Precursors and mediators of Intergroup Reconciliation in Northern Ireland: a new model.

Abstract

We examined social psychological factors contributing to the restoration of the intergroup relationship between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland. A theoretical model of reconciliation orientation (ROM) was developed, with intergroup forgiveness and subjective evaluation of past violence as the main precursors of that orientation. Data from a northern Irish sample (N = 318) validated and extended the model. Forgiveness and evaluation of past violence were predicted by 'competitive victimhood' (a belief in having suffered more than the outgroup), negatively and positively respectively. These associations were fully accounted for by the strength of identification with the ingroup and trust in the outgroup. Empathy functioned mainly as a direct predictor of forgiveness. The theoretical and practical implications of these results are discussed.

Jo Berry: "I wanted to meet Pat to put a face to the enemy and see him as a real human being. I have realised that no matter which side of the conflict you're on, had we all lived each other's lives we could all have done what the other did."

Pat Magee: "The big lesson is if you do see people as human beings, how could you possibly hurt them? Then you think of all the barriers to that simple relationship occurring – political, social, economic barriers [sic]. So do everything to remove the blocks and let people be human with each other. That's the big lesson from my meeting Jo." (Quotes from a public conversation between Jo Berry, who lost her father in the IRA bombing in Brighton 20 years ago, and Pat Magee, one of those responsible for that bombing. Source: The Argus, 13, Oct, 2004.)

The willingness of Jo Berry and Pat Magee to confront each other and work at their relationship, however rare it might be, nevertheless provides cause for optimism that relationships damaged due to prolonged intergroup conflict may eventually be restored. As is apparent from the above extract, intergroup conflict does not occur in a psychological void. A crucial dimension of the Northern Irish conflict revolves around conflicting national/constitutional identities. The Protestant community, subsuming Unionists and Loyalists, wishes Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom. The Catholic community, including Nationalists and Republicans, aspires to achieve reunification of Northern Ireland with the Republic of Ireland (Hewstone, Cairns, Voci, McLernon, Niens & Noor, 2004). This disagreement stems from the partition of Ireland in 1921 and has found many different forms of expression, most violently in the period 1960 – 1998. The consequences of this period, locally called 'The Troubles', have been severe. The death toll has approached 4,000 in a population of 1.7m, with estimates of almost 49,000 injured and many more who have been left traumatised by the experience of the conflict (Fay, Morrissey & Smyth, 1999). Consequently, despite the 1998 peace agreement, poor intergroup relations and segregation still characterize daily social life in

Northern Ireland (Dixon, 2001). For example, currently, 95% of schooling and 80% of social housing in Northern Ireland are segregated by religion (Schubotz, 2005).

The aim of this paper is two-fold: first, we present a theoretical model that identifies the precursors of intergroup reconciliation or, more realistically of reconciliation orientation (ROM). Our model will also identify the underlying psychological mediators behind these precursors. Second, we test ROM with data collected in Northern Ireland.

Achieving reconciliation through addressing the legacy of the past

Reconciliation is denoted as a healing process leading to mutual acceptance between conflicting groups (Staub & Bar-Tal, 2003). As is apparent in Northern Ireland, the psychological realities of conflict often resist changes towards intergroup reconciliation, despite a political peace agreement. One factor that might contribute to such resistance are the psychological wounds caused by past intergoup wrongdoings. Dissensus about the past and the assignment of responsibility for the conflict can derail the political peace process and lead to the resumption of violence (de la Ray, 2001; Noor, Brown & Prentice, in press). Successful reconciliation is predicated upon finding an appropriate way of dealing with past intergroup wrongdoings (Nadler, 2002; Staub, 2006).

One way of addressing past wrongs is to correct them. That is, desires for revenge for past wrongdoings are psychologically understandable responses towards the perceived perpetrators. These desires are often manifest in the need to re-establish a sense of control and dignity, both likely to be undermined by the experiences of victimisation (Nadler & Saguy, 2003). However, revenge may, in fact, invite renewed violence. What makes revenge untenable in the post-conflict context is that, while the vengeful motive may feel justified, it can also encourage groups to undertake disproportionate measures of

excessive retaliation and to 'exact more than necessary' (Minow, 1998, p. 10). The issues of proportionality, which is triggered by the psychological mechanism of actively construing the ingroup as the 'victim' and the outgroup as the 'perpetrator' (Nadler, 2002), mean that revenge is limited as a means for bringing closure to the past.

Intergroup forgiveness

In contrast, forgiveness can offer a more constructive approach to addressing past wrongdoings. Forgiveness can be defined as a decision to forgo negative actions against those perceived responsible for past wrongdoings. This response may be fostered through re-establishing connection with those associated with the offence, promoting positive emotions such as empathy and trust (Nadler, 2002). Simultaneously, letting go of negative thoughts and resentment directed at the perpetrator group may further encourage forgiveness. Ultimately, forgiveness acknowledges and thus brings closure to the painful past, while encouraging groups to focus on a positive future (Minow, 1998; Nadler & Saguy, 2003). Forgiveness also has other positive implications for advancing reconciliation. First, in contexts where the boundary between the victims and perpetrators is distinct, forgiveness prevents the victims from becoming victimisers. Forgiveness can counter preoccupation with the past and its pain by offering the affected groups an opportunity to confront those associated with the harm. In this sense, forgiveness can be experienced psychologically as an agency restoring mechanism for the victims. The recent national truth telling commissions are broadly aimed at restoring such agency. For example, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa attempted to create a context for the victims of Apartheid to share the impact of their suffering with the perpetrators, while the latter group could recognise the pain resulting from their deeds

and apologise (Tutu, 1999). In this way, forgiveness offers to both victims and perpetrators a unique way of reintegrating into post-conflict society in which intergroup relations are transformed from hostility to mutual understanding and social reconciliation (Nadler, 2002).

Consistent with our conceptualisation, forgiveness has been defined in the interpersonal literature as a prosocial facilitator for restoring damaged relationships by reducing motivations for negative affect, thought and behaviour in both the victim and the perpetrator (Enright & North, 1998; McCullough, 2001; McCullough, Sandage, Brown, Rachal, Worthington & Hight, 1998; Scobie & Scobie, 1998). In the present paper, we examine forgiveness as a precursor of reconciliation and extend its predominantly interpersonal function to the intergroup level.

Subjective evaluation of past violence

Another precursor of reconciliation, albeit a negative one, could be conceptualised as *subjective evaluation of past violence* (Noor et al., in press). Even after the cessation of violence in a post-conflict context, ingroup perpetrators and their fellow ingroup members may be anxious to justify and portray their use of violence against the outgroup as righteous (Staub & Pearlman, 2006). This is done by minimising the impact of their own group's violence and by blaming the victims (Baumeister, 1997; Lerner, 1980). Psychologically, such a defensive evaluation of ingroup violence is comprehensible. In intergroup contexts of mutual victimisation, any critical reflections over the violent past will inevitably confront the ingroup with its acts of aggression and immoral misdeeds against the outgroup. Such revelation threatens the moral dimension of the ingroup. A coping mechanism against threats of this nature would be to view ingroup violence as

provoked by the outgroup and hence portrayed as self-protection. Ultimately, such a perception reduces the possibility to acknowledge ingroup past wrongdoings, which in turn impedes the course of reconciliation (Staub, 2006; Noor et al., in press).

In Northern Ireland the Protestant and Catholic communities have divergent views regarding who is to blame for the violence and the interpretation of what constitutes a 'legitimate' response to it (Fay et al., 1999; Dixon, 2001). In a recent study, Hewstone et al. (2004) recorded the participants' religious group membership (Protestant or Catholic) and used scenarios describing an incident of a paramilitary violence. In these incidents, the researchers manipulated the religious group memberships of the perpetrator (Protestant or Catholic), the perpetrator's intentions (to kill or no intention), and the perpetrator's motivations (retaliation or no apparent motive). Among other dependent variables, students' judgements concerning attribution of blame and forgiveness were measured. The findings yielded a clear pattern of ingroup bias among participants with a high level of ingroup identification, such that they were more subjective in attributing blame to outgroup victims than the ingroup victims (similar trends were revealed for forgiveness and other related variables).

Thus, such interpretations of past violence imply a justification of violence under the pre-ceasefire circumstances. It is expected to be detrimental to the process of intergroup reconciliation because it denies validation of victims' experiences and hence acknowledgement of harm done.

Competitive victimhood

Next we discuss a further process that we regard as a prime factor in delaying reconciliation. This is *competitive victimhood* (Noor et al., in press). A plethora of

research in intergroup relations reveals that competitive processes are of the essence of intergroup relations, particularly of those defined by conflict about material and/or social resources (Brewer & Brown, 1998; Hewstone, Rubin & Willis, 2002). Moreover, a common consequence of protracted intergroup violence and mutual victimisation tends to be that both groups, often despite differential access to power and other resources, feel a deep sense of victimhood (Shaw, 2003). Nadler and Saguy (2003) identify an exclusive focus on own victimhood in contexts where both groups have perpetrated against each other as an obstacle to reconciliation. The authors explain that such preoccupation with ingroup victimhood leaves little room for critical consideration of one's ingroup's active role in the conflict.

By combining these two tendencies, competition and preoccupation with one's victimhood, we developed the concept of *competitive victimhood.* This concept refers to each group's effort to claim that *it has suffered more than the outgroup*. Moreover, this competition over the *quantity* of suffering also implies some dispute over the *illegitimacy* of the suffering, i.e., 'not only have we suffered more than you, but it is decidedly unfair that we have'.

Although there has been little systematic investigation of this kind of competition nevertheless, anecdotally in Northern Ireland it is colloquially referred to as the 'talk of what-aboutry'. Such talk captures the efforts of the opposing group members to draw attention to the suffering of their ingroup when confronted with the suffering caused by their respective ingroups. Claims to ingroup victimhood can also be found in the murals painted on the street walls throughout Northern Ireland. These murals, particularly in the Catholic communities, often emphasise stories of the ingroup's experienced oppression

and injustices at the hands of the outgroup.

This need to compete over one's share of suffering may well be indicative of one's lack of readiness to forgive those perceived as responsible for the injuries. Indeed, it is plausible to argue that a group which engages in competitive victimhood has a more urgent need to seek to establish the harms suffered at the hand of the outgroup, rather than to let go of the harms and forgive the outgroup. Thus, logically in our model competition over victimhood precedes forgiveness, and its association with forgiveness is predicted to be negative.

It is also plausible that these subjective perceptions of one's group's victimhood feed into the motivation to justify past ingroup violence. Given that even trivial competitive settings give rise to bias (Rabbie & Horwitz, 1969), competition over as sensitive an issue as victimhood may trigger perceptions of the outgroup as the main aggressor and provocateur in the conflict, that left the ingroup with no choice but to respond with violence. Accordingly, we hypothesized that competitive victimhood will precede evaluations of past violence and will be positively associated with them.

Finally, given that forgiveness and subjective evaluation of past violence are two conflicting motivations, and likely to be present simultaneously during the post-conflict era, in ROM they are located at same level and their relationship is specified as negative.

In the next section, we examine the roles of ingroup identification, trust and empathy as mediators of the relationships between competitive victimhood, evaluation of past violence and intergroup forgiveness. Because of the central roles of these mediators in intergroup conflict settings (Eidelson & Eidelson, 2003), we propose a fully mediated model (Figure 1).

Inhibiting and facilitating factors

Notwithstanding the importance of the material dimensions of intergroup conflict, many protracted intergroup conflicts involve issues of identity. In particular, we hypothesize that the strength of identification with one of the conflicting groups is a driving mechanism in the relationships of the variables established earlier. The underlying rationale for the role of such identification as a mediator is as follows: It is plausible that the experience of victimhood, be it personal or collective, is a traumatic event that will affect one's understanding of the self (Staub, 2006). We argue that there are at least two ways in which such experience can affect the self: Perceived victimhood can lead the self to strengthen its identification with the victimized group. For example, leaders around the world (e.g., in former Yugoslavia) have successfully bolstered identification with, and cohesion within, their groups by reminding their members of their past, even sometimes ancient, victimhood experiences (Ignatieff, 1993). Second, perceived victimhood is likely to provide an ideological justification to view the outgroup as a source of threat to the ingroup's identity and existence. Protection from such threat may be sought in the strong bond with the ingroup. Consequently, strengthened ingroup identification resulting from perceptions of own victimhood may dismiss willingness to forgive the outgroup as 'foolish', whereas past ingroup violence may be perceived as a 'legitimate' response to perceived outgroup threat. Thus, identification with one's ingroup will explain in part the negative relationship between competitive victimhood and forgiveness attitudes and the positive relationship between the former and subjective evaluation of past violence.

However, it is also possible that identification serves as a moderator – i.e., that victimhood will be especially potent for high identifiers and these in turn will view ingroup use of violence as more justified and will be least forgiving of the outgroup..

In post-conflict settings, perceptions of past victimhood have conceivably important emotional implications for how members of one group respond to a perpetrator outgroup. During a protracted conflict one's personal or collective suffering at the hand of the outgroup is likely to destroy bonding outgroup emotions, such as trust, and instead nurture a more defensive emotional responses to the outgroup. This would also follow, even if an ingroup member's initial level of outgroup trust was high, because the maintenance of such trust would be rather difficult in the face of witnessing members of the ingroup falling victims to outgroup atrocities. We tested the role of trust as a moderator: individuals with high levels of trust would be less affected by the victimhood of their ingroup; these individuals in turn will be more forgiving and will be less inclined to view ingroup violence as more legitimate than outgroup violence.

What would be more intriguing, however, and of more practical significance is to examine the mediating power of restoring trust through, for example, a third party intervention after the occurrence of intergroup violence and prior to a strong commitment to reconciliation. Such mediation test will be valuable for advancing our knowledge of successful conflict resolving intervention strategies. Thus, in this study we tested whether a measure of outgroup trust would reverse the negative relationship between competitive victimhood and outgroup forgiveness, and equally disrupt the positive relationship between competitive victimhood and subjective evaluation of past violence.

In line with above thinking, we also treated empathy for the outgroup primarily as a

mediator of the reconciliation precursors suggested above. Empathy has already been indicated as a key facilitator in fostering forgiveness attitudes in fractured interpersonal relationships (McCullough et al., 1998) by promoting concerns for the welfare of the offender. We argue that the experience of ingroup victimhood, and competition over whose group has suffered more, may lead to psychological distance from the outgroup. Subsequently, two plausible reactions to this psychological distance may be the lack of outgroup forgiveness and justification of ingroup wrongs against the outgroup (Bandura, 1999). However, once empathy for the outgroup has been induced, empathy then may shield against the negative impact of victimhood, foster forgiveness attitudes and critically raise ingroup awareness of their subjective evaluation of ingroup use of violence. Moreover, empathy may also provide the ingroup with useful insights concerning how, for similar self-protective reasons, the outgroup may have resorted to aggression. Such insights may in turn remind the ingroup of the futility of interpreting ingroup violence as justified and outgroup violence as illegitimate.

Finally, of course, it is plausible to view empathy as a moderator as well – i.e., those persons with high level of empathy will be less impacted by their ingroup victimhood and in turn will be more forgiving and tend not to view ingroup violence as more justified than outgroup violence.

To test ROM (see Figure 1), we collected survey data from a Northern Irish university student sample in 2004.

Method

Participants:

318 Northern Irish undergraduate students participated in this study. Of these 181

identified themselves as belonging to the Catholic community (61 males, 120 females; mean age 19.71 years, range 17 to 34 years), and 137 students identified themselves as belonging to the Protestant community (59 males, 78 females, mean age 20.61 years, range 17 to 51).

Procedure and Measures:

All participants completed a questionnaire in which they were asked to indicate their gender, age and the community to which they belonged. Then participants proceeded to complete the predictor and outcome measures detailed below. Participants were asked to indicate their agreement with the above measures on a Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (disagree) to 7 (agree).

Ingroup identity was assessed using an adapted version of the six-item scale developed by Brown, Condor, Wade and Williams (1986): 'I consider myself as belonging to my community.' 'I feel strong ties to my community and its people.' 'I identify with my community.' 'Being a member of my community is not important to me.' 'I like being a member of my community.' 'I would rather belong to another community than to my own community.' The six items produced a reliable scale, (Cronbach's $\alpha = .90$).

Intergroup forgiveness was assessed with six items, two of which were adapted from the interpersonal forgiveness literature: 'I try not to hold a grudge against the other community for their misdeeds' (based on Takaku, Weiner & Ohbuchi's, 2001), and 'Getting even with the other community for their misdeeds is not important to me' (derived from McCullough et al., 1998). We developed the remaining four items: 'I am prepared to forgive the other community for their misdeeds,' and 'I hold feelings of

resentment towards the other community for their misdeeds,' 'I have ill thoughts about the other community for their misdeeds,' 'I am able to let the other community off with their misdeeds'. The six items formed a reliable scale, (Cronbach's $\alpha = .80$).

Subjective evaluation of past violence was measured with four items, developed by the present authors. These were: 'Most of the violent acts that were carried out on behalf of my community against the other community were mainly for self-protection,' 'Sometimes my community was left with no other choice, but to respond with violence against the other community,' 'Members of my community carried out acts of violence because they were provoked into them by the other community,' and 'Most of the violent acts carried out on behalf of my community against the other community were not justified' (reversed item). These items formed a reliable scale, (Cronbach's $\alpha = .75$).

Outgroup trust consisted of six items (derived from Rosenberg, 1957; and Mitchell, 2000). These items were: 'Most members of the other community try to be fair', 'Few members of the other community can be trusted', 'Most of the other community do not deliberately mislead', 'Most members of the other community cannot be trusted to deliver on their promises', 'Few members from the other community wish to exploit the vulnerability of my community' and 'Trying to look for their own advantage is the main interest of most members of the other community.' This scale, too, was reliable, (Cronbach's $\alpha = .75$).

Empathy consisted of a combination of cognitive and affective items. One item was borrowed from Voci and Hewstone (2003): 'When I hear a piece of news regarding a sectarian attack against members of the other community, I try to look at it from their point of view'. The remaining items were derived from the *ethnocultural empathy scale*

(Wang, Davidson, Yakushko et al., 2003):'When I hear people making sectarian jokes, I feel offended even though they are not referring to members of my community,' 'I share the anger of members of the other community who fall victims to sectarian crimes'. This scale had moderate reliability (Cronbach's α = .63).

Competitive victimhood scale had five items, constructed by the authors. These were: 'Over the last 30 years of 'The Troubles', my community has not suffered more than the other community,' 'On average, the areas that have been most affected by 'The Troubles' are those in which members of my community live,' 'Overall, the proportion of trauma due to 'The Troubles' has been more severe in my community than in the other community,' 'On average, throughout 'The Troubles', more harm has been done to my community than to the other community,' 'Overall, victims in my community have not received adequate attention to their needs compared to victims in the other community.'. The five items formed a reliable scale, (Cronbach's α = .78).

Results

Table 1 provides a summary of the correlations, means and standard deviations all the measured variables. An inspection of the correlations reveals that the bivariate associations between theses variables were all consistent with our hypotheses.

To test ROM a Structural Equation Model (SEM) was carried out[1], using LISREL 8.7 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 2004). This test treated the measured scales as latent variables and a confirmatory factor analysis supported the existence of these latent variables. That is, except for the fifth item of the trust scale, which was omitted from the remaining analyses, all other items loaded on their assigned latent variables with loadings ≥ .46. The goodness-of-fit of the model was estimated, using the Satorra – Bentler scaled chi-

square test, the confirmative fit index (CFI), the non-normed fit index (NNFI) and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). A nonsignificant chi-square test, values of CFI and NNFI > .90 and a value of RMSEA < .08 indicate a satisfactory fit (see Hu & Bentler, 1999). For the full mediation ROM, the chi-square test indicated a significant chi-square test, χ^2 (367) = 617.62, p < .001. However, the chi-square test is sensitive to sample size, and commonly alternative indices are employed (McCullough et al., 1997). Indeed, these alternative indices unanimously yielded an excellent fit for our model: CFI = .974, NNFI = .972, and RMSEA = .047. The standardised path estimates shown in Figure 2 provide more specific support for ROM. As expected in a fully mediated ROM, ingroup identification was a mediator of competitive victimhood and subjective evaluation of past violence and the former and forgiveness: competitive victimhood predicted strength of ingroup identification positively; in turn, such identification predicted subjective evaluation of past violence positively, and forgiveness negatively. Sobel tests further confirmed these mediations ($Sobel_{violence}$ = 3.82, p < .001; $Sobel_{forgive}$= -.3.08, < .01).

As hypothesised, the associations between competitive victimhood and subjective evaluation of past violence and the former and forgiveness were mediated by outgroup trust. More specifically, competitive victimhood predicted trust negatively; in turn, trust was a negative predictor of subjective evaluation of violence and a positive predictor of forgiveness. This mediating function of trust was further supported by individual Sobel tests ($Sobel_{violence}$ = 4.08, p < .001; $Sobel_{forgive}$= -.4.89, < .001).

Contrary to our hypotheses, findings from the SEM indicated that empathy's sole function in ROM was to predict forgiveness, and somewhat weakly, evaluation of past

violence. However, whilst individual Sobel tests detected the role of empathy as a mediator in both the relationships between competitive victimhood and evaluation of violence and the former and forgiveness ($Sobel_{violence}$ = 1.93, p = .05; $Sobel_{forgive}$= -.2.63, $p < .01$), in the context of examining multiple mediators the findings from the SEM are more trustworthy. This is because, unlike any single Sobel test, SEM allows for the simultaneous test of several mediators.

Having clarified the role of identification, trust and empathy as mediators, a series of multiple regressions were conducted to examine their function as potential moderators. The regressions were carried out separately for each potential moderator and consisted of two steps. For example: Step 1 included competitive victimhood and identification as the independent variables, followed by step 2 including the interaction term competitive victimhood X identification. The dependent variable was either forgiveness or subjective evaluation of violence. Results were far from providing any support for the moderation hypotheses.

Overall, ROM explained an acceptable proportion of variance (37 %) in intergroup forgiveness and a slightly larger proportion of variance (41%) in evaluation of past violence. To provide further support for the hypotheses represented in the full mediation model, two alternative models were tested. First, we examined a partial mediation model in which, competitive victimhood predicted forgiveness and subjective evaluation of violence directly, in addition to predicting them through the mediators. The second model considered the possibility of reversed mediation model in which the identified mediators of ROM were specified as predictors of competitive victimhood.

Partial mediation model

A direct statistical comparison of the models indicated that a model specifying partial mediation fitted the data slightly better, $\Delta\chi^2$ (2) = 6.83, p < .05. However, the fit indices (CFI, NNFI, RMSEA) of the partial mediation ROM were identical to the ones obtained from the full mediation ROM. The partial mediation model explained (37%) of the variance in forgiveness and (43%) of the variance in subjective evaluation of past violence, which were near identical to the proportion accounted for by the full mediation ROM. More specifically, the estimated path coefficients revealed that competitive victimhood did not predict forgiveness directly (γ = -.12, *n.s.*), but did in the case of subjective evaluation of past violence (γ = .19, $p < .05$). Again, ingroup identification and trust were the sole reliable mediators in this model. Thus, given the above findings, the partial mediation ROM was not convincingly superior enough over the full mediation model to sacrifice parsimony (because of saving two extra paths). Accordingly, we favour the more parsimonious model.

Reversed model

The second alternative model treated identification, trust and empathy as predictors of competitive victimhood. In turn, competitive victimhood predicted forgiveness and subjective evaluation of past violence. This is because it is plausible that in a post-conflict setting individuals who identify with their groups may in turn compete more over their victimhood and therefore justify past ingroup violence more readily and be less willing to forgive the outgroup. Similarly, group members with a measure of outgroup trust and empathy may become less forgiving of the outgroup and more subjective in their evaluation of past ingroup violence, the more they engage in competitive victimhood.

While a direct statistical comparison between the reverse mediation and hypothesized full mediation model is not possible (because they are not nested), the inspection of the fit indices will help estimate how well the reverse mediation model fit the data. The Satorra –Bentler chi-square was significant (χ^2 (368) = 654.22, $p < .001$). The remaining fit indices obtained for the reversed model were as good as the fit indices for the full mediation ROM (CFI = .971, NNFI = .971 and RMSEA = .051). Critically, however, the reversed model accounts only for moderate proportions of variance in forgiveness and subjective evaluation of violence, (R^2 = .17) and (R^2 = .22) respectively.

In sum, although the reversed model produced acceptable fit indices, pointing towards a possibility of circular pattern of relationships among the variables considered here, the evidence found in support of ROM can be deemed superior. This is because ROM allows for the examination of a set of complex interrelationships of variables involved in the precursors of reconciliation. Thus, in line with our major research objective of gaining insights into the complex nature of the precursors of reconciliation, ROM seems to represent that complex nature better than the reversed model.

Discussion

The primary aim of this research was to identify social psychological factors that either help or hinder the restoration of damaged intergroup relations. To do so, we developed a model of reconciliation orientation, with intergroup forgiveness and subjective evaluation of past violence as the main precursors of that orientation. Our model further hypothesised that these precursors would be predicted by the conflicting groups' competitive attitudes towards their perceived victimhood status. ROM further proposed that these associations in turn are fully mediated by ingroup identification,

outgroup trust and empathy. ROM was validated by fitting a data set from Northern Ireland very well.

More specifically, our findings revealed that identification with the ingroup and outgroup trust functioned as the most reliable mediators in present sample. That is, overall, competitive victimhood exerts its effect on both intergroup forgiveness and subjective evaluation of past violence mainly through diminishing outgroup trust and increasing identification with the ingroup.

In the presence of ingroup identification and outgroup trust, empathy seemed to be a direct predictor of forgiveness, and somewhat weakly of subjective evaluation of violence. This is contrary to our hypothesis concerning empathy's role as a mediator of competitive victimhood's relationship to forgiveness and to evaluations of past violence. Although individual Sobel mediation tests detected empathy as a significant mediator, we trust the advantageous SEM analysis which allows for the simultaneous tests of multiple mediators in a complex model. Thus, from these findings, one could reasonably conclude that on its own empathy can function as a potential mediator. However, this function ceases in the presence of other more potent mediators, namely, that of ingroup identification and outgroup trust.

Thus, our results clearly indicated the presence of mediations rather than moderations. Although viewing identification and trust and empathy as moderators is theoretically viable, in our data the relationships between the reconciliation precursors were mainly driven by mediation mechanisms.

To gain more confidence in our model we tested two alternative models. A partial mediation model specified competitive victimhood as a direct predictor of forgiveness

and subjective evaluation of violence, apart from predicting these criterion variables through the mediators. The fit indices for this alternative model were identical to the ones of full mediation ROM. Moreover, the amount of variance explained in the key outcome variables was similar to our full mediation model. What spoke against this model was first the fact that competitive victimhood failed to predict forgiveness directly. Second, and more importantly, the alternative model seemed to perform as well as our hypothesised model, but in a less parsimonious way (ie. partial vs. full mediation).

We then tested another alternative model which specified identification, trust and empathy as the predictors of competitive victimhood, suggesting a reversed mediation model. While this model produced an acceptable fit, it was less informative about the complex interrelationships of the key variables influencing the major criterion variables, relative to our hypothesised model.

Given the nature of our correlational data, of course, we cannot rule out circular relationships as suggested by this reversed alternative model. Nonetheless, at least our present study conducted in a natural post-conflict setting leads us to believe that the fully mediated ROM is both theoretically and empirically a viable model. Clearly, at this early stage of developing a theory of reconciliation, longitudinal or experimental validation of ROM is called for to specify the definitive directions of the paths in ROM. We have already embarked on such work and found evidence for the longitudinal effect of forgiveness on reconciliation in Northern Ireland (Noor, Brown, Gonzalez, Manzi & Lewis, 2007).

To extrapolate some practical implications from our present findings, we would draw attention to the potentially detrimental effects of groups' sense of victimhood on

reconciliatory processes. However, the need to compete for the highest victimhood status is perhaps also an indirect expression of the need for acknowledgement by the outgroup of ingroup suffering. If such need for validation of victimhood experience is true, then one way of addressing this need could be to create public space - for example, in the form of an inter-community forum - where an exchange of such experiences between the two groups can take place. Consistent with our line of thinking, the work of Lundy and McGovern (2002) highlights the close link between acknowledgment and 'equality of victimhood'.

As we saw in ROM, ingroup identification was a reliable mediator of competitive victimhood and forgiveness and the former and evaluation of violence. Acknowledging the importance of such identification, the post-conflict era could also be used as a space for a reappraisal of the self and the other, for example, through promoting the identification with more inclusive common ingroup identity categories (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). We have recently obtained some cross-cultural validation for our model through studies conducted in Northern Ireland and the Chilean context (Noor, et al., 2007). In these contexts identification with a common ingroup identity (e.gs., 'Northern Irish Society' or Chilean national identity) predicted outgroup forgiveness among the Catholics in Northern Ireland and between the ideologically opposing groups - pro- and anti- the Pinochet regime.

In our model trust and ingroup identification functioned as the most reliable mediators. It is easy to recognise intergroup trust as a social decision which is informed by the history of the intergroup relationship and its potential future development. If such recognition is valid, then the notion of an identity-based trust becomes apparent, where

the decision to offer or withhold trust is related to one's strength of identification with that category (Kramer, Brewer & Hanna, 1996).

Conversely, the association of high trust and low ingroup identification may be time-related. Particularly, during the conflict and shortly after its resolution, such association would certainly hold true. However, it is plausible that as time passes one indication of genuine reconciliation would be a dissociation between these variables, or at least the possibility for an association between high trust and high ingroup identification.

In conclusion, we have argued that the signing of a political peace accord, such as the Northern Irish Good Friday Agreement, is a necessary prerequisite for restoring damaged intergroup relationship, yet by itself it is not sufficient. We have identified intergroup forgiveness and subjective evaluation of past violence as two main precursors of the reconciliation orientation. With our data from Northern Ireland, we have provided evidence for the validity of this model. We regard this model as a first theoretical and practical step towards identifying social psychological processes that can work in parallel with post-agreement political processes in order to equip society for the challenging task of the reconciliation of ruptured intergroup relationships.

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Footnote

1. There were no major differences in the findings across the Protestant and Catholic samples, hence, we collapsed the two samples to validate our findings with a larger and more powerful sample.

Figure 1. A Reconciliation Orientation Model (ROM)

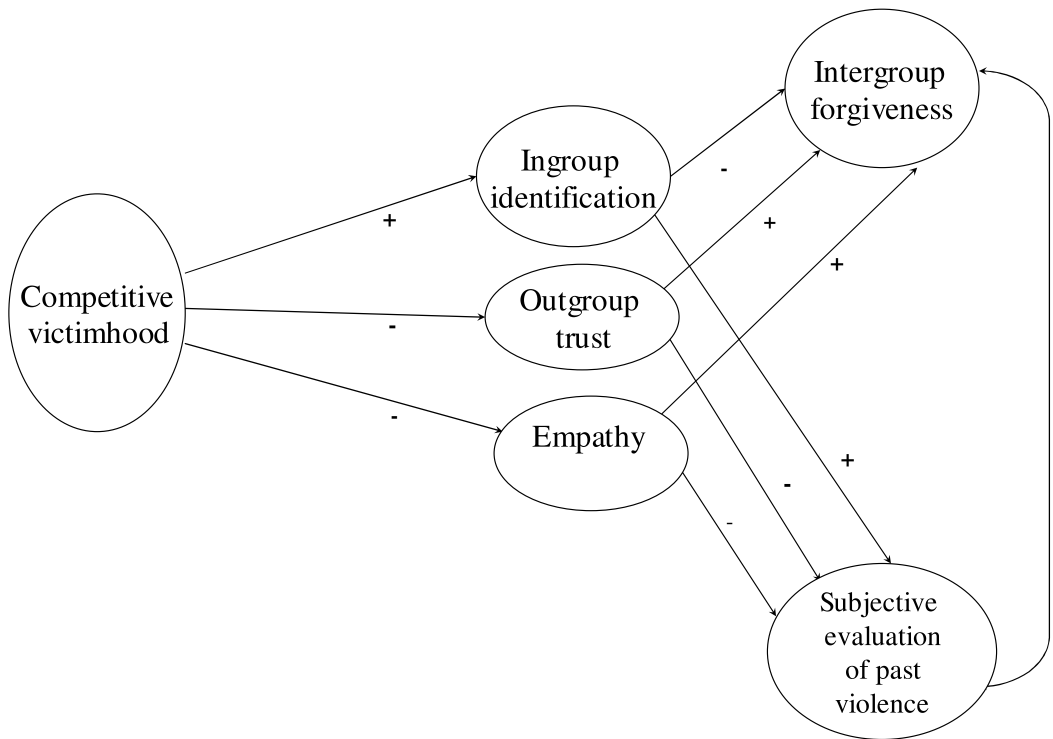
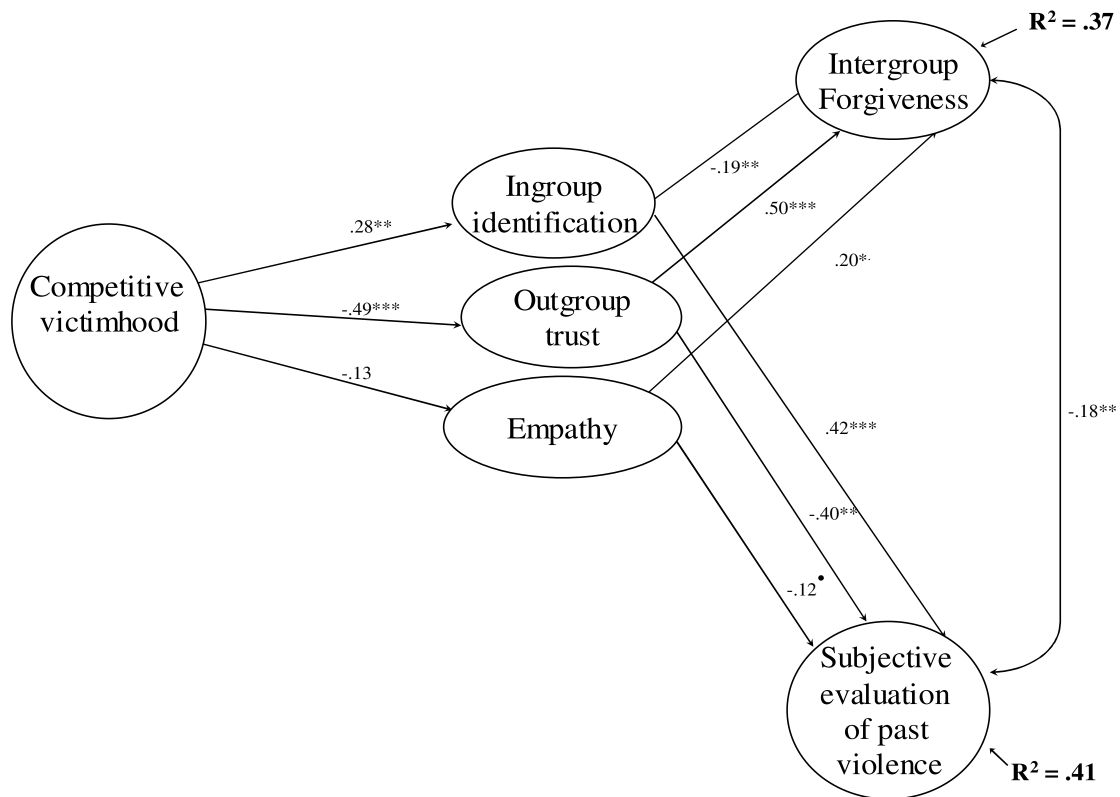
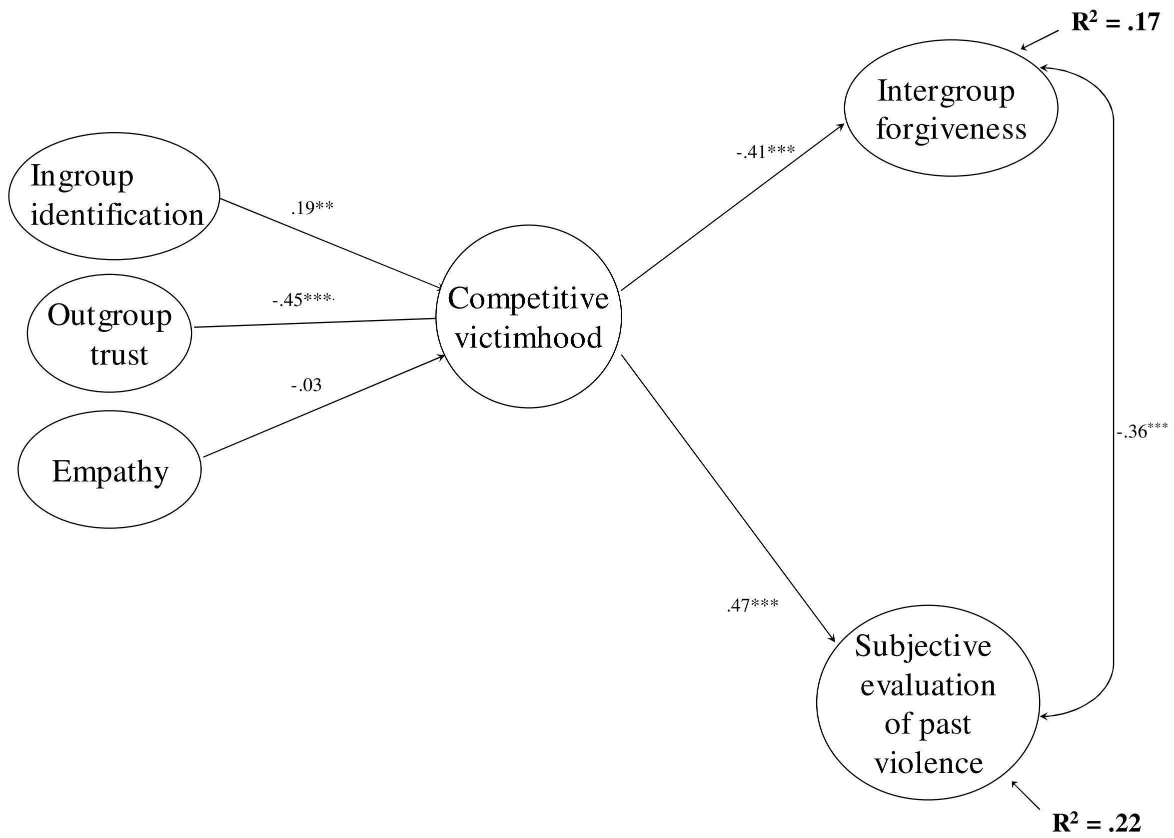


Figure 2. Full mediation ROM predicting intergroup forgiveness and subjective evaluation of past violence



Note. • $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$ and *** $p < .001$

Figure 3. Alternative reversed mediation model



Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$ and *** $p < .001$.

TABLE 1: Correlations, Means and Standard Deviations for Measured Variables

(N = 318)						
Scale	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Competitive victimhood	-	-.35**	.42**	-.36**	-.17**	.25**
2. Intergroup forgiveness		-	-.44**	.47**	.32**	-.30**
3. Subj. evaluation of past violence			-	-.39**	-.20*	.43**
4. Outgroup trust				-	.31**	-.22**
5. Empathy					-	-.04
6. Ingroup identification						-
Mean	3.68	5.08	3.78	4.47	4.67	5.17
Standard deviation	1.26	1.24	1.30	1.21	1.37	1.38

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *two-tailed.*