

Religion and Unforgivable Offenses

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ABSTRACT The value of forgiveness is emphasized in many religions, but little is known about how members of distinct religious cultures differ in their views of forgiveness. We hypothesized and found that Jews would agree more than Protestants that certain offenses are unforgivable and that religious commitment would be more negatively correlated with belief in unforgivable offenses among Protestants than among Jews (Studies 1 and 2). Dispositional forgiveness tendencies did not explain these effects (Studies 1 and 2). In Study 3, Jews were more inclined than Protestants to endorse theologically derived reasons for unforgivable offenses (i.e., some offenses are too severe to forgive, only victims have the right to forgive,

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and forgiveness requires repentance by the perpetrator). Differential endorsement of these reasons for nonforgiveness fully mediated Jew-Protestant differences in forgiveness of a plagiarism offense and a Holocaust offense.

I do not bring forgiveness with me, nor forgetfulness. The only ones who can forgive are dead.

—The sixth Israeli president, Chaim Herzog, when visiting the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in 1988.

Values, defined as beliefs that specific modes of conduct or end-states are preferable, are an important component of personality (Rokeach, 1973). Values impact behavior (Bardi & Schwartz, 2003), provide a sense of coherence and meaning in people's lives (McGregor, Zanna, Holmes, & Spencer, 2001), and influence affective reactions to life circumstances (Oishi, Diener, Lucas, & Suh, 1999; Sagiv & Schwartz, 2000). Furthermore, given the great influence of culture on values (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), the concept of values is useful for explicating the link between cultural and personality processes.

The value of forgiveness has received increased attention in the psychological literature (McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2000; Worthington, 1998). This research has demonstrated personality correlates of forgiveness tendencies as well as influences of emotion and appraisal processes on forgiveness (McCullough et al., 1998). Forgiveness is viewed as a goal in many forms of psychotherapy, including marital therapy and group interventions (Coop Gordon, Baucom, & Snyder, 2000; Malcolm & Greenberg, 2000; Worthington, Sandage, & Berry, 2000). Forgiveness has also been discussed and examined empirically as a virtue, human strength, and a promoter of health and well-being (McCullough, 2000; McCullough & Worthington, 1999; Thoresen, Harris, & Luskin, 2000; Witvliet, Ludwig, & Vander Laan, 2001; Worthington, 2001).

Despite this research, the impact of social and cultural background on forgiveness tendencies is still not well understood. Forgiveness researchers note that "the field still lacks a thorough understanding of the influences of religion, culture, and life situation on people's understandings and experiences of forgiveness" and that "without addressing religious, cultural, and situational variations, scientific notions of forgiveness are likely to be disconnected from lived human experience" (McCullough et al., 2000, p. 10). The value

of forgiveness is emphasized in many religions, and two religion-related factors that may influence views of forgiveness are (a) how religious the individual is (religiosity or religious commitment) and (b) what religion the individual belongs to (religious affiliation or culture). Such factors may influence the way that people think about forgiveness, the tendency to forgive, the conditions and limits of forgiveness, and the expression of forgiveness. The present research seeks to demonstrate that religious culture (or religious affiliation) has a strong and highly specific impact on people's views of the value of forgiveness. To do this, we explored differences between two religious cultural groups within the United States, Jews and Protestants, in beliefs about the value of forgiveness.

RELIGIOSITY AND THE VALUE OF FORGIVENESS

There seem to be two distinct but complementary approaches to the relationship between religion and values. One of these might be termed a "religiosity" perspective on values. This perspective proposes that, regardless of one's specific religious culture, being a religious person is associated with endorsement of specific values. This theoretical proposal is reasonable given that many religious traditions espouse similar values. Schwartz and Huisman (1995) noted that "[t]heological analyses suggest that most and possibly all major contemporary religions promote transcendence of material concerns" and that "religions [in general] encourage people to seek meaning beyond everyday existence" (p. 91). These investigators performed a large-scale study of members of four Western religions (Judaism, Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, and Greek Orthodoxy) from four different cultures (Israel, the Netherlands, Spain, and Greece). Across all four of these religious cultures, relatively religious participants were more likely to endorse values including benevolence, tradition, conformity, and security and less likely to endorse values including power, achievement, hedonism, stimulation, self-direction, and universalism than nonreligious participants (cf. Jensen, 1998).

The religiosity perspective on values would make the prediction that religious people, regardless of their religious culture, would espouse the value of forgiveness to a greater extent than would nonreligious people. In support of this approach, evidence indicates that religiosity

is positively correlated with valuing forgiveness (e.g., Enright, Santos & Al-Mabuk, 1989; Gorsuch & Hao, 1993; Poloma & Gallup, 1991; Rokeach, 1973; Shoemaker & Bolt, 1977; Tate & Miller, 1971).

RELIGIOUS CULTURE AND THE VALUE OF FORGIVENESS

While acknowledging that there is common ground among religious people across distinct religious traditions, there is another theoretical approach from which to study the effect of religion on values. In line with a “religious culture” perspective, we propose that members of different religions tend to espouse values that are consistent with the relevant doctrines of their specific religions. Such an approach would not deny the demonstrated, and theoretically sensible, relationship between religiosity and values. Rather, a religious culture perspective would claim that, to the extent that different religions make different claims about a value, members of different religions will differ in their views of that value. Our argument is based on the observation that religions differ from one another in important ways that have an impact on values (e.g., Cohen, 2003; Cohen & Rankin, 2004; Cohen & Rozin, 2001) and that it is important to understand religious constructs in the contexts of specific religious groups or cultures (e.g., Hill & Pargament, 2003; Moberg, 2003; Shuman & Meador, 2003).

Although the religious group to which an individual belongs is often referred to as his or her “religious affiliation,” we consider “religious culture” to be a more apt term. Specifically, we propose that a person’s religion, like his or her country or region of origin, represents an important cultural influence on values and personality processes. One common psychological definition holds culture as the belief systems and value orientations that influence customs, norms, practices, and social institutions, including psychological processes and organizations (Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1998). Religions certainly seem to fit this definition, and we therefore find it useful to use terminology consistent with other cultural research.

One important theoretical perspective on the relationship between religious culture and values comes from Shweder and colleagues, who have proposed three different domains of moral concerns (Shweder, Much, Mahapatra, & Park, 1997). The ethic of autonomy, which seems to be the principal moral concern in Western, individualistic cultures, focuses on issues of harm, rights, and justice.

However, in other cultures, such as Hindu India, the ethics of community and divinity are also commonly invoked as moral domains. The ethic of community is concerned with concepts such as duty, hierarchy, and interdependency. The ethic of divinity is focused on maintaining a sacred order, tradition, and purity, and avoiding pollution (Shweder et al., 1997).

Other work in the domain of values suggests that members of different cultures hold different values, and we again suggest that some of these differences stem from differences in religion. Hindu Indians appear to value more highly interpersonal responsibilities in the moral domain in comparison to European Americans, consistent with the more interdependent self-construal promoted by Hindu Indian culture (Miller & Bersoff, 1992, 1994; Miller, Bersoff, & Harwood, 1990; Miller & Luthar, 1989). Such findings dovetail with Shweder's notion of the salience of the ethic of community in Hindu India and the greater level of collectivism, or interdependence, in Hindu Indian self-concepts (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1995).

Even within the United States, there is evidence that members of different religious cultures hold different values. For example, American Jews and Protestants differ strongly in their moral evaluations of thoughts about immoral actions. Specifically, American Protestants are more disposed than are American Jews to believe that thoughts are as morally important as actions (Cohen & Rozin, 2001). Furthermore, this cultural difference does not appear to be due to American Protestants being more inclined than American Jews to believe that immoral actions are likely to be acted upon. For example, a married man who thinks about having an affair with the actress Julia Roberts is unlikely to act on this ambition, but Protestants still consider such thoughts to be significantly more immoral than do Jews (Cohen, 2003). Interestingly, Jews and Protestants do not differ in their moral evaluations of thoughts about highly virtuous actions—both cultural groups appear to give high amounts of moral credit to individuals who think about very virtuous actions (Cohen & Rankin, 2004).

These cultural differences and similarities appear to parallel the values expressed in Jewish and Protestant theological doctrines. For instance, it is a Christian religious notion that looking at a woman lustfully is the same as having an affair with her (Matthew 5: 27–28), whereas Jewish doctrine provides little or no indication that thoughts about immoral actions have any moral significance. However,

Jewish doctrine does propose that thoughts about virtuous actions are morally important. The Talmud (*Kiddushin*, p. 40a) claims, “A good thought is regarded as a good deed . . . but that the Holy One, blessed be He, does not regard a bad thought . . . as an actual deed.”

Approaching religion somewhat as social psychologists approach culture, we propose that people’s views of when forgiveness is appropriate are shaped, in part, by their religions’ teachings regarding forgiveness and the consequent religious cultures that emerge. We note the early finding by Rokeach (1973) that Jews rated forgiveness as a less important value than did members of many denominations of Christianity. Our specific theoretical proposal is that differences in religious dogma between Judaism and Protestant Christianity will affect the likelihood that Jews and Protestants will agree that some offenses are unforgivable.

We chose to contrast these two religious cultures because of their similarity and differences in views of certain aspects of forgiveness. As we will claim, both religious cultures highly prize forgiveness. Furthermore, both are major Western religions and are represented in the United States. Judaism, however, teaches that forgiveness is not required—and perhaps ought not be granted—for certain offenses. Protestant Christianity, on the other hand, teaches that there are almost no limitations on what an individual should forgive.

DISPOSITIONAL FORGIVENESS IN JUDAISM AND PROTESTANTISM

Both Judaism and Protestantism place strong value on forgiveness (Gopin, 2001; Rye et al., 2000). Biblical law explicitly commands forgivingness: “You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your neighbor” (Leviticus 19:18). Religious scholars note that forgiveness is a central value in Protestant Christianity (Marty, 1998; Rye et al., 2000). Rye et al. (2000) claimed, for example, “Forgiveness is at the religious, theological, and ethical core of Christianity” (p. 31). In Judaism, as well, forgiveness is seen as one of the most important qualities of God that people are obliged to emulate (Dorff, 1998). One rabbinic commentary (the *Tosefta*) claims that God’s forgiveness is five hundred times as strong as his wrath. Jews are expected to forgive others so that their own sins will be forgiven (Dorff, 1998; *Sifre, Ekev* on Deuteronomy 11:22; *Megillah*, p. 28a).

UNFORGIVABLE OFFENSES IN JUDAISM AND PROTESTANTISM

There seem to be very few limits, if any, on forgiveness in the teachings of Protestant Christianity. Although the New Testament (Luke 12:10) specifies blasphemy as an unforgivable offense, Protestant Christianity teaches that forgiveness should be unconditional and should not depend on repentance, justice, or restitution between the offender and the victim. For example, Rye et al. (2000) state that “According to the model of Christ on the cross (Luke 23:34), forgiveness, or at least the petition for God the Father to forgive, does not depend first of all on repentance by the offender” (pp. 31–33). Christian theology regarding forgiveness does emphasize, however, that forgiveness is not cheap or easy (Marty, 1998).

This view of forgiveness, however, differs from that associated with Judaism. Whereas the idea of unforgivable offenses is rarely discussed in a Protestant context, Jewish theological doctrines state in no uncertain terms that some offenses are unforgivable. There seem to be three interrelated characteristics that make an offense unforgivable in Jewish law: some offenses are too severe to forgive, only the victim of an offense has a right to forgive that offense, and forgiveness requires repentance on the part of the perpetrator.

Severe Offenses

In Judaism, some offenses are simply too bad to be forgiven. A biblical example of an offense too bad to be forgiven is that the Ammonites, Moabites, and Amalek can never be forgiven for wantonly trying to destroy Israel (Deuteronomy 25; Dorff, 1998). Postbiblically, as well, there are also clear examples of unforgivable offenses to Jewish authorities. The *Talmud* (*Sanhedrin* 10:1) as well as Maimonides (12th century) stated that some offenses are so severe that they are unforgivable (*Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Return, chapters 3 and 4). These include committing heresy or murder, causing many others to sin, and cutting oneself off from the community. Separating oneself from the community is unforgivable partly because such a person is not among the community when it repents and thus does not share in the virtue that is accrued because of repentance (Laws of Return 4:2). This highlights the Jewish emphasis on the process of repentance, to which we turn next.

Repentance

According to Jewish doctrines, one is not required to grant forgiveness until the offender has engaged in a process of sincere repentance accompanied by genuine remorse (Rye et al., 2000). In the absence of a process of repentance, the offender is not reintegrated into the community, and, furthermore, he or she may feel free to commit offenses without consequences (Dorff, 1998; Gopin, 2001). The process of repentance is so valued in Jewish theology that a person who has sinned and repented is seen as greater than a person who has never sinned (*Talmud, Berachot* p. 34b).

Dorff (1998) explains that this process of repentance situates forgiveness in a social framework in Judaism. Such a perspective dovetails with the greater salience of social aspects of religion among Jews, as compared to Protestants (Cohen, Hall, Koenig, & Meador, 2005). The American psychological forgiveness literature has had little to say about more social or public aspects of forgiveness (but see Exline & Baumeister, 2000; Shults & Sandage, 2004).

Right to Forgive

Judaism teaches that only the victim has the right to forgive an offense. According to Jewish doctrines, even God cannot forgive a person for an offense against another person until forgiveness has been obtained from the victim (*Talmud, Yoma* 8:9). Hence, there is a tradition before the Jewish day of repentance, Yom Kippur, of asking other people for forgiveness for any offenses that might have been committed in preparation for asking God for forgiveness for these offenses.

The issue of the right to forgive is poignantly discussed in Wiesenthal's (1997) book *The Sunflower*. Wiesenthal described an experience he went through as a prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp. Summoned to the bedside of a dying SS soldier, Wiesenthal was asked by this soldier for forgiveness before the soldier's imminent death. The soldier had set fire to a building with Jews inside and shot people who attempted to escape. Wiesenthal did not know what he should do and simply left without making a decision of whether or not to forgive.

After this story is told, the book goes on to discuss what some eminent thinkers from a range of fields believe Wiesenthal should have done. Some of the respondents were Jewish theologians, and their responses almost uniformly claimed that one may not forgive an offense committed against another person. For example, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, the eminent Jewish theologian, argued, “No one can forgive crimes against other people. It is therefore preposterous to assume that anybody alive can extend forgiveness for the suffering of any one of the six million people who perished. According to Jewish tradition, even God Himself can only forgive sins committed against Himself, not against man” (p. 171). Similarly, Rabbi Joseph Telushkin asked, “How could Wiesenthal forgive crimes committed against others?” (p. 263).

Christian theologian Martin Marty also provided a very thoughtful, balanced response. He appeared to struggle with his view of whether forgiveness was appropriate, being concerned about “cheap grace,” minimizing the offense, or promoting forgetting of the offense. However, despite his reservations, and in contrast to many of the Jewish theologians who commented, Marty responded, “My answer would be that in every circumstance that I can picture, more value would grow out of forgiveness than out if its withholding” (p. 211).

CURRENT GOALS

Based on this theoretical analysis, we conducted a series of studies documenting Jewish-Protestant differences in forgiveness and examining the processes that account for these differences. In Studies 1 and 2, we tested the hypothesis that Jews would be more inclined than Protestants to believe that certain offenses are unforgivable. Furthermore, because individuals who are more religious are more likely to be familiar with their religion’s teachings, we hypothesized that religious commitment would correlate negatively with the belief that some offenses are unforgivable among Protestants, but not among Jews. Because of the high value placed on forgiveness in both Judaism and Protestantism, we also predicted that dispositional forgiveness would not account for Jewish-Protestant differences in the belief that some offenses are unforgivable. Finally, we predicted that the demonstrated tendency for Protestants to report higher levels of

religious commitment than Jews (e.g., Cohen et al., 2005; Cohen & Rozin, 2001; Cohen, Siegel, & Rozin, 2003), would not account for Jewish-Protestant differences in the belief that some offenses are unforgivable.

In Study 3, we presented participants with a scenario depicting an offense that had severe consequences for the victim, was committed against a person other than the participant, and in which the perpetrator did not express repentance toward the victim. In this scenario, the perpetrator, a college student, plagiarizes a friend's paper, resulting in the friend receiving a failing grade. We measured participants' willingness to forgive this offense as well as endorsement of the three theologically prescribed reasons for nonforgiveness (i.e., certain offenses are too severe to forgive, only the victim has the right to forgive, and forgiveness requires repentance). We hypothesized that Jews would report less forgiveness than Protestants and that this effect would be mediated by endorsement of the three theologically prescribed reasons for nonforgiveness.

Throughout history, Jews have been the victims of persecution, and in no recent event more so than the Holocaust. One would expect that Jews would be less likely to forgive Holocaust-related offenses because of reasons pertaining to ethnic and religious identity, not simply the theologically prescribed reasons discussed earlier. A demonstration that even Jewish nonforgiveness of a Holocaust-related offense is mediated by the three theologically prescribed reasons for nonforgiveness would provide stronger evidence for the salience of these reasons in the processes accounting for religious differences in forgiveness. For this reason, we included in Study 3 a description of the Holocaust-related offense that Wiesenthal was asked to forgive and tested the same mediational hypothesis with regard to the responses to this offense.

STUDY 1

Study 1 investigated the following hypotheses: (a) that Jews would be more likely than Protestants to believe that certain offenses are unforgivable; (b) that religious commitment would correlate negatively with belief that certain offenses are unforgivable among Protestants, but not among Jews; and (c) that these effects would not be

attributable to differences in dispositional forgiveness or, in the case of the first hypothesis, religious commitment.

Method

Participants

Participants were introductory psychology students at the University of Pennsylvania who volunteered to complete the questionnaire in a psychology course.

Measures

Religious culture and religious commitment. Participants indicated their religious cultures. Data from 43 Protestants (29 women, 14 men) and 71 Jews (44 women, 26 men) were retained for analysis. In terms of religious denominations, 42 of the Jews simply specified Jewish, 13 were Reform, 10 were Conservative, and 5 were Orthodox. For the Protestants, most simply indicated Protestant or Christian ($n = 22$), 6 were Presbyterian, 6 were Episcopalian, and 4 were Baptist.

Participants responded to four items probing religious commitment, including self-ratings of religiosity, spirituality, extent of religious belief, and extent of religious practice. All items were rated on 0 (*Not at all*) to 5 (*Extremely*) scales. Because we wanted to capture the full range of religious commitment experienced by individuals, we included the spirituality item in addition to items capturing content relevant to more conventional forms of religious commitment. Recent theoretical work has defined spirituality as the process of locating and contemplating the role of the sacred in life, whereas religiosity refers to one's relationships with organized religion (Hill & Pargament, 2003; Hill et al., 2000; Zinnbauer et al., 1997; Zinnbauer, Pargament, & Scott, 1999). Items tapping both practice and belief were used because notions of religiosity in Judaism and Protestantism seem to rely on these differentially. Whereas belief is central to both religions, Judaism stresses practice as the hallmark of religiosity. In support of this, recent research has shown that belief does not make a significant, unique contribution to the prediction of Jews' religiosity, whereas both belief and practice make independent contributions to predicting religiosity among Protestants (Cohen et al., 2003).

The four religious commitment items were subjected to a principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation. A scree test indicated a one-factor solution. The single factor had an eigenvalue of 3.21 and accounted for 80% of the variance. Factor loadings ranged from .82 to .94. Therefore, the four items were combined into a single religious commitment scale ($\alpha = .91$).

Dispositional forgiveness. The following four dispositional forgiveness items were rated on a -2 (*Strongly disagree*) to $+2$ (*Strongly agree*) scale: (a) "I often bear grudges" (reverse-scored); (b) "Overall, compared to most people I know, I am more forgiving"; (c) "I am a person that almost always publicly forgives"; and (d) "I am a person that almost always privately forgives." These four items were subjected to a principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation. A scree test indicated a one-factor solution. The single factor had an eigenvalue of 2.22 and accounted for 55.5% of the variance. Factor loadings ranged from .69 to .82. Therefore, the four items were combined into a single dispositional forgiveness scale ($\alpha = .72$).

Belief in unforgivable offenses. Participants responded to these five items on a -2 (*Strongly disagree*) to $+2$ (*Strongly agree*) scale: (a) "There are certain offenses, such as rape or murder, that can never under any circumstances be forgiven, because the harm cannot be undone"; (b) "A person who publicly forgives someone for a really bad offense is a fool"; (c) "There are certain offenses that no one should publicly forgive"; (d) "There are certain offenses that no one should privately forgive"; and (e) "Individuals who commit crimes against humanity, such as genocide, should never be forgiven."

Responses to the five belief-in-unforgivable-offenses items were subjected to a principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation. A scree test indicated a one-factor solution. The single factor had an eigenvalue of 3.24 and accounted for 64.8% of the variance. Factor loadings ranged from .65 to .86. Therefore, the five items were combined into a single belief in unforgivable offenses scale ($\alpha = .86$).

Results and Discussion

Preliminary Analyses

No sex differences were found in any of the variables, and none of the reported effects differed significantly between the sexes. Therefore, all analyses were conducted collapsed across sex and without controlling for sex. Consistent with past research (e.g., Cohen et al., 2003), Protestants ($M = 2.76$, $SD = 1.39$) rated themselves as higher on religious commitment than did Jews ($M = 2.16$, $SD = 1.05$; $r = -.24$, $p = .01$).

Mean Differences in Forgiveness

Jews ($M = 0.59$, $SD = 0.92$) reported significantly greater belief in unforgivable offenses than Protestants ($M = -0.43$, $SD = 1.15$; $r = .44$,

$p < .001$). However, Jews ($M = 0.45$, $SD = 0.91$) and Protestants ($M = 0.63$, $SD = 0.81$) did not significantly differ in dispositional forgiveness ($r = -.10$, ns). Furthermore, controlling for dispositional forgiveness did not substantially alter the effect of religious culture on belief in unforgivable offenses ($\beta = .42$, $p < .001$). Finally, controlling for religious commitment did not substantially alter the effect of religious culture on belief in unforgivable offenses ($\beta = .36$, $p < .001$).

These findings confirmed our hypotheses that Jews would be more inclined than Protestants to believe in unforgivable offenses and that this effect would not be attributable to differences in dispositional forgiveness or religious commitment.

Religious Commitment and Forgiveness

Overall in the sample, religious commitment was correlated negatively with belief in unforgivable offenses ($r = -.45$, $p < .001$) and positively with dispositional forgiveness ($r = .18$, $p = .06$). To test the hypothesis that religious commitment would correlate negatively with belief in unforgivable offenses among Protestants but not among Jews, we performed a moderated regression analysis. Belief in unforgivable offenses was regressed on religious culture, religious commitment, and their interaction. The interaction effect was significant ($\beta = 0.34$, $p < .001$). Religious commitment and belief in unforgivable offenses had a large negative correlation among Protestants ($r = -.76$, $p < .001$), but no relationship among Jews ($r = -.02$). Controlling for dispositional forgiveness did not substantially alter the religious culture \times religious commitment interaction in the prediction of belief in unforgivable offenses ($\beta = .33$, $p < .001$).

A similar moderation analysis was conducted to investigate whether correlations between religious commitment and dispositional forgiveness were similar among Jews and Protestants. Dispositional forgiveness was regressed on religious culture, religious commitment, and their interaction. The interaction term was not significant ($\beta = -.10$, ns), indicating that the correlations were similar across the two religious groups.

This finding confirmed our hypothesis that, among Protestants, being a religious person is strongly associated with believing that no offenses are unforgivable, whereas among Jews, this relationship does not exist. Furthermore, this moderation effect is not attributable to differences in dispositional forgiveness.

STUDY 2

In Study 1, we measured dispositional forgiveness using four items that we developed. In Study 2, we sought to replicate the findings of Study 1 using a validated measure of dispositional forgiveness, the Transgression Narrative Test of Forgiveness (TNTF; Berry, Worthington, Parrott, O'Connor, & Wade, 2001).

Method

Participants

Participants were students at the University of Pennsylvania who volunteered to complete this study's questionnaire. Participants were 49 Protestants (27 men, 22 women) and 52 Jews (24 men, 28 women). Seventeen of the Protestants indicated no denomination; other denominations that were reasonably represented included Episcopalian ($n = 10$), Presbyterian ($n = 5$), Lutheran ($n = 4$), and Methodist ($n = 4$). Twenty-eight of the Jews did not provide a denomination, and the others were mainly Reform ($n = 11$) and Conservative ($n = 9$).

Measures

Religious culture and religious commitment. Participants indicated their religious culture. Those who indicated Jewish or Protestant were retained for the analyses. Participants rated (a) how religious and (b) how spiritual they were on 1 (*Not at all*) to 5 (*Extremely*) scales. These items were combined into a religious commitment scale ($\alpha = .67$).

Dispositional forgiveness. Participants completed the TNTF. For this measure, participants rated how likely they would be to forgive people for five interpersonal transgressions on a scale of 1 (*Definitely not forgive*) to 5 (*Definitely forgive*). The TNTF has shown adequate internal reliability, and the scale correlates as expected with measures of anger and hostility, showing convergent validity. The scale also shows strong test-retest reliability and predicts forgiveness of an interpersonal offense at 8 weeks following the assessment (Berry et al., 2001). The TNTF was measured at about the same level of internal reliability as in past research by Berry et al. ($\alpha = .63$).

Belief in unforgivable offenses. Participants rated the following statement on a 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*) scale: "There are certain offenses which can never be forgiven."

Results and Discussion

Preliminary Analyses

No sex differences were found in any of the variables, and none of the reported effects differed significantly between the sexes. Therefore, all analyses were conducted collapsed across sex and without controlling for sex. There was a trend for Protestants ($M = 2.99$, $SD = 0.84$) to score higher on religious commitment than Jews ($M = 2.73$, $SD = 0.86$; $r = -.16$, $p = .12$).

Mean Differences in Forgiveness

Jews ($M = 4.35$, $SD = 0.81$) reported significantly greater belief in unforgivable offenses than Protestants ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 1.35$; $r = .47$, $p < .001$). There was a marginally significant tendency for Jews ($M = 2.58$, $SD = 0.54$) to score lower than Protestants ($M = 2.79$, $SD = 0.63$) on dispositional forgiveness ($r = -.18$, $p = .07$), but controlling for dispositional forgiveness did not substantially alter the effect of religious culture on belief in unforgivable offenses ($\beta = .45$, $p < .001$). Finally, controlling for religious commitment did not substantially alter the effect of religious culture on belief in unforgivable offenses ($\beta = .43$, $p < .001$).

Using different measures of forgiveness than we used in Study 1, we replicated the findings of Study 1 that Jews are more inclined than Protestants to believe in unforgivable offenses and that this effect is attributable to neither differences in dispositional forgiveness nor differences in religious commitment.

Religious Commitment and Forgiveness

Overall in the sample, religious commitment was correlated negatively with belief in unforgivable offenses ($r = -.31$, $p = .002$) and positively with dispositional forgiveness ($r = .29$, $p = .004$). To test the hypothesis that religious commitment would correlate negatively with belief in unforgivable offenses among Protestants but not among Jews, we performed a moderated regression analysis. Belief in unforgivable offenses was regressed on religious culture, religious commitment, and their interaction. The interaction effect was nearly significant ($\beta = .15$, $p = .08$). Religious commitment and belief in

unforgivable offenses had a significant negative correlation among Protestants ($r = -.37, p = .01$), but not among Jews ($r = -.15, ns$).

As in Study 1, religious culture did not moderate the relationship between religious commitment and dispositional forgiveness ($\beta = -.04, ns$). Also, controlling for dispositional forgiveness did not alter the religious culture \times religious commitment interaction in the prediction of belief in unforgivable offenses ($\beta = .15, p = .08$).

These findings mirror those of Study 1 in indicating that religious commitment negatively predicts belief in unforgivable offenses among Protestants, but not Jews, and that this differential prediction is not attributable to differences in dispositional forgiveness.

STUDY 3

In Study 3, we sought to replicate and extend the results of Studies 1 and 2. In this study, we measured forgiveness in response to two different scenarios that fulfilled the three criteria for nonforgiveness in Jewish law. Furthermore, we measured endorsement of the three theologically prescribed reasons for nonforgiveness. In line with the findings of Studies 1 and 2, we predicted that Jews would report less forgiveness than Protestants for these offenses and that religious commitment would be positively correlated with forgiveness of these offenses among Protestants, but not among Jews.

We also hypothesized that Jews would be more inclined than Protestants to endorse the three theologically prescribed reasons for nonforgiveness—the beliefs that certain offenses are too severe to forgive, that only the victim has the right to forgive, and that forgiveness depends on repentance. Furthermore, we predicted that religious commitment would be negatively correlated with endorsement of these reasons among Protestants, but not among Jews. Finally, we predicted that endorsement of these three reasons for nonforgiveness would fully account for the Jewish-Protestant differences in forgiveness of both offenses.

Method

Participants

The questionnaire in this study was posted on the Internet and advertised to several university religious groups at the University of California,

Berkeley, an introductory psychology class at the University of Pennsylvania, and online religious groups. We collected data on the student affiliations of 129 participants (8 did not provide this information). Most participants were students at the University of California, Berkeley ($n = 66$) or at the University of Pennsylvania ($n = 36$).

Participants were 60 Jews (11 men, 49 women) and 77 Protestants (29 men, 48 women). Participants reported their religious denominations and ethnicities in an open-ended format. In terms of religious denominations, the Jews were mostly Conservative ($n = 23$) and Reform ($n = 21$), with 8 Orthodox participants. The Protestants were mainly nondenominational, with the most highly represented denomination being Episcopalian ($n = 20$). Other Protestant denominations that were represented include Evangelical ($n = 4$), Lutheran ($n = 4$), Pentecostal ($n = 4$), and Presbyterian ($n = 4$). The large representation of nondenominational Protestants is not surprising given that this is a rapidly growing segment within American Protestantism (Steensland et al., 2000).

Almost all of the Jews reported their ethnicity as White ($n = 56$). The Protestants were mostly White ($n = 37$), Asian ($n = 23$), or Asian American ($n = 7$). Education level was reported from elementary school (1) to graduate degree (5). Religious groups did not differ significantly in education, or in age (Table 1).

Measures

Religious commitment. Participants rated six items assessing religious commitment on 1 (*Not at all*) to 5 (*Deeply* for the first four items, *Extremely* for the last two items) scales. The items were: (a) "How religious are you?" (b) "How spiritual are you?" (c) "How much do you believe in the teachings of your religion?" (d) "How much do you practice the requirements of your religion?" (e) "How important a part of your identity is your religious or faith to you?" and (f) "If someone wanted to understand who you are as a person, how important would your religion or faith be in that?"

These six items were subjected to a principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation. A scree test suggested a one-factor solution. This single factor had an eigenvalue of 3.93 and accounted for 65.6% of the variance. Item loadings were between .73 and .85. Therefore, the six religious commitment items were combined into a single religious commitment scale ($\alpha = .89$).

Plagiarism offense. Participants were presented with a scenario, adapted from the TNTF, depicting an offense that had severe consequences for the victim, was committed against a person other than the participant, and

Table 1
Mean Differences on Demographics and Mediator Scales in Study 3 Broken Down by Religion

	Religion Differences					
	Jews		Protestants		Jewish-Protestant difference in raw means	Jewish-Protestant difference while controlling for religious commitment
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
<i>Demographics</i>						
Education	3.3	0.88	3.3	0.83	-0.01	
Age	23.3	9.31	21.5	4.43	0.13	
Religiosity	3.01	1.04	3.62	1.06	-0.28***	
<i>Forgiveness measures</i>						
Plagiarism	2.49	0.75	3.44	0.98	-0.47***	-0.37***
Sunflower	2.56	0.97	3.91	0.83	-0.60***	-0.53***
<i>Mediator scales</i>						
No Right	3.25	0.87	2.40	0.69	0.48***	0.46***
Severity	3.21	0.85	1.91	0.80	0.62***	0.56***
Repent	3.45	0.77	2.67	0.79	0.45***	0.37***

Note. *** $p \leq .001$. For Jews, *n*'s range from 59 to 60. For Protestants, *n*'s range from 70 to 77. For the religious culture variable, Jew was coded as 1 and Protestant as 0.

did not include repentance toward the victim on the part of the perpetrator. The scenario read as follows:

Imagine that your best friend is taking a class. In that class, an important paper was due at the end of last week. Your best friend was already finished with the paper early in the week. Someone that your best friend occasionally sees in that class, Robert, told your best friend that he is under a lot of time pressure. Robert then asked your best friend to borrow your best friend's paper, just for some ideas. Your best friend agreed, and Robert simply retyped the paper and handed it in. The professor recognized the paper and gave your best friend an F for the assignment. Robert has never apologized to your best friend. Imagine that you see Robert in the student union building. Robert knows who you are and asks you to forgive him for getting your best friend in trouble.

Participants responded to the following five items assessing their willingness to forgive the plagiarism offense on a 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*) scale: (a) "I would forgive Robert," (b) "It is the right thing for me to do to forgive Robert," (c) "I would not forgive Robert" (reverse scored), (d) "I would hold a grudge against Robert for this offense" (reverse scored), and (e) "It would be immoral for me not to forgive Robert for this offense." Forgiveness of the plagiarism offense was measured reliably ($\alpha = .86$).

Holocaust offense. Participants were presented with this offense adapted from Wiesenthal's description of the offense discussed earlier:

In the book *The Sunflower*, Simon Wiesenthal describes an experience that happened to him while he was an inmate in a concentration camp. He was brought to the bedside of a dying SS soldier who wanted Mr. Wiesenthal to forgive him for a terrible act he committed. This SS soldier participated in rounding up some Jews into a building and setting the building on fire. When people jumped out the windows of the building, he and other soldiers shot the Jews. The SS soldier deeply regretted this incident and wanted Mr. Wiesenthal to forgive him for it before he died.

Participants responded to the following five items assessing their willingness to forgive the Holocaust offense on a 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*) scale: (a) "Mr. Wiesenthal should have forgiven the SS soldier"; (b) "Mr. Wiesenthal would have done the virtuous thing if he forgave the soldier"; (c) "If Mr. Wiesenthal came to me for my advice, I would tell him that my opinion is that he should have forgiven the SS soldier"; (d) "Mr. Wiesenthal should not have forgiven the SS soldier" (reverse scored); and (e) "Forgiving the SS soldier would not be

appropriate in that situation” (reverse scored). Forgiveness of the Holocaust offense was measured reliably ($\alpha = .94$).

Theologically prescribed reasons for nonforgiveness. Participants completed measures of the beliefs that (a) some offenses are too severe to forgive (“Severity”), (b) forgiveness requires repentance (“Repent”), and (c) only the victim has the right to forgive (“No Right”).

For the Severity scale participants rated the following five items on a 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*) scale: (a) “Certain offenses are simply too bad to ever forgive”; (b) “It is not right to forgive someone for an offense as bad as murder”; (c) “There is no offense that is so bad that it can never be forgiven” (reverse scored); (d) “The moral thing to do is to forgive someone for an offense, no matter how severe the offense is” (reverse scored); and (e) “It would be immoral to forgive someone for an especially bad offense.” The Severity scale was measured reliably ($\alpha = .89$).

For the No Right scale, participants rated the following five items on a 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*) scale: (a) “People do not have the right to forgive offenses that were not committed against them personally”; (b) “Anyone has the right to forgive any offense” (reverse scored); (c) “If someone did something to hurt a friend of mine, they would have to get forgiveness from my friend before I could forgive them”; (d) “Murder can never be forgiven since the victim can never forgive the offender”; and (e) “Even a relatively minor offense, committed against someone, can only be forgiven by the victim.” The No Right scale was measured reliably ($\alpha = .79$).

For the Repent scale, participants rated the following items on a 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*) scale: (a) “Before I can forgive someone for an offense, they have to repent in some way,” (b) “A person who did something to hurt me would not have to try to make it up to me before I could forgive them” (reverse scored), (c) “An offender would not deserve forgiveness if they did not try to make up for their offense,” (d) “People deserve forgiveness even if they do not ever accept responsibility for what they did” (reverse scored), (e) “I would forgive someone for an offense even if they never apologized to me” (reverse scored), (f) “Justice should come before forgiveness,” and (g) “A person does not have to change for the better before I can forgive them.” The Repent scale was measured reliably ($\alpha = .87$).

Results and Discussion

Preliminary Analyses

No sex differences were found in any of the variables, and none of the reported effects differed significantly between the sexes. Therefore, all analyses were conducted collapsed across sex and without

controlling for sex. Protestants ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 1.06$) rated themselves as higher on religious commitment than did Jews ($M = 3.01$, $SD = 1.04$; $r = -.28$, $p = .001$).

Mean Differences in Forgiveness

Jews were more inclined than Protestants to endorse each of the theologically prescribed reasons for nonforgiveness, and were less likely than Protestants to forgive in both of the scenarios (Table 1). Controlling for religious commitment did not substantially alter any of these findings (Table 1).

These findings supported the hypotheses that Jews are less inclined than Protestants to forgive offenses that meet the theologically prescribed criteria for nonforgiveness and are more inclined to endorse each of these reasons for nonforgiveness than Protestants. Furthermore, these effects were not attributable to differences in religious commitment.

Religious Commitment and Forgiveness

Overall in the sample, religious commitment had significant positive correlations with forgiveness of both scenarios and significant negative correlations with endorsement of each of the theologically prescribed reasons for nonforgiveness (Table 2). To determine whether the effects of religious commitment on forgiveness of the two offenses and endorsement of the three theologically prescribed reasons for nonforgiveness differed across Jews and Protestants, we conducted a series of moderated multiple regression analyses. Each forgiveness variable was individually regressed on religious culture, religious commitment, and their interaction. In each of the five analyses, the religious culture \times religious commitment interaction was significant, indicating stronger effects of religious commitment on forgiveness among Protestants than among Jews (Table 2).

These findings confirmed our predictions that among Protestants, to a greater extent than among Jews, being more religious was associated with greater forgiveness as well as unwillingness to endorse the beliefs that certain criteria make offenses unforgivable.

Theologically prescribed reasons for nonforgiveness as mediators. Structural equation modeling was used to test the hypothesis that the

Table 2
Moderation Analyses in Study 3

Scale	Correlations of scales with religious commitment			Interaction of religious culture (Jew or Protestant) and religious commitment
	Jews	Protestants	J&P	β
Forgive plagiarism offense	.25*	.56***	.50***	-.19**
Forgive Holocaust offense	.09	.51***	.39***	-.18**
No Right	.16	-.36**	-.20*	.23**
Severity	-.01	-.52***	-.39***	.22**
Repent	-.10	-.48***	-.39***	.18*

Note: * $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$. *N*s ranged from 59–60 for Jews, and 70–77 for Protestants. “J&P” means the combined sample of Jews and Protestants. For the religious culture variable, Jew was coded as 1 and Protestant as 0.

three theologically prescribed reasons for nonforgiveness fully account for the effect of religious culture on forgiveness in each of the two scenarios. For each of the two scenarios, a model depicting religious culture impacting forgiveness entirely via the theologically prescribed reasons for nonforgiveness (i.e., with no direct effect of religious culture on forgiveness) was fit to the data. Religious culture and forgiveness were modeled as observed variables, and theologically prescribed reasons were modeled as a latent variable with Severity, Repent, and No Right as indicators. Analyses were conducted with Amos 4 (Arbuckle, 1994). Maximum likelihood estimation was used to generate parameters, and the models were fit to covariance matrices. The two models are displayed in Figures 1 and 2.

For the plagiarism offense, the model provided a good fit to the data; $\chi^2(5) = 5.204$, $p = .391$; Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) = .984; Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI) = .951; Normed Fit Index (NFI) = .981; Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = .018. Freely estimating the direct effect of religious culture on forgiveness yielded a nonsignificant parameter estimate; $-.03$; and did not improve the fit of the model; $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 0.078$, *ns*. These findings suggest that the effect of religious culture on

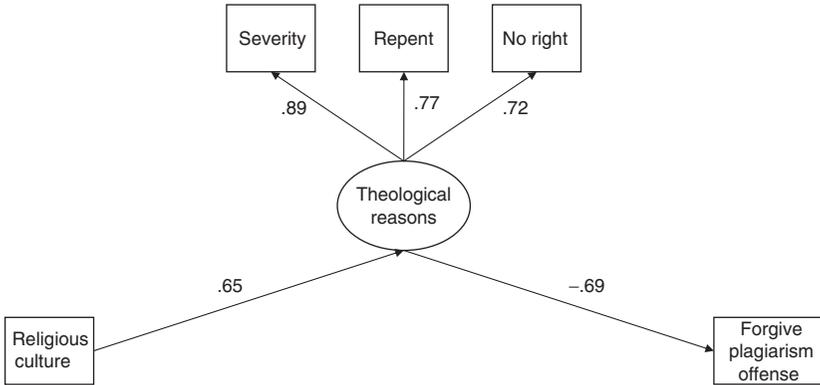


Figure 1

Path model depicting the effect of religious culture (higher score means Jewish, lower score means Protestant) on forgiveness of the plagiarism offense fully mediated by the theologically prescribed reasons for nonforgiveness. Residual terms are omitted. $N = 121$. For all parameters, $p < .001$. $\chi^2 (5) = 5.204$, $p = .391$; GFI = .984; AGFI = .951; NFI = .981; RMSEA = .018.

forgiveness of the plagiarism offense is fully accounted for by endorsement of the theologically prescribed reasons for nonforgiveness.

For the Holocaust offense, the model provided a good fit to the data; $\chi^2 (5) = 3.884$, $p = .566$; GFI = .987; AGFI = .962; NFI = .989;

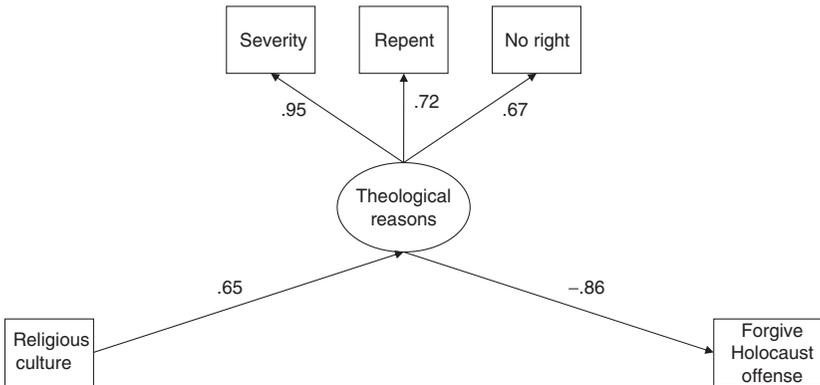


Figure 2

Path model depicting the effect of religious culture (higher score means Jewish, lower score means Protestant) on forgiveness of the Holocaust offense fully mediated by the theologically prescribed reasons for nonforgiveness. Residual terms are omitted. $N = 122$. For all parameters, $p < .001$. $\chi^2 (5) = 3.884$, $p = .566$; GFI = .987; AGFI = .962; NFI = .989; RMSEA = .000.

RMSEA = .000. Freely estimating the direct effect of religious culture on forgiveness yielded a nonsignificant parameter estimate, $-.06$, and did not improve the fit of the model; $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 0.732$, *ns*. These findings suggest that the effect of religious culture on forgiveness of the Holocaust-related offense is fully accounted for by the theologically prescribed reasons for nonforgiveness.

The theologically prescribed reasons for nonforgiveness were so strongly associated with nonforgiveness of the Holocaust offense that one could argue that nonforgiveness of the Holocaust offense is better construed as an indicator of an underlying belief in unforgivable offenses, rather than an outcome of this underlying belief. The same could be said regarding nonforgiveness of the plagiarism offense, although the effect on this variable was weaker. Clearly some of the items comprising the scenario forgiveness measures assess underlying principles regarding forgiveness, similar to those captured in the measures of the theologically prescribed reasons for nonforgiveness. To address this concern, we isolated the two items from each of the scenario forgiveness measures that directly gauge forgiveness decisions, as opposed to expressions of value orientations (i.e., "I would forgive Robert" and "I would not forgive Robert" (reverse scored) for the plagiarism offense, and "Mr. Wiesenthal should have forgiven the SS soldier" and "Mr. Wiesenthal should not have forgiven the SS soldier" (reverse scored) for the Holocaust offense). We then reexamined the mediational hypotheses of Study 3 using these measures. Jews scored significantly lower than Protestants on both of the two-item scenario forgiveness measures, and the effect sizes were similar to those obtained with the full-scenario measures ($r = -.42$, $p < .001$, for the plagiarism offense; $r = -.57$, $p < .001$, for the Holocaust offense). Furthermore, the full mediational model provided a good fit to the data using both the two-item plagiarism forgiveness measure ($\chi^2(5) = 4.700$, $p = .454$; GFI = .985; AGFI = .956; NFI = .981; RMSEA = .000) and the two-item Holocaust forgiveness measure ($\chi^2(5) = 2.580$, $p = .764$; GFI = .992; AGFI = .976; NFI = .992; RMSEA = .000).

GENERAL DISCUSSION

One promising approach to understanding the relationship between culture and personality is to examine the effects of cultural

memberships on values. In the present research we, therefore, examined the influence of religious culture on the value of forgiveness. In Study 1 and Study 2, we found that Jews were significantly more inclined than Protestants to believe that some offenses are unforgivable. Moreover, this finding was not attributable to differences between Jews and Protestants in dispositional forgiveness or religious commitment. We also found that religious culture moderated the relationship between religious commitment and belief in unforgivable offenses. Specifically, this correlation was significantly negative among Protestants but not among Jews, and this moderation finding was not due to differences in dispositional forgiveness.

These differences in correlations between religiosity and belief in unforgivable offenses are particularly interesting in light of the distinction between religiosity-based and religious-culture-based theoretical approaches to values. Our results underscore the importance of taking religious culture into account even when studying the relationship between religiosity and values. It may be fruitful for future research to follow up on these findings by investigating other aspects or dimensions of religiousness. One potentially useful distinction in this regard is that between intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity (Allport & Ross, 1967). However, we urge caution in such investigations, as the value of certain religious motivations differs across religious cultures. For example, social motivations for religion are more normative among Jews and Catholics, as compared to American Protestants (Cohen et al., 2005).

Since we found in Study 1 and Study 2 that dispositional forgiveness does not account for Jewish-Protestant differences in willingness to forgive certain offenses, we proposed three potential mediators of Jewish nonforgiveness of certain offenses. These were derived from differences in Jewish and Protestant dogma concerning reasons that certain offenses are unforgivable. These were that only the victim has the right to forgive, that forgiveness depends on a process of repentance, and that some offenses are too severe to forgive. Jews endorsed each of these reasons to a greater extent than did Protestants in Study 3. Furthermore, belief in these theologically prescribed reasons for nonforgiveness fully accounted for religious differences in willingness to forgive two offenses, one that does not pertain specifically to Jews (the plagiarism offense), and one that does (the Holocaust offense).

It may not seem intuitive that the three theologically prescribed reasons for nonforgiveness account for Jewish-Protestant differences in forgiveness of Holocaust offenses. One could reasonably suppose that being Jewish is associated with nonforgiveness of the Holocaust simply because Jews were the primary victims of the Holocaust. If this were the case, however, we would not expect that Jewish nonforgiveness of the Holocaust offense would be mediated by the three theologically prescribed reasons for nonforgiveness. Of course, it is quite possible that having the Holocaust in recent cultural memory largely underlies the tendency of Jews to believe in unforgivable offenses in general and to endorse the three theologically prescribed reasons for nonforgiveness. The question then becomes: Would Jews be more inclined than Protestants to believe in unforgivable offenses if the Holocaust had not occurred? Although it is impossible to collect definitive data on this question, we believe that the answer is yes. Specifically, we propose that the Jewish doctrines that discuss reasons for nonforgiveness have had a lasting impact on Jewish culture, making Jews especially inclined to internalize the theologically prescribed reasons for nonforgiveness. This view is consistent with our finding that Jews are less inclined than Protestants to forgive an offense that meets these criteria that have nothing to do with Jewish identity whatsoever. It would be useful, however, for future research to measure the degree to which having direct family experience with the Holocaust is associated with greater general belief in unforgivable offenses.

A related concern with Study 3 pertains to the fact that the measures of the theologically prescribed reasons for nonforgiveness were very similar to the measures of the scenario forgiveness measures. Although we demonstrated that the mediational hypotheses were confirmed using scenario forgiveness measures consisting only of forgiveness decisions, common method bias still limits the conclusions that can be drawn from these analyses. Future research should attempt to replicate this mediational finding by using more objective measures of forgiveness, such as other-report and behavioral measures.

Another limitation of the current work is its exclusive focus on two religious cultural groups. Of course, there are many religious cultures on which we could have chosen to focus, even within the United States. We believe that contrasting Jews' and Protestants' views of forgiveness is theoretically important because of certain

clear differences in theology between these two religious cultures. We excluded Catholics, for example, because Catholic doctrine regarding forgiveness seems to resemble aspects of both Judaism and Protestantism, and thus Catholics would be predicted to fall somewhere between Jews and Protestants with regard to beliefs about forgiveness. Catholicism, like Protestantism, could be characterized as holding unconditional forgiveness as a central value. However, the distinction between mortal sins and venial sins could be taken to imply that Catholics consider some offenses to be unforgivable (or at least less forgivable) than other sins. The Catholic sacrament of reconciliation (confession) could be interpreted to mean that forgiveness depends on repentance, as we are claiming it does in Judaism. Thus, we felt that the Jewish-Protestant comparison would provide a better demonstration of the impact that religious culture can have on views of forgiveness, as compared to Catholic-Jewish or Catholic-Protestant comparisons. Future research should address differences in values among other religious cultures (e.g., Hinduism and Islam).

The influence of religion on forgiveness may occur through direct religious instruction as well as the more subtle cultural manifestations of religion. Regarding direct instruction, religiously prescribed views of forgiveness may be developed, for example, through exposure to sermons and religious scripture. As discussed previously, forgiveness is a prominent theme in both Jewish and Protestant theology and is likely to be stressed in both religions. However, instruction in Jewish thought also involves communication of the boundaries regarding forgiveness, whereas instruction in Protestant thought is more likely to emphasize that forgiveness should almost always be granted.

We propose that another way in which religion can influence forgiveness tendencies is through more subtle cultural channels. We assume that most of the participants in the present studies could not quote, chapter and verse, their religions' teachings regarding forgiveness. This is more likely to be true among the Jewish participants, as they tended to be lower in religious commitment than the Protestant participants. Nevertheless, we believe that it is possible that the transmission of cultural values regarding forgiveness might persist even as modern American Jews and Protestants become more distant from the traditional practice and study of their religions. Such a process is similar to that proposed by D. Cohen, Nisbett, Bowdle, and Schwarz (1996) regarding differences between the

southern and northern United States in the culture of honor. These researchers claimed that the source of southern United States White males' greater aggressiveness following an insult was the herding economies that were historically more prevalent in the South than in the North. However, this cultural difference remains long after its original cause has ceased to be a factor.

In relating the forgiveness literature to the Holocaust or to other group-level offenses, we feel that we are opening up some new approaches to the study of ethnic conflict. Most of the work that has been done on forgiveness has been in the context of dyadic, interpersonal relationships, and most scales that have been designed to measure forgiveness tendencies ask people to recall or imagine interpersonal offenses and then rate how forgiving they would feel (e.g. Berry et al., 2001; McCullough et al., 1998). Forgiveness research has not focused primarily on group relations, but forgiveness is clearly relevant in the group context.

One area of relevance is the aftermath of intergroup conflict. This involves both individual and group levels of analysis, such as the willingness of victims of genocides to forgive their individual perpetrators as opposed to the metagroup. In particular, members of different religions may be differentially willing to forgive and may consider the importance or normativeness of forgiveness to be different. Some authors deem forgiveness important even after ethnic conflict. Staub and Pearlman (2001), for example, have stated, "Forgiving is difficult. The very idea of it can be offensive after horrible events like the Holocaust, the genocide in Rwanda, or the genocidal violence in Tibet. Even to people outside the victim group, the idea that survivors should forgive following genocide is an affront, an anathema. . . . Nevertheless, forgiving is necessary and desirable" (p. 207).

In other work, we interviewed Holocaust survivors about their forgiveness of Germans and their tolerance of modern German people and products. Holocaust survivors vary widely in their apparent tolerance of German products and people (Cherfas, Rozin, Cohen, & Davidson, in press). Some Holocaust survivors are very averse to any person, activity, or object with a connection to Germany, whereas other survivors are completely comfortable with German people, culture, and products. The degree of acceptance of current young Germans and current German products among Holocaust survivors is related to survivors' beliefs about nonforgiveness and to survivors'

attributions of blame to contemporary Germans (Cherfas et al., in press). Of interest in this regard, Wohl and Branscombe (in press) found that Jewish undergraduates who were primed to think of the Holocaust as an offense committed by humans against other humans were more forgiving and assigned less collective guilt to Germans, as compared to those encouraged to see the Holocaust as an offense that Germans committed against Jews.

Our results suggest that different religious groups may have different views about the appropriateness of forgiveness following genocide or other major offenses. Rather than recommending to unforgiving people that they forgive or be more tolerant, we wish to consider the possibility that nonforgiveness may be religiously justified, and perhaps even healthy on certain levels, for certain individuals. Although many authors recommend forgiveness even after ethnic conflict (Staub & Pearlman, 2001), nonforgiveness might be seen by some Jews as preventing feelings of victimhood and promoting Jewish religious and cultural identity. Of course, these benefits must be weighed against the potential disadvantages of nonforgiveness, including prolonged conflict, distress, and the assignment of blame to innocent individuals. We feel that work on intergroup conflict can be enriched through a better understanding of the perceived value and limits of forgiveness among different cultural groups.

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