

## When Two Groups Hurt Each Other

### Understanding and Reducing the Negative Consequences of Collective Victimhood in Dual Conflicts

*Nurit Shnabel, Rotem Kahalon, Johannes Ullrich, and Anna Lisa Aydin*

In many intergroup conflicts, even ones in which there is a relative consensus over who the perpetrator group is, members of both conflicting groups experience collective victimhood. To illustrate, some Hutus, who are responsible for the mass killings of Tutsis in the 1994 Rwandan genocide, underscore in their narrative of the events that their group was victimized by the Tutsis both before the genocide (e.g., during the colonial period; Staub, 2008) and after the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) took over power (Lemarchand, 2009; see also Moss, this volume). In a similar vein, the narrative of the Turks, who are responsible for the mass killings of Armenians during the First World War, highlights the Turkish suffering and victimization during this war (Bilali, 2013; see also McNeill & Vollhardt, this volume; Twali, Hameiri, Vollhardt, & Nadler, this volume).

In this chapter, we start from the assumption that victim and perpetrator roles have different implications for groups' identities and resulting needs to restore agency and moral identity (for a more expanded theoretical perspective on the needs of victimized group members, see Kachanoff, Wohl, & Taylor, this volume). However, when conflicts are characterized by mutual transgressions, whether perceived or real, the question arises as to which social role will dominate intergroup behavior. We review empirical evidence that the experience of victimization has a more profound effect on group members' behavior toward the conflicting outgroup than the experience of perpetration. We also present findings showing that when group members feel that agentic identity is restored, and their collective victimization is acknowledged, they exhibit less vengeful and more conciliatory tendencies toward the outgroup.

The theoretical framework that guided the research presented in this chapter is that of the needs-based model of reconciliation (Nadler & Shnabel, 2015), according to which intergroup conflict threatens the identities of victimized and perpetrating groups in different ways. Specifically, research about the “Big Two” in social psychology tells us that there are two fundamental content dimensions along which social targets, such as groups, are perceived and judged (Abele & Wojciszke, 2013): agency, representing traits such as competence and strength, and communion, representing traits such as morality and sociability. Based on this theorizing, the needs-based model argues that members of victim groups experience threat to their agentic identity (they feel weak, incompetent, and humiliated), whereas members of perpetrator groups experience threat to their communal, moral-social identity (they are concerned that their ingroup is viewed as evil).

These threats bring about different needs: Members of victim groups experience the need to restore their identity as agentic, influential social actors, whereas members of perpetrator groups experience the need to restore their identity as morally accepted social actors. This argument has received empirical support in various contexts of intergroup conflict, ranging from relatively minor disputes between competing universities to violent conflicts involving collective victimization. For example, reminding immigrants living in Germany of German authorities’ failure to deal with right-wing extremists, who eventually killed nine Turkish and Kurdish immigrants (in what is known as the NSU [National Socialist Underground] killings), increased their need for agency, whereas it increased the need for communion among German participants (Aydin, Ullrich, Locke, Siem, & Shnabel, 2019).

The model further argues that the satisfaction of group members’ needs increases their readiness to reconcile with each other. For example, messages from representatives of a victim group that convey moral-social acceptance of the perpetrator group, thus restoring its moral identity, should increase perpetrator group members’ readiness to reconcile with the victim group more than equally positive messages that are irrelevant to the moral-social dimension. Correspondingly, messages from representatives of a perpetrator group that empower the victim group, thus restoring its agentic identity, should increase victim group members’ readiness to reconcile with the perpetrator group more than equally positive messages that are irrelevant to the agency dimension. Illustrating this pattern, when referring to the Second World War, empowering messages from German representatives (conveying that the Jews’ contribution to humanity should be cherished, or

that Jewish Israelis have the right to be strong and proud of their country) led to greater willingness among Jewish Israeli participants to reconcile with the Germans, as compared with accepting messages (conveying that they should be accepted by Germans and expressing empathy toward the Jews' suffering under the Nazi regime). The opposite pattern was observed among German participants, who showed greater willingness to reconcile following accepting, as compared with empowering, messages from Jewish representatives (Shnabel, Nadler, Ullrich, Dovidio, & Carmi, 2009).

### Dual Conflicts: When Groups Hurt Each Other

Whereas in its original formulation the needs-based model treated conflicting parties as if they had *either* a victim *or* a perpetrator role, in most intergroup conflicts these roles are not so clear-cut. Rather, most conflicts—hereby referred to as “dual conflicts”—are characterized by mutual transgressions in which each group victimizes the other group in some incidents and is victimized by it in others. In the example mentioned above, Tutsis in Rwanda were victimized by the Hutus in the 1994 genocide, but they victimized Hutus after seizing power again (e.g., the 1995 massacre in Kibeho). Notably, sometimes groups involved in a dual conflict feel victimized in different ways; namely, with regard to different dimensions. For example, in their narrative of the 1948 war, Israeli Jews highlight the Palestinians' refusal to accept the UN's decision to establish two states (one Jewish and one Arab state) and their decision to start a war, whereas Palestinians highlight the displacement of more than 700,000 people and the creation of the refugee problem (Bar-On & Adwan, 2004).

Before we turn to describe theorizing and research about dual conflicts, three clarifications are in order. First, we use the term *dual conflicts* to denote conflicts that are characterized by mutual transgressions, even when there is a power asymmetry between the conflicting parties. For example, the conflict between Turks and Kurds may be described as dual, even though the Turks are more powerful. In other words, the term *duality* is used in a purely descriptive form, with no intention to imply equality in terms of strength, morality, responsibility for the situation, and so forth.

Second, many given conflicts occur in the background of other conflicts that involve different, or additional, groups. For example, the conflict in Rwanda occurs in the background of its colonization by the Belgians, whose

elevation of the Tutsis has fueled the conflict between Hutus and Tutsis (Staub, 2008). Similarly, the conflict between Israeli Jews and Palestinians occurs in the background of anti-Semitism in Europe (e.g., the 1881 pogroms in Russia), which catalyzed the Zionist movement (Bar-On & Adwan, 2004). While we acknowledge that victimization by one group can influence responses to victimization by another group (Volkan, 2001), we limit our analysis to the psychological processes related to the conflict between two adversarial groups.

Third, much of the research in social psychology (including some of our own work; e.g., Shnabel et al., 2009, Study 2) has focused on isolated incidents within generally dual conflicts in which each group had a clear-cut role of either the victim or the perpetrator. For example, Čehajić-Clancy, Effron, Halperin, Liberman, and Ross (2011, Study 3) reminded Jewish Israeli participants of the killings of the three daughters and niece of Izzeldin Abuelaish, a Palestinian medical doctor, by an Israeli tank fire during the 2014 Gaza war and then examined the effectiveness of various strategies to increase their acknowledgment of culpability and support for reparation policies. Contrary to this prior research, the novelty of the research presented in this chapter is that it adopts a more holistic view, by examining group members' responses to incidents of both perpetration by and victimization of their ingroup simultaneously—rather than separately.

### **The Primacy of the Agency Over Morality Need in Dual Conflicts**

As our first step in applying the logic of the needs-based model to dual conflicts, we tested the prediction that “duals” (i.e., group members referring to conflicts in which their ingroup, regardless of its relative power, can be construed as a victim in some incidents and as a perpetrator in others) would experience threat to, and consequent need to restore, both their agency and their morality. For this purpose, we conducted a study (SimanTov-Nachlieli & Shnabel, 2014, Study 2) in which Jewish Israeli participants were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions. Participants assigned to the victim condition wrote about two incidents in which their ingroup was victimized by Palestinians (e.g., the Passover massacre of 2002 in which 30 unarmed Israeli civilians were killed by a suicide bomber). Participants assigned to the perpetrator condition wrote about two incidents in which

their ingroup victimized Palestinians (e.g., the 1994 Cave of the Patriarchs massacre in which 29 unarmed Palestinian civilians were killed by an Israeli settler who opened fire inside a mosque). Participants assigned to the dual condition wrote about one victimization incident and one perpetration incident. As expected, participants in the victim condition expressed a heightened need for agency (wish for “a stronger Israel”), participants in the perpetrator condition expressed a heightened need for morality (wish for “a more moral Israel”), and participants in the dual condition expressed heightened needs for both agency and morality.

Having established that needs for agency and morality can be simultaneously aroused, we looked at their implications for behavior. Considered alone, the need to restore agency should lead to aggressive, vengeful behavior (Frijda, 1994), and indeed participants in the victim condition expressed more antisocial tendencies against Palestinians (e.g., support for the use of unrestricted force against even the slightest act of terrorism). Likewise, considered alone, the need to restore morality should lead to prosocial tendencies, such as compensating (Estrada-Hollenbeck & Heatherton, 1998) or offering help to the victims (Dovidio, Piliavin, Schroeder, & Penner, 2006), and indeed participants in the perpetrator condition expressed more helping tendencies toward Palestinians (e.g., support for providing humanitarian aid to Gaza).

But what about duals? Based on findings that a major theme in the collective memory and ethos of societies involved in protracted dual conflicts (Bar-Tal, 2013) is their self-perceived collective victimhood (not perpetration), we reasoned that *the experience of victimization is more psychologically profound than the experience of perpetration*. Support for our reasoning can be found in a study among conflicting groups in Liberia, which had experienced two consecutive civil wars between 1989 and 2003 due to the competition over political power between the descendants of settlers of the freed slaves and the native tribes (Mazziotta, Feuchte, Gausel, & Nadler, 2014). Participants in this study were Liberians, who were asked to write about an episode in which either their ingroup had victimized people from an adversarial group or another group had victimized their own. In line with previous findings of group members' biased historical memory (Sahdra & Ross, 2007), participants indicated that they found it easier to recall episodes of ingroup victimhood than ingroup perpetration. Moreover, half of those asked to describe an event in which their group had perpetrated violence against an outgroup also described how their group had been victimized

by this outgroup. None of those asked to describe an event of victimization described how the ingroup had perpetrated violence against the outgroup. Also, the descriptions in the victim condition were longer and more detailed than those in the perpetrator condition.

Based on our reasoning about the profoundness of the experience of victimhood (vs. perpetration), we expected dual group members' need for agency (stemming from their victimization experiences) to exert a greater influence on their behavior than their need to restore morality (stemming from their perpetration experiences). In line with this expectation, we found (SimanTov-Nachlieli & Shnabel, 2014, Study 2) that duals' heightened need for agency translated into vengeful tendencies against Palestinians (similar to what was found among victims), yet their heightened need for morality failed to translate into prosocial tendencies toward Palestinians (as opposed to what was found among perpetrators). In terms of their behavioral tendencies, thus, duals resembled victims, not perpetrators.

This primacy of agency effect implies a somewhat pessimistic outlook on the reconciliation potential of groups involved in dual conflict. However, in line with the logic of the needs-based model, we reasoned that addressing duals' pressing need for agency may reduce vengeful, antisocial tendencies. The next step in our research program was, therefore, to identify strategies to restore duals' agentic identity. For this purpose, we turned to research that has extended self-affirmation theory (Steele, 1988) to the group level.

This research has demonstrated that the negative effects of various social identity threats on group members' attributions, achievements, motivations, attitudes, and behaviors can be alleviated by affirming positive aspects of their ingroup's identity. To illustrate, group members responded less defensively (they no longer used exceptionally high confirmatory standards) to a threat to their ingroup's morality after they were given a chance to affirm their ingroup's identity by writing about the values most important to their group (Miron, Branscombe, & Biernat, 2010). In another context, women showed lower cardiovascular threat responses that typically undermine performance after affirming their group identity in a car-parking task (a context in which their group is stigmatized; Derks, Scheepers, Van Laar, & Ellemers, 2011). Although these studies did not focus on groups subjected to violent collective victimization, the general conclusion derived from them—namely, that group affirmation exercises can buffer against identity threats—may be applied to the contexts of dual conflicts that were of interest to us.

Earlier research on self-affirmation suggested that threats in one domain can be addressed through affirmation of another, unrelated domain (Steele, 1988). Yet, more recent research has revealed that group affirmation is effective only to the extent that there is a “match” between the type of threat and the content of the affirmation. For example, members of stigmatized groups who fear that “they just don’t belong” in certain situations (e.g., women in a math test) benefited, in terms of performance improvement, from affirmations focused on belonging, but not from general affirmations (Shnabel, Purdie-Vaughns, Cook, Garcia, & Cohen, 2013).

Applying these insights to contexts of violent, dual conflicts, we theorized that to effectively reduce antisocial tendencies in such conflicts, group affirmations must target the ingroup’s agency. In the next section we describe in detail the series of studies that we conducted to test this theorizing (SimanTov-Nachlieli, Shnabel, Aydin, & Ullrich, 2017). These studies examined whether agency affirmation—reminding and reassuring group members of their ingroup’s competence and self-determination—would satisfy their pressing need for agency and thus reduce antisocial and increase prosocial tendencies toward the conflicting outgroup.

### **Agency Affirmations Increase Conciliatory Tendencies Among Members of Conflicting Groups**

The first study in this research program aimed to integrate our findings about the “primacy of agency” in dual conflicts with findings about the “primacy of morality,” which show that group members view morality as the most important dimension in their ingroup’s identity, and that morality affects their pride in and distancing from their ingroup more than any other dimension (Leach, Ellemers, & Barreto, 2007). Reconciling these seemingly contradictory findings, we theorized that, in line with Leach et al.’s results, morality should be more important in nonconflictual contexts. Indeed, conclusions about the “primacy of morality” were derived from observations of contexts that do not involve collective victimization, revealing, for example, that their ingroup’s morality is what makes students proud in their university (Leach et al., 2007), or employees satisfied with their organization (Ellemers, Kingma, van den Burgt, & Barreto, 2011). We further theorized that in conflictual contexts, agency should become more important because the

damaging effects of victimization on agentic identities dominate the damaging effects of perpetration on moral identities.

To measure group members' prioritizing of needs, we used the Circumplex Scales of Intergroup Goals (CSIG; Locke, 2014). The CSIG measures group members' pursuit of agentic and communal (i.e., moral-social) goals, organizing them within one conceptual circle-shaped space (see Figure 19.1).

Each point within this conceptual space can be specified as a weighted mixture of agentic and communal goals. The vertical dimension refers to agency, such that points in the upper half of the circle denote goals associated with competence, self-determination, and power, whereas points in the lower half of the circle denote goals associated with submissiveness, helplessness, and passivity. The horizontal dimension refers to communion, such that points on the right-hand side of the circle denote goals associated with warmth, morality, and solidarity, whereas points on the left-hand side of the circle denote goals associated with coldness, wariness, and detachment. To the extent that the circumplex structure of the goals is statistically validated, it is possible to calculate two overall vector scores, representing group members' needs for agency and communion. To illustrate, in the previously mentioned study in which participants were reminded of the NSU

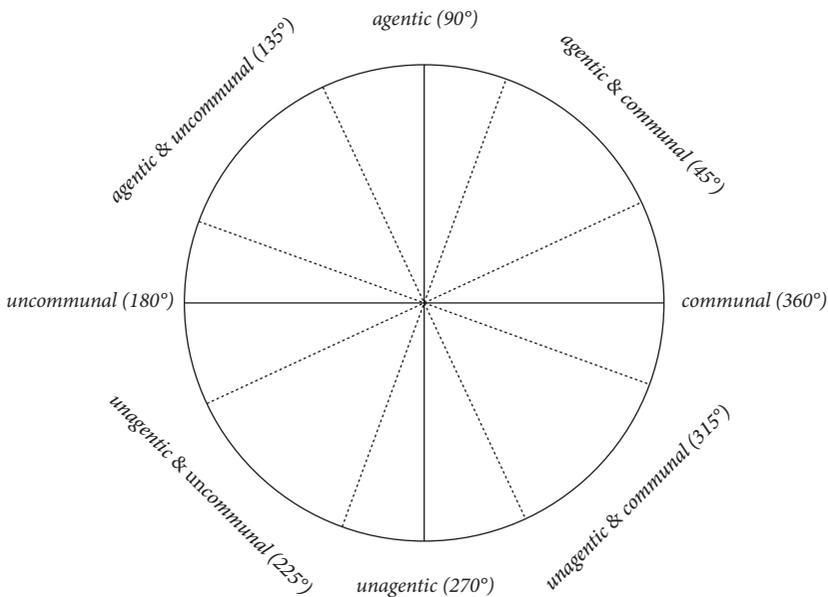


Figure 19.1. Circumplex model of intergroup goals.

killings (Aydin et al., 2019), Germans had a higher score on the communal vector, reflecting their wish to act in a cooperative and caring manner toward immigrants, while immigrants living in Germany had a higher score on the agency vector, reflecting their wish to be strong and assertive in their interactions with Germans.

Participants in our study (SimanTov-Nachlieli et al., 2017; Study 1) were Swiss citizens who, in the February 2014 referendum, voted in support of an initiative to restrict immigration to Switzerland. The result of this referendum led Switzerland to breach an existing treaty with the European Union (EU), and in response the EU imposed various sanctions against Switzerland (e.g., exclusion from joint research programs). Swiss people who supported the initiative viewed the EU's sanctions as an illegitimate interference with the Swiss democratic system. As such, even though overall the relations between Switzerland and the EU are peaceful, in these particular circumstances they were involved in a dual conflict. Admittedly, the dual conflict between Switzerland and the EU is not characterized by direct violence and oppression, and, as such, it is substantially different from the collective victimization contexts that are the focus of the present volume. For example, it is unlikely to lead group members to experience an existential threat, which according to Hirschberger, Ein-Dor, Leidner, and Saguy (2016, p. 1877) "lies at the heart of intergroup conflict" (see also Hirschberger & Ein Dor, this volume). Nevertheless, previous work within the needs-based model's framework revealed consistency across substantially different contexts, which made this context relevant to the study of basic psychological processes involved in victimization.

Participants in this study were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: a control/no-conflict condition, a conflict condition, and a conflict-with-agency-affirmation condition. In the no-conflict condition, participants simply completed the CSIG while referring to other countries in general: "When Swiss representatives or leaders interact with representatives or leaders of *other countries* it is important to me that . . ." (e.g., "we show that we can be tough"). In the two conflict conditions, participants were reminded of the conflict revolving around the referendum, and they completed the CSIG while referring to the EU: "When Swiss representatives or leaders interact with representatives or leaders of *the EU* it is important to me that . . ." (e.g., "we show that we can be tough"). Participants assigned to the conflict-with-agency-affirmation condition were also asked—right before they completed the CSIG—to think about situations that confirm the view

of Switzerland as being strong, successful, and highly developed. As can be seen in Figure 19.2, and in line with “primacy of morality,” participants in the no-conflict condition prioritized their communal (moral-social) intergroup goals over their agentic intergroup goals. In line with the “primacy of agency,” the reverse pattern emerged in the conflict condition, in which participants prioritized their agentic over communal (moral-social) intergroup goals. However, participants in the conflict-with-agency-affirmation condition did not show such “primacy of agency,” exhibiting equal levels of agentic and moral-social goals.

These findings suggest that in the absence of conflict, group members wish to preserve harmonious relations with other groups and hence prioritize their communal (over agentic) intergroup goals (exhibiting allophilia; Pittinsky, Rosenthal, & Montoya, 2010). However, in the presence of conflict, even one that occurs against the background of generally peaceful intergroup relations, group members’ goal pursuit patterns reverse, as they become preoccupied with their victimization and consequent need to secure their identity as agentic social actors. Leaving some room for optimism, an agency affirmation was able to reduce this reversal effect, leading group members to pursue comparable levels of agentic and communal goals in their interactions with the conflicting outgroup.

The goal of our next study (SimanTov-Nachlieli et al., 2017; Study 2a) was to demonstrate that not every positive affirmation of the ingroup’s identity can “do the trick.” For this purpose, we pitted the agency affirmation against a corresponding affirmation of the participants’ ingroup’s morality

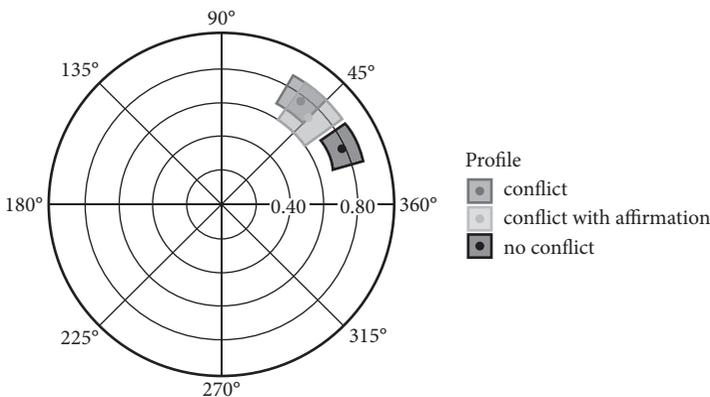


Figure 19.2. Needs for agency and communion across conditions.

(i.e., reassurance of the ingroup's moral conduct and values). The prediction derived from social labeling literature (Kraut, 1973) would be that the latter type of affirmation, which labels the ingroup as moral, should activate group members' self-perception of their ingroup as moral, leading to prosocial tendencies that are consistent with this label. Opposite to this prediction, however, we theorized that because conflicting parties are primarily concerned about the restoration of agency, only agency affirmation would increase group members' conciliatory tendencies toward their conflicting outgroup.

We tested our predictions among Jewish Israeli participants, referring to the intractable conflict between their ingroup and the Palestinians. Intractable conflicts result in a deep sense of victimhood among the involved parties (Bar-Tal, 2013). Thus, even though objectively Israeli Jews belong to the more powerful party in the conflict, some Israeli Jews view their ingroup as the "real" victim of the conflict and engage in competitive victimhood with the Palestinians (Sonnenschein & Bekerman, 2010). Our participants were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions. In the agency affirmation condition they were exposed to a text that praised Israel's strength, economic resilience, and scientific excellence. In the morality affirmation condition they were exposed to a text that praised Israel's morality (e.g., "Israel is known worldwide for sending teams to aid countries facing natural disasters"). In the control condition they were not exposed to any text.

Participants were then given the opportunity to donate money to a pro-Palestinian organization (providing Palestinians with humanitarian aid) and an anti-Palestinian organization (advocating more forceful policies against Palestinians). As expected, compared with the control condition, in the agency affirmation condition participants donated more money to the pro-Palestinian organization, and less money to the anti-Palestinian organization. Participants' donations to pro- and anti-Palestinian organizations in the morality affirmation condition did not differ from the control condition.

The effectiveness of the agency affirmation was replicated in a series of subsequent studies. One study (SimanTov-Nachlieli et al., 2017; Study 2b) was conducted during Operation Pillar of Cloud in Gaza, in the course of which Hamas leader Ahmed al-Jabari was killed by Israeli rockets, targets in Gaza were bombed by the Israeli air force, and rockets from Gaza reached Tel Aviv for the first time since the First Gulf War. Participants were Israeli Jews, who were assigned either to an agency affirmation or a control condition. We found that Israeli Jews whose agency was affirmed showed increased readiness to relinquish some power (i.e., restrain Israel's use of

military force) for the sake of moral considerations. This change in the relative prioritization of agency and morality needs, which is consistent with the change observed among Swiss participants (see Figure 19.2), led to less aggressive and more prosocial tendencies toward Palestinians. Another study (Shnabel, SimanTov-Nachlieli, & Halabi, 2016) assigned Israeli Jews and West Bank Palestinians either to a control or to an agency affirmation condition (the agency affirmation text for the Palestinians reminded them of their ingroup's resiliency, inner strength, cohesiveness, and competence). Despite the fundamental power difference between the groups, the observed processes (schematically depicted in Figure 19.3) were similar: the agency affirmation increased both Jews' and Palestinians' readiness to relinquish the use of power and violence for the sake of morality, which in turn increased conciliatory tendencies (e.g., readiness to aid the outgroup in the case of a natural disaster).

In a similar vein, Schori-Eyal, Reifen-Tagar, Saguy, and Halperin (2015) found, in a series of studies, positive effects of inducing collective pride among Israeli Jews. To illustrate, one study exposed participants to a text that applauded the Iron Dome defense system, which was developed by the Israeli authority for the development of armaments (Rafael) and was successfully used to destroy rockets during the 2014 Gaza war. Participants who were led to feel pride, especially if they highly glorified their ingroup (i.e., thought it to be better than other groups), showed greater willingness to admit guilt for aggressive actions against Palestinians (compared with control participants). Because this "pride induction" was similar to the agency affirmations used in our own studies, these results may be viewed as consistent with our theorizing.

Together, these studies suggest that one reason why members of groups involved in intractable conflict become relatively unresponsive to moral considerations is that they are preoccupied with their agency-related needs.

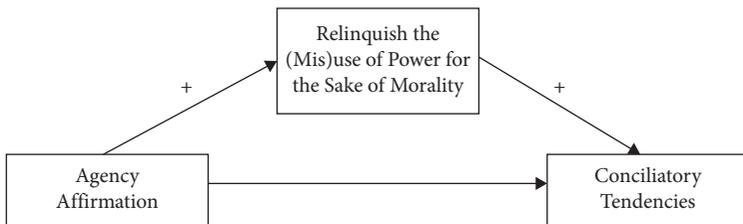


Figure 19.3. Mediational model of agency affirmation.

Of course, there are additional reasons for this unresponsiveness. Group members may perceive the outgroup to be completely outside the “scope of justice” (Clayton & Opatow, 2003) or feel that their own historical victimization entitles them to behave aggressively (see Klar, Schori-Eyal, & Yom Tov, this volume). Nevertheless, at least some degree of improvement, in terms of attentiveness to moral considerations, can be expected following the affirmation of group members’ collective agency. This is noteworthy considering the evidence that conflict-related attitudes are rigid and resistant to change (Bar-Tal, 2013).

Notably, one might argue that the trade-off between agency and morality is particularly salient in contexts of intractable conflicts. For example, shooting missiles at Israel may serve as a demonstration of power by Hamas but at the same time damage its moral reputation (e.g., in the eyes of Europeans), whereas restraint may bolster its moral reputation but erode its image as a powerful social actor. A similar “damned if you do, damned if you don’t” trap characterizes Israel’s (in)actions. To probe the generalizability of the results, we tested the effectiveness of agency affirmation in a context in which this trade-off between power and morality is less salient (SimanTov-Nachlieli et al., 2017, Study 3).

For this purpose, we used the context of the intrasocietal conflict between Jewish Israeli rightists (“the national camp”) and leftists (“the peace camp”). The conflict between these camps is a prominent feature of Israel’s political landscape, and both groups foster a narrative that portrays them as victims: For example, the narrative of the national camp highlights the 1948 killing of 16 rightist fighters of Altalena as evidence of the leftist camp’s aggressiveness, whereas the narrative of the peace camp highlights the murders of peace activist Emil Grunzweig in 1983 and Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995 as evidence of the rightist camp’s aggressiveness (Waxman, 2008).

Consistent with the pattern schematically depicted in Figure 19.3, among both leftist and rightist participants, agency affirmation (e.g., reminding participants how influential their political camp is in shaping Israel’s character) led to more conciliatory behavior (e.g., in allocation tasks) toward the conflicting ideological camp, and this effect was mediated by increased readiness to relinquish some power for the sake of morality. Again, a morality affirmation (e.g., reminding participants that their political camp is known for caring for the weak sectors in society) had no positive effect on participants’ conciliatory behavior. These findings strengthen the generalizability of our conclusion pertaining to the effectiveness of agency affirmation.

### Is It All in Our Heads? Agency Affirmation and Actual Power Relations

While the findings of this research program were in line with our theorizing, we admit that one finding that was somewhat surprising to us is that, despite the power asymmetry between these groups, agency affirmation had a similar effect on Israeli Jews and West Bank Palestinians (Shnabel et al., 2016). This finding is consistent with the results of an earlier study (Shnabel, Halabi, & Noor, 2013, Study 2), in which we induced Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel with “a common perpetrator identity” by exposing them to a short text that reminded them that both Jews and Palestinians are equipped with lethal weapons and have actively inflicted substantial harm upon each other. This reminder increased both Palestinians’ and Jews’ sense of agency (feeling that their ingroup is strong and has the power to influence the course of the conflict), resulting in more conciliatory tendencies toward the outgroup.

In addition, studies that focused on group members’ need for acknowledgment (see Twali et al., this volume) of their victimhood (which may be viewed as a form of empowerment, because victims are entitled to reparation and support from third parties) also found corresponding patterns among more and less powerful parties. For example, Hameiri and Nadler (2017) found that when West Bank Palestinians and Israeli Jews were led to believe that members of their outgroup acknowledged their victimhood in the Nakba and Holocaust (respectively), it increased their conciliatory attitudes. Another study revealed that both Palestinians and Jews showed more heightened conciliatory tendencies following the exposure to information according to which “objective studies” found that their ingroup was subjected to greater injustice and suffering by the hand of the outgroup than the other way around (SimanTov-Nachlieli, Shnabel, & Halabi, 2015).

While we do not question the validity of these findings (in terms of reproducibility etc.), we do wish to raise two concerns. Our concern is that pointing to *similarities* among more and less powerful parties of a conflict might unintentionally divert attention away from the power *differences* between them (Saguy, Dovidio, & Pratto, 2008). This might lead to the interpretation of our findings as suggesting that “everything is in our heads.” That is, readers might erroneously conclude that restoring group members’ agentic identity through short texts or writing exercises can replace real changes in power structure. It is, therefore, critical to clarify that restoring the agentic identity of members of groups involved in dual conflicts is an

important step in *preparing* their hearts and minds for reconciliation. As social psychologists, who study people's mental lives, our research focuses on this step. Thus, we examine how group members' subjective perceptions of the conflict affect their emotional needs and identify ways to channel these needs into less aggressive and more conciliatory directions. However, this does not mean that we deny the importance of more tangible macrolevel change that would create social systems that are both nonviolent and just, through dealing with issues of justice, historical truth, and reckoning with history (Rouhana, 2011). Actual reconciliation must consist of fundamental changes in policy, legislation, and distribution of resources that would bring about "positive peace" (social arrangements that eliminate group-based inequality and injustice; Christie, Tint, Wagner, & Winter, 2008).

A second concern is that these results, which reveal similarities among more and less powerful groups, do not tell the whole story. Highly relevant, in this regard, are the findings of Bruneau and Saxe (2012), who examined dyadic interactions between members of the less powerful (Mexican immigrants in Study 1; Palestinians in Study 2) and more powerful (White Americans and Israeli Jews, respectively) groups in a conflict. In line with classical research on the ability of empathy to improve outgroup attitudes (Batson & Ahmad, 2009), members of the more powerful groups benefited more, in terms of attitude improvement, from taking the perspective of their partners (i.e., summarizing their statements) than from sharing their own perspective with members of the weaker groups. However, members of the weaker groups benefited more from perspective giving (i.e., expressing the difficulties of life in their society) than from perspective taking—demonstrating "the power of being heard" for those who often feel voiceless.

A possible explanation for the discrepancy between Bruneau and Saxe's (2012) finding and findings suggesting that processes are similar among members of more and less powerful groups is that Bruneau and Saxe examined face-to-face interactions with a member of the outgroup while there was no such direct contact in the other studies we reviewed. This suggests that to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the psychological needs of members of groups involved in a dual conflict, it is critical to examine them in various situations, such as when they are on their own (e.g., reading a newspaper alone), or when interacting with ingroup and/or outgroup members. Admittedly, interactions with outgroup members might be scarce in conflicting societies characterized by collective victimhood, which are often segregated (see, for example, the case of segregated Catholic and

Protestant schools in Northern Ireland; e.g., Hewstone et al., 2005; see also Taylor, Štambuk, Čorkalo Biruški, & O'Driscoll, this volume). Nevertheless, they have the potential to provide us with valuable insights that cannot be reached when observing members of each group separately.

### Conclusion and Future Directions

While certainly not a panacea, we believe that our research can contribute to the promotion of more positive intergroup relations by underscoring the importance of restoring group members' positive agentic identities. Existing interventions have traditionally focused on changing attitudes and feelings (e.g., empathy; Batson & Ahmad, 2009) toward the outgroup. Our research points to another critical factor, namely, restoring group members' own identities (i.e., removing identity threats), which has critical implications for how they feel about and behave toward the outgroup. An advantage of this approach is that positive affirmations of their ingroup's agency are likely to be experienced by group members as emotionally pleasant, as opposed to strategies that attempt to elicit outgroup empathy, which might backfire under certain circumstances (Vorauer, 2013).

Future research should examine the effects of agency affirmation on group members' tendency to engage in competitive victimhood. Surveys among members of groups involved in dual conflicts (e.g., Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland; Noor, Brown, & Prentice, 2008), as well as ethnographic observations of dialogue groups between members of conflicting groups (e.g., Sonnenschein & Bekerman, 2010), show that they often compete over the victim status, arguing their ingroup to be the exclusive victim of the conflict (see also Mari, Bentrovato, Durante, & Wassermann, this volume; Szabó, this volume). In light of recent findings that, besides the need to protect their moral image, competitive victimhood stems from group members' need for power (Kahalon, Shnabel, Halabi, & SimanTov-Nachlieli, 2019), it is possible that agency affirmation, which restores group members' identity as strong social actors, can reduce competitive victimhood. Reducing competitive victimhood is an important goal because, although it might help group members adapt to difficult social conditions (see Bilewicz & Liu, this volume; Hirschberger & Ein-Dor, this volume), it might also foster a discourse that inhibits attempts to escape victimhood and take action for changing the situation.

Indeed, engagement in competitive victimhood, which reflects the view of the victim status as nondivisible, is not the only possible response to dual conflicts. Members of groups involved in a dual conflict may conceptualize the “victim” category in an inclusive manner, which highlights that one thing common to both groups is their suffering due to the conflict (Vollhardt, 2015; see also McNeill & Vollhardt, this volume). Such inclusive victim consciousness has been demonstrated to predict peace activism (Shnabel, Belhassen, & Mor, 2018) and positive outgroup attitudes in various contexts including Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) (Vollhardt & Bilali, 2015); India (Vollhardt, Nair, & Tropp, 2016); and Northern Ireland (Cohrs, McNeill, & Vollhardt, 2015). It may, therefore, be intriguing to examine whether agency affirmation contributes to fostering inclusive victim consciousness. In sum, we hope to stimulate a fruitful discussion and further research on the importance and means to restore groups’ agentic identities following victimization.

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