

Fast track report

Winning the victim status can open conflicting groups to reconciliation: Evidence from the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

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Abstract

Members of conflicting groups often engage in 'competitive victimhood', that is, they are motivated to gain acknowledgment that their ingroup is the conflict's 'true' victim. The present study found that compared with a control group, Israeli Jews and Palestinians reassured that their ingroup had won the victim status showed increased willingness to reconcile with the outgroup and held less pessimistic, fatalistic views of the conflict. Moreover, for members of the stronger party—Israeli Jews—winning the victim status also led to increased group efficacy and consequent readiness to take action toward resolution. These findings extend previous theorizing about the positive effects of addressing group members' need for acknowledgement of their victimization. Copyright © 2015 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Members of groups involved in a protracted violent conflict often seek to establish that their ingroup has been subjected to more suffering and injustice than their adversarial group (Noor, Shnabel, Halabi, & Nadler, 2012). Based on Gray and Wegner's (2009) theorizing on 'moral typecasting,' it has been argued that groups' engagement in such 'competitive victimhood' stems from construing the victim and perpetrator roles as mutually exclusive. This zero-sum mindset motivates conflicting groups to 'win' the victim status, which is associated with various material and symbolic benefits (see Noor et al., 2012). Tragically, evidence obtained in various contexts of violent conflict, including Northern Ireland, post-Pinochet Chile (Noor, Brown, Gonzalez, Manzi, & Lewis, 2008a; Noor, Brown, & Prentice, 2008b), Burundi, DRC, Rwanda (Vollhardt & Bilali, 2014), and Israel (Shnabel, Halabi, & Noor, 2013), suggests that group members' engagement in competitive victimhood negatively affects their attitude toward their outgroup (e.g., their readiness to forgive and reconcile with it). Apparently, when groups fight over their share of victimhood, they are unable or unwilling to let go of the painful past and replace it with a vision of a conflict-free future (Noor, Shnabel, Halabi, & Doosje, 2014).

Because the concept of competitive victimhood has only recently entered the scientific discourse (Noor et al., 2012), it is still under-researched. Existing research has focused on the antecedents (e.g., Sullivan, Landau, Branscombe, & Rothschild, 2012) and consequences (e.g., Noor et al., 2008a & 2008b) of groups' engagement in competitive victimhood, but to the best of our knowledge, no research has explored

what happens when group members actually win the competition. The present research provides preliminary answers to this question, focusing on two critical psychological outcomes. Specifically, previous theorizing suggests that two psychological barriers to peace in a protracted conflict are group members' unwillingness to let go of the grudge against the outgroup and make an effort to reconcile with it (Noor et al., 2012; Shnabel, Nadler, Ullrich, Dovidio, & Carmi, 2009); and their pessimistic view of the conflict as essentially eternal and inevitable, which overrides their hope for a peaceful future (Bar-Tal, 2013; Noor et al., 2014). The present study examines the effects of receiving acknowledgement that one's ingroup is the 'true' victim on these two outcomes, namely, (non) conciliatory attitudes and pessimistic views.

Importantly, if the acknowledgment of victim status comes from the adversarial outgroup (as in the case of official apologies), it implies reassurance that the transgression will not recur and willingness to compensate for it (Blatz, Schumann, & Ross, 2009). Obviously, these implications can affect the two key outcomes above and beyond winning the victim status per se. Thus, in order to examine the *unique* effects of winning the victim status, the source of recognition of groups' victim status in our study was not the conflicting outgroup, but rather an (allegedly) objective, impartial scientific analysis.

Previous research found that victims experience a sense of entitlement to behave antisocially to avoid further suffering (Zitek, Jordan, Monin, & Leach, 2010). Based on this research, a straightforward prediction would be that group members who receive acknowledgement of their victim status

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would show reduced readiness to reconcile with the outgroup and less hope for better future relations with it, because such attitudes reflect generous, prosocial tendencies (Zechmeister & Romero, 2002) and attributions (Bar-Tal, 2001). However, the findings of Zitek et al. (2010) were obtained in contexts fundamentally different than the contexts of intractable conflicts that are of interest here. Specifically, their participants' default state was neutral, and they were induced with feelings of victimization in the experimental condition. By contrast, in contexts of prolonged, violent intergroup conflicts, the group members' default state involves a deep sense of collective victimhood (Bar-Tal, 2013). Therefore, members of these groups experience a chronic, pressing need for acknowledgement of their suffering and the injustice done to them (Noor et al., 2012). Because conflicting group members' unsatisfied psychological needs serve as barriers to reconciliation, whereas addressing these needs has been shown to open them to reconciliation (Shnabel et al., 2009), we hypothesized that winning the victim status in the conflict would exert positive effects on their conciliatory attitudes and view of the conflict.

These hypothesized outcomes are consistent with research pointing to the critical role of acknowledgment of victimization in reconciliation processes (Auerbach, 2009; Hamber, 2007), as well as recent findings that when members of historically victimized groups gained acknowledgment of their victimization, they became more open to reconciliation with their historical perpetrators (Vollhardt, Mazur, & Lemahieu, 2014). Admittedly, Vollhardt et al. did not study contexts of ongoing conflicts where both groups served simultaneously as victims and perpetrators (see SimanTov-Nachlieli & Shnabel, 2014, for further investigation of duality in social roles). Rather, they focused on historical conflicts with clear-cut roles of victims and perpetrators, such as the Armenian and Jewish genocides. Nevertheless, we hypothesized that in contexts of intractable conflicts as well, acknowledgement their ingroup's victimization would open group members to reconciliation. In particular, we predicted that winning the victim status would liberate group members from preoccupation with the painful past and allow them to consider the possibility of a positive, reconciled future.¹

We tested this hypothesis in the context of the conflict between Israeli Jews and Palestinians. Despite the power asymmetry between Jews and Palestinians, both groups have developed a rigid, deeply rooted belief that their ingroup is the innocent victim of the opponent's violent acts (Bar-Tal, 2013), and their members often compete over the status of being the 'real' victim in the conflict (Shnabel & Noor, 2012; Sonnenschein, 2008). We assigned Israeli Jewish and Palestinian

participants into either a control, neutral condition, or a condition in which they were exposed to a text, affirming that their ingroup had been subjected to greater suffering and injustice than the outgroup—thus winning the victim status. In line with the integrated theorizing by Shnabel et al. (2009) and Vollhardt et al. (2014), we predicted that Jews and Palestinians assigned to the winning-the-victim-status condition would show heightened willingness to forgive and reconcile, and to endorse a less pessimistic view of the conflict (Hypothesis 1).

Effects on Group Efficacy and Action Tendencies

Beyond Hypothesis 1, we also tested the effects of winning the victim status on group members' efficacy, that is, their belief that the ingroup is able to resolve the challenges it encounters through collective effort (Bandura, 1995). Importantly, group members' efficacy is a critical requisite for group members' readiness to take action (e.g., participate in demonstrations, Klandermans, 1997), which in turn is critical for the actual achievement of resolution (Van Zomeren, Spears, Fischer, & Leach, 2004). The prediction derived from the social labeling literature (e.g., Kraut, 1973)—according to which people's behavior is affected by the terms used to describe or classify them—would be that winning the victim status should reduce group efficacy and action tendencies, because victimization is associated with helplessness and lack of agency (Gray & Wegner, 2009). However, we expected the opposite directionality: we theorized that when group members engage in competitive victimhood, they adopt a passive victim stance with regards to their role in the conflict (Noor et al., 2012; see also Ginges & Atran, 2008, for 'inertia effects' of humiliation and victimization on passivity). This stance prevents them from recognizing that their ingroup contributes to perpetuating the conflict and is therefore able to contribute to ending it. We therefore hypothesized that winning the victim status, which would free group members from the need to establish their suffering and thus allow them step out of the passive victim stance, would result in group members' acknowledgement of their ingroup's ability to affect the course of the conflict, that is, increase their efficacy. Group efficacy, in turn, was predicted to increase group members' readiness to engage in action aimed at bringing about a peaceful resolution (Van Zomeren et al., 2004).

We note that in principle, an additional reason why acknowledgement of victimization can increase group members' efficacy is that their group had invested substantial efforts and resources in campaigns designed to achieve such acknowledgement. To illustrate, to the extent that many countries officially recognize the Armenian genocide, this may signal to the Armenian people that their ingroup is influential and capable of achieving its goals and hence increase their efficacy. However, this possibility was unlikely in the present study, because as explained, the source of the acknowledgment in our case was not a social actor who could be potentially influenced by the ingroup. Specifically, the acknowledgment was (ostensibly) based on statistical data and analyses, rather than argumentative persuasion. This allowed us to focus on the unique efficacy effects of receiving acknowledgment of ingroup victim status per se, without signaling the group's success in its pro-recognition campaign.

¹A pilot study of 66 Palestinians and 68 Jews provided preliminary support for our hypotheses. Participants were randomly assigned to reading a text stating that either their ingroup or outgroup experienced more suffering and injustice due to the conflict (thus winning the victim status). A two-way analysis of variance revealed that participants assigned to the ingroup-winning-the-victim-status condition showed greater reconciliation tendencies ($M=3.71$, $SD=0.96$) than participants in the outgroup-winning-of-victim-status condition ($M=3.36$, $SD=0.93$), $F(1,130)=4.30$, $p=.04$, $\eta^2=.03$. No other significant effects of group affiliation or interaction emerged.

Admittedly, the experimental design does not enable us to determine whether the source of the effect was an increase in the 'ingroup-winning' condition or a decrease in the 'outgroup-winning' condition. Nevertheless, these findings are consistent with our hypothesis (and inconsistent with the opposing prediction).

Importantly, however, we expected the effects of winning the victim status on group efficacy and consequent action tendencies to be moderated by group affiliation. Due to the substantial power asymmetry between Palestinians and Jews, we expected these effects to be more pronounced for the latter. As the stronger party in terms of military, economical, and political power, Jews may have more influence on the course of the conflict than Palestinians (to a large extent, Jews determine 'the rules of the game'; Aggestam, 2002). They may therefore be more likely to step out of the passive victim stance, which is incongruent with their actual, objective position (Rouhana, 2004), once their need for acknowledgment of victimization has been addressed. In other words, we predicted a conditional indirect effect, namely, moderated mediation (Hypothesis 2), such that being assigned to the winning-the-victim-status condition would increase group efficacy to a greater extent among Jews than Palestinians (a condition by group affiliation interaction). Group efficacy, in turn, would lead to greater readiness to engage in action to promote resolution (Van Zomeren et al., 2004).

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 51 Palestinian students (34 women, $M_{\text{age}} = 21.80$, $SD = 2.16$) and 50 Jewish students² (26 women, $M_{\text{age}} = 27.59$, $SD = 7.54$) of a large Israeli university, all highly fluent in Hebrew. They participated in exchange for 20 NIS.

Procedure

Participants were approached by (Jewish) research assistants (RAs) in the student dorms and asked to fill out a short 'survey' about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. All participants reported their age and gender, and Jewish participants also reported their political orientation (42% were right-wingers, 40% left-wingers, and 18% centrists).³ Next, participants were randomly assigned either to the winning-the-victim-status condition or to a control, neutral condition. In both, in order to set the stage for the cover story and manipulation, participants first read a short paragraph about the conflict, which referred to the fact that both Israelis and Palestinians tend to consider themselves as victims of greater injustice and suffering. Then, participants in the control condition proceeded to complete the dependent measures, whereas participants in the experimental condition proceeded to read the following:

²One Jewish outlier, with a Cook's distance of over 0.09 in *all analyses*, who expressed extreme anger about the study's topic, was excluded from the sample (see McClelland, 2002). Importantly, the pattern of results persisted when including her, such that the only change in significance level was obtained in the interaction effect presented in Table 2's third row (condition \times group affiliation on efficacy), which became marginal, $p = .10$. Nevertheless, the indirect effect of condition on action toward resolution through efficacy for Jews remained significant even when including this outlier.

³We assessed political orientation only among Jews because there is no parallel, simple measure of Palestinians' political orientation (see Ghanem, 2002, for a discussion of Palestinians' political orientation).

Recent studies have tried to examine which party had undergone greater injustice and suffering by assessing a series of factors such as casualties, trauma, human rights violations, breach of UN resolutions, and economic loss.⁴... These studies clearly show that the real victim of the conflict is the [Palestinian/Jewish] party as [Palestinians/Jews] experienced greater injustice and suffering on both the national and individual levels. For example, one study found that the number of [Palestinians/Jews] victimized by illegitimate actions... is substantially higher than the respective number of [Jews/Palestinians].

Next, participants completed the manipulation checks and dependent measures specified in the succeeding text⁵ were thanked and debriefed.

Measures

Manipulation Check

Participants were asked to indicate which group, according to the text, (a) constitutes the real victim of the conflict, and (b) has been subjected to greater injustice and suffering (1 = the ingroup, 2 = debatable, 3 = the outgroup); $r(101) = .86$, $p < .001$.

Mood

Participants completed a short version of the positive and negative affect schedule (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988), comprised of six 5-point (1 = not at all to 5 = very much) items (e.g., 'angry'; 'relaxed,' reverse-scored); $\alpha = .86$. This scale was included to rule out mood as an alternative explanation of our findings. Specifically, participants assigned to the winning-the-victim-status condition, which satisfies their psychological needs, could experience a more positive mood than those assigned to the control condition. Because positive

⁴To make the results of the 'scientific analysis' (which ostensibly revealed that the participants' ingroup was the conflict's 'true' victim) credible for both Palestinians and Jews, the text comprising the experimental manipulation intentionally referred to *various* dimensions of victimization. Thus, although the Palestinians are clearly the greater victims in terms of casualties, Jews may nevertheless perceive themselves as the greater victims in terms of breaches of UN resolutions—a highly plausible possibility given that the Jewish narrative emphasizes that the 1948 War broke out because the Palestinians had rejected the UN Partition Plan (see Bar-On & Adwan, 2006, for competing narratives of Palestinians and Jews). This multidimensional manipulation is based on theorizing that conflicting parties engaged in competitive victimhood may establish their victimization on different dimensions (Noor et al., 2012).

⁵Beyond these measures, we also delivered three items that measured participants' moral defensiveness, namely, their motivation to protect their ingroup's moral identity (e.g., 'It is important to me to defend the moral image of my group when doubted in the world'; see Shnabel et al., 2013); $\alpha = .89$. In line with the argument by Sullivan et al. (2012) that group members strategically engage in competitive victimhood in order to restore their threatened moral image, we hypothesized that winning the victim status (which is associated with innocence and superior morality; Gray & Wegner, 2009) would reduce group members' moral defensiveness, which would, in turn, open them to reconciliation (see Shnabel et al., 2013). Unexpectedly, however, the experimental condition failed to affect group members' moral defensiveness, $F(1,97) = 1.27$, $p = .26$, $\eta^2 = .01$ (the effects of group affiliation and the condition \times group affiliation interaction were also nonsignificant, $ps > .42$). Also, the indirect effect of winning-the-victim-status through moral defensiveness on both conciliatory tendencies and pessimism failed to reach significance (95% CIs: -0.05 , $.32$ and -0.23 , $.03$, respectively). We did not report these results in the main text for the sake of brevity.

mood is a strong predictor of prosociality (e.g., Isen & Levin, 1972) and optimism (Räikkönen, Matthews, Flory, Owens, & Gump, 1999), improving participants' mood in the experimental condition could in itself lead to greater conciliatory tendencies and a less pessimistic view of the conflict, although our purpose was to highlight the importance of receiving acknowledgment of the ingroup's victimization regardless of any mood effects.

Reconciliation and Forgiveness

Four 7-point items (1 = *not at all* to 7 = *very much*) based on the measure of forgiveness by Noor et al. (2008a) and the measure of reconciliation by Shnabel et al. (2009), assessed participants' willingness to forgive and reconcile with the outgroup (e.g., 'I would like my group not to hold grudge against the other group for the things they have done to us'; 'We have to do everything possible in order to reconcile with the other group'); $\alpha = .85$.

Pessimistic View of the Conflict

Building on Oren & Bar-Tal (2007), three 7-point items assessed participants' negative, fatalistic view of the conflict (e.g., 'The conflict is so deep that there is no way to end it'); $\alpha = .90$.

Group Efficacy

Three 7-point items, adapted from Van Zomeren et al. (2004) for the present context, assessed participants' perceptions of their group's efficacy to resolve the conflict (e.g., 'My group is able to influence and promote reconciliation'); $\alpha = .76$.

Acting Toward Resolution

Three 7-point items assessed participants' willingness to engage in action aimed at resolving the conflict (e.g., 'I want to become an active participant in collective activities (demonstrations, petitions) aimed at ending the conflict'); $\alpha = .81$.

RESULTS

Manipulation Checks

The vast majority of our participants answered both manipulation check items as expected: 41 of the 48 participants assigned to the control condition checked '2' for both items, and 49 out of the 53 assigned to the winning-the-victim-status condition checked '1' for both. Still, seven participants in the control and four participants in the experimental condition failed to answer at least one of the items as intended. We assume that participants in the control condition mistakenly provided their personal opinions (i.e., that their ingroup had undergone more suffering) instead of referring to the text. As for participants in the experimental condition, we assume that they either provided their own opinion (i.e., that the issue is still debatable) or referred to the first paragraph in the text

(according to which, both parties view themselves as having suffered more) instead of to the second (according to which 'scientific analysis' shows that their ingroup suffered more). In other words, we assume that these wrong answers did not reflect miscomprehension of the manipulation text and therefore include all the participants in the analyses reported in the succeeding text. Note, however, that all the results reported in the succeeding text remain unchanged in direction and significance when these 11 participants are excluded.

Mood

A two-way analysis of variance revealed that the experimental manipulation did not affect participants' mood, $F(1,97) = 0.11$, $p = .74$, $\eta^2 = .00$, $M_s = 2.32$ ($SD = 0.87$) vs. 2.26 ($SD = 0.78$) for the control and experimental conditions, respectively. Mood was also not affected by group affiliation, $F(1,97) = 0.00$, $p = .99$, $\eta^2 = .00$, $M_s = 2.28$ ($SD = 0.88$) versus 2.29 ($SD = 0.78$) for Jews and Palestinians, respectively. Finally, the condition \times group affiliation interaction was nonsignificant, $F(1,97) = 0.31$, $p = .58$, $\eta^2 = .00$. These findings rule out positive mood as an alternative explanation for the effects reported in the succeeding text. Also, all the results reported in the succeeding text remain unchanged even when controlling for mood.

Main Analysis

Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations for our outcome variables.

Hypothesis 1: Two 2-way (group affiliation [Jew, Palestinian] \times condition [winning-the-victim-status, control]) analyses of variance revealed that participants assigned to the

Table 1. Means and standard deviations of main dependent variables (DVs)

	Condition	Group affiliation	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Reconciliation and forgiveness	Control	Palestinians	4.01	1.44
		Jews	4.29	1.47
		Total	4.13	1.44
	Winning victim status	Palestinians	4.74	1.61
		Jews	5.13	1.07
		Total	4.95	1.34
Pessimistic view of the conflict	Control	Palestinians	3.91	1.58
		Jews	3.76	1.65
		Total	3.85	1.59
	Winning victim status	Palestinians	3.33	1.63
		Jews	2.92	1.58
		Total	3.11	1.60
Group efficacy	Control	Palestinians	3.89	1.24
		Jews	3.68	1.44
		Total	3.80	1.32
	Winning victim status	Palestinians	3.90	1.26
		Jews	4.76	1.48
		Total	4.37	1.44
Acting toward resolution	Control	Palestinians	4.41	1.38
		Jews	3.54	1.29
		Total	4.03	1.40
	Winning victim status	Palestinians	4.14	1.62
		Jews	4.17	1.66
		Total	4.16	1.63

N = 51 Palestinians and 50 Jews.

Table 2. Conditional indirect effect: winning-the-victim-status × group-affiliation interaction on acting toward resolution via group efficacy

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>IV-Mediator</i> (Winning-the-victim-status on group efficacy)	0.01	0.38	0.04	0.97
Moderator-mediator (Group affiliation on group efficacy)	-0.21	0.39	-0.52	0.60
<i>IV × moderator interaction-mediator</i> (Winning-the-victim-status × group affiliation on group efficacy)	1.06	0.54	1.95	0.05
Mediator-DV (Group efficacy on acting toward resolution)	0.31	0.11	2.94	0.01
Direct effect (Winning-the-victim-status on acting toward resolution)	-0.05	0.30	-0.16	0.87
Conditional indirect effects of winning-the-victim-status on acting toward resolution through group efficacy				
Group affiliation	<i>B</i>	Boot <i>SE</i>	<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>
Palestinians	0.004	0.11	-0.21	0.28
Jews	0.336	0.19	0.04	0.77

CI, confidence interval; LL, lower limit; UL, upper limit.

N = 51 Palestinians and 50 Jews. Level of confidence = 95%. Experimental condition was coded such that it received the values '1' in the winning-the-victim-status condition and '0' in the control condition. Group affiliation was coded such that it received the value '1' for Jews and '0' for Palestinians. Bootstrap sample size = 1000.

An alternative analytic approach would be to additionally test whether the experimental condition interacted with group affiliation directly on acting toward resolution (i.e., unmediated by group efficacy). Testing this alternative model (i.e., using Model 8 in the PROCESS macro, in which both the direct and indirect effects are moderated by group affiliation; see Preacher, Rucker, & Hayes, 2007) revealed that (a) consistent with Model 7 (presented in Table 2), the indirect effect remained significant for Jews and nonsignificant for Palestinians; (b) the direct effects were nonsignificant for both Jews and Palestinians (*ps* > 0.50); and (c) the indirect effect of the experimental condition × group affiliation interaction was significant (95% bootstrap CI: 0.01, 0.97), in line with our theorizing.

winning-the-victim-status condition showed greater willingness to forgive and reconcile, $F(1,97)=7.91, p=.006, \eta^2=.08$, and expressed a less pessimistic view of the conflict, $F(1,97)=4.89, p=.03, \eta^2=.05$, compared with control participants (Table 1). No other significant effects of group affiliation or condition × group affiliation interaction emerged (*ps* > .24).⁶

Hypothesis 2: We used Hayes (2012) PROCESS macro (Model 7) to test for the predicted conditional indirect effect (a.k.a. moderated mediation), whereby the strength of the effect of winning-the-victim-status on action tendencies through group efficacy depends on the level of group affiliation. Results are presented in Table 2.

First, consistent with our hypothesis, the condition × group affiliation interaction effect on group efficacy was significant (see the third row of Table 2), suggesting that the effect of winning-the-victim-status on group efficacy was different among Jews compared with Palestinians. Planned comparisons revealed that winning the victim status significantly increased Jews' efficacy, $p=.007$, but did not affect Palestinians' efficacy, $p=.97$ (see Table 1 for means). Second, as predicted, group members' efficacy predicted their willingness to act toward resolution (see fourth row of Table 2). Third, the direct effect of winning-the-victim-status on action toward resolution (obtained when the mediator, group efficacy, is controlled for) was nonsignificant (see fifth

row of Table 2). Finally, as seen in the lower part of Table 2 and in line with our hypothesis, the indirect path (i.e., winning-the-victim-status on acting toward resolution through group efficacy) was significant for Jews but not for Palestinians.⁷

DISCUSSION

The present study examined whether in the context of a prolonged violent conflict in which both parties transgress against each other and compete over their share of victimhood, winning the victim status can open group members to reconciliation. We found that Palestinians and Jews who were affirmed that their ingroup was the conflict's 'true' victim showed more conciliatory, forgiving attitudes toward their outgroup and held less pessimistic views of the conflict. At first glance, these results may seem counterintuitive, especially in light of previous findings about victims' sense of entitlement to behave antisocially (Zitek et al., 2010). However, they are

⁶For Hypothesis 1, when controlling for political orientation, the positive effect of winning the victim status persisted for the reconciliation and forgiveness measure ($p=.19$), and became marginal for the pessimistic measure ($p=.098$). As for Hypothesis 2, results persisted with no change in significance level when controlling for political orientation (in particular, the indirect effect of winning-the-victim-status on action tendencies through efficacy for Jews remained significant: 95% CI: 0.02, 0.61).

⁷Although we suggest that the power asymmetry between Palestinians and Jews accounts for the differential effect of winning-the-victim-status on their efficacy, an alternative explanation may be that this difference was driven by the fact that the source of the experiment was clearly Israeli Jewish (as the experiment was conducted in Hebrew, in an Israeli university, and the recruitment was carried out by Jewish research assistants). Although we cannot completely rule out this possibility, we believe that if anything, this should have led to a reverse pattern of heightened levels of efficacy among Palestinians. Specifically, social psychological literature suggests that admission by the perpetrator of the injustice caused to the victim serves as a form of acknowledging a 'moral debt' (Minow, 1998), which is empowering to the victim (Shnabel et al., 2009). If so, winning the victim status should be more empowering when its source is the other conflict party rather than an impartial scientific analysis (see Harth & Shnabel, in press, for similar effects of message source). Hence, we believe that the differential effect on Jews' and Palestinians' efficacy is better accounted for by the lopsided nature of the conflict than by methodological aspects.

consistent with the integrated logic of theorizing about conflicting groups' pressing need for acknowledgement of suffering and injustice caused to them (e.g., Vollhardt et al., 2014), as well as theorizing that addressing group members' psychological needs can increase their conciliatory tendencies (Shnabel et al., 2009). Moreover, although the victim status is associated with passivity and lack of agency (e.g., Gray & Wegner, 2009), we found that winning it did not reduce group members' efficacy. On the contrary, among Jews, who as the stronger party have greater influence over the conflict (Aggestam, 2002), winning the victim status led to increased efficacy, which in turn led to heightened tendencies to act toward resolution.

Theoretically, the present study extends previous work, which identified the importance of acknowledgment of victimization for reconciliation in contexts of historical conflicts characterized by clear-cut roles of victims and perpetrators (e.g., the Armenian genocide; Vollhardt et al., 2014), by examining the effects of receiving such acknowledgment in the context of an ongoing conflict characterized by competitive victimhood. Also, whereas previous work on group members' need for acknowledgment of victimization focused on outcomes such as forgiveness (e.g., Noor et al., 2008a; Shnabel et al., 2013) and conciliatory attitudes (e.g., trust and political inclusion; Vollhardt & Bilali, 2014), the present study is the first, to the best of our knowledge, to examine group efficacy and action tendencies toward resolution as additional outcomes of interest.

At the practical level, one obstacle to the real-life application of our findings is that in reality, only one party can be crowned as the 'true' victim. To illustrate, a mediator cannot communicate to both parties at the same time that they are the real victims. One way of overcoming this obstacle is to include two mediators (e.g., in peace negotiations), each reassuring the victim status of one party. Alternatively, strategies that promote more inclusive perceptions of victimhood, namely, the construal of the victim role as a divisible, rather than non-divisible 'commodity' (Vollhardt, 2009; Vollhardt & Bilali, 2014) can be developed (see also Shnabel et al., 2013, for the positive effects of inducing a 'common victim identity' among conflicting parties).

At this point, a word of caution may be in order. Consistent with the results of the present study, we believe that group members have an authentic need for recognition of their ingroup's suffering and victimization and that receiving acknowledgement of this suffering increase their willingness for reconciliation. We do acknowledge, however, that because the victim's role is associated with various benefits in contemporary society (Moscovici & Pérez, 2009), group members might compete over the victim's status for strategic reasons. In particular, members of the dominant group might make claims with regard to their ingroup's victimization to maintain the status quo from which their ingroup benefits (see Sonnenschein, 2008, for the Israeli context; Leach, Iyer, & Pederson, 2007, for the Australian context; and Thomsen et al., 2010, for the US context). It is possible that under such circumstances, receiving acknowledgement of victimhood might carry negative implications, as it can be used to legitimize the dominant group's refraining from taking action to change the situation, or even justify its aggressive military acts

against the outgroup (see Bar-Tal, 2013). We therefore do not suggest that acknowledging victimhood is a panacea for competitive victimhood under all circumstances. Future research should distinguish between authentic versus strategic expressions of group members' need for acknowledgment of their ingroup's victimization, and examine the effects of receiving such acknowledgment when the underlying motivation is strategic rather than authentic.

Future research should test the generalizability of our findings in other contexts of prolonged violent conflicts, as well as in contexts characterized by structural rather than direct violence (see Galtung, 1969, for this distinction), in which advantaged and disadvantaged groups also occasionally compete over the victim status (Sullivan et al., 2012). Future research should also aim to identify the mechanism driving the positive effects of winning the victim status. As mentioned in footnote 4, group members' wish to win the victim status may be motivated by their desire to defend their ingroup's threatened moral image (e.g., when facing accusations by the outgroup; Sullivan et al., 2012). However, in the present study, we did not find evidence that the mechanism through which winning the victim status increased conciliatory tendencies was reduction in group members' moral defensiveness.

This suggests that group members' wish to receive acknowledgment of their victimization may be driven by additional needs beyond protecting the ingroup's morality. In particular, we speculate that because victimization is a highly profound psychological experience (Baumeister, 1996), when group members experience a deep sense of victimization that is not shared by members of other groups (including the conflicting outgroup), it violates their fundamental human need to experience a shared reality with others (Echterhoff, Higgins, & Levine, 2009). To illustrate, when Palestinians feel victimized by the Israeli occupation, yet are condemned worldwide for terrorist attacks, which they consider a legitimate form of resistance, or when Israelis are rocketed yet condemned for bombing Gaza, which they consider a legitimate form of self-defense, both groups suffer not only from impairment to their moral image but also from lack of common ground between their own and others' basic worldview. If so, winning the victim status may exert positive effects because it restores a sense of shared reality, reducing some of the psychological tension caused by incongruent, competing worldviews (see Jost, Ledgerwood, & Hardin, 2008)—a possibility that may be examined in further research. Hopefully, such research may advance our understanding of the detrimental effects of competitive victimhood and ways to overcome it.

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