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Overcoming competitive victimhood and facilitating forgiveness through re-categorization into a common victim or perpetrator identity[☆]

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Inducing Jews and Palestinians with a common victim identity reduced their moral defensiveness.
- Inducing Jews and Palestinians with a common perpetrator identity increased their sense of agency.
- Both decreased moral defensiveness and increased agency led to decreased competitive victimhood.
- Decreased competitive victimhood led to increased forgiveness.
- The induction of a common regional identity failed to set these processes in motion.

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ABSTRACT

We argue that facilitating forgiveness among groups involved in intractable conflicts requires reducing competitive victimhood which stems from the conflicting parties' motivation to restore agency and a positive moral image. Examining novel and traditional re-categorization interventions, Study 1 found that inducing Israeli Jews and Palestinians with a *common victim identity* decreased competitive victimhood, which in turn increased forgiveness. Inducing a *common regional identity* failed to initiate a similar process. Study 2 further revealed that inducing either a *common victim* or a *common perpetrator identity* (but not a *common regional identity*) led to decreased competitive victimhood and increased forgiveness. The mechanisms involved were decreased moral defensiveness in the *common victim* intervention versus increased sense of agency in the *common perpetrator* intervention.

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Introduction

Groups involved in prolonged, violent conflicts compete over various tangible and psychological resources, including their victim status (Kelman, 2008). Specifically, adversarial groups often engage in competitive victimhood, that is, they are strongly motivated to establish that their ingroup has been subjected to *more* injustice and suffering at the hands of the outgroup than the other way round (Noor, Shnabel, Halabi, & Nadler, 2012). Tragically, groups' engagement in competitive victimhood was found to be associated with reduced willingness to forgive the outgroup, that is, to abandon retaliation and seek reconciliation despite the traumatic past (Noor, Brown, Gonzalez, Manzi, & Lewis, 2008).

The case of Jews and Palestinians serves to illustrate this destructive dynamics. Efforts by Jews and Palestinians to establish that their ingroup is the "real" victim of the conflict are evident at both the collective level (e.g. in these groups' historical narratives; Baram & Klar, 2012; see also Hammack, 2008) and the interpersonal level (e.g. in encounters between Jewish and Palestinian participants in dialog groups; Sonnenschein, 2008). These groups' strong need to establish their ingroup's victimization makes them unwilling to let go of the grudge they hold against the outgroup and to consider the possibility of more harmonious future relations (Shnabel & Noor, 2012).

The present research was designed to develop two novel interventions to reduce Jews' and Palestinians' engagement in competitive victimhood and open them, in turn, to mutual forgiveness. While our research focused on the conflict between Jews and Palestinians, it examined general psychological processes that are also likely to be applicable to other contexts of intractable conflicts (i.e., prolonged, violent conflicts that are perceived as existential and zero-sum in nature, Bar-Tal, 2007).

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The rationale for our interventions is based on the Common Ingroup Identity Model (CIIM; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000, 2012), which suggests that intergroup relations can become more harmonious if members of conflicting groups develop a common *superordinate* identity instead of clinging to their *separate* identities. In support of this model, interracial bias was reduced when Blacks and Whites in the US re-categorized themselves as Americans (Nier, Gaertner, Dovidio, Banker, & Ward, 2001). Similarly, inducing Jews to think about themselves and Germans as common members of humanity increased their willingness to forgive the latter for the Holocaust (Wohl & Branscombe, 2005). To the best of our knowledge, the CIIM hypotheses have never been experimentally tested in contexts of prolonged violent conflicts, including that between Jews and Palestinians. Yet, the model's general logic seems to suggest that interventions inducing Jews and Palestinians to think of themselves as members of common superordinate group (e.g., Middle Easterners) may be expected to promote more harmonious intergroup relations, including mutual forgiveness.

However, a major limitation of any such intervention is that it would leave Jews and Palestinians' pressing need for recognition of their suffering unaddressed. Because groups' unaddressed psychological needs serve as barriers to reconciliation (Shnabel, Nadler, Ullrich, Dovidio, & Carmi, 2009), we theorized that successful application of CIIM to contexts characterized by groups' competitive victimhood requires that they be simultaneously induced with a common identity and have their need for acknowledgment of their suffering addressed¹ (see also Noor et al., 2012). Our interventions aimed to achieve this dual goal through the induction of a *conflict-related* rather than *conflict-unrelated* (e.g., Middle-Eastern) superordinate identity.

Study 1 developed and tested an intervention promoting re-categorization into a common victim identity (i.e., "We are both victims of the Middle-East conflict"). This intervention, originally proposed by Noor et al. (2012; see also Vollhardt for conceptually similar strategies, 2009), was based on the premise that despite the divide between them, Jews and Palestinians can find it possible to agree that the conflict involves aversive implications for both groups' lives (insecurity, unstable economy, etc.). Hence, the proposed intervention aimed to transform Jews' and Palestinians' perceptions of their group boundaries from mutually exclusive victims and perpetrators (the ingroup and outgroup, respectively) into a more inclusive "we" (i.e., both parties are victims of the conflict and hence share a common victim identity). Such transformation, in turn, is expected to reduce competitive victimhood and promote mutual forgiveness because it induces Jews and Palestinians to think of their groups as sharing a common superordinate identity and satisfies their need for acknowledgment of their victimhood at the same time. One remarkable real-life example for the use of the *common victim identity* strategy is the Palestinian Israeli Bereaved Families for Peace organization, which consists of people who have lost close family members in the regional conflict. By sharing the loss of their loved ones, these families promote solidarity across group boundaries.

At first glance the *common victim identity* strategy may seem counterintuitive as groups engaging in competitive victimhood are by definition motivated to magnify their own suffering and dismiss the outgroup's (Noor et al., 2012). Therefore, they might resist any attempt to highlight mutual suffering. However, based on Gray and Wegner's (2009) theorizing on "moral typecasting" we argue that groups' engagement in competitive victimhood may stem from their construal of "victim" vs. "perpetrator" as *mutually exclusive* roles: only one group in the conflict can be "cast" into the victim role while the other must inevitably be the perpetrator. This zero-sum mindset may drive groups to engage in competitive victimhood not because of their need to disacknowledge their outgroup's suffering per se, but rather due to the need for acknowledgment of their *own* suffering, combined with the fear that any recognition of the outgroup's suffering might leave this need unaddressed and cast their ingroup into the role of the exclusive perpetrator (Noor et al., 2012). Thus, a *common victim identity* may facilitate forgiveness by promoting a more *inclusive* construal of the

victim role, which may in turn promote positive, prosocial emotional tendencies and behaviors among both Palestinians and Jews. In fact, the above rationale echoes Vollhardt's work, who has developed the model of Inclusive Victim Consciousness and furnished empirical support for it (Vollhardt, 2012, 2013).

Study 2 developed and tested an additional novel intervention promoting re-categorizing into a common perpetrator identity (i.e., "We are both perpetrators in the Middle-East conflict"). We theorized that while Jews and Palestinians may disagree on whose violent acts were more (il)legitimate, they may still agree that both groups carried out violent acts against each other. Similar to the *common victim identity* intervention, the second intervention was hypothesized to facilitate forgiveness as it induces a common superordinate identity (i.e., both parties have transgressed against each other and hence share a common perpetrator identity). At the same time, by recognizing the outgroup's role as perpetrator, it implies the ingroup's suffering and thus addresses both groups' need to have their victimhood acknowledged. A noteworthy real-life example for the use of the *common perpetrator identity* strategy is the Combatants for Peace movement established by Palestinians and Israelis who had played an active role in the cycle of violence and decided to drop their arms and promote a peaceful solution to the conflict.

Again, at first glance the *common perpetrator identity* strategy may seem counterintuitive because ingroup members often resist and deny their portrayal perpetrators (e.g., Wohl, Branscombe, & Klar, 2006). However, as explained above, we theorized that this defensive response stems from the fear that such portrayal would cast the ingroup into the role of "bad guys", a social role associated with exclusion and condemnation by others (Shnabel et al., 2009). Because a *common perpetrator identity* promotes *inclusive* construal of the perpetrator role (i.e., both groups are "cast" into the role of perpetrators, rather than into mutually exclusive "good" and "bad guys" roles) it implies that both share the burden of responsibility and guilt. Hence, it was not expected to bring about a negative, defensive response but rather to open group members up to mutual forgiveness.

Taken together, our studies aimed to apply CIIM to a context of intergroup conflict characterized by competitive victimhood. In their extension of the model's original formulation, Dovidio, Gaertner, and Saguy (2009) argued that the specific contents emphasized within a certain common identity may moderate its effects. In particular, Dovidio et al. suggested that some forms of common identity (e.g., "We are all Americans") can distract attention from group-based disparities. By contrast, the induction of a dual identity representation in which both the common identity and the separate identities are activated simultaneously (e.g., "We are African- and European-Americans"), focuses attention on existing group inequality and therefore may be particularly effective in promoting group members' social action towards change. Dovidio et al.'s theorizing reveals that "not all re-categorization strategies are born equal", as certain common identity representations may be more effective in addressing group needs than others (for example, the dual-identity representation better addresses disadvantaged groups' need to restore equal status and agency; Dovidio, Saguy, & Shnabel, 2009). Moreover, this theorizing suggests, perhaps counterintuitively, that focusing on the negative side of intergroup relations within a common identity (i.e., highlighting negative contents such as group disparity or victimization) may nevertheless have positive effects on intergroup relations. Accordingly, our goal was to establish effective re-categorization strategies that, through highlighting a particular content of the common identity, would address groups' need for acknowledgment of their suffering and facilitate forgiveness.

Study 1

Study 1 examined the effectiveness of two interventions. The first was a novel intervention that induced a *common victim identity* in both groups, whereas the second induced a *common regional identity*

similarly to interventions traditionally examined within the CIIM framework. Using a 2(ethnic group: Palestinian/Jewish) \times 3(condition: control/common regional identity/common victim identity) between-participants experimental design, we examined the effects of these interventions on two¹ consecutive outcomes, as follows.

Engagement in competitive victimhood

The *common victim identity* intervention, but not the *common regional identity* intervention, was hypothesized to address Palestinians' and Jews' need for acknowledgment of their victimization. Consequently, the former but not the latter was predicted to reduce their engagement in competitive victimhood compared to the control condition.

Forgiveness

Because competitive victimhood was found to be negatively associated with forgiveness (Noor, Brown, Gonzalez, et al., 2008; Noor, Brown, & Prentice, 2008), we hypothesized that the decrease in group members' competitive victimhood in the *common victim identity* condition would translate into increased forgiveness. By contrast, although the experimental induction of common identity had been previously found to be associated with forgiveness (Wohl & Branscombe, 2005), this finding was obtained in a context characterized by clear-cut, consensual victim and perpetrator roles (i.e., the Holocaust). However, we theorized that in a context characterized by competitive victimhood its reduction was a prerequisite for forgiveness. Hence, we did not predict the *common regional identity* intervention to facilitate forgiveness compared to the control condition.

Method

Participants

Participants were 60 Jewish citizens and 60 Palestinian permanent residents of Israel (mainly from East Jerusalem) who agreed to participate in a study on information processing (30 men and 30 women in each group; $M_{\text{age}} = 23.6$, range: 19–28). All participants were college students who received 20 NIS (approximately \$5) for their participation.

Procedure

As a cover story, adapted from Nadler and Liviatan (2006), participants were told that the study explores the effects of exposure to identical information through different media (newspaper vs. television) on cognitive-emotional processing. In fact, participants in all three conditions were exposed to short texts, at about the same length, ostensibly taken from a well-known newspaper. The texts' content constituted the experimental condition to which participants were randomly assigned.

In the control condition, participants read a neutral text about aircraft that was not related to the Jewish–Palestinian conflict or identities. Participants in the *common regional identity* condition read about recent archeological research that purportedly revealed that ancient Middle-Eastern peoples, including Palestinians and Jews, originate from a common primordial culture that is still evident today in highly similar traditions, cuisines and mentalities. Participants in the *common victim identity* condition read about recent research purportedly suggesting that both Jews and Palestinians are victims of the prolonged conflict as they have both experienced substantial individual and national losses in human life, property, trust and hope.

Measures

After reading the article participants completed the following measures, using 7-point scales (1 = *not at all*; 7 = *very much*).

Competitive victimhood

Eight items measured the participants' perception that their ingroup suffered more than the outgroup on various dimensions including number of casualties, emotional pain, economic loss, political isolation, and being subjected to evil, unacceptable atrocities for which the outgroup and its leaders must apologize (e.g., "The ingroup suffered more casualties than the outgroup"; $\alpha = .79$).

Forgiveness

Adapted from Noor, Brown, Gonzalez, et al. (2008), and Noor, Brown, and Prentice (2008), seven items measured participants' willingness to forgive their outgroup (e.g., "I would like my ingroup to forgive the outgroup for its violent acts"; $\alpha = .93$).

Finally, participants reported demographic information, and were thanked and debriefed.

Results

Means and standard deviations are presented in Table 1.

Main analysis

First, we tested the effects of group affiliation, condition and their interaction on the outcome variables (Competitive victimhood and Forgiveness) using multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA). We next tested our theory-driven predictions using focused comparisons (planned contrasts), in line with Rosenthal, Rosnow, and Rubin's (2000) recommendation to test the precise predicted patterns (rather than overly broad omnibus effects).

The 2(Group: Jews/Palestinians) \times 3(Condition: common victim identity/common regional identity/control) MANOVA revealed a significant multivariate effect of Group, $F(2,113) = 35.60, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .387$. The between-subjects analyses revealed that compared to Palestinians, Jews engaged less in competitive victimhood, $F(1,114) = 50.71, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .308$, and expressed greater forgiveness towards their outgroup, $F(1,114) = 47.86, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .296$.

Of direct relevance to the present study, the multivariate effect of Condition was significant, $F(2,114) = 4.79, p < .011, \eta_p^2 = .078$. Focused comparisons testing the between-participant effects revealed that compared to the control condition, the *common victim identity* condition significantly reduced competitive victimhood, $t(114) = 2.85, p < .006$, and increased forgiveness, $t(114) = 2.19, p < .031$. By contrast, compared to the control condition, the effect of the *common regional identity* condition was non-significant for both competitive victimhood, $t(114) = 1.42, p > .159$, and forgiveness, $t(114) = 1.03, p > .304$.¹

Finally, the multivariate effect of the two-way Group \times Condition interaction was non-significant, $F(2,114) < 1.811, p > .168, \eta_p^2 = .031$.

Mediation analysis

Next, using the PROCESS macro developed by Hayes (2012), we tested for a mediation model (Model 4). Specifically, we tested the following causal sequence: (a) the induction of *common victim identity* reduced Competitive victimhood, and (b) reduced Competitive victimhood

¹ Because the Group \times Condition interaction was not significant we did not compare forgiveness in the three experimental conditions for each group separately. Nevertheless, close examination of the means reveals that unexpectedly, Jew's forgiveness level was almost identical in the *common regional identity* and the *common victim identity* conditions. This may stem from Jews' general sense of exclusion from the Middle-Eastern identity (due to differences in religion, ethnicity, etc.), which may have made the induction of a *common regional identity* particularly effective for them. By contrast, Palestinians may view the characteristics of the Middle-Eastern identity as representing their ingroup, which may have undermined the positive effects of inducing this superordinate category (see Ingroup Projection Model; Wenzel, Mummendey, & Waldzus, 2007).

Table 1

Means and standard deviations for Competitive victimhood and Forgiveness among Jews and Palestinians in the three experimental conditions of Study 1.

	Jews	Palestinians	Total
<i>Competitive victimhood</i>			
Common regional identity	4.26 (1.15)	5.83 (.83)	5.04 (1.27)
Common victim identity	3.86 (.92)	5.55 (1.20)	4.70 (1.36)
Control	4.94 (1.19)	5.81 (1.03)	5.38 (1.18)
<i>Forgiveness</i>			
Common regional identity	4.17 (1.87)	1.80 (.79)	2.98 (1.86)
Common victim identity	4.12 (1.90)	2.60 (1.10)	3.36 (1.71)
Control	3.43 (1.55)	1.87 (1.06)	2.65 (1.53)

Note. $N = 60$ Jews and 60 Palestinians.

led to increased Forgiveness. In this model, the experimental condition (*common victim identity* vs. control) was the independent variable, Competitive victimhood was the mediator, Forgiveness was the dependent variable, and the contrast between the *common regional identity* and control condition was controlled for (i.e., used as a covariate). Because the Group \times Condition interaction was non-significant both for the multivariate effect (see above), and for the between-participant analyses conducted for each of the outcomes separately ($ps > .178$), the serial mediation model was tested for the entire sample to boost statistical power.

The results, presented in Table 2, suggest that as expected, the *common victim identity* intervention had a significant negative effect on Competitive victimhood while Competitive victimhood, in turn, had a significant negative effect on Forgiveness. Moreover, the indirect effect of *common victim identity* on Forgiveness through Competitive victimhood was also significant (i.e., zero was not included in the 95% confidence interval, suggesting that the indirect effect significantly differed from zero). Finally, the direct effect of the *common victim identity* intervention on Forgiveness (i.e., the effect *not* mediated by Competitive victimhood) was non-significant. That is, once Competitive victimhood was controlled for, *common victim identity* did not increase forgiveness.

By contrast, testing for an identical mediation model with the *common regional identity* intervention as an independent variable (controlled for the contrast between the *common victim identity* and the control conditions) revealed a non-significant indirect effect, as the 95% confidence interval for the *common regional identity* – Competitive victimhood – Forgiveness indirect path was between $-.165$ and $.671$ (i.e., zero was included in the confidence interval).

Discussion

Study 1 revealed that an intervention inducing *common victim identity* among Israeli Jews and Palestinians successfully promoted a process leading to reduced competitive victimhood and, ultimately, greater forgiveness. By contrast, an intervention inducing *common regional identity*, corresponding to interventions traditionally examined within the CIIM framework, failed to either reduce competitive victimhood or increase forgiveness.

Although the results strongly support our hypotheses, one potential limitation of Study 1 involves the possible influence of demand characteristics on participants' responses. A common strategy to overcome the risk of demand characteristics is to measure and control for social desirability, using the Marlowe–Crowne scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960). Although this strategy is often used in current research on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict (e.g., Halperin, Porat, Tamir, & Gross, 2012), we chose not to include the scale in our studies because accumulating evidence reveals that it is in fact an invalid measure of the social

Table 2

Results of the mediation model for the common victim identity – Competitive victimhood – Forgiveness path (Study 1).

Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>Competitive victimhood</i>				
Constant	5.377	.201	26.756	.000
Common victim identity	–.675	.284	–2.373	.019
Common regional identity	–.335	.284	–1.180	.240
<i>Forgiveness</i>				
Constant	6.678	.600	11.134	.000
Competitive victimhood	–.749	.103	–7.241	.000
Common victim identity	.201	.326	.617	.538
Common regional identity	.081	.320	.253	.801
Direct path	<i>Effect</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	.201	.326	.617	.538
Indirect path	<i>Effect</i>	<i>Boot SE</i>	<i>LLCI</i>	<i>ULCI</i>
	.505	.238	.108	1.021

Note. $N = 120$ participants.

The three experimental conditions were coded into two dummy-variables with the Control condition as the reference group. The variables Common victim identity and Common regional identity represent the independent contrasts between each of the intervention conditions and the Control condition.

Bootstrap samples = 1000.

Direct path: Common victim identity \rightarrow Forgiveness, controlled for Competitive victimhood.

Indirect path: Common victim identity \rightarrow Competitive victimhood \rightarrow Forgiveness.

LLCI = lower level of the bias-corrected 95% bootstrap confidence interval.

ULCI = upper level of the bias-corrected 95% bootstrap confidence interval.

desirability construct (Uziel, 2010) and an alternative valid measure is yet to be developed.

An alternative strategy to reduce the risk of experimental demands is to use a repeated-measures design (e.g. expose participants to the experimental manipulation at Time 1, and have them complete the dependent measure tasks a week later). However, this strategy increases the risk of experimental attrition which might threaten internal validity, particularly when there are differential attrition rates per condition or group. Also, due to similarities across the two experimental sessions (e.g., participants are exposed to texts or questions about the same topic in both) the demands issue could persist despite the time gap. A third strategy used in Study 2 is to present the manipulation and measures as unrelated studies and separate them with a filler task (such that participants are led to believe that altogether they have taken part in three separate studies).

Importantly, because the conflict and its related beliefs (such as the narrative negating the outgroup's *raison d'être*) constitute a core element of group members' identities (Kelman, 2008) people's conflict-related attitudes and emotions are typically viewed as deeply rooted, rigid, and difficult to change (Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2011). This suggests that the demand characteristics risk may be less severe than initially appears. The uniqueness of group members' responses in the context of an intractable conflict is further illustrated by the fact that the common victim identity intervention, which reminded group members of their loss and suffering, did not have negative effects. In studies conducted in other contexts (interpersonal transgressions, Zitek, Jordan, Monin, & Leach, 2010; or historical intergroup victimization episodes, Wohl & Branscombe, 2008) reminding people of their victimization was found to increase their sense of entitlement to behave antisocially. We argue, however, that because in contexts of intractable conflicts the ingroup's victimization is chronically available and salient (Bar-Tal, 2007), our manipulation did not simply serve as a reminder of participants' ingroup suffering. Rather it acknowledged its victimization, which in turn facilitated constructive, prosocial responses compared to the condition that ignored participants' ingroup suffering.

Study 2

The goal of Study 2 was to replicate and extend Study 1 by developing and testing an additional strategy that applies the CIIM principles to

the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, namely, a *common perpetrator identity* intervention. This intervention highlighted that during the conflict both groups actively transgressed against each other using lethal weapons and causing significant casualties.

Additionally, Study 2 examined the hypothesis that different mechanisms drive the effects of *common victim identity* vs. *common perpetrator identity* on reducing competitive victimhood. This hypothesis was based on Noor et al.'s (2012) theorizing that two distinct motivations underlie group engagement in competitive victimhood, as explained below. Specifically, trying to elucidate why groups compete over the victim role although it is associated with weakness and humiliation (Lindner, 2006), Noor et al. theoretically proposed that such competition reflects groups' attempts to restore dimensions of their identities that have been impaired due to the conflict. According to the Needs-Based Model (Nadler & Shnabel, 2008; Shnabel & Nadler, 2008) transgressions threaten perpetrators' moral image and victims' sense of agency (i.e., sense of power, security, and self-determination). However, groups involved in an intractable conflict, such as Israeli, Palestinians and Jews, repeatedly transgress against and victimize each other and hence serve as perpetrators and victims at the same time. Consequently, the two groups experience chronic threats to *both* their moral image *and* agency, and are consequently motivated to restore both identity dimensions (SimanTov-Nachlieli, Shnabel, & Nadler, 2013).

Noor et al. (2012) further theorized that receiving acknowledgment of the ingroup's victim status may address both motivations simultaneously. On the one hand, because the victim's role is associated with innocence (Gray & Wegner, 2009) such acknowledgment may provide moral credentials to the ingroup and serve to legitimize actions that might otherwise seem immoral (e.g., it may justify the use of violence as self-defense). This possibility is consistent with recent empirical findings suggesting that groups strategically engage in competitive victimhood to protect their moral identity in response to accusations by outgroups (Sullivan, Landau, Branscombe, & Rothschild, 2012). On the other hand, acknowledgment of the ingroup's victim status implies entitlement for redress, increases the ingroup's cohesiveness, and can facilitate support from third parties – all forms of social empowerment (Noor et al., 2012). Moreover, when such acknowledgment is offered by the perpetrator group, it may serve as an admission of responsibility and consequent moral debt (Minow, 1998). Because the victim group can then decide whether and how this debt should be cancelled or repaid, such admission may empower victims and restore their sense of agency.

To the best of our knowledge, the possibility that the motivation to restore agency drives groups' engagement in competitive victimhood has not been experimentally examined.² Nevertheless, it is consistent with Sonnenschein and Bekerman's (2010) ethnographic analysis of dialog group interventions in which Israeli Jews and Palestinians discussed the conflict between them. This analysis revealed that group members engage in competitive victimhood not only in response to the experience of threat to their ingroup's moral image (consistent with Sullivan et al.'s suggestion) but also in an attempt to gain power and dominance over the discussion.

We hypothesized that common victim and perpetrator identities would exert their positive influence through addressing different motivations underlying groups' engagement in competitive victimhood. Because the victim role is associated with innocence and moral

superiority (Gray & Wegner, 2009; Shnabel et al., 2009; Sullivan et al., 2012) we expected the *common victim identity* intervention to protect and reassure groups' positive moral image. Hence, this intervention was expected to reduce competitive victimhood by reducing groups' moral defensiveness (i.e., the motivation to protect their threatened moral image, which underlies groups' efforts to “win” the victim status; Sullivan et al., 2012).

By contrast, the social role of perpetrator is associated with high agency (Gray & Wegner, 2009) so that belonging to a perpetrator group implies greater dominance and power (Shnabel et al., 2009). We therefore expected the *common perpetrator identity* intervention which reminded group members of their ingroup's strength to affirm and reassure their sense of agency. Note that even though this intervention is also related to the outgroup's agency, we did not expect it to increase the sense of threat to the ingroup's agency due to the outgroup's strength because this threat is already available and chronically salient due to the conflict (Bar-Tal, 2007). The restoration of agency was predicted to lead, in turn, to reduced competitive victimhood and to increased forgiveness.

Fig. 1 illustrates the two proposed processes.

Using a 2(ethnic group: Jewish/Palestinian) × 4(condition: control/common regional identity/common victim identity/common perpetrator identity) experimental design, we examined the effects of these interventions on competitive victimhood and forgiveness (see Study 1) as well as on the following two potential mediators.

Moral defensiveness

Because belonging to a victimized group implies superior moral status (Sullivan et al., 2012) we predicted the *common victim identity* condition, which reassures victim status, to reduce the participants' sense of threat to their ingroup's positive moral image. Consequently, their need to protect the ingroup's moral image (i.e., moral-defensiveness) would be experienced as less urgent and pressing, leading to reduced engagement in competitive victimhood.

By contrast, the *common perpetrator identity* intervention, which reminded group members of their ingroup's violence, was not expected to reduce moral defensiveness. At the same time, because this intervention explicitly referred to the outgroup's violence, we did not expect it to increase moral defensiveness beyond baseline level (i.e., the control condition). Finally, the *common regional identity* condition, which did not relate to groups' moral image, was also not expected to affect moral defensiveness.

Sense of agency

Because the perpetrator role is associated with power and agency (Gray & Wegner, 2009; Shnabel et al., 2009), we predicted the *common perpetrator identity* condition to increase group members' sense of agency leading in turn to reduced engagement in competitive victimhood. By contrast, because the *common victim identity* condition reminded group members of their victim status, a social role associated with weakness and passivity (Gray & Wegner, 2009; Shnabel et al., 2009), we did not expect it to increase participants' sense of agency. At the same time, because this intervention explicitly referred to the outgroup's victimization and vulnerability, we also did not expect it to reduce group members' sense of agency beyond the baseline level obtained in the control condition. The *common regional identity* was similarly predicted to have no effect on participants' agency.

Consistent with Study 1, we predicted the decrease in competitive victimhood – due to either reduced moral defensiveness (in the *common victim identity* condition) or increased sense of agency (in the *common perpetrator* condition) – to translate into increased forgiveness (see Fig. 1).

² Although Sullivan et al. (2012) showed “competitive victimhood to be independent of perceived material benefits to be gained from making claims to victimization [or] status concerns” (p. 792) these findings were obtained following group members' exposure to moral threats (i.e., information that their ingroup is responsible for the discrimination of another group). To directly test our hypothesis that group members engage in competitive victimhood in an attempt to restore their agency, it is necessary to examine whether their level of competitive victimhood increases following threats to their ingroup's agency and dominance (e.g., exposure to information that their ingroup is discriminated against).

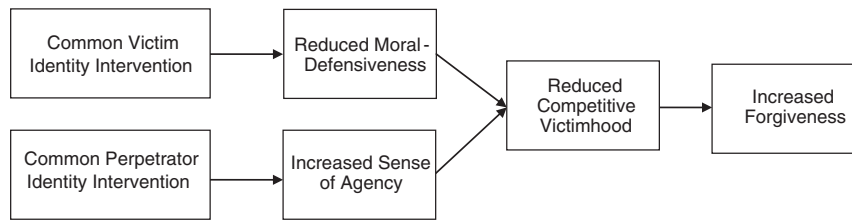


Fig. 1. The proposed serial mediation model for the *Common Victim Identity vs. Common Perpetrator Identity* interventions.

Method

Participants

Participants were 99 Jewish (78 women; 21 men) and 78 Palestinian (64 women; seven men; seven participants did not report their gender) citizens of Israel ($M_{\text{age}} = 23.9$, range: 18–49, participants were mainly from Haifa and elsewhere in northern Israel). All participants were college students who received 20 NIS for their participation.

Procedure

As a cover story, participants were told that they would be taking part in three unrelated studies. The first involved an ostensive reading comprehension assignment. Participants were exposed to a text which constituted the experimental manipulation to which participants were randomly assigned. They were then asked several questions about this text (e.g., regarding its length and clarity). The second study involved a neutral filler task that was unrelated to the other two. Finally, the third study, which included the measures of our dependent variables, was presented as a public opinion survey on various social issues.

In the control condition, participants read a neutral anthropological text about the “Acirema tribe” that was not related to the Jewish–Palestinian conflict or identities. Participants in the *common regional identity* condition read a text that described the Middle East (geographically), and pointed to commonalities between Middle-Eastern peoples, including Palestinians and Jews, in terms of language, culture, cuisine, and mentality. Participants in the *common victim identity* condition read about recent research purportedly suggesting that both Jews and Palestinians are victims of the conflict (see Study 1). Participants in the *common perpetrator identity* condition read about recent research purportedly suggesting that both Jews and Palestinians are equipped with lethal weapons and have actively inflicted substantial harm upon each other.

Measures

After reading the article participants completed a series of measures, using 7-point scales (1 = *not at all*; 7 = *very much*), as follows.

Common identity

An explicit measure of Jews’ and Palestinians’ representation of their groups as belonging to a common superordinate group was used as a manipulation check. Specifically, three items measured participants’ representation of Jews and Palestinians as sharing common identity (e.g., “Palestinians and Jews have much in common”, “Palestinians and Jews belong to the same group”), $\alpha = .57$.³

³ The reliability of the manipulation check and the Agency measure was lower than expected, perhaps due to differences in the participants’ mother tongues (i.e., all questionnaires were administered in Hebrew, yet participants’ mother tongue was Hebrew for Jews vs. Arabic for Palestinians). However, this is not necessarily problematic, as Schmitt’s (1996) analytical approach reveals that “When a measure has other desirable properties, such as meaningful content coverage of some domain... low reliability may not be a major impediment to its use. There is no sacred level of acceptable or unacceptable level of alpha. In some cases, measures with (by conventional standards) low levels of alpha may still be quite useful” (pp. 351–353).

Moral defensiveness

Four items measured the extent to which participants were motivated to protect their ingroup’s moral image (e.g., “I want the world to understand that my ingroup took part in atrocities because it had no choice”; “It is important for me to protect the moral integrity of my ingroup”), $\alpha = .73$.

Agency

Four items measured participants’ sense of agency (e.g., “My ingroup has the power and resources to solve the conflict”; “The ability to end the conflict is in the hands of the outgroup”, reverse scored), $\alpha = .54$.³

Competitive victimhood

Using a different measuring method than in Study 1, six items indicated the extent to which participants believed that their *ingroup* suffered from casualties, physical damage, trauma, emotional pain, unforgivable and indefensible acts committed against it by the outgroup. Six additional items indicated the *outgroup’s* suffering on the same dimensions. We then calculated six difference scores, which represented the extent to which *the ingroup suffered more than the outgroup* on each of the respective dimensions. These difference scores were averaged to obtain the Competitive victimhood measure, $\alpha = .89$.

Forgiveness

Five items (see Study 1) measured participants’ willingness to forgive their outgroup, $\alpha = .76$.

Finally, participants reported demographic information, and were thanked and debriefed.

Results

Means and standard deviations are presented in Table 3.⁴

Manipulation check

A two-way ANOVA tested for the effects of group affiliation, condition and their interaction. It revealed the intended effect of condition on participants’ perceptions of shared common identity, $F(3,168) = 4.316$, $p < .006$, $\eta_p^2 = .072$. Planned comparisons revealed that participants’ perception of Jews and Palestinians as sharing a common identity was significantly higher in each of the three experimental conditions

⁴ Although from a strictly statistical point of view it may be problematic to compare means across studies, we would like to turn the readers’ attention to the striking difference in Forgiveness levels among Palestinian participants in Study 1 (where forgiveness levels were generally very low, with an overall mean of 2.088) and Study 2 (where forgiveness levels were generally moderate, 3.812). We believe this difference may be attributed to participants’ different statuses in terms of citizenship: whereas Palestinians residing in Haifa and elsewhere in northern of Israel (as our Study 2 participants) have full Israeli citizenship, Palestinians residing in East Jerusalem (Study 1 participants) are granted only permanent residency status (they may apply for citizenship, but it is not automatically granted). This different status is likely to affect their general forgiveness orientation. Importantly, the process set in motion through the induction of a common victim identity seemed to be highly similar in both groups, despite the differences between them.

Table 3

Means and standard deviations for Common identity representation, Moral-defensiveness, Sense of agency, Competitive victimhood and Forgiveness among Jews and Palestinians in the four experimental conditions of Study 2.

	Jews	Palestinians	Total
<i>Common identity representation</i>			
Common regional identity	4.04 (1.23)	3.73 (1.42)	3.90 (1.30)
Common perpetrator identity	4.03 (1.21)	4.24 (.95)	4.12 (1.10)
Common victim identity	4.31 (1.03)	3.47 (1.37)	4.01 (1.22)
Control condition	3.44 (.96)	2.96 (1.08)	3.21 (1.03)
<i>Moral defensiveness</i>			
Common regional identity	5.78 (1.13)	5.53 (1.25)	5.67 (1.17)
Common perpetrator identity	5.51 (.90)	5.34 (1.12)	5.43 (1.00)
Common victim identity	4.81 (1.51)	4.97 (.87)	4.87 (1.30)
Control condition	5.66 (1.21)	5.14 (1.06)	5.41 (1.15)
<i>Sense of agency</i>			
Common regional identity	4.39 (1.40)	3.28 (.80)	3.90 (1.28)
Common perpetrator identity	4.77 (.99)	4.13 (.76)	4.49 (.95)
Common victim identity	4.42 (1.38)	3.58 (.95)	4.12 (1.30)
Control condition	4.32 (.87)	3.38 (.91)	3.88 (1.00)
<i>Competitive victimhood</i>			
Common regional identity	.73 (1.07)	2.64 (2.11)	1.57 (1.86)
Common perpetrator identity	.42 (1.18)	2.58 (1.63)	1.37 (1.75)
Common victim identity	.57 (1.54)	2.26 (1.79)	1.17 (1.81)
Control condition	1.65 (1.09)	2.87 (1.53)	2.23 (1.44)
<i>Forgiveness</i>			
Common regional identity	4.18 (1.59)	3.61 (1.12)	3.93 (1.41)
Common perpetrator identity	4.77 (1.27)	4.20 (.79)	4.52 (1.12)
Common victim identity	4.39 (1.34)	3.89 (1.39)	4.21 (1.36)
Control condition	3.49 (1.30)	3.60 (1.30)	3.54 (1.28)

Note. $N = 99$ Jews and 78 Palestinians.

compared to the control condition ($ps < .041$). The differences between the common regional identity condition and the common victim or perpetrator identity conditions were non-significant ($ps > .196$), suggesting that the novel interventions elicited perceptions of shared identity similar to those induced by the standard intervention. The effect of group was also significant, $F(1,168) = 5.408$, $p < .021$, $\eta_p^2 = .031$, such that Jews' perceptions of common identity were higher than Palestinians'. The two-way interaction was non-significant, $F(3,168) = 1.881$, $p > .135$, $\eta_p^2 = .032$.

Main analysis

As in Study 1, we tested the effects of group, condition and their interaction on the outcome variables (Moral defensiveness, Agency, Competitive victimhood and Forgiveness) using MANOVA followed by focused comparisons.

The 2(Group: Jews/Palestinians) \times 4(Condition: common perpetrator identity/common victim identity/common regional identity/control) MANOVA revealed a significant multivariate effect of Group, $F(4,160) = 20.785$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .342$. The between-subject analyses revealed that Jews and Palestinians did not significantly differ in terms of Moral defensiveness, $F(1,163) = 1.133$, $p > .289$, $\eta_p^2 = .007$. Yet compared to Palestinians, Jews had higher Agency, $F(1,163) = 28.017$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .147$, were less engaged in Competitive victimhood, $F(1,163) = 54.802$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .252$, and expressed marginally greater Forgiveness, $F(1,163) = 3.573$, $p < .061$, $\eta_p^2 = .021$.

Of direct relevance to the present study, the multivariate effect of Condition was significant, $F(4,162) = 4.463$, $p < .002$, $\eta_p^2 = .099$. Focused comparisons testing the between-participants effects revealed that, as expected, the *common victim identity* condition marginally reduced Moral defensiveness, $t(169) = 1.908$, $p < .059$, but did not affect Agency, $t(169) = .628$, $p > .530$. Also, replicating Study 1, it significantly reduced Competitive victimhood, $t(169) = 2.469$, $p < .015$, and increased Forgiveness, $t(169) = 2.013$, $p < .046$. By contrast, compared to the control condition, the *common perpetrator identity* condition significantly increased Agency, $t(169) = 2.720$, $p < .008$, but did not affect Moral defensiveness, $t(169) = .090$, $p > .928$. Also, it significantly reduced Competitive victimhood, $t(169) = 2.412$, $p < .017$, and increased Forgiveness, $t(169) = 3.483$, $p < .001$. Finally, the *common regional identity* condition affected neither Moral defensiveness, $t(169) = .922$, $p > .358$, nor Agency, $t(169) = .040$, $p > .968$. Also, consistent with Study 1, it failed to reduce Competitive victimhood, $t(169) = 1.616$, $p > .108$, or to increase Forgiveness, $t(169) = 1.145$, $p > .253$.

The multivariate effect of the two-way Group \times Condition interaction was non-significant, $F(4,162) = 1.340$, $p > .257$, $\eta_p^2 = .032$.

Mediation analysis

Next, using the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2012, Model 6), we tested for two serial mediation models. Because the Group \times Condition interaction was non-significant both for the multivariate effect (see above), and for the between-participants analyses conducted for each of the outcomes separately ($ps > .519$), the serial mediation model was tested for the entire sample to boost statistical power.

The first model tested the following causal sequence: (a) induction of *common victim identity* reduced moral-defensiveness; (b) moral-defensiveness predicted competitive victimhood; and (c) competitive victimhood predicted (decreased) forgiveness. In this model, the experimental condition (*common victim identity* vs. control) was the independent variable, Moral-defensiveness was the first mediator, Competitive victimhood was the second mediator, and Forgiveness was the dependent variable. The contrasts between the *common perpetrator identity* and the control condition and between the *common regional identity* and the control condition were controlled for (i.e., used as covariates).

The results, presented in Table 4, suggest that as expected, the *common victim identity* intervention had a significant negative effect on Moral-defensiveness, which in turn had a significant positive effect on Competitive victimhood, which in turn had a significant negative effect on Forgiveness. Moreover, as expected the *common victim identity* – Moral-defensiveness – Competitive victimhood – Forgiveness path was significant, and the direct effect of the *common victim identity* intervention on Forgiveness was non-significant. That is, once Moral-defensiveness and Competitive victimhood were controlled for, *common victim identity* did not increase forgiveness.

Alternative mediation models with either the *common regional identity* or the *common perpetrator identity* interventions as independent variables revealed non-significant indirect effects: the 95% confidence interval for the *common regional identity* – Moral-defensiveness – Competitive victimhood – Forgiveness indirect path was between $-.089$ and $.019$ (i.e., zero was included in it); the 95% confidence

Table 4
Results of the serial mediation model for the Common victim identity – Moral defensiveness – Competitive victimhood –Forgiveness path (Study 2).

Predictor	B	SE	t	p
<i>Moral defensiveness</i>				
Constant	5.414	.191	28.341	.000
Common victim identity	-.545	.260	-2.095	.038
Common perpetrator identity	.018	.242	.074	.941
Common regional identity	.255	.274	.929	.354
<i>Competitive victimhood</i>				
Constant	.861	.686	1.255	.211
Moral defensiveness	.252	.115	2.187	.030
Common victim identity	-.920	.393	-2.341	.020
Common perpetrator identity	-.859	.361	-2.376	.019
Common regional identity	-.719	.410	-1.756	.081
<i>Forgiveness</i>				
Constant	4.857	.453	10.721	.000
Moral defensiveness	-.102	.077	-1.330	.185
Competitive victimhood	-.341	.051	-6.683	.000
Common victim identity	.249	.263	.948	.345
Common perpetrator identity	.685	.241	2.838	.005
Common regional identity	.188	.272	.692	.490
Direct path	Effect	SE	t	p
	.245	.263	.948	.345
Indirect path	Effect Boot	SE	LLCI	ULCI
	.047	.037	.002	.166

Note. N = 171 participants (only cases with no missing values across the variables were included in the analysis).

The four experimental conditions were coded into three dummy-variables with the Control condition as the reference group. The variables Common perpetrator identity, Common victim identity and Common regional identity represent the independent contrasts between each of the intervention conditions and the Control condition.

Bootstrap samples = 1000.

Direct path: Common victim identity → Forgiveness, controlled for Moral defensiveness and Competitive victimhood.

Indirect path: Common victim identity → Moral defensiveness → Competitive victimhood → Forgiveness.

LLCI = lower level of the bias-corrected 95% bootstrap confidence interval.

ULCI = upper level of the bias-corrected 95% bootstrap confidence interval.

interval for the *common perpetrator identity* – Moral-defensiveness – Competitive victimhood – Forgiveness indirect path was between -.051 and .038.

The second model, presented in Table 5, tested the following sequence: (a) induction of *common perpetrator identity* increased agency; (b) agency reduced competitive victimhood; and (c) competitive victimhood reduced forgiveness. In this model, the experimental condition (*common perpetrator identity* vs. control) was the independent variable, Agency was the first mediator, Competitive victimhood was the second mediator, Forgiveness was the dependent variable and the contrasts between the *common victim identity* and control conditions and between the *common regional identity* and control conditions were controlled for. As expected, the *common perpetrator identity* intervention had a significant positive effect on Agency, which in turn had a significant negative effect on Competitive victimhood, which in turn had a significant negative effect on Forgiveness. Moreover, the indirect *common perpetrator identity*-Agency-Competitive victimhood-Forgiveness path was significant (i.e., zero was not included in the 95% confidence interval). Finally, the direct effect of the *common perpetrator identity* intervention on Forgiveness (i.e., the intervention's effect not mediated through Agency and Competitive victimhood) was significant. This suggests that beyond its effect through Agency and Competitive Victimhood, the *common perpetrator identity* intervention directly increased Forgiveness.

Again, alternative mediation models with either the *common regional identity* or the *common victim identity* interventions as independent variables revealed non-significant indirect effects: the 95% confidence interval for the indirect *common regional identity*-Agency-

Table 5
Results of the serial mediation model for the Common perpetrator identity – Sense of Agency – Competitive victimhood –Forgiveness path (Study 2).

Predictor	B	SE	t	p
<i>Sense of agency</i>				
Constant	3.932	.186	21.148	.000
Common victim identity	.189	.255	.740	.461
Common perpetrator identity	.559	.237	2.357	.020
Common regional identity	-.078	.265	-.296	.768
<i>Competitive victimhood</i>				
Constant	4.874	.488	9.997	.000
Sense of agency	-.689	.106	-6.524	.000
Common victim identity	-.868	.352	-2.469	.015
Common perpetrator identity	-.409	.332	-1.233	.219
Common regional identity	-.565	.365	-1.549	.123
<i>Forgiveness</i>				
Constant	2.831	.431	6.563	.000
Sense of agency	.338	.083	4.086	.000
Competitive victimhood	-.260	.054	-4.825	.000
Common victim identity	.289	.251	1.151	.252
Common perpetrator identity	.526	.234	2.249	.026
Common regional identity	.100	.257	.388	.698
Direct path	Effect	SE	t	p
	.526	.234	2.249	.026
Indirect path	Effect boot	SE	LLCI	ULCI
	.100	.045	.030	.212

Note. N = 174 participants (only cases with no missing values across the variables were included in the analysis).

The four experimental conditions were coded into three dummy-variables with the Control condition as the reference group. The variables Common perpetrator identity, Common victim identity and Common regional identity represent the independent contrasts between each of the intervention conditions and the control condition.

Bootstrap samples = 1000.

Direct path: Common perpetrator identity → Forgiveness, controlled for Sense of agency and Competitive victimhood.

Indirect path: Common perpetrator identity → Sense of Agency → Competitive victimhood → Forgiveness.

LLCI = lower level of the bias-corrected 95% bootstrap confidence interval.

ULCI = upper level of the bias-corrected 95% bootstrap confidence interval.

Competitive victimhood-Forgiveness path was between -.105 and .098; the 95% confidence interval for the indirect *common victim identity*-Agency -Competitive victimhood-Forgiveness path was between -.052 and .148.

Discussion

Study 2 replicated and extended Study 1. Consistent with Study 1, although the *common regional identity* intervention successfully increased Palestinians' and Jews' representation of their groups as belonging to a common superordinate group, it failed to reduce competitive victimhood and facilitate forgiveness. In contrast, both the *common victim identity* and the *common perpetrator identity* interventions, which referred to the groups' conflict-related identities and explicitly related to their mutual victimization and transgressions, successfully reduced competitive victimhood, leading, in turn, to increased forgiveness. Yet these two interventions reduced competitive victimhood through different routes: reduced moral defensiveness for the *common victim identity* intervention vs. increased agency for the *common perpetrator identity* intervention.

Identifying two divergent routes to promote intergroup forgiveness has practical implications that may be explored in future research. For example, the interventions' effectiveness may be enhanced by tailoring them to group members' unique psychological needs: group members with a particularly strong need for positive moral image (e.g., those with left-wing orientation) may benefit more from the *common victim* intervention whereas those with a particularly strong need for agency

(e.g., those with right-wing orientation) may benefit more from the *common perpetrator* intervention.

Importantly, whereas the *common victim identity* intervention is consistent with Vollhardt's (2009) and Noor et al.'s (2012) theorizing about the potential benefits of groups' inclusive representation of *victimhood*, the present research is the first to identify the potential benefits of an inclusive representation of *perpetration*. We believe this original perspective can stimulate much future research. For example, groups often fail to act to change their situation, even when they are dissatisfied with it, because of their perceived lack of agency (Gergen, 1999; see also van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008). It is possible that the *common perpetrator identity* intervention which restores group members' sense of agency would be particularly effective compared to other interventions in increasing their willingness to engage in collective action to promote peace.

General discussion

Building on Noor et al. (2012) theorizing, the present research developed and tested novel interventions to facilitate intergroup forgiveness. Two studies supported our argument that fostering a common identity representation found to promote harmonious intergroup relations in the various contexts examined so far within the CIIM framework is insufficient for facilitating mutual forgiveness among groups involved in an intractable conflict. Previous research pointed to two limitations of the CIIM approach, namely that efforts to induce a common, superordinate identity are sometimes met with resistance, and that the sense of common identity is often difficult to sustain (Dovidio, Gaertner, et al., 2009; Dovidio, Saguy, et al., 2009). Our own research identifies a third limitation, namely, that in contexts of prolonged violent conflicts characterized by intergroup competitive victimhood, re-categorization into a common identity will be inadequate if it fails to address the groups' pressing need for acknowledgment of their victimization.

Identifying these limitations and adapting the CIIM logic and standard interventions to the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict – which is critically different than the contexts of non-intractable conflicts traditionally examined within the CIIM framework – are one theoretical contribution of the present study. Notably, whereas the present research focused on this particular context, our theorizing and interventions may well generalize to other contexts of intractable conflicts characterized by competitive victimhood, such as Northern Ireland or Chile (Noor, Brown, Gonzalez, et al., 2008; Noor, Brown, & Prentice, 2008). We acknowledge that the transformation towards forgiveness obtained thanks to the proposed interventions was modest, as evident by the relatively small effect sizes obtained in both studies ($\eta_{ps}^2 < .1$). This is understandable, however, given that the complexity of intractable conflicts means that an entire range of beliefs and emotions need to be changed to allow reconciliation. For example, Halperin, Russell, Trzesniewski, Gross, and Dweck (2011) found that inducing Jews and Palestinians with the belief that groups are not fixed entities but are rather malleable led to more positive outgroup attitudes; Halperin et al. (2012) found that a brief training in emotion regulation in the form of cognitive reappraisal decreased negative emotions and increased support for conflict-resolution policies among Israeli Jews; and SimanTov-Nachlieli and Shnabel (under review) found that affirming Jews' and Palestinians' sense of agency increased their willingness to relinquish some power for the sake of moral considerations, which in turn led to greater prosocial tendencies towards the outgroup. This accumulating body of research suggests that there is no single panacea for conflict resolution: inducing common victim or perpetrator identity should thus be viewed as but one of several potential strategies in our growing conflict resolution toolbox.

The second theoretical contribution of our research is identifying the differential processes through which our interventions facilitated forgiveness: the *common victim identity* intervention did so by reducing

group members' need to defend their threatened moral image, whereas the *common perpetrator identity* intervention did so by increasing group members' sense of agency. These findings shed light on the motivations underlying groups' engagement in competitive victimhood. The concept of “competitive victimhood” (a term coined by Noor, Brown, Gonzalez, et al., 2008; Noor, Brown, & Prentice, 2008) is relatively new to the social-psychological discourse and it is therefore still understudied. Previous research by Noor et al. (e.g., Noor, Brown, & Prentice, 2008) focused on the consequences of competitive victimhood (e.g., reduced forgiveness) as well as on factors that moderate them (e.g., political ideology). The only empirical research known to us that attempted to identify groups' motivation to engage in competitive victimhood is Sullivan et al.'s (2012). Our research extends their work, which identified moral defensiveness as the key motivation leading groups to engage in competitive victimhood, by identifying agency restoration as an additional key motivation underlying competitive victimhood.

The finding that both protection of moral image and agency restoration contributed to the reduction of competitive victimhood is consistent with the general tenet of the Needs-Based Model (Nadler & Shnabel, 2008; Shnabel et al., 2009) that conflicting groups are motivated to restore their impaired identity dimensions and that such restoration can open them to reconciliation. It should be noted in this regard that Palestinians showed greater impairment to their sense of agency compared to Jews (as evident in the main effect for group membership in Study 1). Palestinians also consistently showed more competitive victimhood and less forgiveness than Jews (Studies 1 and 2). Finally, although the Group \times Condition interactions were non-significant in both studies, close inspection of the means reveals that Palestinians were less affected than Jews by the common identity interventions. We believe these findings are likely to have stemmed from the gap in terms of relative power and advantage between Jews and Palestinians in Israel. Due to these asymmetrical power relations, a possible prediction is that Palestinians would be particularly motivated to restore their sense of agency and hence benefit from the *common perpetrator intervention* more than Jews. We did not find evidence for such interactive effects, however, suggesting that similar psychological processes took place among both groups. In line with these findings, recent survey of a representative sample of Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel ($N = 550$) revealed that moral defensiveness and need for agency were positively correlated with competitive victimhood among both groups (Noor, Halabi, & Shnabel, 2013). Future research should examine whether other contexts of intractable conflicts are also characterized by parallel rather than divergent psychological processes among the majority and the minority group (e.g., Protestants vs. Catholics in Northern Ireland).

Another intriguing direction for future research is to explore the role of empathy in the process leading to reduced competitive victimhood and increased forgiveness. Research on interpersonal forgiveness revealed that the experience of empathy towards the transgressors (i.e., feeling of sympathy and ability to take their perspective) was the key to victims' forgiveness (McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997). On the intergroup level, Dovidio et al. (2010) suggested that empathy plays a central role in determining group members' prosocial behavior towards outgroup members (e.g., they show that it influences behavior over and above outgroup attitudes) and that it can be increased by inducing a common identity. While Dovidio et al. (2010) did not empirically examine forgiveness, they did theoretically propose it to be a potential outcome of increased intergroup empathy. Indeed, beyond the reported outcome variables in Study 1 we also examined group members' level of empathy towards the outgroup (e.g., their ability to put themselves in their outgroup's shoes). We did not include these findings in the report of Study 1's results for the sake of consistency across studies (as empathy was not measured in Study 2). Yet, our findings were consistent with Dovidio et al.'s theorizing in

that empathy was found to mediate the relationship between (reduced) competitive victimhood and (increased) forgiveness obtained in the common victim identity condition.⁵

Apparently, Jews' and Palestinians' engagement in competitive victimhood blocks them from experiencing empathy for their outgroup because their competitive mindset makes them worry that acknowledging and identifying with the outgroup's suffering would undermine their own victim status (Noor et al., 2012). Thus, as opposed to findings obtained in contexts not characterized by competitive victimhood (e.g. racial relations in the U.S., Dovidio et al., 2004) the merging of identities per-se (as in the common regional identity condition) was insufficient to increase empathy in the present context. However, reconstrual of the victim role as an inclusive category that contains both the ingroup and the outgroup (as in the common victim identity condition) allowed Palestinians and Jews to experience empathy and consequently forgiveness towards their outgroup (see also Vollhardt, 2009). Future research may explore whether a similar route between competitive victimhood, empathy, and forgiveness would be obtained for the common perpetrator identity intervention (Karremans and Smith's (2010) finding that among victims of interpersonal transgressions agency was associated with increased forgiveness may be viewed as providing some indirect support for this possibility). It may also be interesting to explore the opposite direction of influence, namely whether the induction of empathy (such as through perspective taking manipulations, Batson et al., 1997) can reduce competitive victimhood.

On the practical level, inspired by the work of Palestinian-Israeli NGOs such as Bereaved Families for Peace and Combatants for Peace, our research is the first to develop theory-based strategies for overcoming competitive victimhood. Ethnographic research on dialog group interventions (structured encounters between Jews and Palestinians in which they discuss the conflict) reveals that when members of these groups engage in competitive victimhood the communication gets "stuck" in what may be described as "a dialog of the deaf" (Sonnenschein, 2008). We hope that the insights gained through our work would be used by group facilitators and other practitioners and activists in their efforts to pave the way to mutual forgiveness, as we believe that the sufferings of cyclic violence are worse than the hardships of forgiveness.

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⁵ In brief, we found that compared to the control condition, the common victim identity condition marginally increased empathy, $t(114) = 1.70, p < .092$. Also, a significant indirect path (95% confidence interval between .050 and .387) indicated that this condition significantly decreased competitive victimhood ($p < .019$); reduced competitive victimhood, in turn, predicted increased empathy (i.e., there was a significant negative effect of competitive victimhood on empathy, $p < .001$); and empathy, in turn, significantly increased forgiveness ($p < .001$). By contrast, compared to the control condition, the effect of the common regional identity condition on empathy was non-significant, $t(114) = .12, p > .908$. The indirect common regional identity–Competitive victimhood–Empathy–Forgiveness path was also non-significant (95% confidence interval between $-.042$ and $.254$). These results are available upon request.

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