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## Forgiving Significant Interpersonal Offenses: The Role of Victim/Offender Racial Similarity

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### ABSTRACT

The influence of victim/offender racial similarity on victim forgiveness was investigated in a study of interpersonal transgressions. It was hypothesized that racial similarity between victim and offender would influence forgiveness only for transgressions that were less distressing for the victim. Participants were 104 adults (45 Black and 59 White) who provided a narrative description of a significant interpersonal transgression they had experienced and completed measures of transgression-related distress and forgiveness. Forgiveness was measured as positive (benevolence) and negative (revenge, avoidance) motivations toward the offender. For negative motivations, revenge and avoidance, there was no effect of racial similarity: more severe distress was associated with less forgiveness for all victim/offender pairings. However, the results revealed a significant interaction of victim/offender racial similarity and distress for positive motivations: Black victims reported increased benevolence towards Black offenders after more distressing transgressions. Victims in other racial combinations reported reduced benevolence for more distressing transgressions. In group favoring of Black offenders by Black victims may be an unexplored aspect of forgiveness. Little research has addressed the potential influence of context on interpersonal forgiveness, and this study suggests that these influences may play an important role.

### KEYWORDS

Forgiveness, Race, Cultural Psychology, Counseling

### Cite this paper

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