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The Experiences of Reconciliation with Destructive Parents Through Imagery Communication Group Psychotherapy

Abstract

Abusive or negligent parenting can negatively impact a child's psycho-social functioning well into adulthood. Self-healing through forgiveness of dysfunctional parents can yield intergenerational benefits, yet the process of reconciliation between children and parents through psychotherapy is rarely studied. This study aims to identify patterns and processes of reconciliation in clinical contexts. We conducted semi-structured interviews with seven Chinese adult children raised through destructive parenting who forgave and reconciled with their parents through long-term group imagery communication psychotherapy. Data were analysed using a grounded theory approach. Our findings identify a series of themes relevant to the process of reconciliation: increased differentiation of self, psychological reconciliation with forgiveness and connectedness, and relationship restoration in actual family interactions. Our findings provide implications for the development of interventions for adult children, and indicate that healing childhood trauma and achieving differentiation from families-of-origin should be prioritised to ensure successful reconciliation.

Keywords: parenting, reconciliation, relationship restoration, differentiation, forgiveness, imagery communication psychotherapy

Introduction

Psychologists have long observed that many of their clients initiate therapy as a result of problems arising from destructive parenting, such as abuse and neglect during childhood. As a result of destructive parenting, many adult children are unable to forgive their parents or move on from negative childhood experiences.

Unforgiveness of parents typically indicates unmet psychological demands and destroyed parent-child attachment (Bowen, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988). After experiencing parental abuse and neglect in childhood, forgiving parents is considered a part of self-healing and an act of kindness toward oneself (Grosskopf, 1999; Hargrave, 2012). The ability to achieve forgiveness determines whether a person can develop a healthy self-image and healthy relationships with others, as well as whether they can interrupt the transmission of intergenerational family violence (Dunham & Dermer, 2012; Rivera, & Fincham, 2014).

As a process of resolving negative resentment-based emotions, motivations, and cognition (Worthington, 2005), forgiveness can be fostered through clinical interventions that release clients' negative feelings and restore their broken relationships (Murray, 2002). Most research of forgiveness interventions in the family context has focused on marital relationships (e.g., Aalgaard, Bolen, & Nugent, 2016), yet a paucity of research has examined the process of adult children forgiving parents after negligent or abusive parenting.

Using cases from Chinese society, where destructive family-of-origin parenting has drawn increasing social media attention in recent years, this qualitative study explores the process of how adult children forgive and achieve reconciliation with parents through group Imagery Communication Psychotherapy (ICP; Yuan, 2019; Zhu, 2007, 2008). The findings provide implications for the facilitation of parent-child relationship restoration, forgiveness, and using psychotherapy to address family-of-origin issues in an Eastern cultural context.

Rising Family-of-Origin Issues in Chinese Society

In recent decades, wide-spread social media reporting of destructive parenting has resulted in increased discussion of parent-child relationship problems in the Chinese sociocultural context. Many adult children have identified the negative influence dysfunctional family-of-origin parenting has had on their daily lives, resulting in condemnation of and resentment towards their parents. Chinese parenting styles have become a popular topic in a surge of news articles and psychology texts (e.g., Wu, 2018) that resonate among adult children who have had such experiences. For instance, one social network forum, “*Anti-parents*,” has attracted over 100,000 members who shared stories about their “poisonous parents” (Liu, 2016).

Several historical and cultural risk factors have contributed to destructive parenting approaches in Chinese families. For instance, many families were emotionally traumatised by the political movements of the 1950s–70s in mainland China, such as the violent Land Reform Movement and the Cultural Revolution. Communist-directed land reform, for example, stressed “the catalytic role of fear, grief, rage and revenge” in energizing people’s participation in the movement (Perry, 2002, p.115).

In the decade-long Cultural Revolution, violence against intellectuals and wealthy families prevailed across the country. Chinese children who grew up during this period may have experienced abnormal family life and disorganised attachment states, as they and their parents were witnesses of as well as victims of these movements. The social instability and unpredictability of this period damaged family cohesion, undermined interpersonal trust, and intensified depression among many (Schopohl, 2016; Yi, 2017).

Additionally, influenced by the traditional Confucian values of filial piety and child obedience, physical punishment of children is perceived to be a normal means of discipline in Chinese culture, which can blur the boundary between punishment and maltreatment (Chan,

Chun, & Chung, 2008; Zhu & Tang, 2012).

Acknowledging parental neglect and abuse is necessary to the reconciliation of resultant childhood pain, but continuing to blame parents for ongoing adversity will hinder an adult child's ability to live a full, satisfying life (Yaeger-von Birgelen, 1996). Great positive impact can therefore be achieved through helping adult children address their childhood trauma and facilitating the restoration of their relationships with family-of-origin parents by fostering forgiveness.

Forgiveness and Reconciliation with Parents through Therapeutic Interventions

Among the few published discussions related to parent-child relationship restoration, Grosskopf (1999), based on successful clinical practice experience, advised that adult children should approach their parents without recrimination and gather stories about their family's past in order to develop empathy for and understanding of their parents. Similarly, Hargrave (2012) proposed a hypothesised framework comprising two components of child-parent forgiveness: salvage and restoration. *Salvage* involves *insight* (exploring mechanisms of victimization by parents, such as recognizing one's own destructive behavioral patterns as a result of destructive parenting) and *understanding* (recognizing parents' limitations due to their own experiences); *restoration* refers to one's efforts to rebuild love and trust with parents, in which parent acknowledgement of their responsibility for destructive parenting is necessary.

Forgiveness of and reconciliation with destructive parents may also be facilitated by helping adult children understand how family problems transmit across generations. For instance, a Canadian study showed that after a six-hour family-of-origin workshop (which involved teaching concepts such as emotional reactivity and sharing personal stories), its 45 participants reported higher levels of differentiation, and one participant described feeling less intimidated by and more intimate with their parents (Rovers et al., 2000). Another study

among eight college students in Taiwan showed that after six weeks of Bowen family system group therapy (e.g., drawing genograms, sharing family letters), some participants' negative views of their families changed, and they understood their parents' behaviors from more empathetic perspectives (Juang & Cho, 2006).

Rebuilding a cohesive and differentiated self via a positive therapeutic alliance may also contribute to forgiveness towards parents in individuals hurt by destructive parenting. A three-year psychotherapy case study in which an adult child was emotionally and physically abused by her parents found that empathy and compassion for parents emerged as the participant addressed her own traumatic memories, patterns of object relationships, and defense mechanisms (Goldfarb, 2005). These studies indicate that potential therapeutic approaches to forgiveness facilitation include addressing hurtful family memories, supplementing previously insufficient self-development, and developing empathy for parents.

Imagery Communication Psychotherapy (ICP) Groups

Imagery Communication Psychotherapy (ICP) groups drive participants to solve problems through self-exploration and inter-subjective communication (Zhu, 2008). A widely adopted indigenised psychotherapy in China (Yuan, 2019), ICP incorporates psychoanalysis (Freud, 1920) and Jungian analytical psychology (Jung, 1968). It uses imagery to help clients present psychological states, examine relationships, and describe emotions (Zhu, 2008).

In ICP self-growth groups for adult children with destructive parenting experiences, participants are taught to recognise their emotional reactions, defensive patterns, and inner demands. Led by a qualified ICP counselor, group members describe memories of their parents, after which they are asked to focus on their feelings at the present moment and use symbolic imagery to express their psychological state.

Through symbolic imagery, participants can convey sub-conscious thoughts, difficult feelings, and can express traumatised states that are otherwise difficult to articulate in words.

With imagery as a medium, a psychotherapist and client can initiate *subconscious-to-subconscious* communication (Yuan, Cao, & Zhu, 2013). For instance, when a group member faces conflict, they may have the experience of a frightened inner child, but they may cope with defensive adult over-intellectualization. In an ICP group, the facilitator may help a client recognise different aspects of his/her personality by saying, for example, “I can feel that a part of you actually panicked, although you try to look calm. Try to pay more attention to that frightened child inside you. Can you use imagery to express what this part of you is like?”

Once a client becomes aware of the vulnerable child within them, the facilitator may substitute in the role of a parent and speak with the client’s inner child. Imagery also helps clients present their emotions in more detail; a client who had negligent parents may describe feeling “lonely.” With imagery, he/she may describe the feeling of loneliness as living in a “frozen house with grey walls with no one inside.”

Through this therapy, ICP group members shift their attention from defensive behaviors to their feelings, thoughts, and emotions via *imagery*, achieve *catharsis*, and uncover support resources for developing mature selves from previously dysfunctional selves. During each group session, the facilitator introduces relevant psychological theories, participants share their daily experiences, and the facilitator responds. ICP groups can last for years, and through this long-term experience participants may form deep self-understanding, address relationship problems in-depth, and generate meaningful insights about their relationships.

The Imagery Communication Research Institute (ICRI) announces ICP group recruitment notices on a regular basis. Participants find the groups via recommendations from friends, referrals from counselors, and from individual research. Each 2-3 hour session costs CNY \$100-300 (equivalent to GBP £11-33), with prices varying geographically and by facilitator experience. Clients are self-funded.

The Present Study

In this qualitative study, we explore the experience of reconciliation between seven Chinese adult children and their parents through their participation in Imagery Communication Psychotherapy (ICP) self-growth groups. In doing so, we aim to identify themes that contribute to reconciliation, a dynamic process that evolves from therapeutic group healing. Our research questions are: how do participants who experienced destructive parenting achieve forgiveness and restore relationships with their parents through ICP? What are the key themes related to reconciliation?

Method

Participants

We used purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) to identify information-rich cases among ICP group participants who have already experienced reconciliation with their parents. Collaborating with the China Imagery Communication Research Institute, a recruitment notice with the researcher's contact information was publicly posted on an ICP social media account. Eligible participants included those who were aged 18 years or above, experienced destructive parenting, had negative relationships with their parents before joining the group, and reportedly reconciled with their parents psychologically. In this study, we define destructive parenting as parenting that involved physical or emotional abuse and neglect as reported by participants.

Ten potential participants initially contacted the researchers. Participant eligibility was screened via a 15-minute pre-interview, and three cases were excluded: one withdrew, one was reluctant to be interviewed, and one reported still feeling resentment towards her parent. The remaining seven participants joined semi-structured individual phone interviews.

Our interview questions covered the history of participants' relationships with their families, how participants coped with relationship problems with their parents, what their

experiences of ICP self-growth groups were like, the process of reconciling with their parents, and changes in family relationships throughout ICP group participation. Each interview lasted for approximately 1.5-2 hours. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim in Chinese. Ethical approval was obtained from [blinded for review] University and informed consent was obtained from all participants.

As shown in the demographic statistics (Table 1), five interviewees were female and two were male (age ranged 27-54 years). Four of them experienced physical or verbal abuse by their parents. All participants described having been emotionally neglected by their parents during childhood.

Data Analysis

We used a grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) that aims to “generate explanatory propositions that correspond to real-world phenomena” (Patton, 2002, p.489), which fits the exploratory nature of this rarely studied reconciliation experience among adult children. We used constant comparative analysis to identify constructs and relationships among them, and to synthesise narratives with constructs. Our analysis was conducted with Nvivo 11.0 software. The coding procedure is presented in the appendix.

Two raters were involved in the coding process, including a social work PhD student with a clinical psychology background, who was also the interviewer (referred to as Rater *A* hereafter), and a clinical psychology master’s degree student (Rater *B*). Both raters have had qualitative research training as well as ICP training and practice experience, which is of great importance to understanding the transcripts.

Our analysis included the following steps: in the open coding stage, Rater *A* conducted line-by-line analysis of all interview transcripts, using participants’ original words to summarise the transcripts’ narrative passages. Codes that reflected the same meaning were developed into initial concepts. For instance, one participant mentioned “always pleasing

others in the group to avoid being disliked” and another participant mentioned “always provoking other group members to test their trust;” both were coded as “awareness of interpersonal patterns in group.” Rater *A* completed the initial coding independently, and Rater *B* then checked the coding. Modifications were made based on the discussion and consensus between the two raters.

Next, during the axial coding stage, emerging concepts were combined based on constant scrutiny and comparison, until all relevant codes were structured into higher-level constructs agreed upon by both raters. These higher-level constructs were generated based on raters’ clinical experience and their understanding of the themes. For example, the concepts of “awareness of projecting the absent parent on group facilitator” and “awareness of projecting anger and aggression on group members” were both merged into the higher-level construct “insight into how group interactions reflect relationship patterns formed in family of origin.” Labels of the constructs were generated through discussion between raters. These constructs were then grouped into higher-level categories. Analysis concluded when participants’ reconciliation experiences were clearly depicted and there were no more higher categories to develop.

To ensure credibility, the results were: (a) examined in their original context to check if they consistently explained participants’ experience, (b) shared with participants for their feedback, and (c) examined by a third researcher, a Jungian psychotherapist and experienced ICP supervisor with a doctoral degree, who checked the coding, took part in the discussion, and provided feedback on the consistency between our findings and her clinical observations.

Findings

Three major themes related to the reconciliation process (Figure 1) emerged in our analysis. Participants experienced *therapeutic healing*, in which early family-of-origin traumas were addressed and healed in the ICP self-growth groups. After that, *psychological*

reconciliation happened when participants began to differentiate from, connect with, and forgive their parents internally. Lastly, several participants achieved *relationship restoration*, during which positive changes appeared in the adult child-parent relationship. The following section explains each theme in detail.

Addressing Family-of-origin Trauma through Therapeutic Approaches

Uncovering emotions and memories through imagery. The emergence of images accompanying traumatic emotions and family memories helped participants reflect on their psychological states. In doing so, participants were encouraged to face their subconscious feelings and unspoken emotions with fewer defensive reactions. For instance, *W*, whose family suffered from severe poverty and whose father often vented his anger on her, described an early-childhood image: “My father had a human body with a lion’s head. He ripped out my heart, ate it, and I felt destroyed. [It was] extremely painful...” Another participant, *L*, grew up with a lack of parental emotional support. Her imagery presented a sense of loneliness: “I saw little stray cats, very little ones... as if they were looking for a place to settle, just like my feeling of homelessness.”

Developing awareness of and insight into self-destructive patterns. Participants were guided to realise how family-of-origin experiences influenced the way they related to others, how their inner object relations and attachment problems impacted their relationships with important others, and what their defensive patterns were. For instance, *S* found herself interacting with the group in the same way she used to interact with her parents: “I found I couldn’t help pleasing others. I behaved to please the teacher and group members, I was afraid of people disliking me. Only when I found myself being needed, I felt I had value, I was useful.” This pattern, as *S* recognised, was driven by the feeling of not being accepted by her mother: “My life was never welcomed. This brings too many negative feelings.”

Similarly, *B*, who felt insecure in relationships, realised that he attacked others as a

defensive behavior due to his distrust of people:

I kept testing and provoking others in the group, because I never believed someone in the world—or a relationship—would be nice to you even when you were attacking them... There had never been a warm relationship in my life. I thought of my ex-wives. I divorced twice. Now I'm starting to feel they were kind, but at that time I never believed they were willing to spend their whole lives with me wholeheartedly.

Corrective recapitulation. ICP group members and facilitators substituted in the role of family, which gave participants an opportunity to correct dysfunctional interpersonal relationships (Yalom, 1995). The unconditional regard, acceptance, and support from the group helped with restoring participants' psychological well-being impaired by destructive parenting. For instance, Z placed his unsatisfied emotional demands on the group facilitator, who substituted in his father's role. "I attached a good father image to the teacher. I projected my absent father on him," said Z, "In my most difficult time, the teacher and friends in the group gave me support and love; they never gave up on me." S also said, "The teacher gave me a lot of support, like a father; that's what I lacked in my life."

Catharsis. Catharsis is the release of conscious or unconscious feelings, followed by a sense of relief (Yalom, 1995). As a common group process, a safe space was created in which participants could express and release their repressed feelings. For some of the participants, catharsis naturally emerged in the group (e.g., "After releasing the child in me, those negative emotions were alleviated," said N); for others, catharsis happened in imagery. For instance, G compared the group to a "stable Mother Earth," she said, "I'm growing in it, happy or angry, sad or joyful, all can be freely presented here, every time I felt released." In another example, S, while exploring her relationship with her mother via imagery, said: "I saw a lot of ice beneath the ground. It made me feel aggrieved, [I was] frozen like the ice. When these feelings were released, like tears moistening the ground, the ground turned less

dry.”

Psychological Reconciliation

As attachment traumas were addressed, participants approached psychological reconciliation with their parents. Their attitudes toward their parents changed from long-term resentment and alienation to growing understanding and love. This theme involved three components: differentiation of self, connectedness, and forgiveness.

Differentiation of self. Differentiation of self, an ability to individuate and maintain self-autonomy in relationships (Bowen, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988), appeared as an important intrapsychic relational change with parents. One indicator of differentiation is using the “I” position (Kerr & Bowen, 1988) to mindfully express one’s true feelings rather than attacking and blaming. To illustrate, participant Z said:

Gradually, I had my own boundaries, I could express my anger to my parents. Unlike before when I felt impotent and concealed everything, now I can speak out my feelings. Our relationship became better after a period of conflict. When I used a “here and now” mindset to talk with them with respect and honesty, their attitudes also changed.

Higher differentiation led to lower reactivity in emotionally provocative moments (Bowen, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988). For instance, *W* described that after addressing family-of-origin issues through catharsis, he felt less vulnerable when he no longer acted defensively:

My father was always like a child, I really couldn’t bear him. When this emotion was triggered in the group, I cried until I vented all my pent-up tears. I found my inner space got bigger, like a bigger container. When I faced him again, he was still complaining, but I could treat him calmly, no longer feeling irritated.

Differentiation of self also allows individuals to understand others’ needs without trying to modify the course of another person’s life (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Increased levels of differentiation therefore enable people to see others in an objective way, with less projection.

As *G* said, “I stopped interfering in my family, like telling others to do this or that. I also stopped sacrificing myself to satisfy others’ needs.” Another participant, *L*, also said,

After [group therapy], my inner child is seen, and I no longer feel neglected. I find I relate to my parents partly in an adult state, not completely in a child’s role.

Sometimes when my mother was anxious, I could contain her anxiety as an adult. I comforted her, “It doesn’t matter, take it easy.” At that moment, I felt the relationship between us was one person with another.

Connectedness. Participants identified a deeper connection with their parents, with stronger feelings of parental love and increased empathy for their parents.

Feeling of parental love. Destructive parenting often caused so much pain and anger in participants that they were driven to withdraw from their families. Once the pain and anger were addressed, participants came to see their parents’ love despite past problems. For instance, *W*, who was often beaten and intimidated by her parents in childhood, recalled positive memories of her parents after several years of catharsis:

It seemed that all the sorrow was cried out. I began to recognise that my parents had tried their best to support me, and there was love and warmth in them. I used to doubt whether I was their biological daughter, now I’m sure I am; if not, they wouldn’t have supported me to go to school even though our life was difficult. . . . I realised that my mom did care a lot about me, but these parts were blocked by anger.

Increased empathy for parents from shared suffering. When parents have unresolved psychological distress, their parenting might trigger distress in their children. Parents’ suffering is thus shared by, and sometimes transferred to, their children. By exploring these shared experiences in depth, participants began to understand their parents’ suffering. For instance, *S* had always thought that her mother never accepted her because her mother was reluctant to give birth to her and sent her to be raised by her grandparents. By re-

examining the early stage of mother–child interaction, *S* developed a new understanding of her mother: “When I found that my own depression was from repressing so much grief, I suddenly understood hers. She was like me: we both repressed our feelings, and we could not talk about it. . .”

Forgiveness. Participants also described a feeling of relief from the past when their unresolved issues were addressed, when they empathised with their parents, or when they realised that their parents were also victims of intergenerational traumas. This relief gave rise to forgiveness, when participants let go of their past while no longer ruminating over it. This was illustrated by narratives such as “When that fear of being abandoned was dissolved, I was no longer holding on to my past sorrow” (Participant *Z*), and “When that neglected inner child was seen and understood in the group, I no longer seemed to insist that I didn’t get enough love from my parents” (Participant *L*).

Relationship Restoration

After psychologically reconciling with their parents, some participants’ family relationships were restored in two ways: family intimacy increased, and participants perceived positive changes in their parents.

Increased intimacy. Five participants showed increased intimacy with their parents. When participants empathised with their parents and acknowledged their parents’ love, their interactions also changed, such as expressing care and love to parents and visiting parents more frequently. For example, “Now I take initiative to show intimacy, hug her [the mother], kiss her, say or message ‘I love you’ to her, or those sorts of things” (Participant *N*). “After my experience [being in the ICP group], I could sense my mother’s feelings. I was more willing to go to her home, I visited her more often” (Participant *S*).

Perceived changes in parents. Along with their own changes, three participants also felt their parents responded to them with increased love and closeness. For instance, *Z*, who

condemned his parents for over-criticizing and humiliating him and for caring about nothing but his school grades, found his parents' attitudes changed: "Now they can understand who I am, no matter whether I can do well, or whether I am good enough."

Discussion

This study explores the processes of healing from destructive parenting and reconciling with parents in adult child–parent relationships through Imagery Communication Psychotherapy. Our findings identify four main factors in the process of reconciliation between adult children and their parents: differentiation of self, connectedness, forgiveness, and relationship restoration.

Psychological Reconciliation: The Key Role of Differentiation of Self

Our findings suggest that differentiation of self appears to be a key theme in the process of reconciliation in the parent-child relationship. According to Bowen's family system theory (Bowen, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988), unsolved attachment issues impair an individual's ability to differentiate from their family of origin. Undifferentiation, which entails poor boundaries (Bartle-Haring, Rosen, & Stith, 2002) and reactive or suppressive coping (Murdock & Gore, 2004), is a defensive approach to anxiety alleviation in relationships (Chang, 2018). If adult children keep interacting with parents in undifferentiated ways, and if they are still impaired by destructive parenting, reconciliation will not happen.

Our participants' narratives suggest that after addressing the attachment issues underlying defensive behaviors, their self-differentiation ability improves, and they may break problematic behavioral patterns formed in their families of origin. Participants then move on from their fixed self-identification (i.e., the neglected or unloved child), which heightens vulnerability to family-of-origin issues (Fischer & Wampler, 1994), and they become more autonomous with less emotional reactivity. This ability to self-differentiate then enables them to release themselves from rumination over their resentment and anger.

Differentiation of self is often achieved through developing insights into family intergenerational transmission (e.g., drawing a family genogram) and interpersonal coaching (e.g., reducing emotional reactivity and using the “I” position; Kerr & Bowen, 1988). In addition to these traditional approaches, our findings suggest that ICP group therapeutic approaches—such as catharsis in the group and fulfilling unmet attachment needs by group members substituting in parental roles—may also facilitate differentiation.

Reconciliation through Forgiveness and Connectedness

Our findings further elaborate how forgiveness and connectedness evolve during participants’ ICP group experiences. Connectedness involves recognizing parents’ love and understanding the family’s shared suffering. Notably, connectedness is not something newly produced in therapy; connectedness is something realized through therapy, as it has long existed in the parent-child relationship but was previously neglected due to family traumas.

This finding extends Hargrave’s (2012) theoretical model of forgiveness, which does not discuss the process of identifying parents’ love, an important factor that can be concealed by destructive parenting. In our participants’ experiences, releasing negative emotions from early family memories helped them recognise their parents’ love, leading to the emergence of positive family memories, positive attitudes towards parents, and more objective views of family relationship problems.

Additionally, acknowledging suffering in parents’ own families of origin enables adult children to recognise intergenerational family trauma. By understanding their own emotions, adult children may also understand their parents’. All participants in this study reported that their parents had endured difficulties of their own and had tried their best to nurture their children. This empathy constitutes a strong socio-cognitive antecedent for forgiveness (Riek & Mania, 2012), which leads to deeper parent-child connectedness.

The lack of love and trust in parents’ own families of origin (Hargrave, 2012) appears

to be a main cause of destructive parenting in our study, a perspective shared by all of our participants. Moreover, societal problems could transform into problematic family interactions (Isobel et al., 2019), where children become the indirect victims of collective traumas. In this study, the historical and sociocultural context of China shows strong links with the family system. For instance, two participants born in the 1960s directly linked traumatic historical events (e.g., the Chinese Cultural Revolution) to their parents' emotional neglect and abusive parenting.

Relationship Restoration

In addition to psychological changes, some participants are able to show kindness and intimacy in actual interactions, and parent-child relationships begin to change. Given that family relationships are highly reciprocal, when an individual changes, the family responds to that change as a whole (McGoldrick & Carter, 2001). From our interviewees' narratives, it appears that parents may show parallel growth even though they have not participated in ICP groups directly, possibly because their adult child's empathy, love, differentiation, and reduced defensiveness indirectly influenced their behavior. This may also indicate a transition in the adult child's perception of their parents, which leads them to re-interpret their parents' behaviors.

While Hargrave (2012) argues that it is essential for parents to admit to destructive parenting in order to restore the parent-child relationship, this does not appear requisite to reconciliation in our study. Although an apology from parents could be an effective way to realise justice, "justice" in a child-parent relationship is very complicated due to the complexity of cause and effect within a family system. Instead of asking for parents' apologies, developing a sense of connectedness may help adult children move beyond the victim-perpetrator perspective, and enable them to perceive their family from a more empathetic, forgiving perspective.

It is important to note that not everyone can reach the final stage of relationship restoration, given that reconciliation is a complicated, long-term process. Although all participants in our study have psychologically reconciled with their parents, not all participants reported intimacy with or changes in parents. Two participants' parents had already passed away prior to their interview, and two other participants have not yet observed changes in their actual interactions with their parents.

Limitations, Future Research Directions, and Clinical Implications

Several limitations of this study warrant further research and clinical attention. First, a small sample size of seven may limit our identification of other possible factors related to reconciliation.

Second, while the purpose of this study is to explore the universal themes related to adult child-parent reconciliation through ICP, parent-child relationship changes may be influenced by a diversity of factors throughout the relatively long duration of ICP group participation, factors including major family events such as marriage, pregnancy, or a parent passing away (Blieszner & Wingfield, 2000). For example, *B* mentioned how his father's death forced him to face his feelings. These life course events may become interwoven with ICP group experiences over time, which should be kept in mind when interpreting the reconciliation process as facilitated by ICP.

Third, given that our study adopted purposeful sampling to explore the question "how do participants who experienced destructive parenting achieve forgiveness and restore their relationships with parents through ICP," we interviewed only those who have at least achieved psychological reconciliation with their parents. Future studies may also examine ICP participants at various stages of the intervention, as well as unsuccessful cases in order to understand the applicability and effectiveness of ICP across populations.

Lastly, all of the participants in our study took several years to reach internal

reconciliation. ICP sessions are flexibly structured and guided by clients' experiences and sharing. This provides participants with ample space for reflection and discussion, however the time and cost associated with this approach should be taken into consideration when determining if this intervention meets a client's needs and means.

Self-differentiation, forgiveness, connectedness, and restoration of parent-child relationships are underlying mechanisms of interventions such as ICP groups that promote reconciliation. For adults who have been severely traumatized by parental abuse and neglect, achieving differentiation of self from the family, restoring the parent-child relationship, and healing are interwoven, complementary processes. Throughout these processes in clinical work, recognizing self-destructive patterns, providing a holding environment for catharsis, and correcting dysfunctional attachment through the therapeutic relationship are recommended precursors to reconciliation. While restoration of the parent-child relationship may be beneficial to clients, reconnection with and forgiveness of parents should not be forcefully imposed upon clients, as such transformation should be allowed to emerge naturally from the healing process.

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Table 1: Participants' background

Name	Gender	Age	Years of Group Participation	Educational Level	Marital Status	Family-of-Origin Issues
B	Male	49	5	Vocational school degree	Divorced	Frequently beaten by father; mother always told him that he must pay back for what he received from her whenever he had normal demands; a persistent tension with and resentment toward parents
G	Female	49	10	College degree	Divorced	Born of an unwanted pregnancy; mother is violent-tempered with suspected psychosis, who often hit and swore at her children; father did not treat her mother well; could not refuse unreasonable demands from family-of-origin members and exhibited self-sacrificing behaviors
L	Female	31	13	Graduate degree	Engaged	Lack parental care; emotionally distant from parents; constantly feel grievance; believe that parents did not love her
N	Female	34	4	Graduate degree	Married	Parents had constant conflicts in an unhappy marriage; difficult experience of parental divorce; had a controlling mother; hatred of her irresponsible and alcoholic father
S	Female	45	7	College degree	Married	Adopted by grandmother at birth; remote and hostile relationship with parents
W	Female	54	4	College degree	Divorced	Assumed a "scapegoat" role of the family; parents vented hardship on her by insulting, intimidating, and physically punishing her; had difficulties letting go of the past and resented parents
Z	Male	27	3	College degree	Single	Mother was controlling and emotionally unstable; received harsh physical punishment and put-downs from parents; violent conflicts with parents in adulthood; attempted suicide as a way of attacking parents

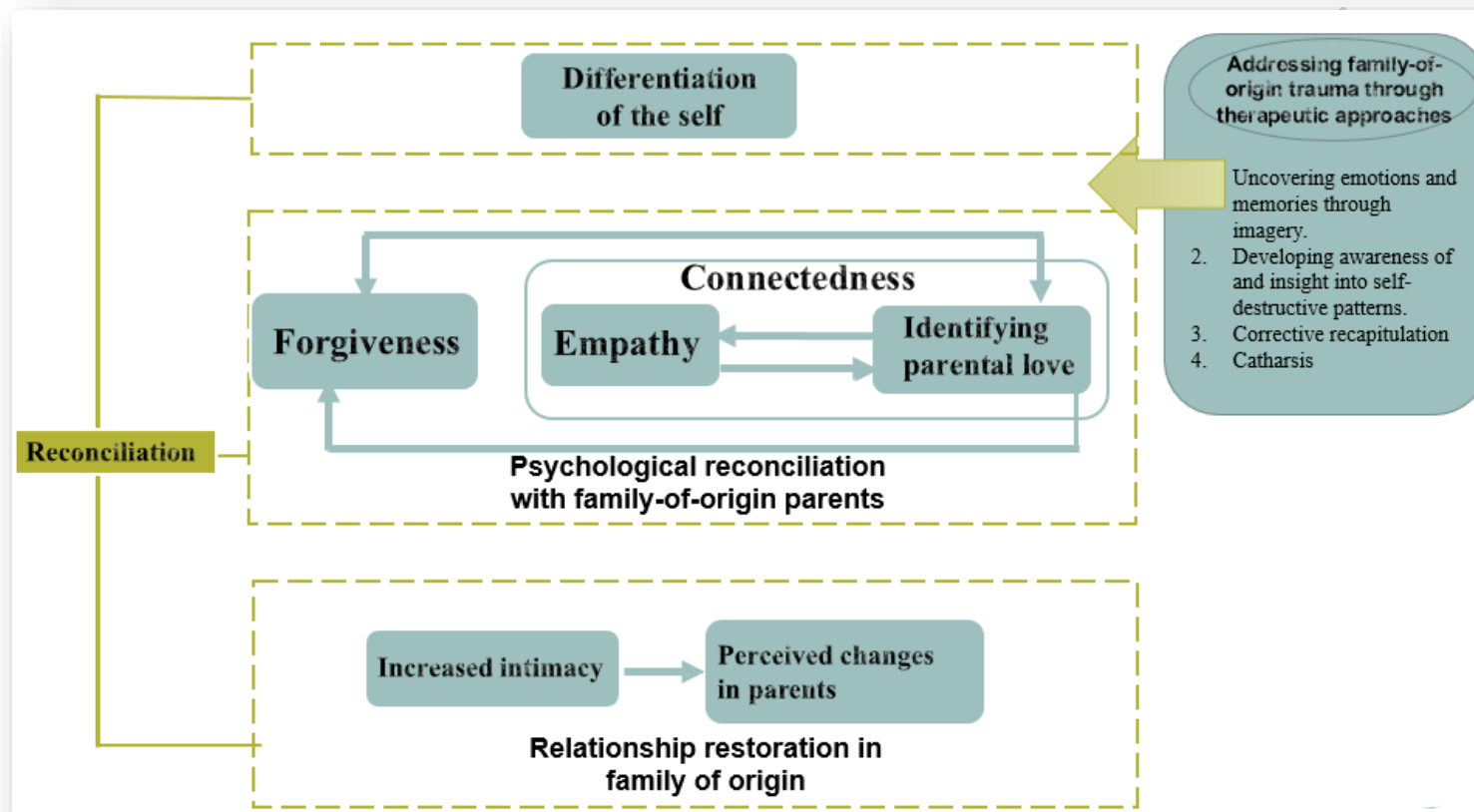


Figure 1: Emergent themes from the process of reconciliation.