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How Does Culture Shape Conceptions of Forgiveness? Evidence From Japan and the United States

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Abstract

Theories of culture, cognition, and social relations suggest there may be differences in conceptions of forgiveness between the members of East Asian and Western cultures, but few researchers have examined this issue. This article builds on previous research on prototypes of forgiveness in the United States to address the question "What is forgiveness?" in Japan. In Studies 1a and 1b, we investigated Japanese conceptions of forgiveness. Study 2 demonstrated that forgiveness features that U.S. and Japanese participants generated are meaningfully different. Compared with Americans, Japanese participants focused more on aspects related to relationship harmony; they seemed to emphasize an adjustment motive and decisional forgiveness. They also put less emphasis on emotional forgiveness and attention to individuals in comparison with Americans. Our results suggest that the high value placed on relationship maintenance in Japan leads to different understandings of forgiveness. Inclusion of culturally diverse conceptions into the definition of forgiveness aids further understanding of forgiveness, which, in turn, enhances the development and application of existing theories.

Keywords

forgiveness, prototype analysis, culture, Japanese

The classic children's tale *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* is about a young girl named Goldilocks who intrudes into the house of three bears. Goldilocks runs away when she gets caught by the angry bears, leaving a mess she made behind her. Interestingly enough, in some older Japanese versions, the story ends differently. Instead of running away, Goldilocks apologizes to the bears for her misbehavior, and the bears decide to forgive her (see Kristof, 1996; Lanham & Shimura, 1967). Considering that children's tales are meant to convey central cultural values and beliefs to

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the younger generation, the different endings of the story indicate unique understandings about forgiveness. Although the forgiveness literature and the cultural psychology literature have both expanded in the past two decades, relatively little research brings the two together. As a result, researchers know little about whether the Western conceptualization of forgiveness is held also in non-Western populations. In the current research, we aimed to compare and contrast Japanese and American lay conceptualizations of forgiveness using a prototype perspective, and we demonstrate the need for cultural consideration in forgiveness research.

Conceptions of Forgiveness in Cultural Contexts

To date, most forgiveness theorizing and research has been conducted in Western European Heritage (WEH) cultural contexts; consequently, Western assumptions and beliefs about the nature of the person, relationships, emotions, and cognitions form the foundation of this research. In particular, researchers tend to focus on the forgiveness process taking place within an individual (i.e., freeing the self from negative thoughts, reducing personal motivations of revenge and avoidance, transforming one's anger), rather than the processes occurring in the relationship with the transgressor (i.e., reconciliation, apology, and restitution; see, for example, Baskin & Enright, 2004; Wade & Worthington, 2005). The development of forgiveness research in individualistic cultural contexts has been noted by some scholars, who argue that conceptions of forgiveness and the processes linked to forgiveness may be framed differently in collectivist cultural contexts (Hook, Worthington, & Utsey, 2009; Sandage, Hill, & Vang, 2003). Some empirical studies support this view; they will be discussed further below (Fu, Watkins, & Hui, 2004; Hook et al., 2013; Kurniati, Worthington, Kristi Poerwandari, Ginanjar, & Dwiwardani, 2017; Suwartono, Yeti Prawasti, & Mullet, 2007; Takada & Ohbuchi, 2013).

Indeed, examining cultural differences in forgiveness in collectivistic cultures is a good first step in developing a more global theory of forgiveness. However, one caveat when considering the results of the studies conducted in non-Western contexts is that many of the measures of forgiveness used in these studies were developed in WEH contexts; consequently, they may not adequately capture non-Western conceptions and experiences of forgiveness. For instance, Watkins and his colleagues (2011) had to drop several items from Worthington, Witvliet, Pietrini, and Miller's (2007) measure of forgiveness due to low reliabilities in Nepal. The measure of forgiveness used by Mullet and colleagues in a variety of different nations was developed in Western Europe, based on WEH conceptions of forgiveness (Azar & Mullet, 2002; Bagnulo, Muñoz-Sastre, & Mullet, 2009; Tripathi & Mullet, 2010). Efforts to test the generalizability of existing measures of forgiveness cross culturally are valuable and necessary (see, for example, Bagnulo et al., 2009; Kadiangandu, Gauché, Vinsonneau, & Mullet, 2007; Suwartono et al., 2007; Tripathi & Mullet, 2010), but these measures may inadvertently fail to include dimensions or aspects of forgiveness that are important in a particular cultural context (Caluori, Dugas, Mansour, & Gelfand, 2018). Hook and his colleagues (2012) voice this concern when they urge researchers to identify indigenous (or lay) understandings of forgiveness:

> Researchers have gone to great lengths to determine specific definitions of forgiveness, and present parameters and boundaries to the forgiveness process. Lay conceptualizations of forgiveness by individuals have not always lined up with these definitions. Thus, it is important for researchers to examine these lay conceptualizations of forgiveness, as they may have important ramifications for coping with a transgression, as well as the relationship between the victim and offender . . . Identifying these differences is an important theoretical and methodological advancement in forgiveness research. (p. 691; see also Leach & Parazak, 2015)

In this research, we take up the challenge by Hook and colleagues (Hook, Worthington, Utsey, Davis, Gartner, et al., 2012) to investigate the lay conceptions of forgiveness in an East Asian Heritage (EAH) context—Japan. Japan is an important location for this work due to its role in much of the recent cultural research on self-construals, cognition, emotion, and motivation (see Cross, Hardin, & Gercek-Swing, 2011, for reviews). Our investigation of indigenous understandings of forgiveness in Japan relies on an approach used by others that permits the identification of key features of a lay conception: the prototype approach.

A Prototype Perspective

When one is seeking to identify the defining characteristics of abstract concepts, it may be easier to understand the concept when it is organized around the best examples, called *prototypes* (Fehr, 1988, 2005). Researchers have examined the prototypical conceptions of abstract concepts such as love (Fehr, 1988, 1993), respect (Frei & Shaver, 2002), and humiliation (Elshout, Nelissen, & van Beest, 2017). Dimensions underlying a set of prototypical features of a construct can be compared with experts' theories, resulting in support for or elaboration of those theories (Aron & Westbay, 1996; Fehr & Russell, 1991).

A modified prototype perspective was applied in the current research to identify the content and structure of lay conceptions of forgiveness across cultures. We used the first steps in the prototype approach to generate the most common (Study 1) and most central (Study 2) features of the concept of forgiveness. Other studies have followed these steps with studies that test how people process and respond to prototypical versus nonprototypical features of the construct (Fehr, 1988, 2005; Kearns & Fincham, 2004). These cognitive consequences of prototypicality were not our focus; instead, the current studies focus on the degree to which cultural prototypes of forgiveness reflect theoretical cultural differences in values, cognitions, and motivations and the similarities and differences in the dimensions that underlie these prototypical features.

The prototype approach is particularly well suited for the purpose of the current study, which is to examine differing conceptions of forgiveness cross culturally. Previous cross-cultural studies have successfully applied the prototype perspective to identify differing conceptions of honor (Cross et al., 2014), marriage ideals (Lam et al., 2016), and a good person (Smith, Smith, & Christopher, 2007). The approach helps us to address the "What is it?" question and identify the defining features of the concept. By comparing the prototypes and their underlying structures, researchers can better evaluate the similarities and differences between Western and East Asian conceptions of forgiveness.

Of particular relevance to the current study, Kearns and Fincham (2004) examined the lay conception of forgiveness in the United States using a prototype approach. In the first two steps of their study, participants generated features of forgiveness in a free response format, and then a second set of participants rated the features from Study 1 for their centrality to the concept of forgiveness. Kearns and Fincham tested the prototypicality of the most central features in further studies. Although these studies provide very helpful information of the defining features of forgiveness, they are limited to a WEH cultural perspective. By extending the prototype approach across cultures, we are able to compare American and Japanese conceptions of forgiveness. To our knowledge, no prior research has investigated the lay prototype of forgiveness in non-Western cultures, despite a wealth of data on cultural variation in related processes. Therefore, the current studies aim to investigate cultural differences in Japanese and American laypeople's conceptions of forgiveness by applying a prototype analysis.

Forgiveness in Western and East Asian Contexts

Much of the existing research on culture and forgiveness has focused on individualism–collectivism as the key dimension that distinguishes different cultural groups (e.g., Hook et al., 2009;

Table 1. Theoretical Framework: Areas of Hypothesized Cross-Cultural Differences in Forgiveness.

Dimension	Japan	United States
Focus	Relationship harmony	Self and self-enhancement
Motive	Adjust the self to the situation and other person	Influence the situation to fit the self
Process	Decision	Emotional alteration (negative to positive)
Attention	Situation	Individual
Valence	Ambivalent (both positive and negative)	Positive or neutral

Hook, Worthington, Utsey, Davis, Gartner, et al., 2012). Newer research in cultural psychology has identified several other ways that WEH cultures and EAH cultures differ from each other in cognition, motivation, and emotion (see Ho & Fung, 2011). We hypothesize that Japanese and American differences in features of forgiveness may be due to the following potential contributors to culturally specific understandings of forgiveness: differences in focus on relationship harmony or self-enhancement, motivation to adjust to or influence others, decisional or emotional processes, emphasis on the situation or the individual, and the acceptance of ambivalent or primarily positively valenced attributes (see Table 1).

Focus on Relationship Harmony Versus Self-Enhancement

Interpersonal harmony is an essential concept in EAH cultures (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). For members of these groups, the most significant function of forgiveness may be to restore closeness and group harmony. For example, research among Japanese participants found that relationship-oriented motives (e.g., desire for social harmony, sympathy for the offender) were endorsed as reasons to forgive (Fu et al., 2004; Takada & Ohbuchi, 2007, 2013). When social harmony and personal interests are in conflict, Japanese people may forgive and resolve conflict for the sake of the relationship, even if it incurs a personal cost (such as inner peace; Hook et al., 2009; Sandage et al., 2003). Hence, Japanese people may be more likely than American people to emphasize aspects of forgiveness that are other- and relationship oriented.

In contrast, members of WEH cultures tend to prioritize personal interests and goals over relationships. They value and endorse a positive view of the self, and self-esteem is viewed as one benchmark of an individual's mental health (Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999). Consequently, American people may view forgiveness as a strategy for maintaining a positive view of the self, rather than as a method to restore and maintain relationship harmony.

Motivation for Adjustment Versus Influence

Researchers have identified cultural variation in two forms of personal control: influence (also termed *primary control*) and adjustment (also termed *secondary control*; Morling, Kitayama, & Miyamoto, 2002; Weisz, Rothbaum, & Blackburn, 1984). Influence targets other people, objects, and environmental circumstances, with the goal of enhancing reward by changing one's situation to fit the self. Adjustment targets one's own expectations, wishes, goals, perceptions, and attitudes, with the goal of enhancing reward by regulating the self to fit into the situation (Morling & Evered, 2007; Morling et al., 2002). Japanese participants tend to prefer adjustment strategies; in contrast, North Americans prefer influence strategies (Morling & Evered, 2007; Morling et al., 2002). Because Japanese people value adjustment strategies, they may conceive of forgiveness as efforts an individual makes to change the self and fit into the situation (such as by overlooking the incident). Similarly, because people in North America value influence strategies, they may conceive of forgiveness as efforts intended

to influence others and to produce the desired changes in the situation (such as by confronting the transgressor).

Process of Decisional or Emotional Forgiveness

Western European views of forgiveness underline the role of emotion in forgiveness by distinguishing decisional and emotional forgiveness (Exline, Worthington, Hill, & McCullough, 2003; Worthington et al., 2007). Decisional forgiveness is a behavioral intention in which one no longer wishes to avoid or retaliate against the transgressor, but instead chooses to engage in positive behavior toward the transgressor (Worthington et al., 2007). Emotional forgiveness occurs when a victim has stopped feeling negative emotions and has begun to experience positive emotions toward the perpetrator (Worthington et al., 2007).

For members of WEH culture, emotional forgiveness seems to be prioritized; they focus on the transformation of internal thoughts and emotion (e.g., restoring inner peace) rather than on relationship dynamics in understanding forgiveness (Hook, Worthington, Utsey, Davis, & Burnette, 2012; Kadiangandu et al., 2007; Worthington & Scherer, 2004). Previous research in WEH contexts has sometimes defined decisional forgiveness alone as "hollow forgiveness," suggesting that emotional forgiveness is a necessary condition for true forgiveness (Lichtenfeld, Buechner, Maier, & Fernández-Capo, 2015). In contrast, in EAH contexts, decisional forgiveness may be emphasized because actual restoration of the relationship and harmony is the priority. Indeed, scores on a measure of decisional forgiveness were more strongly related to conciliatory behavior than were scores on a measure of emotional forgiveness for participants from collectivistic cultures (Hook et al., 2013; Kurniati et al., 2017; Watkins et al., 2011).

Furthermore, cultural conceptions of ideal or appropriate emotional expression and experience may influence lay prototypes of forgiveness. In EAH contexts, free expression of one's emotion (especially negative emotion) can be inappropriate, as it may disturb interpersonal relationships (Butler, Lee, & Gross, 2009). In WEH cultural contexts, the independent self-construal is marked by the open expression of one's emotion, and positive emotion is much more highly valued than negative emotion (Heine et al., 1999; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Sims et al., 2015). Members of EAH cultures value emotional control more than do members of WEH cultures, and their emotional control is less strongly related to physiological arousal than for Westerners (Butler et al., 2009; see also Matsumoto, 1990; Tsai & Clobert, 2019; Wei et al., 2013). Taken together, these findings suggest that for Japanese people, restored relationships may have more influence on an individual's well-being than restored inner peace. This difference in the value placed on emotional expression and control may lead Japanese people to focus on the decision to forgive and American people to focus on emotional forgiveness.

Cognitive Processes in Forgiveness

Focus on situations versus individuals. Forgiveness is at least, in part, a cognitive process; consequently, cultural variation in cognitive processes can influence conceptions of forgiveness. Individuals in EAH contexts tend to engage in dialectical thinking, which encompasses a holistic thinking style, an inclination to acknowledge contradiction, and the tendency to perceive the world as comprising opposites that work in company to maintain balance (Peng & Nisbett, 1999). Related to holistic thinking, East Asians are more likely than WEH people to pay attention to the situation when making attributions for others' behavior. In contrast, people in WEH contexts tend to focus on dispositional factors (e.g., personality) and give less attention to situational factors (Choi & Nisbett, 1998; Morris & Peng, 1994). This tendency to concentrate on dispositional factors can affect how American people conceptualize forgiveness. For example, they may tend to attach positive characteristics to the person who forgives rather than considering the context

(Kearns & Fincham, 2004). Japanese people may be more likely than American people to consider situational factors when asked to describe forgiveness.

Ambivalent versus positive valence. Dialectical thinking also involves a tolerance for contradiction, and members of EAH societies are less motivated to resolve contradictions than are members of WEH societies. East Asians tend to make ambivalent (both positive and negative) assessments of themselves, their partners, and situations (Cross & Lam, 2018; Kanagawa, Cross, & Markus, 2001; Leu et al., 2010). In contrast, in Western cultural groups, inconsistencies bring about anxiety, which leads individuals to engage in the resolution of contradictions (Peng & Nisbett, 1999).

As a result of dialectical thinking, members of EAH cultures may perceive forgiveness as having both positive and negative (or contradictory) attributes. In contrast, having contradictory conceptions of forgiveness may cause cognitive dissonance for members of WEH cultures. Consequently, they are likely to perceive forgiveness as either positive or negative. Thus, we expect American conceptions of forgiveness to be primarily positive and Japanese descriptions of forgiveness to include both positive and negative attributes.

Overview of the Current Studies

The current exploratory studies apply the prototype approach to identify the content and structure of Japanese and North American conceptions of forgiveness and to compare those conceptions across cultures. These studies build on the work of Kearns and Fincham (2004), who identified prototypical features of forgiveness in a North American sample. We designed Study 1a (feature generation) and Study 1b (centrality ratings) to be identical in procedure and content to Kearns and Fincham's (2004) Studies 1 and 2, but we conducted these with only Japanese participants. In Study 2, we combined forgiveness features generated by Japanese participants in Studies 1a and 1b with the features generated by the American participants from Kearns and Fincham's (2004) Studies 1 and 2. Participants from the United States and Japan rated the centrality of the features, which allowed us to identify cultural similarities and differences in responding to the same items. First, we coded the combined set of features into several categories reflecting the theoretical perspectives described above, and we examined whether the centrality scores in each category differed across the two groups. Second, we used discriminant function analysis to investigate whether there were distinct conceptions of forgiveness across cultures. Finally, we conducted exploratory factor analyses (EFAs) to examine underlying forgiveness factors in each culture. Although this work was exploratory in nature, we approached and framed it using theoretically interesting and plausible explanations for cross-cultural differences.

Study 1a—Feature Generation and Study 1b—Feature Centrality Ratings

Method

Following Kearns and Fincham (2004, Study 1), we asked Japanese undergraduates to describe forgiveness in Study 1a. In Study 1b, we examined the centrality of the forgiveness attributes participants generated in Study 1a to determine which features were most important in the prototype of forgiveness.

Study 1a. Participants were 123 undergraduates from Hokkaido University in Sapporo, Japan. Their average age was 20.2 years and 52.1% were male. Following Kearns and Fincham (2004, Study 1), we asked participants to think about the concept of forgiveness and to list attributes of

forgiveness that came to mind. Participants were given an 8-min period, because prototypical features are likely to be those that are generated relatively quickly and easily. These instructions were translated and back translated to ensure linguistic equivalence.

Study 1b. Participants were 154 students from Tohoku University in Sendai, Japan, who were recruited from introductory psychology classes. Their average age was 19.2 years (SD = 1.15 years) and 44.2% were male. We asked participants to rate "how central or important you think each feature is to the concept of forgiveness" (Kearns & Fincham, 2004, Study 2). Items were the features generated from Study 1a. So that our data were comparable with those of Kearns and Fincham's (2004), participants rated the features on a scale ranging from 1 (*extremely poor feature of forgiveness*) to 8 (*extremely good feature of forgiveness*). Instructions were translated and back translated to ensure linguistic equivalence.

Results and Discussion

Compilation of features. A Japanese undergraduate research assistant compiled a verbatim list of the forgiveness features identified by participants. On average, Japanese participants generated 4.1 features. Then, we placed the features into larger categories following procedures used by Kearns and Fincham (2004, which were adapted from Fehr (1988). First, we extracted linguistic units and identified single-word responses as distinct features (e.g., *sincerity* and *emotional*). A total of 504 linguistic units were extracted from the feature list.

Next, one American and two bilingual Japanese graduate students sorted the linguistic units into different attribute categories. We followed three guidelines recommended by Fehr (1988). First, different grammatical forms of the same word were placed into one feature category. Next, we put the linguistic units modified by adjectives or adverbs such as *extremely, slight*, or *sometimes* into one feature category. Finally, linguistic units that we judged as having the same meaning were placed into one feature category. The coders agreed on 98% of feature categories. They resolved the discrepancies by discussion.

The coding procedure yielded 112 forgiveness features. A total of 60 responses were mentioned by only one participant, and we eliminated them from further analyses. The final feature list comprised 52 attributes.

Feature frequencies (Study 1a). No one feature was mentioned by all participants (see Table 2). However, there was substantial agreement for one particular feature: 52.85% of Japanese participants identified *to have an open heart/broad mind* as a feature of forgiveness. Other frequently generated features included *being accepting, charitable, kindness, to be tolerant*, and *to compromise*. The least frequently generated features included *gives a good impression, a positive characteristic to have, accept own flaws, back down from argument*, and *not caught up in matters*.

Feature centralities (Study 1b). For Japanese participants, the five most central features were *to be tolerant, high caliber person, charitable, to have an open heart/broad mind*, and *being accepting* (see Table 2). Forgiveness features rated as least central were *indifference, moral ambiguity, to pamper/spoil, being superior to the perpetrator*, and *a sign of weakness*.

We also examined the relation between frequency and centrality for the features. Frequencies from Study 1a and centrality ratings from Study 1b were positively correlated, $r(52) = .40$, $p = .003$. In other words, the most frequently generated features were also likely to be rated as most important to forgiveness by Japanese participants. This finding suggests that there may be a good deal of consensus when describing forgiveness among Japanese college students.

Table 2. Frequencies and Centrality Ratings of Forgiveness Features Generated by Japanese Sample.

	Study 1a (N = 123)		Study 1b (N = 154)	
Forgiveness feature	N	Percentage of participants	Centrality rating	SD
To have an open heart/broad mind	65	52.85	6.96	1.13
Being accepting	43	34.96	6.95	1.21
Charitable	31	25.20	7.08	1.29
Kindness	27	21.95	5.66	1.88
To be tolerant	24	19.51	7.50	1.17
To compromise	18	14.63	4.12	1.76
Letting go of anger	17	13.82	4.56	1.53
Calm	15	12.20	5.62	1.46
Being understanding	14	11.38	6.16	1.46
Respond flexibly	11	8.94	6.34	1.50
Overlook the incident	10	8.13	5.43	1.60
Blame no one	9	7.32	4.59	1.74
Empathy	7	5.69	5.71	1.81
Patience	7	5.69	4.46	1.72
High caliber quality	7	5.69	7.14	1.10
Control one's emotions	7	5.69	5.43	1.70
Moral ambiguity	7	5.69	3.42	1.76
Indifference	6	4.88	3.64	1.90
Pamper/spoil	6	4.88	3.03	1.68
Wide range of tolerance	6	4.88	6.50	1.28
Not pushy	6	4.88	4.89	1.85
Not strict	6	4.88	4.22	1.75
To reconcile	6	4.88	5.06	1.62
Do not fuss over small matters	5	4.07	5.02	1.64
Overlook small mistakes	5	4.07	4.74	1.80
Maturity	5	4.07	5.88	1.49
All-encompassing	5	4.07	6.38	1.50
A broad worldview	4	3.25	5.64	2.08
Listening	4	3.25	6.37	1.48
Have space in the heart	4	3.25	6.50	1.18
Able to live in harmony	4	3.25	4.62	1.73
Being superior to perpetrator	4	3.25	2.26	1.54
Evoked when victim is calm	3	2.44	4.06	1.89
Give in	3	2.44	4.57	1.92
Respect	3	2.44	6.16	1.52
An act of love	3	2.44	5.73	1.81
Accept someone's apology	3	2.44	5.48	1.63
Focusing on the good instead of the bad	3	2.44	5.16	1.73
A sign of weakness	3	2.44	2.12	1.41
Done to preserve the relationship	3	2.44	5.34	1.75
Trust	3	2.44	4.51	1.73
Appeals more to adults than children	2	1.63	5.87	1.78
Mercy	2	1.63	5.79	1.63
Close to godliness	2	1.63	5.45	2.00
Not being indifferent	2	1.63	4.20	1.80
Cooperate	2	1.63	6.32	1.28

(continued)

Table 2. (continued)

	Study 1a (N = 123)		Study 1b (N = 154)	
Forgiveness feature	N	Percentage of participants	Centrality rating	SD
Give a good impression	2	1.63	5.03	2.06
A positive characteristic to have	2	1.63	5.78	1.59
Accept own flaws	2	1.63	5.42	1.76
Do not hold back	2	1.63	3.75	1.59
Back down from argument	2	1.63	4.39	1.86
Not caught up in matters	2	1.63	4.33	1.87

Study 2: Cross-Cultural Comparison of Evaluations of Forgiveness Features

The purpose of Study 2 was to compare Japanese and American centrality ratings of the combined set of forgiveness features generated by Japanese participants in Studies 1a and 1b and Kearns and Fincham's (2004) American participants. Our analysis of these data focused on three primary questions. First, we investigated whether the hypothesized differences between the two groups (focus on relationships vs. self, motives to adjust or influence, etc.) were reflected in the centrality ratings of these features. Second, we examined whether group membership (Japanese vs. American) could be reliably determined by the participants' ratings of the centrality of the combined set of features, and if so, which features best distinguish the two groups. Finally, our third question addressed whether there were culturally meaningful underlying dimensions of these features in each cultural group, and whether these dimensions were relatively similar or different across the two groups. If we found meaningful dimensions, we aimed to investigate the association between those dimensions and our theoretical framework in Table 1.

Method

Participants. Participants were 257 students from Tohoku University in Sendai, Japan, and Koshien University in Hyogo, Japan, and 271 students from Iowa State University in the United States. One Japanese student who reported living in the United States for more than 6 months was eliminated from all analyses, resulting in 256 Japanese participants. We recruited participants from both countries from introductory psychology classes. The average age in both samples was 19.7 years (SD_J = 1.15 years, SD_{US} = 2.41 years). The Japanese sample was 51.3% male, whereas the American sample was 47.1% male.

Procedure. All participants rated the forgiveness attributes used in Kearns and Fincham (2004, Study 1), plus the forgiveness attributes generated in Study 1a by Japanese participants. Eighteen forgiveness features were generated in both the Japanese and American sample, leaving 112 unique features. Participants used a 1 (*extremely poor feature of forgiveness*) to 8 (*extremely good feature of forgiveness*) rating scale. Hence, attributes with centrality ratings of 4.0 or lower are considered unimportant features of forgiveness by the raters. Using the centrality ratings acquired in Study 1, we accordingly deleted 14 items with mean centrality ratings below 4.0 (four Japanese-generated items, eight American-generated items, and two shared), leaving 98 forgiveness attributes. Participants completed the same centrality-rating task as in Study 1b with this combined set of attributes. The instructions and forgiveness attributes were translated and back translated to ensure linguistic equivalence for all participants. The data can be accessed at https://osf.io/m7zxh/

Conceptual coding. Two coders who were blind to the research hypotheses evaluated the English versions of the 98 forgiveness attributes according to the hypothesized differences spelled out above (see Table 1). Each attribute was evaluated with respect to each of the following distinctions: Category 1—the attribute reflects the theme of relationship harmony (yes or no).[1] Category 2—the attribute reflects the theme of adjusting to the situation, influencing the situation, or neither. Category 3—the attribute is related to decision processes, emotional processes, or neither. Category 4—the attribute focuses on an individual, on situational factors surrounding the offense, or neither. Category 5—the attribute is positive in valence, negative in valence, or neither (See Supplementary Table 4 for full coding). Interrater reliability (Cohen's kappa) ranged from .87 to 1. Differences in coding were discussed to reach an agreement.

Results and Discussion

Some of our analyses for Study 2, such as the discriminant function analysis, are sensitive to outliers. Discriminant function analysis is robust to failures of normality if the violation is caused by skewness rather than by outliers (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007), so we eliminated outliers from the analyses. Data were screened for univariate and multivariate outliers using procedures outlined in Tabachnick and Fidell (2007). We removed 16 participants (nine Japanese and seven American) from the data as outliers due to random and off-task response patterns or due to largely incomplete data, resulting in a final sample size of 511.

Overall centrality ratings. We present centrality ratings for both cultural groups in Table 3; for ease of comparison, we also present rankings by culture in Table 3. The rank-order correlation between rankings of features for the two groups was .28 ($p = .005$), representing a small-to-moderate level of similarity in the features considered most central to the concept of forgiveness. The five features rated as most central to the concept of forgiveness by the Japanese sample were *high caliber quality, charitable, acceptance, to have an open heart/broad mind*, and *compassion*. In contrast, the five features rated as most central by the American sample were *understanding, doing the right thing, accepting someone's apology, respect*, and *learning from mistakes*.

The origin of the most central features is worth noting. Of the 10 most central features on the Japanese list, six were generated by only Japanese participants, one came from only American participants, and three originated from both groups. Of the 10 most central features on the American list, five were generated by only American participants, two came from only Japanese participants, and three originated from both groups. The majority of each group's most central features were generated by members of their own culture. This suggests that there are distinct ideas of forgiveness among Japanese and American participants.

Likewise, nine of 10 least central features on the Japanese list came from only American participants; the remaining item was generated by both cultures (see Table 3). This suggests that American conceptions of forgiveness include features that are less familiar to Japanese. In contrast, seven of 10 least central features on the American list originated from only American participants, suggesting a somewhat broader representation of the concept among Americans.

Feature centrality and culture. To compare centrality ratings of each coding category between the two cultures, four of the five coding categories mentioned above were further broken down into one or two subgroups, resulting in nine coded dimensions (Category 1: *harmony in relationship*, Category 2: *adjustment motives* and *influence motives*, Category 3: *decisional processes* and *emotional processes*, Category 4: *attention to situations* and *attention to individuals*, Category 5: *positive valence* and *negative valence*). We computed mean centrality scores for the items coded into each category to create an index for each criterion. We centered mean scores within

Table 3. Forgiveness Feature Centrality Ratings for Japanese and American Samples (Study 2).

	Sample					
	Japanese ($N = 248$)			American ($N = 262$)		
Forgiveness feature	*M*	*SD*	Rank	*M*	*SD*	Rank
High caliber quality	6.67	1.39	1	5.15	1.54	71
Charitable	6.64	1.58	2	4.99	1.69	76
Acceptance	6.63	1.44	3	6.24	1.39	27
To have an open heart/broad mind	6.57	1.46	4	6.36	1.35	16
Compassion	6.38	1.38	5	6.28	1.27	21
To be tolerant	6.38	1.84	6	6.22	1.44	28
Have space in the heart	6.31	1.29	7	5.87	1.48	45
An act of love	6.17	1.61	8	6.05	1.40	38
Wide range of tolerance	6.16	1.50	9	5.52	1.60	63
Overlook the incident	6.10	1.64	10	4.28	1.80	90
Control one's emotions	6.07	1.50	11	5.69	1.58	54
Listening	6.07	1.59	11	6.51	1.42	10
Caring	6.04	1.49	13	6.19	1.31	32
An act of kindness	6.03	1.52	14	6.15	1.35	33
Appeals more to adults than children	6.01	1.81	15	4.48	1.85	87
All-encompassing	6.00	1.47	16	5.14	1.48	72
Nice	5.99	1.55	17	5.87	1.47	45
Generosity/not being selfish	5.96	1.73	18	5.88	1.65	44
Respect	5.95	1.50	19	6.65	1.34	4
Understanding	5.90	1.72	20	6.81	1.27	1
Respond flexibly	5.89	1.68	21	5.66	1.35	56
Mercy	5.87	1.74	22	5.66	1.55	56
Cooperate	5.71	1.77	23	5.99	1.36	40
Gives a good impression	5.71	1.65	23	5.41	1.65	66
A broad worldview	5.69	1.77	25	5.27	1.61	69
Focusing on the good instead of the bad	5.69	1.79	25	5.94	1.59	42
Accepting someone's apology	5.67	1.70	27	6.73	1.26	3
Empathy	5.60	1.69	28	6.07	1.45	37
Trust	5.60	1.70	28	6.51	1.35	10
A positive characteristic to have	5.59	1.62	30	6.48	1.41	13
Understanding that everyone makes mistakes	5.58	1.69	31	6.60	1.30	7
Blame no one	5.57	1.76	32	4.88	1.82	78
Having peace of mind	5.54	1.67	33	6.25	1.35	24
Giving someone a second chance	5.51	1.85	34	6.42	1.39	14
Saying "I forgive you"	5.51	1.64	34	6.22	1.60	28
Close to godliness	5.50	1.96	36	4.51	2.15	85
Done to preserve the relationship	5.47	1.65	37	5.87	1.63	45
Maturity	5.46	1.76	38	6.38	1.41	15
Calm	5.32	1.71	39	6.14	1.33	34
Patience	5.32	1.72	39	6.10	1.34	35
Do not fuss over small matters	5.30	1.73	41	5.67	1.66	55
Something you ask for	5.19	1.74	42	5.25	1.69	70
Overlook small mistakes	5.15	1.82	43	5.43	1.67	65
End to fighting	5.12	1.82	44	5.58	1.70	59
Not holding a grudge	5.09	1.69	45	6.25	1.46	24

(continued)

Table 3. (continued)

	Sample					
	Japanese ($N = 248$)			American ($N = 262$)		
Forgiveness feature	*M*	*SD*	Rank	*M*	*SD*	Rank
Not pushy	5.09	1.64	45	5.05	1.60	75
Not wanting or seeking revenge	5.08	1.92	47	6.26	1.62	23
Reconciling	4.99	1.81	48	6.33	1.30	18
Letting it go	4.93	2.02	49	5.73	1.68	53
Moving on	4.93	1.98	50	6.31	1.54	20
Able to live in harmony	4.91	1.76	51	5.87	1.48	45
Not being indifferent	4.90	1.62	52	5.13	1.53	73
Accept own flaws	4.85	1.88	53	6.22	1.44	28
Not caught up in matters	4.85	1.64	53	5.32	1.42	67
Makes you feel good about yourself	4.84	1.63	55	5.87	1.57	45
Learning from mistakes	4.81	1.80	56	6.63	1.35	5
Freeing another person from blame	4.76	1.96	57	4.88	1.80	78
Back down from argument	4.74	1.69	58	4.12	1.77	91
Sincerity	4.70	1.61	59	6.56	1.35	8
Not strict	4.66	1.86	60	4.49	1.61	86
Compromising	4.54	2.02	61	6.05	1.40	38
Happens between friends	4.51	1.84	62	5.82	1.58	50
Makes you feel good afterward	4.44	1.89	63	6.10	1.42	35
Telling the person it is okay what he or she did	4.44	1.91	63	4.05	2.11	93
Evoked when a victim is calm	4.43	1.82	65	4.53	1.65	83
Feeling happy/joyful	4.40	1.70	66	5.63	1.50	58
Finding a solution to a problem	4.35	1.81	67	6.33	1.48	18
Takes time	4.30	1.84	68	5.74	1.58	52
Difficult to do	4.27	1.82	69	4.97	1.88	77
Starting over	4.26	1.74	70	5.55	1.47	62
Happens among family members	4.25	1.86	71	5.96	1.66	41
Thinking about the situation	4.21	1.67	72	5.58	1.63	59
Having sympathy for the perpetrator	4.19	1.84	73	5.45	1.70	64
Doing the right thing	4.17	1.66	74	6.80	1.19	2
Something you are supposed to do	4.16	1.86	75	4.85	1.85	80
Perpetrator admits they are wrong	4.05	1.78	76	6.21	1.58	31
Truthful	4.05	1.78	76	6.61	1.35	6
Letting go of anger	4.01	1.81	78	6.27	1.53	22
Buying the other person things	3.91	1.84	79	2.68	1.67	98
Making amends	3.91	1.86	79	6.49	1.27	12

Note. Feature origins are differentiated by typeset. American-generated features are in normal typeset; Japanese-generated features are in italics, and features generated in both samples are in bold.

an individual to reduce the effect of response bias. We adjusted the significance criterion using Bonferroni correction.

There were no significant differences in centrality ratings of attributes related to *harmony in relationship, influence motive*, and *negative valence* (see Table 4). Compared with the Americans' ratings, the centrality ratings of Japanese participants were higher for attributes that belong to the *adjustment motive* ($d = 0.99$) and *decisional process* ($d = 0.34$) coding categories. In contrast, American participants gave higher centrality ratings than did Japanese participants to the

Table 4. Centrality Ratings of Coded Categories by Cultural Group (Study 2).

	Japanese		American			95% CI		
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t* test	Lower	Upper	Cohen's *d*
Harmony in relationship	0.25	0.21	0.26	0.19	−0.54	−0.04	0.03	0.05
Influence motive	0.01	0.76	−0.03	0.69	0.52	−0.09	0.16	0.06
Adjustment motive	0.55	0.39	0.21	0.29	11.10***	0.28	0.40	0.99
Decisional processes	0.17	0.32	0.07	0.26	3.76***	0.04	0.14	0.34
Emotional processes	−0.58	0.43	−0.11	0.28	−14.49***	−0.53	−0.41	1.30
Attention to individuals	0.09	0.29	0.31	0.30	−8.48***	−0.27	−0.17	0.75
Attention to situations	0.26	0.66	0.37	0.54	−2.00	−0.21	−0.001	0.18
Positive valence	0.30	0.18	0.36	0.20	−4.34***	−0.11	−0.04	0.32
Negative valence	−1.28	0.89	−1.23	0.98	−0.61	−0.21	0.11	0.05

Note. Scores centered within individuals. *N*: Japanese = 247, American = 264. Bonferroni correction was applied.
CI = confidence interval.
*$p < .005$. **$p < .001$. ***$p < .0001$.

attributes related to *emotional processes* ($d = 1.30$), *attention to individuals* ($d = 0.75$), and *positive valence* ($d = 0.32$).

The results support most of our hypotheses about cultural differences. Compared with Americans, Japanese people are more likely to consider features relevant to the adjustment motive and decisional processes to be highly central when thinking about forgiveness. In contrast, Americans view attributes that are related to an emotional process, are focused on the individual, and are positive to be highly central in defining forgiveness, compared with Japanese. Our hypotheses concerning the centrality of relationship harmony, the influence motive, and the negative valence of features were not supported by these analyses.

Discriminant function analysis. We used a discriminant function analysis to determine (a) whether the ratings of the features could reliably predict group membership and (b) which forgiveness attributes best distinguish the two groups. Discriminant function analysis has been used in cultural research to validate the systematic differences between groups. For instance, Keller et al. (2006) applied discriminant analysis to examine whether the self-reported models of parenting of mothers from various cultures predicted the mothers' cultural membership. Also, Kashima and his colleagues (1995) investigated whether the result of collectivism and contextualism scales could successfully distinguish between men and women of five cultures, using discriminant analysis. In the current analysis, we used individuals' centrality ratings of the forgiveness features to predict category membership—in this case, being a Japanese or American participant. We hypothesized that some forgiveness features would be rated as highly central in one culture, but not in the other, thus discriminating between Japanese and American participants.

This analysis involves two steps. First, an *F* test (using Wilks' lambda) is used to determine whether the discriminant model is significant. Second, if the model is significant, individual independent variables (in this study, the forgiveness features) are assessed to see which differ significantly by group. Then, these are used to classify the dependent variable (in this study, group membership: Japanese or American). We performed the analysis using the centrality ratings of the 98 forgiveness features as predictors of membership in two groups (i.e., Japanese participants or American participants). As in previous analysis, we used the standardized centrality scores. Missing data appeared to be randomly scattered throughout groups and predictors. Missing values comprised less than 0.3% of data for Japanese and American participants. We imputed missing values using forgiveness feature means within each culture. When conducting a

Table 5. Discriminant Analysis (Study 2).

Feature	Wilks' lambda	*F*	Significance	Japanese sample means		U.S. sample means	
				Classification group	Test group	Classification group	Test group
Best discriminators							
Being the bigger person	.583	364.40	$p < .001$	−2.31 (1.77)	−1.99 (1.97)	0.69 (1.56)	0.72 (1.44)
High caliber quality	.598	342.30	$p < .001$	1.82 (1.36)	1.69 (1.24)	−0.031 (1.39)	−0.56 (1.32)
Doing the right thing	.617	315.76	$p < .001$	−0.75 (1.54)	−0.74 (1.27)	1.27 (1.00)	1.11 (1.07)
Overlook the incident	.620	311.69	$p < .001$	1.23 (1.52)	1.13 (1.51)	−1.40 (1.68)	−1.26 (1.71)
Charitable	.621	310.46	$p < .001$	1.76 (1.51)	1.70 (1.52)	−0.60 (1.45)	−0.60 (1.51)
Making amends	.688	231.16	$p < .001$	−1.05 (1.57)	−0.94 (1.77)	0.98 (0.98)	0.78 (1.14)
Poorest discriminators							
Something you are supposed to do	1.00	0.000	$p > .993$	−0.86 (1.58)	−0.63 (1.80)	−0.83 (1.63)	−0.68 (1.70)
Respect	1.00	0.001	$p > .971$	1.02 (1.28)	1.06 (1.31)	0.95 (1.22)	1.14 (1.02)
Difficult to do	1.00	0.004	$p > .950$	−0.84 (1.84)	−0.44 (1.66)	−0.42 (1.99)	−0.85 (1.87)
Having peace of mind	1.00	0.016	$p > .901$	0.70 (1.29)	0.55 (1.58)	0.62 (1.23)	0.67 (1.13)
Saying "I forgive you"	1.00	0.020	$p > .887$	0.73 (1.32)	0.46 (1.49)	0.65 (1.58)	0.58 (1.27)
Letting it go	.999	0.394	$p > .531$	0.13 (1.81)	−0.08 (1.83)	0.06 (1.42)	0.17 (1.51)

Note. Feature origins are differentiated by typeset. American-generated features are in normal typeset, Japanese-generated features are in italics, and features generated in both samples are in bold. Standard deviations are in parentheses.

discriminant function analysis, it is common to split the sample into two halves. One half is used to create classification rules, and the other half is used to test the classification rules. We randomly assigned participants to the classification rule or the test group. The test group comprised 130 American and 126 Japanese participants. We calculated one discriminant function with the 98 forgiveness features entered simultaneously as a block.

The canonical discriminant function was statistically significant, $\chi^2(98) = 832.96$, $p \leq .001$, and accounted for 99.99% of the variance in cultural groups. A total of 96.6% of American and 94.3% of Japanese participants were classified correctly based on the classification rules. This indicates high consistency in the classification scheme. These results provide additional evidence that Japanese and American participants describe forgiveness differently.

We used Wilks' lambda criterion to test the statistical significance of each forgiveness feature. The value of Wilks' lambda ranges from 0 to 1, and lower values indicate greater importance of the variable to the discriminant function. These values identified several excellent predictors for distinguishing between American and Japanese participants (see Table 5 for Wilks' lambda and *F* values for forgiveness features, which were the best/worst discriminators). Among them were (in order of magnitude of discrimination) *being the bigger person, high caliber quality, doing the right thing, overlook the incident, charitable*, and *making amends*. American participants rated *being the bigger person, doing the right thing*, and *making amends* as more central to their prototype of forgiveness than did the Japanese participants. There were also several features that did not discriminate well between the groups. Among them were *something you are supposed to do, respect, difficult to do, having peace of mind, saying* "*I forgive you*," and *letting it go*. This indicates that these features are endorsed similarly by the two groups, and so they may represent a common understanding of forgiveness.

Dimensions of forgiveness. In our final analyses, we investigated whether similar or different dimensions characterized Japanese and American conceptions of forgiveness. We conducted EFAs of the centrality rating to investigate the factor structure of forgiveness for the two cultures.

This analysis can reveal whether the dimensions that underlie the centrality ratings of the features tend to be similar or different in the two cultural contexts. If the same features tend to load together in the two groups, one could conclude there are basic similarities in the conceptions of forgiveness, despite the cultural differences described above. In contrast, if the features load quite differently in the two groups, this suggests avenues for further investigation of how cultural values, norms, ideals, and processes shape forgiveness (see Cross et al., 2014 and Lam et al., 2016, for other examples).

Parallel analysis using pooled data suggested six factors. We used Procrustes rotation to examine whether there was a factor structure common to both cultures (van de Vijver & Leung, 1997). The factor structure from the pooled correlational matrix was rotated against the factor structure of each culture. Tucker's phi (Tucker, 1951) is a congruence coefficient commonly used and the value above .90 represents a good agreement in factor structure. For U.S. data, Tucker's phis for the six factors were .89, .90, .88, .85, .69, and .69. For Japanese data, they were .93, .85, .85, .92, .80, and .55. Each factor structure of forgiveness in two cultures differs from the factor structure from pooled data set. Therefore, there seems to be a separate factor structure of forgiveness in Japan and United States.

We applied maximum likelihood analysis with oblimin rotation to extract factors in each sample. Parallel scree analyses suggested seven factors for the Japanese sample and seven factors for the American sample. The seven-factor solution was interpretable for the Japanese sample. However, in the American sample, the seven-factor solution was uninterpretable, so we examined an eight-factor solution, in line with the recommendations by Kashy, Donnellan, Ackerman, and Russell (2009). We chose the eight-factor solution for further analysis because it was much more interpretable than the seven-factor solution. We provide tables of explained variance and factor correlations in supplementary material due to their length.

A brief interpretation and comparison of factor structures. Table 6 illustrates the result of factor analysis with the Japanese sample. The pattern matrix loadings for a seven-factor model accounted for 35.87% of the total variance. We dropped the items with loadings lower than .30, resulting in 84 features in the final factors. In order from highest to lowest mean centrality ratings, we interpreted the seven factors as *adjustment, compassion, letting go, acts of decisional forgiveness, personal challenges and achievements of forgiveness, harmony*, and *foreign ideas of forgiveness*. The factors representing *foreign ideas of forgiveness* (9.54%), *harmony* (8.72%), and *acts of decisional forgiveness* (8.17%) explained the most variance after rotation.

Table 7 illustrates the results of factor analysis with the American sample. An eight-factor structure accounted for 37.82% of the total variance. We dropped the items with loadings lower than 0.30 and included 83 features in the final factors. In order from highest to lowest mean, we interpreted these factors as *actions and attitudes of emotional forgiveness, self-enhancement, spirituality/kindness, conditions of forgiveness, positive consequences of forgiveness, tolerance, letting go*, and *incomplete forgiveness*. The factors representing *self-enhancement* (12.72%), *actions and attitudes of emotional forgiveness* (10.20%), and *letting go* (8.85%) explained the most variance after rotation.

We are reluctant to make too much of these exploratory analyses, because it can be interpreted in different ways. Even so, a close examination of the organization of the two factor structures reveals potential differences. In fact, features that factored together in one culture were often distributed across several factors in the other culture (see Tables 6 and 7). Again, one cannot stake too much on these findings—they require replication—but they support our hypothesis that forgiveness is understood differently in Japanese and American cultural contexts.

Table 6. Pattern Matrix (Maximum Likelihood, Promax Oblimin Rotation) for Japanese Centrality Ratings of Forgiveness Features (Study 2, $N = 247$).

	Forgiveness features	Loading	*M* (*SD*)	α
Factor 1:			5.89 (0.95)	.78
Compassion	Compassion	0.47		
	A broad worldview	0.44		
	Accept own flaws	0.40		
	An act of love	0.39		
	Sincerity	0.38		
	Respect	0.37		
	To have an open heart/broad mind	0.35		
	All-encompassing	0.32		
	High caliber quality	0.31		
Factor 2:			3.97 (1.03)	.90
Foreign ideas of forgiveness	Perpetrator admits he or she is wrong	0.62		
	Still think about the incident	0.59		
	Starting over	0.59		
	Questioning if you made the right decision	0.57		
	Sadness	0.56		
	Perpetrator says he or she is sorry	0.54		
	Crying	0.54		
	Talking things out	0.52		
	Perpetrator feels sorry or regretful	0.50		
	Relief	0.49		
	Doing the right thing	0.48		
	Learning from mistakes	0.48		
	Truthful	0.43		
	Physical acts	0.43		
	Making amends	0.40		
	Thinking about the future	0.36		
	Feeling happy/joyful	0.38		
	Trust	0.38		
	Consequence of a wrongdoing	0.37		
	Thinking about the situation	0.35		
	Moving on	0.31		
	Forgetting the incident	0.31		
Factor 3:			5.06 (0.99)	.83
Acts of decisional forgiveness	**Accepting someone's apology**	0.66		
	Telling the person it is ok what he or she did	0.59		
	Not wanting or seeking revenge	0.56		
	Overlook small mistakes	0.55		
	Saying I forgive you	0.53		
	Not holding a grudge	0.46		
	Blame no one	0.45		
	Compromising	0.44		
	Back down from argument	0.38		
	Patience	0.35		
	Having sympathy for perpetrator	0.34		
	Nice	0.34		

(continued)

Table 6. (continued)

	Forgiveness features	Loading	*M* (*SD*)	α
	An act of kindness	0.32		
	Everything continues as normal	0.30		
Factor 4:			4.99 (0.93)	.71
Personal challenges and achievements of forgiveness	Takes time	0.49		
	Something you ask for	0.48		
	A positive characteristic to have	0.44		
	Evoked when a victim is calm	0.42		
	Difficult to do	0.37		
	Not strict	0.34		
	Gives a good impression	0.34		
	Do not fuss over small matters	0.32		
	Appeals more to adults than children	0.32		
	Makes you feel good about yourself	0.31		
Factor 5:			4.61 (1.07)	.78
Harmony	Happens between friends	−0.63		
	Happens among family members	−0.55		
	Able to live in harmony	−0.54		
	Buying the other person things	−0.50		
	Reconciling	−0.43		
	Cooperate	−0.42		
	Not worrying the event will happen again	−0.39		
	Mercy	−0.33		
	Letting go of anger	−0.32		
Factor 6:			5.94 (0.89)	.77
Adjustment	*Control one's emotions*	0.50		
	Listening	0.43		
	Understanding	0.42		
	Overlook the incident	0.41		
	Caring	0.41		
	Done to preserve the relationship	0.39		
	Wide range of tolerance	0.37		
	Having peace of mind	0.35		
	Respond flexibly	0.34		
	Acceptance	0.34		
	Maturity	0.32		
Factor 7:			5.34 (0.90)	.61
Letting go	Letting it go	0.49		
	Emotional	−0.37		
	Giving someone a second chance	0.37		
	Close to godliness	0.36		
	Thinking about the situation	−0.34		
	Finding a solution to a problem	−0.34		
	Being the bigger person	−0.33		
	Freeing another from blame	0.32		
	Have space in the heart	0.31		

(continued)

Table 6. (continued)

	Forgiveness features	Loading	*M* (*SD*)	α
Did not factor				
	Not being indifferent	Factor 1		
	Not pushy	Factor 1		
	Religious act	Factor 2		
	Not caught up in matters	Factor 4		
	Perpetrator does not feel guilty anymore	Factor 4		
	Something you are supposed to do	Factor 4		
	Understanding that everyone makes mistakes	Factor 4		
	Generosity/not being selfish	Factor 5		
	Makes you feel good afterward	Factor 5		
	Calm	Factor 6		
	Charitable	Factor 6		
	Empathy	Factor 6		
	Focusing on the good instead of the bad	Factor 6		
	To be tolerant	Factor 6		

Note. Feature origins are differentiated by typeset. American-generated features are in normal typeset, Japanese-generated features are in italics, and features generated in both samples are in bold. Factor loadings below 0.30 are suppressed. Features that did not load >0.30 on any factor were dropped from analyses, but their strongest loading is indicated.

Table 7. Pattern Matrix (Maximum Likelihood, Promax Oblimin Rotation) for American Centrality Ratings of Features of Forgiveness (Study 2, $N = 263$).

	Forgiveness features	Loading	*M* (*SD*)	α
Factor 1:			6.15 (0.88)	.88
Self-enhancement	Makes you feel good about yourself	0.59		
	Accepting someone's apology	0.54		
	Being the bigger person	0.45		
	Generosity/not being selfish	0.45		
	Understanding that everyone makes mistakes	0.45		
	Saying "I forgive you"	0.44		
	Makes you feel good afterward	0.43		
	Nice	0.42		
	Compromising	0.41		
	Not holding a grudge	0.40		
	Giving someone a second chance	0.35		
	Gives a good impression	0.35		
	Focusing on the good instead of the bad	0.34		
	To have an open heart/broad mind	0.34		
	Finding a solution to a problem	0.31		
	Cooperate	0.30		
Factor 2:			4.91 (0.70)	.68
Incomplete forgiveness	Buying other person things	0.55		
	Questioning if you made the right decision	0.45		
	Having peace of mind	−0.43		
	Sadness	0.41		

(continued)

Table 7. (continued)

	Forgiveness features	Loading	*M* (*SD*)	α
	Letting go of anger	−0.40		
	Sincerity	−0.39		
	Reconciling	−0.39		
	Crying	0.30		
	Physical acts	0.37		
	Telling the person it is ok what he or she did	0.35		
	Not wanting or seeking revenge	−0.32		
Factor 3:			5.64 (0.92)	.63
Conditions of forgiveness	Takes time	0.47		
	Perpetrator admits they are wrong	0.46		
	Difficult to do	0.46		
	Perpetrator says he or she is sorry	0.40		
	Perpetrator feels sorry or regretful	0.35		
	Done to preserve the relationship	0.34		
	Evoked when victim is calm	0.31		
Factor 4:			6.24 (0.88)	.89
Actions and attitudes of emotional forgiveness	*Listening*	−0.68		
	To be tolerant	−0.67		
	Understanding	−0.66		
	Caring	−0.51		
	Empathy	−0.49		
	Calm	−0.47		
	Patience	−0.46		
	Talking things out	−0.45		
	Control one's emotions	−0.39		
	Learning from mistakes	−0.34		
	Consequence of a wrongdoing	−0.34		
	Truthful	−0.33		
	Trust	−0.32		
	Respect	−0.31		
Factor 5:			5.55 (1.14)	.77
Positive consequences of forgiveness	Feeling happy/joyful	0.43		
	Respond flexibly	0.43		
	Able to live in harmony	0.43		
	Not pushy	0.39		
Factor 6:			5.27 (1.02)	.82
Tolerance	*Wide range of tolerance*	−0.51		
	Charitable	−0.48		
	Overlook small mistakes	−0.48		
	Do not fuss over small matters	−0.46		
	All-encompassing	−0.43		
	A broad worldview	−0.43		
	Having sympathy for the perpetrator	−0.37		
	Back down from argument	−0.37		
	Thinking about the future	−0.33		
	Accept own flaws	−0.30		

(continued)

Table 7. (continued)

	Forgiveness features	Loading	*M* (*SD*)	α
Factor 7:			5.74 (1.01)	.80
Spirituality/kindness	Religious act	0.67		
	Close to godliness	0.55		
	Have space in the heart	0.45		
	An act of love	0.40		
	Compassion	0.40		
	An act of kindness	0.39		
	Mercy	0.38		
	A positive characteristic to have	0.32		
Factor 8:			5.18 (1.00)	.83
Letting go	Letting it go	0.65		
	Forgetting the incident	0.64		
	Freeing another person from blame	0.57		
	Overlook the incident	0.51		
	Everything continues as normal	0.50		
	Perpetrator doesn't feel guilty anymore	0.43		
	Starting over	0.41		
	Blame no one	0.38		
	Moving on	0.37		
	Relief	0.36		
	End to fighting	0.35		
	Not caught up in matters	0.31		
Did not factor				
	Not strict	Factor 1		
	Making amends	Factor 2		
	Doing the right thing	Factor 3		
	Emotional	Factor 3		
	Happens among family members	Factor 3		
	Happens between friends	Factor 3		
	Still think about the incident	Factor 3		
	Thinking about the situation	Factor 3		
	Acceptance	Factor 5		
	High caliber quality	Factor 5		
	Maturity	Factor 5		
	Not being indifferent	Factor 5		
	Appeals more to adults than children	Factor 6		
	Something you are supposed to do	Factor 7		
	Not worrying the event will happen again	Factor 8		

Note. Feature origins are differentiated by typeset. American-generated features are in normal typeset, Japanese-generated features are in italics, and features generated in both samples are in bold. Factor loadings below 0.30 are suppressed. Features that did not load >0.30 on any factor were dropped from analyses, but their strongest loading is indicated.

General Discussion

These studies are among the first to show an East–West difference in the conceptualization of forgiveness. First, different understandings of forgiveness between the American and Japanese samples seem to partly stem from different social motives. Japanese participants considered the adjustment attributes to be more central than did Americans (Table 4). In addition, the

factor analysis revealed an underlying dimension of *adjustment* in Japanese features. However, it is noteworthy that American participants did not consider the attributes related to exerting influence to be more central to forgiveness than did the Japanese participants, contrary to our hypotheses. The motive to influence the situation appears not to be a central aspect of forgiveness in either culture, thus not contributing to culturally different understandings of forgiveness. Rather, it was in the adjustment motive that a contrast appeared between the two cultures.

Second, diverging emphases on decisional and emotional processes seem to influence the way people understand forgiveness in these cultures. Americans regarded the attributes related to emotional processes to be more central than did Japanese. In contrast, Japanese considered the attributes related to decisional processes to be more central. Supplementally, factor analysis revealed an underlying dimension we labeled *acts of decisional forgiveness* for Japanese, and a dimension we labeled *acts and attitudes of emotional forgiveness* was discovered for Americans. This difference in emphasis can be tied to how each process relates to the focus on relationships versus self. Japanese people's focus on relational maintenance may lead them to value the actual decision to forgive compared with the transformation of emotion. In addition, the emphasis on emotional control (vs. emotional expression) in Japanese contexts may be intertwined with the importance of relationship harmony; uncontrolled emotions may disrupt smooth relationships (Tsai & Clobert, 2019). Thus, it might be inappropriate to regard decisional forgiveness without emotional forgiveness as "hollow forgiveness" in East Asian cultures.

Finally, the American conceptualization of forgiveness was more focused on attributes of individuals compared with that of Japanese. American participants rated the features that were coded into the *attention to individual* category as more central features of forgiveness than did Japanese participants (see Table 4). In addition, factor analysis revealed that there were underlying dimensions that reflect the focus on dispositional factors in American conceptions of forgiveness, such as *self-enhancement*. Hence, it seems that Americans conceptualize forgiveness as more *intra*personal in nature compared with Japanese people. In contrast, there was no difference in centrality ratings for features related to attention to situations among Japanese and American participants.

The results of the current study did not support the hypothesis that relationship harmony is a more central focus for Japanese when conceptualizing forgiveness compared with American participants. This may be due to the nature of interpersonal forgiveness in any cultural context: It is inherently relational, involving (at the least) the victim and the perpetrator. The results also did not support the hypothesis that Japanese participants would conceive of forgiveness as both positive and negative, but that Americans would tend to view forgiveness as primarily positive (as predicted by the theory of dialectical thinking). American participants did perceive forgiveness attributes that were positive as more central compared with Japanese participants, but no difference was revealed for the centrality of negative attributes. Future studies that assess ambivalent or contradictory views of forgiveness with alternative formats (such as measuring agreement with oppositely framed statements) would provide useful answers to the question whether Japanese think more dialectically about forgiveness than do Americans.

As our research was primarily exploratory, we encountered interesting findings we did not expect. We discovered underlying dimensions of *tolerance* and *spirituality and kindness* in the factor analysis of American participants' centrality ratings, which might indicate a religious perception of forgiveness. Individuals higher in religious involvement tend to be more forgiving and value forgiveness more than those low in religious involvement (Rokeach, 1969, 1973; Tate & Miller, 1971). In contrast, Japanese people are less likely to hold theistic religious beliefs and are more likely to live by the customs and traditions of Buddhism or Confucianism. They also value forgiveness and related concepts such as compassion, benevolence, and righteousness, and individuals are encouraged to follow these principles and make them a way of life (Gardner & Seeley,

2001). Thus, East Asians may be less likely to conceptualize forgiveness as related to religious and sacred constructs compared with Westerners.

We also note the role of the social environment that may have influenced the diverging focus, motive, and process of forgiveness for the Japanese and American participants. A key assumption in research on forgiveness in Western cultures is that relationships are inherently voluntary and freely chosen. However, relationships in EAH cultures tend to be obligatory and not easily dissolved when compared with individualistic societies such as the United States (Schug, Yuki, Horikawa, & Takemura, 2009). Yuki and his colleagues termed this dimension "relational mobility," and defined it as the extent to which people have opportunities to form new relationships and end old ones voluntarily (Yuki, Maddux, & Masuda, 2007). Considerable research has provided evidence that the perception of relationship mobility among East Asians is lower than among North Americans (for a review, see Schug et al., 2009). Japanese may prioritize adjustment motivations and decisional processes when forgiving, compared with Americans, because they cannot easily leave old relationships for new ones.

The present study speaks to the generalizability of results found in a single culture. As Norenzayan and Heine (2005) point out, identifying universality in a psychological phenomenon requires comparative research based on strict criteria for universality. However, the generalizability of research findings is often assumed, forgiveness studies not being an exception. Take, for example, a study carried out with American participants (Younger, Piferi, Jobe, & Lawler, 2004), where the authors concluded that the primary motivations for forgiveness were self-focused, not altruistic as previously hypothesized (see also Al-Mabuk, Enright, & Cardis, 1995). Our findings challenge this generalization, because Japanese conceptions of forgiveness were focused on adjustment. Furthermore, current forgiveness theories have largely focused on self-related processes (i.e., freeing the self from negative thoughts, reducing personal motivations of revenge and avoidance, transforming one's anger), which do not account for the East Asian focus on others and harmony.

Our findings highlight the importance of concepts such as adjustment and harmony for future research in forgiveness. Research into lay conceptions of forgiveness in cultures of honor, such as the Middle East, may reveal yet different meanings and nuances. A next step in this research is to examine how conceptions of forgiveness vary across different social contexts or relationships. Because members of EAH cultures rely on context in cognitive processes (e.g., Masuda & Nisbett, 2001), it is conceivable that asking members of these cultures about forgiveness without specifying an individual or type of relationship is difficult or confusing for them (Cousins, 1989). Research should examine whether the important elements of forgiveness differ depending on the type of relationship (e.g., friends, family, coworkers, and classmates).

A potential limitation of the current research is that the samples were composed of college students in Japan and the United States. Although the samples were similar in age and education, these results may not generalize beyond this age group and should, therefore, be interpreted cautiously. For instance, cultural differences between two cultures may be larger in community samples (compared with university samples) because people are more exposed to their society's norms with age. Labouvie-Vief and her colleagues (2000) examined Chinese people and found that older people were more likely to endorse collectivistic characteristics. Therefore, the cultural differences that were hypothesized but not found in the current study (e.g., ambivalent ratings of forgiveness) may emerge in community samples. Organizational samples may show different conceptions of forgiveness from university students as well. For instance, members of WEH cultures who work in organizations may value decisional forgiveness because they may feel more pressure to maintain good relationships with people in their workplace, compared with university students. Hence, replications of the results using other samples are necessary to enhance the external validity of the current research.

Moreover, comparisons of two cultures are only a starting point in research that attempts to develop culturally informed theories; this effort should be extended to both other EAH and WEH cultural groups and other understudied groups. For instance, in contrast to traditional Christian beliefs, in Muslim communities, forgiveness must not be unconditional (Moucarry, 2004). Forgiveness can only be granted when perpetrators express repentance explicitly and repeatedly (Mullet & Azar, 2009). Such a factor may play an important role in the conception of forgiveness, which is why lay conceptions of forgiveness across different cultures need to be examined further.

Conclusion

These studies reveal differences in the conceptualization of forgiveness in Japan and the United States. Overall, Japanese notions of forgiveness reflect the importance of motives to adjust to relationship partners and the decision to forgive, compared with that of Americans. American notions, in contrast, reflect the importance of emotional processes, attention to the individual, and positively framed attributes. These findings may prove useful in clarifying forgiveness processes, refining current measures, creating additional scales, or in developing more inclusive theories. Once we understand cultural differences in forgiveness, we may better comprehend a wide array of cultural phenomena, such as the Goldilocks story described in the introduction: we better understand why Goldilocks in Japan chose to apologize and mend the potentially tattered relationship with the three bears.

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Note

1. We also coded for self-enhancement, but we found that the inter-coder agreement was very low, perhaps because the concept of self-enhancement can be very broad. Consequently, we did not include this category in our report.

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Supplemental Material

Supplemental material is available for this article

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