, Africa has been the site of enormous exploitation, colonialism, political oppression, conflict, tribal tensions among indigenous people, and power struggles. On the other hand, the people of Africa are largely more collectivistic than are most Western countries despite the centuries of colonial rule. The spirit of Ubuntu, a sense of “we-ness,” characterizes much of African indigenous culture. In recent decades, religious interests have been high and, besides indigenous religions, Christianity has grown dramatically as has Islam. Hinduism, often more located in immigrant communities, has a strong presence as well.

Why Forgiveness and Forgiveness Research Matters in Africa

Both Ubuntu and religions promote forgiveness for wrongs done. Historically, most of the offenses have been long-practiced by colonial governing countries and tribal tensions, however other offenses continue or are perpetrated anew as leaders vie for power and influence. Powerful rulers of some African countries frequently impose harsh rule, stimulating resistance and civil war which causes suffering for its citizens. The inhabitants of these countries may take on various roles in these wars as some including children are conscripted, killed or wounded, or forced to kill or wound others. As a result, families are torn apart by wars and ethnic conflicts. In addition, conflicts negatively impact the economies of these countries (for example, trade and tourism become difficult), which leads to poverty and low Gross Domestic Product (GDPs). Furthermore, some political leaders engage in corruption, abuse their power, or may be perceived as uncaring or incompetent at managing the affairs of the countries by citizens. Taken together, these events set the stage for injustices and transgressions for which forgiveness may be beneficial. Nonetheless, some Africans may perceive the offenses committed as too egregious to forgive. The inauspicious history of Africa has derailed the growth of most countries in that
region despite being a continent rich in natural resources. This highlights the relevance of forgiveness research in an effort to reconcile wrongdoings.

Given the historical context of Africa, we might expect to find a plethora of forgiveness research from that region. However, there are reasons to believe that little research exist on forgiveness in Africa. In Northern America and Europe, institutions of higher education are the epicenter for producing research unlike in Africa where the main focus is on pedagogy. African universities produce less research due to a myriad of factors such as lack of governmental funding, fewer career opportunities and training in research and policies to promote growth in scientific research (Whitworth et al., 2008; Zeleza, 2002). Most countries in sub-Saharan Africa obtained independence from colonial rule over the last four decades. Therefore, attempts to reduce the literacy rate by creating more opportunities for primary and secondary education (Zeleza, 2002) increase the demand for higher education. Professors tend Most universities on the continent are government funded and as a result governmental funding may not prioritize research and/or cover the independent research expenses of university professors (Zeleza, 2002). Lack of resources (such as lab space, computer equipment, etc.) hinders research productivity. Academic assessments used in many African countries tend to be comprehensive and students’ grades comprise of two or more major examinations which is mostly assessed using essay questions unlike in the US for example where a student’s grade may consist of homework assignments, quizzes, class projects and exams. Hence, professors have to dedicate a substantial amount of time to lecture and grade integrative essay, which leaves little time for research.

The purpose of the present review paper was to summarize the research on forgiveness in an African context. In a subsequent qualitative review article, our intention is to condense the information gathered and critique the extant literature to create a review paper for publication in
a psychology journal. Thus, we sought to investigate the quantity and types of research conducted on forgiveness of harms—historic, political, and domestic, throughout Africa. An additional aim was to examine the regional distribution of research.

The Worldwide Context for Research on Forgiveness

Research on forgiveness has been a recent occurrence around the globe. Prior to 1998, McCullough, Baumeister, and Exline (1998) located 58 high-quality empirical studies of forgiveness. A grant initiative by the John Templeton Foundation in 1997 which resulted in 14 funding partners coming together by 2003, yielded a substantial surge in studies addressing the topic of forgiveness. A rough indication of the impact of that initiative and its aftermath is depicted in Figure 1 with PsychINFO hits each year from 1990 to 2014 for the search term forgiv*. We see that the rate of publication of forgiveness-related articles has increased at a rate greater than linear.

Defining Forgiveness

Forgiveness is one of many responses to the experience of an injustice. McCullough, Pargament and Thoresen (2000) defined it as a prosocial response to an offense that reduced the motivations to avoid or get revenge on the offender and promoted more benevolent motives toward the offender. Exline, Worthington, Hill, and McCullough (2003) distinguished between two types of forgiveness. Decisional forgiveness was defined as a behavioral intention statement to forswear revenge and to treat the offender as a person of value. Emotional forgiveness was defined as the emotional replacement of unforgiving emotions (i.e., resentment, bitterness, hostility, hatred, anger, and fear) with positive other-oriented emotions of empathy, sympathy, compassion or love).
In the present review, we identified research articles conducted within Africa. We summarize the status of the literature, and we make recommendations for a research agenda that specifically focuses on Africa-relevant issues.

**METHOD OF THE REVIEW**

We searched PsychINFO in May 2014, in November, 2014, and on December 31, 2014 using keywords associated with forgiveness (i.e., forgiv*, offense, apology, reconcile*), crossed with Africa. Articles were screened according to the following inclusion criteria. (1) They had to report either qualitative of quantitative research. (2) They had to involve samples collected within Africa. (3) They had to be published within the time framework of 2005 to 2014. We scoured in PsychINFO for articles that had cited each reference after its publication, and examined reference sections for other articles that the searches did not uncover. This produced a total of 61 research studies on forgiveness conducted in Africa. These were geographically distributed (see Table 1 for which studies were in each geographical region). The majority of studies were conducted in South Africa (n=36), reflecting the worldwide interest in apartheid and in the conduct, findings, consequences, and reactions to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The next group of studies were concentrated in Rwanda (n=7), reflecting the 1994 genocide and how the gacaca courts dealt with those offenses. Others were conducted in the Great Lakes Region of East Africa (and surrounding countries; n=9), which included Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda (n=1), Angola (n=1), the Democratic Republic of Congo (n=1), and in both Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (n=1). Two other studies encompassed a larger region of Africa (n=1) or the location within Africa was not specified (n=1).

**Data Extraction Strategy**
First, we examined some of the general findings from the body of literature. Second we reviewed specific studies on South Africa, which comprise the majority of the research studies. Third, we summarized the past literature conducted in Rwanda. Fourth, we summarized the research from the remainder of Africa.

**Time Flow of Publications**

The earliest study reviewed was in 1996 as research activity essentially began in 1998 with three publications. Over the next decade, the dissemination of research continued at a steady rate with an average of three to four publications per year. There was a substantial increase in research activity during a three-year period from 2006-2008 with a peak of 18 articles. After that, research activity has returned to the steady pace of three to four publications per year.

Table 1

*Forgiveness Publications per Year in Africa (and in Five-Year Increments)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Publications</th>
<th>Every 5 Years</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>2013</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
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</table>
Authorship and Methodological Diversity across Countries

Of the studies published 26 were quantitative empirical studies and 11 were qualitative empirical studies. In Table 2, we have organized the quantitative studies (n=25), quantitative meta-analysis (n=1), qualitative studies (n= 11), and theoretical and review articles (n=30) by date, within each of the categories. We also provided the nationality of the author(s) and sample size for each empirical study.

Most of the studies used survey data and applied a cross-sectional research design. Nineteen of the studies reviewed were theoretical articles and one article was a response to an earlier publication. Six articles reviewed various topics using qualitative literature review methods. One of the studies was a meta-analysis that examined effects of participation in the justice hearings such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions in South Africa (Beristain et al., 2010).

The empirical studies were mostly conducted by US scholars (n=18: 11 quantitative, 7 qualitative) and fewer South African (n=11; 9 quantitative and 2 qualitative) researchers. On the other hand, the review papers and theoretical articles were mostly by South African (n=10) and fewer USA (n=7) researchers. Research conducted by other African scholars ranged from across the continent. These included Rwandan (n= 2; 2 quantitative, 0 qualitative, 0 theory and review), Nigerian (n= 2; 1 quantitative, 0 qualitative, 1 theory and review), Tanzanian (n= 1; 0 quantitative, 0 qualitative, 1 theory and review), Namibian (n=1; 0 quantitative, 0 qualitative, 1 theory and review) and Algerian (n= 3; 1 quantitative, 1 qualitative, 1 theory and review) researchers. There were a number of European scholars who identified as Portuguese (n= 5; 2 quantitative, 1 qualitative, 2 theory and review), French (n= 3; 2 quantitative, 0 qualitative, 1
theory and review), German (n= 3; 3 quantitative, 0 qualitative, 0 theory and review), Northern Irish (n= 2; 1 quantitative, 0 qualitative, 1 theory and review), Swedish (n= 2; 0 quantitative, 1 qualitative, 1 theory and review), and Slovenian (n= 1; 0 quantitative, 0 qualitative, 1 theory and review). Two of the researchers were Australian (n= 2; 2 quantitative, 0 qualitative, 0 theory and review).

Table 2

Summary of the Methods of the Studies of Forgiveness in the Present Review—Quantitative Studies, Qualitative Studies, Meta-Analyses, and Qualitative Reviews (and Conceptual Articles)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author (Year)</th>
<th>Nationality of Author</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
<th>Qualitative Research</th>
<th>Quantitative Research</th>
<th>Meta-Analysis (MA), Reviews, Theory</th>
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</thead>
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<td><strong>Quantitative Research Studies</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Gibson &amp; Gouws (1999)</td>
<td>USA &amp; South African</td>
<td>3031</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kaminer et al. (2001)</td>
<td>South African</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gibson (2002) or (2006)?</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>3727</td>
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<tr>
<td>Smith et al. (2003)</td>
<td>USA and South African</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pham et al. (2004)</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>2091</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vora &amp; Vora (2004)</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Staub et al. (2005)</td>
<td>USA and Rwandan</td>
<td>194</td>
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<tr>
<td>Allan et al. (2006)</td>
<td>Australian and South African</td>
<td>134</td>
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<td>Kaminer (2006)</td>
<td>South African</td>
<td>20</td>
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<td>McCool et al. (2006)</td>
<td>Irish, South African, USA</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>Bayer et al.(2007)</td>
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<td>169</td>
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<td>Kadiangandu et al. (2007)</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>619</td>
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<tr>
<td>de Oliveira. (2007)</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stein et al. (2008)</td>
<td>South African &amp; USA</td>
<td>4351</td>
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<td>Gibson &amp; Claassen, (2010)</td>
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<td>4108</td>
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<tr>
<td>Study</td>
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<td>Status</td>
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<td>Green (2010)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neto &amp; Pinto (2010)</td>
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<td>??</td>
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<tr>
<td>Idemudia &amp; Mahri (2011)</td>
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<td>220</td>
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<td>Australian</td>
<td>202</td>
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<td>Schaal et al. (2012)</td>
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<td>269</td>
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<td>Reif et al. 2013</td>
<td>USA, Algerian, Portuguese</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>Bilali &amp; Vollhardt (2013)</td>
<td>USA and German?</td>
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**Meta-Analysis (Quantitative)**

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<td>Beristain et al. (2010)</td>
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**Qualitative Research Studies**

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<td>Brounens (2008)</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nqweni et al. (2002)</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramsey (2003)</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Byrne (2004)</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermeulen et al. (2006)</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rugira (2011)</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>??</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isakson &amp; Jurkovic (2013)</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Twose et al. (2013)</td>
<td>USA, Algerian, Portuguese</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kraft (2014)</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>71</td>
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**Reviews and Theory**

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<tr>
<td>De la Rey et al. (1998)</td>
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<td>Minow (1998)</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Skinner (2000)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilson (2000)</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurgan (2001)</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gallagher (2002)</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>Murithi (2006)</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>De Oliveira (2007)</td>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Urbsattis (2007)</td>
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</table>
RESULTS OF THE REVIEW

We organized the results of the review by country starting with studies conducted in South Africa, Rwanda, and all others, respectively.

South Africa

Getting Past Apartheid through Public Truth-Telling and Public Reconciliation

In an attempt to help South Africans heal from decades of apartheid unfairness, conflict, violence, abuse, oppression, and classism, Nelson Mandela established the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) during his term as president. The goal of the TRC was to provide opportunities for reconciliation between the victims and offenders. The concept was that by hearing the truth, people would be liberated from future bias, discrimination, racial and class conflicts, hatred, and unforgiveness. Also, the hope was that economic disadvantages would be minimized. Thus, three types of public hearings were established—those that dealt with (1) human rights violations for people who had experienced discrimination and harm or loss of a loved one and perhaps had lingering uncertainty about what really happened, (2) amnesty
hearings for perpetrators of crimes who had done so for political, not personal motives, who agreed to complete disclosure of their misdeeds, and (3) reparation hearings to decide on fair compensation for the losses people might have experienced.

**The impact and influence of the South African TRC and justice rituals.** Much of the research on South Africa focuses on TRC hearings—whether each type of hearing was fair and whether each type of hearing positively or negatively affected participants and viewers. Judgments of fairness seem to depend on which cultural or ethnic group the judge belonged to. While controversy still exists about the degree to which these hearings were beneficial, it is uncontested that some participants experienced positive outcomes. Nonetheless, specific questions surrounding the magnitude of the benefits and how much harm was experienced by the victims remain given the wide range of experiences.

The TRC hearings were almost always televised through one of the South African television stations, so the workings of the hearings and the findings were available publicly, which was in line with the policies set up by the Mandela government.

The government hoped that the human rights hearings would help people hear the stories of violations of human rights, in an effort to create transparency. Story-tellers were given the opportunity to freely provide information about what happened that might have been shrouded in secrecy up to that point. Because there were multiple storytellers, often victims learned much more than they had previously known about what had happened. In addition, victims were often given the opportunity (regardless of whether they sought the opportunity) to express forgiveness to their transgressors. The public aims by the South African government were ambitious—seeking understanding, a chance for catharsis by victims, an uncovering of truth, and a process by which fair reparations could be realized—and perhaps they were overly optimistic about the
benefits of these hearings. Arguably, regardless of the public hearings, South Africans would display a range of behaviors – some citizens may remain hostile, become enraged or hold grudges whereas others would be forgiving or channel their angry into political activism. Nonetheless, the public TRC hearings were attempts to shift negative attitudes to reflect of reconciliation.

The amnesty hearings had their own set of expectations. Participants who agreed to disclose the complete truth expected to receive leniency or to be granted full amnesty. However, definitional problems as to what characterized a politically versus personally motivated crime, made it difficult to assess the different crimes. Observers were content as they watched the hearing – they were conflicted as to whether the proceedings met the criteria for amnesty.

The reparation hearings held perhaps the highest expectations. Participants had the expectation that they would be awarded damages after sharing their stories. Others believed an assessment was in place for the offenders to pay for their transgressions. The expectations of the citizens were unrealistic and far outweighed the amount of money available for reparations. For many of the Afrikaners, a lack of awareness of the benefits of white privilege made it difficult to take responsibility for any wrongdoings. Therefore, they were less likely to see the need for retributions.

Thus, in many ways, the three sets of TRC hearings were bound to disappoint many South Africans. Nonetheless, these hearings set the stage for national healing as an avenue was created to start a dialogue about the deleterious effects of apartheid. Whether the benefits of these hearings outweighed the disappointments is an issue that will be long debated in South Africa and around the world.
Analyses of the effectiveness of the TRC. Many researchers have used a theoretical or conceptual approach to explore effectiveness of the TRC. Minow (1998) reviewed the challenges of South Africans as they confronted their painful past through the TRC and indicated that truth-telling was advantageous in reconciliation. Minow considered the roles of witnesses, perpetrators, and bystanders during the TRC trials and argued that the TRC process was important in overcoming a painful national history. Other writers have taken issue with the degree of reconciliation and democratization that arose from the TRC (Chapman & Spong, 2003).

Statman (2000) indicated that little attention has been given to analyzing the TRC as a system that enforces rules and defines proper interactions of testimony and discourse. In rectifying this gap in research, Statman (2000) examined the TRC in light of social psychology by including: (a) the role of positivist methodology in victim testimony, (b) the role and influence of Christian ideology, and (c) how the TRC proceedings influenced expressions of truth, using the case study of the Mandela United Football Club hearings. This analysis focused on an examination of the role of the TRC proceedings in reducing manifestations of anger and vengeance to facilitate forgiveness and reconciliation. Wissing and Temane (2014) also advocated for a systematic approach to understanding the functionality of the TRC. Wissing and Temane (2014) used certain principles from positive psychology to evaluate the impact of reconciliation on South Africa and its citizens on a personal level. Many studies have examined the impact of the TRC with mixed reviews about its success.

Success. Some have suggested that evaluations of the effectiveness of the TRC differ based on one’s cultural identification. In a correlational study, Vora and Vora (2004) investigated the overall perceptions of the success of the TRC in achieving its purpose. They
surveyed 158 university students within three South African ethnic groups (i.e., Xhosa, English, and Afrikaners) to determine their beliefs regarding the effectiveness of the TRC as a successful and effective judicial force. They collected (and analyzed by content analysis) descriptive data regarding the participants’ beliefs about the success (or failure) of the TRC’s two stated purposes: (a) bringing out the truth with regard to apartheid atrocities and (b) promoting reconciliation among the racially-divided country. All three groups of participants agreed that the TRC’s ability to bring about the truth was valid; however, the groups did not agree on the extent of the TRC’s success. English and Xhosa participants had similar perceptions and reported that the TRC was fairly effective. Afrikaners reported that the TRC hearings were unsuccessful. The three groups agreed that the TRC proceedings did not bring about reconciliation. The Xhosa perceived the TRC to be at least somewhat successful in promoting reconciliation, although the White and Afrikaner groups disagreed with this assessment. Overall, the Xhosa and English groups held synonymous beliefs about the TRC though substantially different from the Afrikaners. Group assessments of the TRC hearings was subjective as the degree of one’s vested interests influenced the outcome of their assessment. Thomas (2011) also found inevitable tensions in testimony. Not everyone agreed, even on the facts, much less their interpretation. Thomas suggested that there was still disagreement about whether repair and healing of the nation and its people had actually occurred due to the TRC.

Forgiving Violation of People’s Human Rights

Optimistic predictions of the TRC versus actual benefits. While most South Africans who observed the TRC hearings evaluated the proceedings. An alternative question is whether the participants actually benefitted from the human rights or amnesty hearings. As with judgments of fairness, controversy existed about whether participation in the TRC was beneficial
or harmful for victims who testified. Many researchers theorized about such benefits. Given that the stories of past trauma were mainly conveyed by women, they were integral to the TRC hearings. Gobodo-Madikizela (2011) stated that the collective voices of women played a pivotal role in the healing process as their stories brought healing and restoration to the TRC. Mothers, wives and grandmother alike interjected calls for forgiveness as they told their stories (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2011).

Stein (1998) discussed the importance of evaluating the psychiatric aspects of the TRC to determine whether recounting the past was therapeutic or harmful. Psychotherapists agree that a recollection of past abuse can be cathartic particularly when the victim feels heard and becomes empowered. While this is easier to manage in a therapeutic setting with as the therapist is trained to be an active listener, different effects are likely to occur in a public setting. Given that there was no formal assessment of the victims’ experience, it remains to be determined whether they felt heard. Stein suggested that a lesson learned from the hearings was that the victims displayed remarkable resilience in spite of the traumatic stress they encountered.

Qualitative studies such as those by De la Rey and Owens (2011), Skinner (2000), Nqeni (2001), Thomson (2007), Thomas (2011) provided support for the positive outcomes of the TRC. During the initial stages of the TRC process, De la Rey and Owens (1998) examined narratives from TRC testimonies to understand the effects of testimonies in promoting healing. Using thematic analyses of transcriptions from the testimonies and the TRC facilitators, the authors found out that storytelling, reparations, and support systems were significant to restorative process. Overall, De la Rey and Owens’ (1998) conclusions indicate that the TRC hearings were cathartic and benefited participants. Generalization of De la Rey and colleagues’ (1998)
findings should be met with caution given that this was a qualitative study, conducted in an urban setting.

In small, isolated rural communities, however, things might be a little different. Skinner (2000) evaluated the effects of TRC participation in two small rural communities in South Africa. Convenience sampling was used to select twenty participants with an attempt to gather a representative sample of males and females with variations in age, nature of trauma, and experience. Depth interviews were conducted prior to the TRC hearings, a week after the hearings, and five months after the hearings. In general, the TRC was viewed favorably among participants who noted that they believed the process helped their healing as well as advanced society. Participants did report any disappointment about the misperceptions of the role of the TRC. For instance, misperceptions that their reparations would be delivered in a timely manner or the amount of presence the TRC would have in the community. Skinner (2000) concluded that the TRC was the beginning of the healing process for South Africans.

Thomson (2007) examined significant intrapersonal effects on victims who testified at the KwaZulu-Natal TRC hearings. Open-ended interviews were used to collect data from 12 victims approximately one year after their testimony. Participants varied in their psychological experience as some described their experience as traumatic due to unmet expectations of justice for their perpetrators and lack of reparations for the victims while others experienced restoration. Victims experienced the greatest healing when perpetrators (1) took responsibility for their abuses instead of trying to justify their crimes and (2) offered a sincere apology or request for forgiveness. According to Thomson (2007), victims need to see their perpetrators offer an honest and transparent evaluation of the atrocities they inflicted on their victims. In the TRC proceedings, victims’ expectations differed from their transgressors’ apologies which lead
to dissatisfaction with the process (Byrne, 2004; Thomson, 2007) further perpetuating their emotional pain.

A cross-cultural study by Thomas (2011) focused on the experiences of victims who participated in the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia (ICTY) and South African victims of apartheid who testified in the TRC hearings. Thomas (2011) defined the victims’ experiences as a psychological fallout likely to produce short-term and prolonged negative effects.

The effects of political violence extend beyond the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim. In a qualitative study conducted by Nqweni (2002), unstructured interviews were used to evaluate the effects of political violence on the family unit. Participants included 22 individuals from 10 different families who did not participate in the human rights hearings. The results indicated that political violence negatively affected all 10 families as disintegration of the family unit was a common theme. Participants reported that they distrusted communities and the state, which negatively affected their families. In addition, the perceived absence of a helpful judicial system and alienation from political organizations had an adverse effect on participants’ lives. Nonetheless, the families had a positive perception of the TRC although their opinions varied.

Contrary findings—some people concluded that there was no effect or even negative effect of participating. Kaminer, Stein, Mbanga, and Zungu-Dirwayi (2001) studied the link between psychiatric conditions and attitudes about forgiveness as a result of participation in the TRC. Participants included 134 South Africans from the Western Cape who experienced a human rights violation as defined by the TRC. Participants’ psychiatric history were assessed and the Mini-International Neuropsychiatric Interview (MINI), Enright Forgiveness Inventory
were administered. Religious commitment was self-rated by participants. Traumatic experiences that did not meet the TRC’s criteria of a human rights violation were accounted for by using the Composite International Diagnostic Interview (CIDI). Findings revealed no significant association between TRC participation and current psychiatric conditions or forgiveness. Low forgiveness attitudes were associated with poor psychiatric health such as higher levels of depressive symptoms, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Despite theorizing about the helpfulness of testifying (see Stein, 1998) or qualitative assessments that placed the helpfulness in doubt (see Thomas, 2011; Thompson, 2007), actual measurement of people who testified showed that, on the average, there seemed to be no positive effects of testifying. Additionally, among those who professed forgiveness, on the average, were less likely to forgive was privately assessed. This supports distinctions between social communication (e.g., “I forgive you” and an intrapersonal experience of forgiveness (e.g., (Worthington, 2006).

Byrne’s (2004) findings were less supportive of participation in the TRC hearings. A thematic analysis was used to assess the experience of 30 Black residents from the Johannesburg area as they participated in the TRC Participants submitted in- person testimonies during the formal TRC hearings or provided their testimonies in written statement. Victims reported their level of personal involvement for example, whether they confronted their perpetrators as part of their public testimony as well as general feelings regarding their involvement in the process. Victims’ responses to their offenders’ attitudes about the human rights violations committed were also. Victim participation in the TRC resulted in some manifestation of stress on the body for an overwhelming majority of participants. Only a very small percentage of participants had an overall positive experience. Few victims reported sensing regret on the part of their
victimizers for the human rights abuses they inflicted. Overall, victims had deep dissatisfaction after participation in the TRC process.

**Delayed memory of participation—distance makes the heart grow fonder.** Long after the hearings had passed, Van der Merwe and colleagues (2006) assessed the retrospective evaluation of the impact of story-telling using qualitative methods with two small samples of survivors whose human rights were violated. In the first study, Van der Merwe, Venter, and Temane (2006) investigated the impact of storytelling on those who suffered human rights abuses during the apartheid era. Seven Black South African apartheid survivors were interviewed and thematic analysis was used to examine the data. The effects on victims telling their stories was positive in several areas: (a) an attitude characterized as positive, (b) a sense of accepting the past and a desire to move forward toward a more positive future, (c) personal awareness of their own individual strengths, (d) an ability to forgive, (d) deeper and more positive relationships with family and friends, and (f) the ability to overcome racial prejudice toward the White race as a whole. Van der Merwe and colleagues (2006) suggested that more public storytelling could lead to more widespread positive effects among other apartheid survivors.

Another qualitative study by Vermeulen, Venter, Temane, and Vand der Merwe (2006) examining the experiences of Black South Africans revealed positive attitudes towards Whites. Specifically, participants also noted that they did not believe that all white people are bad given that they had moved beyond past wrongs committed against them and developed an increased awareness of their own strengths. Finally, participants reported that they had found forgiveness and were able to begin a dialogue with family and friends. Overall, participants were able to recognize a positive change within themselves and others.
In general, we might summarize these limited studies by noting that, although positive outcomes were anticipated from the TRC testimonies, some participants experienced delayed benefits as seen by an increase in forgiveness and other mental health variables. Other studies report negative effects from the TRC hearings, especially participants who felt blamed for human rights violations. Nonetheless, the advantages appear to have outweighed the disadvantages although notably, this body of research consists mostly of qualitative research and sample sizes.

Perceptions of victims who had been detained, tortured and testified in human rights hearings. Others approach the question of the effectiveness of the TRC with regards to the effects on victims who had been detained and tortured prior to their testimonies during the human rights hearings. The gruesome treatment of these victims is suggestive of more negative consequences such as poor psychological health and physical health. Kagee (2006) examined the effects of 148 literate victims after testifying. Kagee (2006) tested whether former political detainees who gave a recorded testimony to the TRC about their persecution later experienced fewer psychological problems than their counterparts who abstained from TRC participation. Analogous to findings from Kaminer, Stein, Mbanga, and Zungu-Dirwayi (2001), Kagee (2006) found no correlation between psychological problems and participation in the TRC, and no differences between participants and those who did not testify.

The TRC hearings were also criticized for the public pressure to forgive and reconcile. Kaminer (2006) examined whether the personal interaction apartheid victims experienced with members of the TRC during their testimony, directly influenced their ability or decision to forgive. Forgiveness was measured using the Enright Forgiveness Inventory and both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to analysis the data. Although, participants’ potential for
forgiveness varied across a wide spectrum, victims typically fell into one of two categories; forgiving and unforgiving. The respondents in each category had synonymous characteristics. Female participants were more likely to be classified as unforgiving, particularly if they experienced the murder of a family member. On the contrary, men were also more likely to have talked to about their personal human rights abuses during their TRC testimony. Contrary to public opinions, participants indicated that they were not pressured into forgiveness. However, high forgivers were provided with more opportunities to discuss their experiences relative to low forgivers. Kaminer (2006) acknowledged the need for more rigorous research in this area since the study consisted of a small non-representative sample of South Africans.

**Perpetrators Role in Whether Victims Can Forgive**

**The impact of TRC amnesty hearings on both participants and non-participants.**

Stein (1998) called for closer study of perpetrators and of societal factors that influence the prevalence of psychopathic behaviors. A study by Gibson and Gouws (1999) examined the degree to which the South Africans ascribed blame to perpetrators of human rights violations when political beliefs are the motivating factor for such abuses. The TRC had adopted a stance that human rights’ offenders whose actions were carried out as a result of their political convictions (or under political pressure from superiors) were less culpable than perpetrators whose impetus for acting was due to personal gain. By surveying 3,031 racially and ethnically representative South Africans, Gibson and Gouws (1999) sought to determine the degree to which South Africans’ perceptions matched that of the TRC. While the TRC focused on the political (versus personal) nature of offenses in deciphering the recipient of amnesty, the citizens of South Africa placed emphasis on the power of the perpetrator when attributing blame. The highest degree of blame was ascribed to perpetrators driven by hatred, who held decision-making
power and influence to carry out or coerce others to commit human rights crimes. Perpetrators who act at the command of more powerful individuals were perceived to be the least culpable of perpetrators. There was also a positive association between the severity or extent of blame ascribed and the severity of the crime committed such that more blame was attributed to more serious crimes.

In a theoretical article, Gobodo-Madikizela (2002) investigated the role of forgiveness in the aftermath of gross human rights violations committed during the apartheid era. Eugene de Kock, a colonel of the apartheid government and arguably its chief assassin who apologized for his role in over 100 apartheid atrocities, is an example of perpetrator of mass human violations (see Gobodo-Madikizela, 2003). Gobodo-Madikizela (2002) argued that perpetrators can be humanized by their own genuine remorse since they are perceived as having failed their moral obligations. As such, the perpetrators’ remorse serves as a catalyst for forgiveness.

Van Dyk (2008) focused on those serving in the South African National Defense Force (SANDF), in the immediate post-apartheid era. He argued that the nature of daily duties brought members of the SANDF into frequent contact with circumstances characterized as traumatic. Such experiences cause them to experience negative feelings such as bitterness, unresolved anger, and rage. Potential effects of forgiveness on SANDF members were evaluated, and van Dyk further suggested processes for leaders in society to help implement an overall attitude of forgiveness within the SANDF organization.

Several articles reviewed other studies regarding some aspect of perpetrators of human rights violations. Ramsey (2003) explored the impact of being publicly forgiven and granted amnesty, on six convicted human rights abusers in South Africa. All six participants publicly confessed human rights violations at TRC trials and they were granted amnesty. In addition,
several interviews were conducted with the perpetrators. Ramsey (2003) explored commonalities in participants’ experiences in receiving public forgiveness and amnesty and in how the public forgiveness affected their lives. The findings indicated that the experience of receiving forgiveness and amnesty resulted in feeling accepted, both intrapersonally and interpersonally as it positively influenced perpetrators’ ability to exercise self-forgiveness. Furthermore, receiving amnesty led to feeling redeemed, which in turn resulted in an acceptance of the future as an opportunity for living a life undefined by their past crimes. Two of the men actively sought reconciliation with those they abused, as a result of the forgiveness shown by their victims. Ramsey (2003) described the changes occurring as dramatic transformations since the perpetrators received public forgiveness and were granted amnesty. The offenders who engaged in human rights violations had caused detrimental psychological and emotional effects to themselves. The cultural concept of “Ubuntu” (human equality based on the concept of respecting others’ humanity) had far-reaching positive effects on the perpetrators, because the concept allowed for reconciliation on three different levels: (a) between the offender and victim, (b) the offender and himself or herself, and (c) the offender and society as a whole.

**Personality predictors of which South Africans forgave.** Idemudia and Mahri (2011) examined predictors of willingness to forgive among 220 citizens from the North West Province of South Africa, 132 females and 88 males. Participants ranged from the ages of 18 to 68 years and several demographic variables such as age, gender, religious affiliation and personality variables were collected. The results indicated that of that the personality trait, extraversion was a positive predictor of willingness to forgive, making them more willing to forgive. Participants with a post university education reported an increased willingness to forgive, signifying that
people who are more educated are more open to forgiveness. None of the other demographic variables was a significant predictor of forgiveness (Idemudia & Mahri, 2011)

**Human rights violators in South Africa.** Fourie, Gobodo-Madikizela, and Stein (2013) analyzed the typical characteristics of human rights violators in society. They discussed the processes best suited to counter the negative psychological effects of apartheid victims. Their conclusions posits that a thorough comprehension of both the psychological and biological factors involved in human empathy may provide a better understanding of the aforementioned topics and provide processes for averting potential human rights violations in the future.

**Amnesty in South Africa.** Gibson (2002) investigated the moral judgments South African citizens hold to be true regarding the concepts of amnesty and fairness. A group of 3,727 South Africans reflective of the racial makeup of the country participated in the study. Questionnaires and personal interviews were used to measure each groups’ perception of amnesty, specifically amnesty granted to human rights abusers during the apartheid era. While most were not opposed to amnesty, the majority of South Africans believed granting amnesty was unfair to surviving victims and the deceased. While less than the majority of White, Coloreds, and Asian South Africans approved of amnesty, Black South Africans were more likely to approve. Across all races, most agreed that amnesty is a necessary evil. Receiving a genuine apology was attributed to a more positive perception but not so much as whether or not the victims’ families were compensated. However, it was more important to participants that the family’s voice was heard during the TRC process than it was that they receive compensation. Retribution did not seem as important to participants than simple compensation. Racial differences indicated that Black South Africans and Asians differed in that Asians were more likely to view the outcome as fair to the families of the victims. Asians were less likely to be
influenced by their perceptions of the apology and the justice of the proceedings in comparison to Africans. White South Africans judged the outcome as fair and were not as influenced by their perceptions of compensation relative to Black Africans. Whites were also less impacted the manipulation of the apology (Gibson, 2002).

**Mixed Samples of Respondents**

**Effect of participating in the TRC—mixed respondents.** McCool, Du Toit, Petty, and McCauley (2006) examined cultural understandings of healing in post-apartheid South Africa as well as variants of the healing process prevalent among TRC participants. Researchers collected data from TRC testimony records and unstructured interviews from victims, commissioners, and NGO personnel. Thematic analysis revealed frequent mention of suffering, with most instances referring to physical pain. Victims commonly reported severe negative psychological effects that were emotionally upsetting. TRC participants of all backgrounds perceived healing as a necessary experience for the country as a whole. The most common types of healing were classified into three groups, namely; story-telling, reparations, and support systems. Although some very influential TRC participants advocated for financial reparations as being pivotal to the success of the healing experience, research data revealed the most powerful element involved in the efficacy of healing was support. This included emotional and mental health support, faith and God, and close friends and family.

Van Heerden (1996) advocated for the establishment of a Truth Commission for doctors based on several arguments. The premise of these arguments were that the apology offered on behalf of all doctors for the various ways in which the industry supported apartheid was unsatisfactory as many individuals in the profession participated in apartheid victimization on a deeper and personal level. Van Heerden (1996) argued that it is necessary to implement
procedures to correct such human rights violations to prevent similar abuses in the future. Further, Van Heerden (1996) called for the implementation of a procedure to include truth-telling, forgiveness, and reparation and, theorized that such a procedure would have positive results on physicians and dentists alike.

**Forgiveness in South Africa: Measuring victims and perpetrators.** Of the articles and studies surveyed, over half involved aspects of recovery in post-Apartheid South Africa, at the personal and societal level. Allan, Allan, Kaminer, and Stein (2006) examined the relationship between offenders’ attitudes about their perpetration of human rights violations and victims’ forgiveness attitudes. Participants’ ages ranged from 25 to 86 years and consisted of 134 men and women. The participants were chosen from several Black communities in Western Cape Province who had experienced human rights violations during the apartheid era. The results revealed that most victims were unforgiving towards their transgressors. However, a majority claimed to have *started* forgiving those who victimized them. The study revealed a small positive correlation between apology and forgiveness as victims who received an apology from their perpetrators were more likely to forgive them. Perpetrators who made excuses for their crimes in place of an apology, were less likely to be forgiven by their victims. However, a plurality, nearly 45% of participants who did not receive any communication from their perpetrators believed their victimizers were earnestly sorry for their abuses. Overall, males were more likely to forgive than their female counterparts.

**Reconciliation and Nation Rebuilding**

**What predicts reconciliation in South Africa?** A study by Kraft (2014) explored reconciliation factors between perpetrators and victims in South Africa. Further, the study provides an explanation of what is required for successful instances of reconciliation between
perpetrators and their victims interacting during TRC hearings. Participants included 34 human rights offenders and 37 victims who testified during TRC hearings. Thematic analyses revealed several prerequisites necessary for reconciliation between the two parties. Both perpetrator and victim alike had to meet certain guidelines during their interaction for the reconciliation to be deemed successful. Reconciliation was successful if perpetrators met four main criteria: (a) being fully forthcoming in their confessions to their crimes, (b) conveying genuine regret that was discernible by the victims, (c) stating and giving evidence of willingness to take ownership of their crimes without excuses, and (d) acknowledging clearly the horrors they inflicted on the humanity of their victims. Reconciliation was considered successful if victims: (a) accepted that they (i.e., the victims) often considered the magnitude of crimes committed to be more serious than did offenders, (b) accepted that there might be “multiple truths” about reality of the situation, and (c) understood that perpetrators often felt that they had no power not to perpetrate violence. Ultimately, the role of perceptions of reconciliation and forgiveness is key in understanding the restorative process.

**Nation-rebuilding after apartheid.** Urbsaitis (2007) approached the topic of nation-rebuilding with an exploration of a working definition of reconciliation. Arguing that a definition of reconciliation should come from the perspectives of clients of South African NGO’s, Urbsaitis sought to understand why, after years of liberation and reconciliation work, marginalization of particular groups in South African society continues to exist. Urbsaitis (2007) recommended policy changes in NGO programs for successful reconciliation at the national level.

Stein, Seedat, Kaminer, Moomal, Herman, Sonnega, and Williams (2008) investigated the impact of the TRC on forgiveness and psychological distress using a correlational study. They also examined perceptions of the TRC’s effectiveness as well as perceptions of victims’
testimonies at the TRC. Participants included a national sample of 4,351 South African adults living in either houses or hostels. The participants were interviewed for 3.5 hours and these interviews were conducted in seven languages. The study had a response rate of 85.5% and used measures such as the South Africa Stress and Health Study (SASH) measures of forgiveness, anger, and psychological distress. The majority of the participants were witnesses who provided testimonies to inform the TRC hearings. A handful of the participants actually participated in the TRC hearings. Higher psychological distress was associated with a negative TRC experience as well as a negative view of victims’ testimony. Respondents were asked to report notable experiences during their TRC hearings. These experiences were associated with higher psychological distress. Blacks, females with a lower level of education, and unemployed respondents were more likely to have higher levels of psychological distress. Higher levels of anger were associated with greater attendance at and more negative perceptions of the TRC. Younger respondents (relative to older ones) and female (relative to male) respondents reported higher levels of anger. Blacks reported higher anger than in other racial backgrounds. Whites with higher income were more likely to have negative perceptions of the TRC proceedings. Male respondents and younger participants were more likely to make positive attributions to the TRC hearings as were participants who were married and employed. Predictors of distress included TRC participation and perception of victims. Whites had a less positive view of TRC victims as did older individuals. Respondents exposed to media reports of the TRC reported greater levels of forgiveness while those who were a part of the TRC hearings indicated low levels of forgiveness of others. Participants who perceived victims’ and perpetrators’ testimonies in a positive manner reflected higher levels of forgiveness.
Other research regarding the TRC focuses on the TRC’s influence and effect on societal reconciliation and nation-rebuilding. Kurgan (2001) discussed three historical examples to examine processes that lead to reconciliation in societies with a history of severe human rights atrocities. These examples include: (a) The TRC in South Africa, (b) slavery and reconciliation in the United States, and (c) a 1999 conference on reconciliation between the descendants of Nazi leaders and the descendants of Holocaust victims. Kurgan (2001) examined forgiveness on both group and individual levels and made recommendations for processes that contribute to restoration and forgiveness among members of society.

Several researchers have examined factors for nation-building in African countries and across the world. A theoretical paper by Veale and Hamber (2010) discussed interrelated topics associated with nations faced with the monumental task of rebuilding their societies after civil conflict, government oppression, or war-related trauma offers. The authors offered guidelines for societal and governmental leaders. Recommendations include prioritizing psychological health as leaders implement change. Therefore, to achieve justice, it is the community’s responsibility to both prosecute perpetrators for human rights violations and help bring victims to a place of restoration and positive psychological health. This involves a two-phase process: (a) acknowledging the reality and the lingering effects of trauma related to abuse and (b) helping victims engage in effective processes that serve as a catalyst for restoration. The psychological needs of citizens should both be at the individual and society levels as a country transitions from periods of conflict to restoration.

Stein, van Honk, and Ellis (2013) suggested that the expediency of the governmental, societal, and cultural changes in South Africa make it particularly useful for exploring conceptions related to both revenge and forgiveness. They argued that, although some
hypotheses posited by McCullough, Kurzban, and Tabak (2013a, 2013b) in an article on the evolution of revenge and forgiveness (2013a) and response (2013b) are supported by occurrences in the immediacy of the post-apartheid era (i.e., apology facilitates forgiveness; for a meta-analysis see Fehr & Gelfand, 2010), they are insufficient to explain the actual occurrences in the society of South Africa (i.e., women were less willing to forgive than were men, not more willing as prior meta-analyses found). The article argued for more comprehensive studies with more exhaustive explanations related to revenge and forgiveness.

The majority of the past research from South Africa is concentrated around reconciliation and reconstruction and improving race relations. Höglund and Sundberg (2008) sought to understand the role of sports in societal reconciliation and reconstruction. Specifically, the authors examined the impact of sports in the immediate aftermath of the apartheid era. Höglund and Sundberg (2008) evaluate both the positive and negative aspects of sports to demonstrate the application of sports in facilitating reconciliation. The authors suggest methodologies for employing sports to bring about societal and governmental restoration in countries recovering from conflicts related to war and ethnic strife.

In an attempt to better understand incidents of severe societal conflict, Zagar (2010) examined the apartheid conflicts and conflicts on the Balkan Peninsula. These analyses led to the conclusion that that current concepts of societal reconciliation is incongruent with reality, emphasizing the importance of redefining reconciliation.

Several studies examined race relations in South Africa. Smith, Stones, and Naidoo (2003) followed up their previous study from 1999. In their initial study, participants consisted of 180 Black, 89 colored and 432 White South African adolescents with a mean age of 15.6 years. The subsequent study conducted four years later, was established to determine whether the
changes in South African society influenced the racial sentiments of young South Africans. Although the participants in 2003 were college students, they were recruited from a comparable age cohort. Measures included the Anti-White Scale, Subtle Racism Scale, and Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measures. In the follow-up study, all groups exhibited a positive identity and showed a moderate tolerance toward those outside their ethnic group.

Another study with an adolescent sample sought to understand the experience of South African adolescents. Tihanyi and du Toit (2005) examined the contributions of racially integrated schools in promoting racial reconciliation. Through questionnaires, discussions, and personal interviews in Cape Town area high schools, which represented a wide array of socio-economic echelons, The 247 high school students were categorized into one of four categories: (a) internal segregation, (b) colorblind multiculturalism, (c) denial, and (d) involuntary exclusion. Schools categorized as internally segregated revealed high levels of racial tension, which occasionally manifested in physical altercations. Differences in language re-enforced years of racial segregation. The colorblind multiculturalism category consisted of a white majority, a Black middle class, and Colored and Indian minorities. In these schools, language that promoted diversity and multicultural values was held in high esteem. Tihanyi and du Toit (2005) concluded that these schools demonstrated a subtle form of segregation, even though racial tension and violence were practically non-existent, because students remained racially divided during free times. Furthermore, students and educators alike seemed afraid to address racial issues. Only one school was classified in the third category, denial. Its majority was White, and located in a high socioeconomic status neighborhood with a small group of Colored and Black students. Students were more open than in any other schools in sharing their feelings about racial tension, but seemed oblivious to any such tension in their own daily lives. In the
fourth category, involuntary exclusion, Blacks’ attitudes toward their White counterparts varied from prejudiced anger to ambivalence. Researchers claimed racial tension in this school was a result of a history of discrimination and social oppression during the apartheid era.

Bornman (2006) examined the relationships between national pride, the importance of national symbols and cultural ideals, and the sense of belonging to a particular cultural or ethnic group in the post-apartheid era. All of South Africa’s provinces and diverse ethnic groups were represented in the 2,128 people who participated. The participants’ ethnic and socio-economic group was determined by their language. The study revealed Afrikaans-speaking Whites showed consistently high levels of national pride, placed great emphasis on their cultural ideals, and placed the highest level of importance on their group identity. Indian/Asian and Shangaan/Tsonga participants also showed strong group affiliation and assigned less significance to the five national symbols on the questionnaire, including the country’s national anthem. While the majority of the participants surveyed showed high degrees of South African pride, the South African Constitution (Bornman, 2006) was the national symbol to have positive associations.

Apartheid’s effect of race relations is indicative of the importance of examining interracial interactions after post-apartheid era. Gibson and Claassen (2010) investigated changes in both interracial interactions and attitudes about race in South Africa over a decade after apartheid. Survey respondents were collected from four racial groups: the country’s Black majority, and three minority groups, Whites, Coloreds, and those of Indian origin. Participants were a representative sample of 4,108 South Africans from different racial backgrounds. Findings from the three-year study revealed that contact with other races did increase; however, the significance of the impact of such interaction varied among all four racial groups. The most
obvious change occurred among Black South Africans, who demonstrated obvious and increasing hostility toward their White counterparts. Interviews indicated that many did not try to hide their prejudiced views. However, Black South Africans showed higher levels of reconciliation toward their counterparts of Indian origin. Race relations between White South Africans and those identifying themselves as Colored South Africans showed no significant changes in attitude toward one another over the course of the three-year period. The three years between studies revealed a trend among all four groups of increased interracial friendships. There was a positive correlation between racial reconciliation and interracial interaction outside work and professional life, but only for the White, Colored, and Indian South African groups—not Black South Africans. Such interracial interaction was not an influential factor of racial reconciliation for Black South Africans. Many of them continued to have negative feelings about reconciliation. In conclusion, Gibson and Claassen (2010) proposed that importantly, among Black South Africans, race relations were defined as positive solely in trusting and intimate relationships with Whites. Evidently, the plethora of past research on forgiveness focuses on South Africa. Nonetheless, Rwanda’s history presents its share of opportunities for research in this field.

**Rwanda**

**Post-Genocide Rwanda**

In 1994, the world was shocked when, in 100 days, over three-quarters of a million Rwandans were killed by others in their country. The division of African countries by colonial rulers, separated Rwandans into two main tribes; Tutsis (with more European shaped features) and Hutus (with more stereotypical African features). These divisions continued to exist after colonialism, separating the two groups. As a result, tribal tensions intensified. Eventually, tribal
tensions lead to ethnic genocide as the Hutus hunted and killed Tutsis. Class differences magnified these tribal differences. The Tutsis often ruled and were economically better off than most Hutus. When the violence erupted, pent up frustration and class anger led to multiple murders. Eventually, President-to-be Kagami led troops into Rwanda and halted the violence.

Numerous books reported on the difficulties of individual Rwandans who were hunted, and most of whom lost many family members. Others described miraculous survival stories, while some books described the bravery of some Hutus who hid Tutsis at their own peril. However, little research has been published on the events of the 100 days during which the mass murders took place. We examine the literature on Rwanda to gather a better understanding of the tribal tensions and genocide between the Hutus and Tutsis.

Of the articles reviewed, seven included studies on Rwanda. One dissertation study in Rwanda by Rugira (2011) examined cultural conflicts in the Great Lakes region of Africa. Rugira used qualitative methodology to shed light on the ethnic violence. Factors such as extremist ideology, weak state governments and institutions, low levels of education, an abundance of natural resources, and structural poverty led to violence in that region. Rugira (2011) concluded that strengthening these factors could help resolve the ethnic conflicts between the Hutus and Tutsis. Rugira advocated for the involvement of state institutions as mediators of reconciliation.

Pham and colleagues (2004) sought to examine the long-term psychological fallout from this mass killing. They interviewed 2,091 participants from four communes about their attitudes towards judicial processes and reconciliation. Specifically, Pham et al. asked about the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), gacaca trials, and the Rwandan national trials. Participants reported more support for gacaca trials and national trials than for the ICTR.
This may be because the gacaca trials were community based and therefore participants were more involved than in the ICTR. However, higher cumulative trauma exposure was associated with (1) negative attitudes regarding the Rwandan national trials and the gacaca trials, (2) positive attitudes towards the ICTR, and (3) negative attitudes towards nonviolence, interdependence, and community. Those with more education reported less positivity regarding all three judicial processes and were also less likely to support community and interdependence. Participants who believed the economic situation had improved since 1994 were more likely to support the Rwandan national trials and the gacaca trials than were those who believed the economic situation to have worsened.

Staub (2005), who had long-studied mass killing and genocide in the holocaust, studied how to promote healing within Rwanda. He conducted both a survey and intervention study. Staub, Pearlman, Gubin, and Hagengimana (2005) conducted an experimental study using groups to explore healing, reconciliation, forgiveness, and prevention. Staub et al. hypothesized that immediately after the group intervention, trauma symptoms may worsen. However, he hypothesized that over time, such symptoms would decrease and the Hutu and Tutsi groups would begin to develop a connection to the other’s group. Rwandans (N=194) were recruited from rural communities; 90 percent of them had lived through the Rwandan genocide. The inclusion criterion for the study was people with current trauma-related difficulties. Given that most of the participants presented with literacy problems, questionnaires were read aloud. The majority of participants could distinguish and understand numbers on their own, while others did so with the help of a family member. The questionnaire was administered three times throughout the study: three months before intervention, immediately after the intervention, and two months following the intervention. Effects of the intervention were evaluated by comparing three
conditions: (a) a treatment-as-usual control group in which administrators used their own approaches and were not trained for the study, (b) an experimental group in which administrators used a combination of their own approach and that of the training seminar, and (c) the no-treatment control group. Assessment tools used in the study included the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire, Trauma Symptoms Questionnaire, and demographic questions. Tutsis had more trauma experiences than the Twa or Hutus. But all three groups had the same amount of trauma symptoms. At the time of the third questionnaire (given two months after the intervention), members of religious groups had less trauma symptoms than did non-religious group members. Sample sizes were too small for meaningful interpretation.

At the core of the intervention were small-group meetings in which people who were previously identified as both Hutus and Tutsis met within the same moderated groups and shared their stories. The intervention focused on empathy for group members (regardless of whether from Hutu or Tutsi tribes). Staub et al. hoped to create a sense of altruism and forgiveness and stimulate mutual desires to reconcile. Participants reported reduced trauma symptoms after the intervention and developed more positive attitudes towards their outgroup relative to those in the no-treatment control group.

Staub (1989) had long found that education about why people engaged in mass killing and genocide could help people recognize the signs and perhaps even avoid repetitions of atrocities in the future. Based on many years of research, Staub (2005) identified numerous signs that can lead to mass violence or genocide. These include taxing social conditions (i.e., economic problems, political disorganization, and conflict between groups), their psychological effects (i.e., frustration of fundamental psychological needs), and destructive social processes that result from social and intergroup strains (i.e., creation of destructive ideologies,
scapegoating, and the evolution of violence). Besides the predisposing signs that a society is ripe for violence, there are characteristics of a culture that make mass violence more likely. These include majority group devaluation of a denigrated group, high respect for authority, and perceptions of past victimization and history of being wounded by the other group.

In light of Staub et al. (2005), Staub (2005) proposed that traumatic events might best not be approached directly because the retelling of them could re-traumatize victims. Staub suggested that using radio dramas to tell stories could help people experience catharsis (Staub, 2005). In 2013, results of national radio broadcasts that attempted to put this into effect were published. Bilali and Vollhardt (2013) studied the effects of a radio drama that presented a historical perspective of the aftermath of the genocide in Rwanda. Participants included 842 Rwandans of various education levels and all regions of the country although the ethnicity of participants was undetermined. In the experimental group, participants were primed by listening to familiar female voice of a character in a popular radio drama. This radio personality symbolizes peace for many in two Rwandan villages and was a favorite among radio listeners. The character introduces herself and then reads a questionnaires about peace and resolution. In the control condition group, an unfamiliar voice introduced herself as being a new character of a similar radio drama. Administrators of the study wore University of Massachusetts clothing to avoid any local government association, and participants were masked to the study’s purpose. In the experimental group, listeners were more likely than non-listeners to have empathy with the other group’s perspective. Contrary, in the control group, there was no difference between listeners and non-listeners. Furthermore, higher education was associated with greater perspective-taking. Those in the experimental group were slightly less likely than those of the control group to express competitive victimhood. While listeners expressed less mistrust than
non-listeners, they were less likely to agree that it would be naive to trust a member of the other ethnic group. No such differences regarding mistrust were found in the control group. Education played a role in intergroup mistrust as those with more education reported less intergroup mistrust.

The tribal conflicts between the Hutus and Tutsis affected the country tremendously particularly because several social injustices were perpetrated. Concurrently as Rwandans were faced with dealing with their tragedies, South Africa had instituted its Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), and early reports were positive—although there was far from unanimity throughout South Africa about the unalloyed benefits of the TRC. Still, Rwanda sought its own means to handle the social disruption and deal with the injustices. At first glance, one might argue that the Rwandans could have simply copied the South Africans’ efforts. However, the South African TRC process could not simply be transplanted to Rwanda. First, the nature of the group tensions varied. South Africa had a history of rule and abuse by minority Whites. They tended to be disproportionately the offenders. But in Rwanda, the Hutus, the more economically and socially oppressed of the two groups, was a majority, and they perpetrated most of the violence. Second, in South Africa, the number of wrongs were relatively few and isolated compared to around 800,000 deaths in Rwanda in a mere 100 days. Third, in Rwanda, most of the violence occurred in mobs but in South Africa it was perpetrated more often by small groups or individuals or police. Fourth, while the South African hearings were nationally televised and were open to the public, in Rwanda, there were simply too many cases to deal with individually in public hearings—especially three separate hearings of victims, offenders, and restitution. Therefore, trials were delegated to localities, in *gacaca* courts. In theory, people who had experienced a violation of their civil rights could call out the perpetrators publicly, and the courts
could decide on guilt, innocence, and perhaps amnesty for the perpetrators, or how perpetrators could make restitution. Fifth, in South Africa, the violence was disproportionately perpetrated on majority members of society who were not in power, at least until after elections brought Nelson Mandela to rule. Hence, the human rights violation hearings involved mostly majority victims calling out wrongs from minority perpetrators whereas, in Rwanda, the majority members had risen up and perpetrated virtually all of the violence and mass killing against minorities. In a gacaca court, a minority member had to publicly call out wrongdoing from a group of people who were the numerical majority. Thus, as Brounéus (2008) argued, this created an environment of insecurity and re-traumatization. In a study similar to that of Kaminer et al. (2001), Brounéus (2008) examined the relationship between justice trial participation and mental health. Participants included 16 Rwandan women who testified at gacaca trials. The results revealed a pattern as most of the participants were ill days leading up to the trial date and also during the trials. It appears as though these symptoms were physical manifestations of their distress related to testifying. Security was a significant concern for these women and some of the women experienced anxiety attacks during their testimonies. Their fears seemed warranted as they were harassed after sharing their testimonies. Other studies produced more encouraging findings.

Given that there was some reconciliation sentiment among victims of Rwandan genocide, Mukashema and Mullet (2010) assessed the relationship between reconciliation sentiment and mental health and forgiveness. None of the 101 research participants included in the study was illiterate; all were Rwandan victims of the 1994 genocide who lived in southern Rwanda. Measures used in this study assessed participants’ feelings toward reconciliation and forgiveness and the state of their mental health. Respondents’ feelings about reconciliation were positively correlated with the quality of their mental health. Higher forgiveness levels were also
associated with feelings openness to reconciliation. Mukashema and Mullet (2010) argued that it was essential for the victims to practice unconditional forgiveness since few perpetrators have offered direct apologies.

Fifteen years after the mass murders, Schaal et al. (2012) investigated the mental health of Rwandans. Schaal and colleagues (2012) conducted perhaps the first study to examine psychiatric morbidity of genocide perpetrators in Rwanda. They surveyed 269 Rwandan genocide perpetrators who were imprisoned and 114 survivors and measured their levels of depression, PTSD symptoms and attitudes towards reconciliation. Of the perpetrators, those with high scores for PTSD denied their roles as accomplices in the murders. They also scored high for reconciliation measures. Trauma exposure and participation in killing were predictors of the severity of depression. Perpetrators who showed remorse also showed greater symptoms of PTSD. For perpetrators there was a positive association between PTSD symptoms and a higher reconciliation score. For survivors, the number of traumatic events experienced varied considerably, but there was a positive correlation between the severity of depression and the number of traumatic events experienced. Higher scores for PTSD and depression reflected a lower score for reconciliation. Women in this group experienced significantly more sexual violence than women in the perpetrator’s group. Also, higher scores for PTSD were noted for women in the survivor’s group. Survivors were more likely to demonstrate depression than perpetrators. Both groups were exposed to a wide range of traumatic events and for both groups 1/5 of participants reported feeling suicidal at the time of the interview. Overall, there appeared to be no difference in the rates of depression between perpetrators and survivors but survivors’ scores indicated more severe symptoms of PTSD than perpetrators. The findings suggest a need
for improved assessment and psychological treatment for both perpetrators and survivors of the genocide in Rwanda.

We have described individual studies on South Africa and Rwanda. It is important to review meta-analyses and qualitative reviews of research related to this topic, specifically as the results pertain to processes used to attain reconciliation and restoration.

**Qualitative Review of Research Related to Public Truth-Telling Processes in South Africa and Rwanda**

Martin-Beristain, Paez, Bernard, Rime, Kanyangara (2010) performed a qualitative review of studies focused on the effects of participation in transitional justice rituals, of which are included justice hearings or trials, such as the TRC and the gacaca trials of Rwanda. These mechanisms have been designed to confront massive violations of human rights in the context of post-conflict situations and dictatorships. Findings for South Africa were mixed in that for some, participation in trials was associated with an increase in negative attitudes, while others demonstrated an increase in feelings of empowerment. Rwandans also reported an increase in negative attitudes.

It is impossible to disentangle the negativity that pervaded these regions from the specific negativity that attended participation in the transitional justice rituals. Martin-Beristain et al. concluded that the rituals were detrimental to the well-being of inhabitants and that they interfered with the healing process for individuals. They also suggested that the hearings and trials also increased the negative emotional climate within the countries, being costly for the societies. Nonetheless, positive outcomes were also reported. In Rwanda, participation improved intergroup relations, decreased shame in victims, and decreased negative stereotypes of out-group members. The reports after South African TRC proceedings included reports of
empowerment and limited reparations. Martin-Beristain et al. also analyzed transitional justice procedures in Latin America. Altogether, Martin-Beristain et al. conclude that microsocial healing was not promoted, but macrosocial benefits and increased respect for human rights ensued.

**Other Countries in Africa**

Although most the extant research in Africa is from the South Africa and Rwanda, forgiveness studies have been conducted in other African countries. Hence, we review the forgiveness literature in other African countries to provide a thorough reflection of the Africa-based research in this field.

**Namibia.** Perstling and Rothman (2014) offered a narrative of Namibia’s political history to discuss the influence of subjective well-being and happiness. A prolonged bush-war followed by Namibia’s independence left many issues unresolved. A truth and reconciliation commission was initiated by the National Society of Human Rights in an effort to bring closure to the conflict. Perstling et al. (2014) proposed that Namibia is vulnerable to post-war consequences, specifically regarding economic development. The Positive Nations Questionnaire was used to assess the subjective well-being of Namibians. Happiness and well-being seem to be limited to economic affluence, income inequality, welfare, and political freedom. Perstling and Rothman (2014) noted the country’s initiatives of incorporating existing monuments with historical museums are indicative of efforts to build a more constructive future.

**Uganda.** Of the studies reviewed, one study reviewed the efficacy of a forgiveness program in Uganda. Sonderegger, Rombouts, Ocen, and McKeever (2011) evaluated the effectiveness of the EMPOWER program designed to help victims of war-related trauma overcome the negative psychological effects of their experiences as well as enable such victims
to experience forgiveness, peace, and reconciliation. Participants included 202 northern Ugandans who experienced the traumas associated with warfare. Participants were divided into a treatment and control group. The 26-hour program administered over the course of three months consisted of two phases. The first emphasized emotional resiliency and the second, reconciliation. There were negligible differences between the groups before the program was administered but significant differences between the groups after the treatment group completed the program. Members of the treatment group reported lower levels of depression, less anxiety, and more prosocial behavior in comparison to the control.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo. Kadiangandu, Gauché, Vinsonneau, and Mullet (2007) investigated the differences in perception of forgiveness based on whether an individual came from a collectivist versus an individualistic culture. The modified version of the Conceptualizations of Forgiveness Questionnaire was administered to 276 Congolese citizens and 343 French subjects. Scores from the Congolese participants were significantly higher than their French counterparts in perceiving forgiveness to reflect “Change of Heart,” forgiveness to be a “More-than-Dyadic Process,” and “Forgiveness is Good.” More than the French participants, Congolese participants perceived reconciliation to be an important part of the forgiveness process (Kadiangandu, Gauché et al., 2007).

Child soldiers of Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Another study focused on events from both Uganda and Congo investigated the association of PTSD symptoms and feelings of revenge and reconciliation in former child soldiers from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda (Bayer, Klasen & Adam, 2007). Participants included 169 former child soldiers currently living in two rehabilitation centers. The rehabilitation centers, in Gulu and Goma, are run by aid organizations. Participants who were at most 18 years were recruited for
the study. Questionnaires were administered individually in their native tongue by a mental health professional. The Child Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Reaction Index (CPTSD-RI) was administered. The results were as follows. Respondents had been recruited violently at a young age. They had been immobilized an average of 2.3 months, having served an average of 38 months. Of the 169 participants, nine scored higher than 35 on the PTSD measure, indicating higher levels of symptoms. Participants who were less open to reconciliation reported greater feelings of revenge and displayed more PTSD symptoms.

An analogous study examined the role of forgiveness in reintegrating former child soldiers back into their communities. Fryman (2013) described the experiences of child soldiers and that of their communities in trying to reintegrate them. These soldiers and their communities were invited to attend forgiveness workshops. That facilitated the reconciliation.

**Angola (and Portugal).** Barros de Oliveira (2007) compared Angolan and Portuguese students on forgiveness and optimism. Angolan students demonstrated a greater capacity for forgiveness and a predisposition for optimism than the Portuguese participants.

Neto and Pinto (2010) conducted a similar study of Angola and Portugal students looking at attitudes towards forgiveness. Angolans demonstrated a significantly higher propensity to forgive than did their Portuguese counterparts. Portuguese students showed a greater affinity for long-term bitterness.

**Torture victims in Africa (and Asia).** Isakson and Jurkovic (2013) surveyed eleven torture survivors; nine men and two women, from across Asia and Africa to better understand their cultural conceptions of healing after torture. These participants were about a year past the initial phase of survival. They were undergoing therapy in facilities specializing in treating victims traumatized by torture. Thematic analyses identified the concepts of “moving on,”
empowerment, and cognitive reframing. Participants’ value systems and social support were integral to their recovery (Isakson & Jurkovic, 2013).

**African research across countries.** Across countries, it is safe to generalize that most Africans focus at least as much on reconciliation as on the internal experience of forgiveness. Reif and colleagues (2013) conducted a qualitative study measuring attitudes about apology and reconciliation. Participants included 69 Africans; 37 men and 32 women, from Angola, Botswana, Ghana, Algeria, and Egypt. Participants were asked about what affect a good apology would have on their forgiveness of an offense. About 24% said that an apology would lead to successful reconciliation, but 13% reported that an apology would not lead to reconciliation. Most (57%) of the participants reported that the effectiveness of an apology is dependent upon other factors such as the nature of the wrongdoing and remorse shown by the transgressor. Almost all (93%) of the participants reported that an apology coupled with certain conditions would make reconciliation possible (Reif et al., 2013).

Dalley and colleagues (2013) also explore the importance of apologies in reconciliation. Similar to Gobodo-Madikizela (2011), they noted the important role of women in transforming an atmosphere of war to one of peace. The article argued that although, women had historically been relegated to passive roles, they were essential to achieving reconciliation. Dalley et al. (2013) described previous work on the perceptions of Africans about reconciliation and peace. The majority of Africans believed apology and forgiveness were necessary to attain reconciliation and peace.

Nwoye (2010) argued that that a significant component of forgiveness is interpersonal. Forgiveness researchers have focused their attention on the individual, internal experience of forgiveness instead of examining the interpersonal context in which forgiveness is likely to
occur. Nwoye (2010) criticized this focus and suggested that understanding forgiveness is incomplete without a thorough understanding of the context in which forgiveness occurs. Instead, restorative conferencing, Nwoye argued, should aim to promote both intrapersonal forgiveness and interpersonal reconciliation. This process involves an interaction between the offender and the victim as well as involving other members of the community. Community members serve important functions as organizers, facilitators, and observers during the reconciliation process by which forgiveness can be facilitated. Nwoye concluded that such an inclusive process results in more mature forgiveness and more lasting and successful reconciliation transactions.

A brief report by Ngcobo, Edwards, and Edwards (2013) provided a psychodynamic interpretation on the Marikana violence, which resulted in several deaths. Although Markana is one of the richest mines in the world, most of its workers are poor. Therefore, in an effort to improve their living circumstances, these miners were undeterred and willing to die to get what they felt was their fair share of wealth for their families and themselves. Tragically, their strikers resulted in several deaths because they were militarized by the police (Ngcobo et al., 2013). Ngcobo, Edwards, and Edwards were able to relate the actions of the miners to several Freudian themes. Individual themes such as death instinct and intra-psychic splitting were evident. Group themes such as identification with the aggressor and projective identification also were identified. Ngcobo, Edwards, and Edwards argued that these themes were related to the psychological history of oppression experienced by the miners. Ngcobo et al. advocated for reconciliation through public acknowledgement of wrongdoings by miners and police, and forgiveness by those wronged.
Green (2010) called for a better understanding and a utilization of applicable methodologies at achieve societal restoration. Furthermore, Green reported that all members of society were essential in bringing about restoration and healing for victims of human rights abuses. The community is particularly important for providing support to those negatively impacted by such strife. Green was careful to acknowledge the complexities of an individual’s involvement during a restorative process. Drawing on the examples from conflicts in Eastern Europe, some African countries and the Mid-East, Green placed importance on the development of reconciliatory processes used by former victims and their perpetrators.

Discussion

Analysis of Findings

General findings. The present paper is the first comprehensive examination of the forgiveness literature in Africa. Notably, Rief and colleagues’ (2013) review incorporated research from Africa but did not have a specific focus on Africa. Additionally, the forgiveness research in Africa is dominated by studies about the South African Truth and Reconciliation process, with fewer on the Rwandan gacaca courts. However, smaller individual hurts, and hurts from local offenses—both historic and recent—have received much less research attention.

We found a general collectivist approach to forgiveness. A variety of researchers advocated more attention to reconciliation between aggrieved parties and between the partners and the community. The internal experience of forgiveness was not minimized, but African researchers tended to assume that it is important in future research to clearly specify the context, especially interpersonal context, of forgiveness.
Missing from the accumulated research—with the exception of the South African and Rwandan studies—are studies in local communities or countries about particular events that are well known within the local community. Thus,

few studies focused on historic wrongs, colonial oppression and fallout from colonial rule, tribal differences and perceived tribal injustices, religious conflicts (despite strong Christian, Muslim, and native religious involvement), and civil wars. Despite numerous discussions of government corruption, sometimes poor governmental management of the country, violations of local norms that are well-known by the population, we find little study within the body of African-based research on these issues. In addition, few studies of specific in-group transgressions within African nations existed.

**Truth and Reconciliation Commission process in South Africa.** Most of the research has focused on the South African Truth and Reconciliation Committee. In general, forgiveness was examined in individuals who had experienced violations of their human rights, sometimes severe violations. In some cases, those people testified publicly, but in other studies, people who did not testify publicly were examined. The presence of an audience—not only others in the hearing venue such as commissioners, offenders, attorneys, and witnesses, but also larger public audiences due to the broadcasting of the hearings—created strong psychosocial pressures. These pressures call into question the truth effectiveness of the TRC proceedings.

Most of the findings from past studies fit well with social psychological accounts of forgiveness (Fehr, Gelfand, & Nag, 2010; Riek & Mania, 2012) and apology (Gelfand & Fehr, 2010) in personal relationships. Some of the public testimonies were arguably as traumatic as the actual events of victimization. Participants’ experiences were highly varied in the mid-term and long-term aftermath of the hearings. Generally, in moderate follow-ups after hearings, many
people seemed to have second thoughts about their granting of public forgiveness, and some publicly renounced their earlier statements and denounced the TRC. Others denounced commissioners for placing them in a position in which they felt coerced. However, as more time passed, people came to terms with their testimony and tended to look back on the hearings less as occasions for coercion and more as an opportunity to share their private thoughts. In addition, Martin-Beristain et al. (2010) have concluded that little individual healing comes about as a result of public hearings. However, they report positive effects at the macrosocial level. This was a public process, averting criticisms about cover-ups or concern that empowered groups were hiding crucial data. In addition, there was a sense of democracy and empowerment coming from the hearings, and there were modest (often perceived to be inadequate) reparations resulting.

**Gacaca trials in Rwanda.** The analyses of Bounéus (2008) and Martin-Beristain et al. (2010) were somewhat at odds. Bounéus concluded that victims (typically members of minority groups) typically refused to participate after initial rounds of trials because they feared retaliation (from people in majority groups). Martin-Beristain et al. (2010) were somewhat more optimistic about the positive macrosocial benefits.

**The remainder of Africa.** Across the areas of Africa outside of Rwanda and South Africa, a few very hurtful transgressions have been studied—such as child soldier reintegration in Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Fryman, 2013). These have ranged from individually experienced transgressions to deep societal wounds like years of oppressive regimes. Certainly individual differences characterize people’s responses and might or might not result in forgiveness, but apologies and restitution go a long way to making even egregious wrongs seem forgivable. More attention is needed to specific transgressions throughout Africa. Methodologically, research has used both quantitative and qualitative methods. Generally,
quantitative methods have been under-represented in the body of literature relative to the percent of studies that tend to be quantitative in high-impact journals.

**Limitations**

The research on forgiveness in Africa is based on a limited number of studies. Forgiveness research in Africa is dominated by studies conducted in South Africa and in Rwanda. While this provides some confidence about our knowledge of the TRC proceedings and the gacaca trials, there are several noteworthy gaps in the literature about other topics. The remainder of the forgiveness research is scattered throughout Africa with perhaps only one or two studies in each geographic region of the continent. This impacts the ability to generalize research in each area.

Many studies use qualitative methodology. Although qualitative research generates rich findings, the goal of qualitative studies is usually not to generalize conclusions but rather to generate hypotheses. We can understand that the relative paucity of research on forgiveness in Africa might tempt researchers to continue to conduct much qualitative research. However, at this point, there are numerous existing hypotheses about forgiveness that have been generated in decades of research in the most developed nations. These include reviews of forgiveness in general (Fehr, Gelfand, & Nag, 2010), forgiveness and mental and physical health (Toussaint, Worthington, & Williams, 2015), forgiveness interventions (Wade, Hoyt, Kidwell, & Worthhington, 2014), forgiveness and relationships (Riek & Mania, 2012), and forgiveness and spirituality (Davis et al., 2013). Thus, currently, more quantitative studies on the African continent are needed. This would allow a clearer understanding of forgiveness constructs on that continent. While some studies in the present review have used a correlational design, at times the sample sizes were questionable, which affects generalizability. In addition, virtually no studies
used experimental designs. Hence few causal statements can be made from the variables examined thus far.

**What Has Not Been Studied?**

There are numerous important issues that have not been studied regarding forgiveness. These break down roughly into those that are related to African culture and those that might involve interventions to promote forgiveness.

**Findings specific to African history, politics, culture, relationships, and conditions of normal living.** First, there are many transgressions and public offenses that have occurred within specific countries in Africa or particular regions of the continent which have yet to be investigated. Each country could list numerous historical offenses, tribal differences, post-colonial tensions with former colonial powers, hurts that came from slavery, governmental decisions about how the country is being or has been operated, instances of corruption, and public crimes that create relational tensions and offenses.

Second, each country or region of the continent has cultural traditions that may have led to misunderstandings and offenses. This might involve such things as attitudes of men to women, or parents to children, of government officials to citizens, of army or police to civilians, of friendship, of loyalty, of STDs and sexual mores. Religious beliefs, values, or customs could have a great effect on whether and how forgiveness might occur.

Third, Africa is a blend of collectivism and individualism due to the indigenous life in Africa and influences of colonization from European colonial powers. The particular blend of collectivism and individualism likely differs from city to rural areas, from country to country, religion to religion, and from tribe to tribe. Detailing the particular blends across Africa and comparing them both within Africa and with other more collectivistic (i.e., India, China, and
other Asian countries and also South and Central American countries) or more individualistic (i.e., Western European countries, the United States, Australia and New Zealand, and Canada) would be useful in understanding the uniqueness of different aspects of African forgiveness.

Fourth, relationships may have different expectations in different areas African countries. These intricacies are likely to impact citizens’ attitudes towards forgiveness. In particular, North Africa has been virtually ignored in forgiveness research. There are important differences between North Africans (mostly Islamic in religion) and the rest of Africa (though Islam has a substantial presence throughout Africa). These differences are worth noting. In addition, due to historic tensions between North African nations (e.g., Egypt) and countries in the Middle East, unforgiveness might be extreme (vis a vis Israel, for instance) in ways that do not extend from North African nations southward into the heart of Africa.

Fifth, the tragic historic relationships within various countries regarding slavery are also worth exploring. Tensions with colonial slave traders and also indigenous collaborators still remain in memory if not in the personal repercussions felt in families. Forgiveness around this heavily emotion-laden topic is important to investigate.

Sixth, relationships might differ from the way relationships look in existing Western cultures. Might indigenous influences color the way that marriage relationships are expected to look—even if the marriages occur in religious communities? Might family relationships, and hence how and when forgiveness or apologies are expected, look different from most Western families? Similarities and differences need to be documented and analyzed.

**Interventions to promote forgiveness.** Africans have undergone a lot of hardships historically. Yet, the desire to forgive, which arises from both traditional value systems like *Ubuntu* and religious value systems like Christianity and Islam, can be strong. Yet, traditional
and religious systems often advocate forgiveness but do not give concrete instruction about how to do so. In the West, a number of interventions have been developed and tested, showing that forgiveness can be guided (for a meta-analysis, see Wade, Hoyt, Kidwell, & Worthington, 2014). Given that no intervention studies to date have been conducted in Africa except Staub, Pearlman, Gubin, and Hagengimana (2005), it is difficult to determine the effectiveness of various interventions for Africans. For example, western counseling sessions may not beneficial to some Africans since they may prefer receiving counsel from their church or elders. To the contrary, interventions like REACH Forgiveness (Worthington, 2006) and the process model (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2015) have been shown to be efficacious in collectivist countries (for a meta-analysis, see Wade, Hoyt, Kidwell, & Worthington, 2014). Applying these interventions in African contexts would be very useful.

Cultural sensitive interventions developed for Africans may also inform some of the interventions already developed for Western populations. Interventions have often been tailored to consider religious or cultural factors. Thus, clinical researchers should consider not only how to present the interventions (i.e., as coming under the authority of elders or a church) but also how the content is modified to be particularly useful and engaging for Africans from particular regions.

Other questions to be addressed include for example, in the USA, there is a strong dose-response relationship between time of the intervention and outcome (Wade, Hoyt, Kidwell, & Worthington, 2014). Is that the case with interventions in Africa? Meta-analytic studies like that of Wade and colleagues (2014) reported a reduction in psychological symptoms that accompanied increased forgiveness? Is this also true in Africa? Wade et al. found that
forgiveness was especially pronounced in individual psychotherapy and couple therapy relative to groups. Is this the case in Africa populations?

Given the collectivistic nature of African culture, the interventions best suited for this region are likely to benefit from a strong community component. Thus, an important question is whether groups conducted in close communities in which people know each other might be more effective than the results of most existing group studies, in which groups of strangers went through interventions. An alternative question to address is who would be best suited to lead these interventions. Previous research by Lin and colleagues (2014) addresses some of these questions in a Western sample, emphasizing the need to address this in an African sample. In conclusion, a plethora of research questions on forgiveness constructs remain to be addressed highlighting the need for research in this region.

**Implications**

Based on the present review, we conclude that research in Africa is in its infancy. Consequently, the doors are wide open for forgiveness research. Research on basic social and personality topics within local African contexts are sorely needed. Intervention research is also needed. Western interventions such as those created by Enright (2001) and by Worthington (2006) could be adapted to Africans and modified as needed (for a meta-analysis, see Wade, Hoyt, Kidwell, & Worthington, 2014).

While we have sought to review the research dealing with forgiveness within the continent of Africa, it is important that we emphasize that Africans are not validly treated as a homogenous sample. There are over fifty countries on the continent with different cultural idiosyncrasies. Therefore, the amount of information that could be potentially generated from this region exceeds any information in the current literature. Even with our current knowledge of
forgiveness research in South Africa and some knowledge on Rwandan genocide, several gaps in the research remain. We conclude by encouraging researchers to expand their horizons to conduct research in all African countries.
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