

RUNNING HEAD: Intergroup forgiveness and reconciliation

Title: On positive psychological outcomes: What helps groups with a history of conflict to forgive and reconcile with each other?

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The research for the first study was supported by a grant given to the third author by the British Council in Chile, grant number (SAN/984/118)

Word count (incl. of ref & tables): 10,238

*Abstract*

Three studies examined the roles of traditional and novel social psychological variables involved in intergroup forgiveness. Study 1 (N = 480) revealed that, among the pro-Pinochet and the anti-Pinochet groups in Chile, forgiveness was predicted by ingroup identity (negatively), common ingroup identity (positively), empathy and trust (positively) and 'competitive victimhood' (the subjective sense of having suffered more than the outgroup) (negatively). Political ideology (Right vs. Left) moderated the relationship between empathy and forgiveness, trust and forgiveness and between the latter and competitive victimhood. Study 2 (N = 309), set in the Northern Irish conflict between Protestants and Catholics, provided a replication and extension of study 1. Finally, study 3 (N = 155/108) examined the longitudinal relationship between forgiveness and reconciliation in Northern Ireland, revealing that forgiveness predicted reconciliation intentions. The reverse direction of this relationship was also marginally significant. Results are discussed in terms of their theoretical and practical implications.

Keywords: intergroup forgiveness, reconciliation, competitive victimhood, identity and emotions

Over the past decades social psychological research on intergroup conflict has accumulated a huge body of knowledge on the nature of prejudice, ingroup favouring bias and the origins of intergroup hostility (e.g., Allport, 1954; Brewer, 1999; Hewstone, Rubin & Willis, 2002; Staub, 1999). Such a contribution is of paramount importance for addressing acute social issues affecting individuals and groups alike. However, social interactions, be they between individuals or groups, are not solely governed by such negative psychological processes. To reduce the study of intergroup relations to the prevention of negative processes is to lose sight of other key psychological processes that may be involved in the promotion of positive outcomes. Moreover, the study of psychological processes leading to positive outcomes is important in that it could bring about a shift in the mindsets of conflicting groups, away from the negativity of a powerless past to the potential of a positive future. Working towards the construction of such a future, albeit a complex and long-term goal, could potentially lead to the restoration of each group's sense of agency that may have diminished during the prolonged conflict. Thus, to extend the above traditional social psychological focus, we have studied the under-researched phenomena of intergroup forgiveness and reconciliation (see for exceptions, Hewstone et al., 2004; Noor, Brown & Prentice, in press a & b; Wohl & Branscombe, 2005).

More specifically, we report findings from three field studies that examined the role of social psychological variables in fostering intergroup forgiveness and reconciliation attitudes. The studies were set in the different contexts of post-Pinochet Chile (Study 1) and the ongoing conflict between the Protestant and

Catholic communities in Northern Ireland (Studies 2 & 3). In Study 3, we also explore the direction of the relationship between forgiveness and reconciliation by means of a longitudinal study.

*Intergroup forgiveness*

Even after ceasefires, peace agreements and processes for democratic transition, there remain still obstacles to reconciliation between groups with a legacy of violent conflict. A chief obstacle revolves around the psychological wounds caused by past intergroup wrongdoings. In fact, if such past wrongdoings are not dealt with appropriately, they can potentially derail the political peace process and lead to the resumption of violence (Noor et al., in press b; Staub, 2006).

One way of addressing this thorny issue of past wrongdoings is to foster forgiveness between the conflicting groups. Forgiveness is a response to forgo negative emotions, thoughts and actions (e.g., revenge) in the face of the wrongdoing. Forgiveness attitudes may be promoted through re-establishing bonding intergroup emotions (e.g., trust and empathy). Forgiveness may entail: (a) more clarity over each group's roles in and responsibility for the conflict, (b) generosity in absolving the outgroup from the 'total blame', (c) leaving past grievances behind and (d) ultimately finding closure for a past hostile intergroup relationship (Nadler & Saguy, 2003; Noor et al., in press a & b).

The above conception of forgiveness also closely relates to how researchers interested in interpersonal forgiveness have used the concept. According to these scholars, forgiveness is viewed as a prosocial facilitator for restoring fractured relationships, whereby one's legitimate entitlement to retaliation after an offence is

relinquished, and emotions, cognitions and behaviours promoting constructive responses towards the offender are fostered (Exline, Worthington, Hill & McCullough, 2003; McCullough, Worthington & Rachal, 1997; Scobie & Scobie, 1998). It is important to note, however, that while our understanding of intergroup forgiveness may usefully be informed by the interpersonal forgiveness literature, there may be qualitative differences between the two levels, some discussed shortly (Hewstone et al., 2004; Noor et al., in press b).

In studies 1 and 2, our central concern was to identify the key social psychological predictors of intergroup forgiveness.

#### *Predictors of intergroup forgiveness*

##### *Identity*

According to Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), the self is conceptualised on a continuum ranging from the self as part of a social group to the self as a separate individual. Moreover, at the group level, the goals and achievements of the group and the person often converge (Brown & Turner, 1981). We argue that one important difference between interpersonal and intergroup forgiveness relates to such issues involving identity. That is, the extent to which individuals identify with a group, and the content of that identity, will influence group members' decision to forgive the outgroup. That influence is likely to be strongest in those conflict settings where an important aspect of the conflict concerns oppositional identities and conflicting identity-based aspirations (e.g., for political systems, national-ethnic sovereignty, etc.) (Noor & Brown, 2007). Thus, in the course of a protracted conflict any signs of generosity, let alone forgiveness,

may be interpreted as revision or letting go of one's ingroup goals which, in turn, may trigger a sense of insecurity and threat to one's ingroup identity.

Moreover, the consideration to forgive the outgroup may also confront each group with issues involving disloyalty towards one's ingroup, and particularly towards those ingroup members who bore huge costs for actively pursuing the ingroup's goals (Marques, Abrams & Serodio, 2001). We therefore expect that identification with an ingroup will be negatively associated with outgroup forgiveness attitudes.

#### *Common ingroup identity*

In spite of the traditional focus of social psychological research and theory on mild forms of intergroup conflict and bias (Hewstone et al., 2002), there are some theoretical models for reducing intergroup bias which could potentially facilitate the promotion of intergroup forgiveness between conflicting groups. One such model is the Common Ingroup Identity Model (CIIM) (Gaertner et al., 1993; see also, Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000).

CIIM can be traced to Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and Self Categorisation Theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). CIIM generates precise predictions regarding the relationship between identification with an inclusive superordinate category and the quality of the relationship between two conflicting groups. Namely, it is expected that identification with a superordinate category, which is inclusive of both conflicting identities, leads to a reduction in negative attitudes towards outgroup members (Gaertner et al., 1993). The primary process underlying such reduction in bias is due to identification with

the superordinate category which, in turn, leads to a less negative evaluation of the former outgroup through increases in the attractiveness and liking of that group (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000).

An extensive research programme has attempted to examine and validate CIIM using a range of methods across a variety of intergroup contexts: organizational mergers (Mottola, Bachman, Gaertner, & Dovidio, 1997), social justice (Huo, Smith, Tyler & Lind, 1996), political coalitions (Gonzalez et al., in press), multi-ethnic schools (Gaertner, Rust, Dovidio, & Bachmann, 1994) and step-families (Banker & Gaertner, 1998). In the present research we wanted to make a contribution towards understanding the relationship between identification with a common ingroup identity, one that is inclusive of both conflicting communities, and intergroup forgiveness attitudes. Following CIIM, we hypothesised that such identification would predict intergroup forgiveness positively.

### *Empathy*

Given that divergent perceptions between conflicting parties are often an obstacle to harmonious relationships, promoting empathy (perspective-taking and/or empathic emotions) among such groups might be a promising remedy for ameliorating fractured intergroup relationships. A similar positive role of empathy has already been identified in research testing the contact hypothesis (Brown & Hewstone, 2005). More central to the present research, the interpersonal forgiveness literature indicates that individuals are more likely to offer forgiveness to their offenders when induced with empathy for the offender rather than when induced with self-enhancement motives (e.g., positive outcomes for the forgiver resulting

from forgiveness) (McCullough et al., 1997, 1998). In the current research we examined this association between empathy and forgiveness attitudes at the intergroup level and expected to observe a similar positive relationship.

### *Trust*

A dominant feature of the relationship between groups in a prolonged conflict is a lack of trust. Generalised distrust, according to Nadler and Liviatan (2004), is a common emotional consequence of such protracted violent conflicts, and one that poses an obstacle to the process of reconciliation. Distrust usually consists of expectations of the outgroup's worst intentions for the ingroup (Mitchell, 2000). Trust has been conceptualised as an intergroup emotion (Brewer & Alexander, 2002), the restoration of which will promote good will towards the outgroup and the reduction of suspicion of the outgroup (Lewicki & Wiethoff, 2000). Similarly, in organisational settings, trust has been identified as a key factor in maintaining harmonious relationships (Kramer, 1999). To extend the existing literature of trust, we tested its predictive power in relation to intergroup forgiveness and hypothesised a positive association between these variables.

### *Competitive victimhood*

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 et al., 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 (Nadler & Saguy, 2003). By combining these two tendencies, we developed the concept of *competitive victimhood* (Noor et al., in press a & b). This concept refers to each group's effort to claim that *it has suffered more than the outgroup*. Further, this competition over the *quantity* of suffering may sometimes be underpinned by an implicit claim over the *illegitimacy* of the suffering. In other words, the fact that ingroup was exposed to suffering in the first instance may be regarded as clearly unjust.

In general, competitive victimhood can be viewed as a way of dealing with conflict. Drawing attention to one's own victimisation can be a strategy for motivating fellow ingroup members to be more accepting of retaliatory responses to the outgroup. In a post-conflict era, focusing on the vulnerability of one's ingroup and its exploitation by the outgroup might serve groups to deflect responsibility away from ingroup's role in contributing to and maintaining the intergroup conflict, or for offering reparative amends (Noor et al., in press b).

We view competitive victimhood as a subjective assessment of the impact of the conflict by the ingroup. We argue that groups, trapped in prolonged conflicts, may engage in competition over their victimhood, sometimes even in contexts defined by clear boundaries between victim and perpetrator groups. To illustrate, such a phenomenon was witnessed even among the Hutus responsible for the genocide against the Tutsis in Rwanda (Staub, 2007). However, in some circumstances (e.g., the Holocaust) the objective level of suffering is easily determined.

What makes this novel concept intriguing is that it clearly points towards the

common need in both groups for acknowledgement of their real or perceived experiences of harm. Simultaneously, however, the competition/comparison dimension in the process of establishing one's suffering may actually trigger a mind-set that is obstructive to displaying generosity and understanding towards the outgroup. The lack of these qualities is most likely to reduce the probability of acknowledgement for past outgroup suffering to occur. Thus, competitive victimhood may well be a defining component feeding into the intractability of intergroup conflicts.

Given that competitive victimhood indicates that the need for establishing ingroup suffering exceeds the need to let go of the past, we hypothesise that competitive victimhood will impede the formation of forgiveness attitudes.

*Going beyond forgiveness: 'Forgive and reconcile?'*

Having identified some key predictors of intergroup forgiveness, we sought to contribute to our understanding of forgiveness itself as a predictor of other outcome variables. More specifically, we examined the role of forgiveness in intergroup reconciliation. Noor et al. (in press a) propose a theoretical model, the Reconciliation Orientation Model (ROM), which identifies intergroup forgiveness as a key positive precursor of reconciliation.

In ROM, reconciliation is conceptualised as mutual acceptance between the conflicting parties, following a process of healing and direct intergroup engagement (Staub, 2006). In the present article we argue that such engagement is planned with the intention of addressing the underlying divisive issues that have led to the estrangement of the intergroup relations.

One such divisive issue that may, in fact, impede the course of reconciliation relates to whether conflicting parties can find a constructive approach to leaving past grievances behind (Nadler & Saguy, 2003). As suggested earlier, forgiveness can be viewed as a useful strategy for finding such closure for the painful past. Forgiveness has a number of attractive features for advancing the process of reconciliation. First, it ends the cycle of revenge; second, it protects the victims from becoming victimisers; and third, while it acknowledges the past, forgiveness is essentially future-oriented and therefore offers an opportunity for the restoration of damaged relationships (Scobie & Scobie, 1998). Thus, logically, addressing past grievances through forgiveness should consolidate the path to reconciliation.

To our knowledge, the relationship between intergroup forgiveness and reconciliation has not previously been empirically tested. We sought to address this gap by examining whether forgiveness predicts a specific composite of reconciliatory awareness and behavioural intentions (e.g., need to change one's relationship, respectful interaction or talking with the outgroup).

### Study 1

The major aim of the first study was to investigate the predictors<sup>1</sup> of intergroup forgiveness in a natural intergroup conflict setting.

#### *Chilean research context*

Following the end of Pinochet's military rule, (1973 – 1990), Chilean society was left to deal with the legacy of his authoritarian regime, a division of the society into those with an affiliation with an ideology of the political right

and those with attachment to an ideology of the left. The former, being originally in support of the Pinochet regime, viewed the military intervention by Pinochet as necessary for combating against Communism in Chile. The latter, in contrast, remembers the coup d'état as destructive of democracy and human rights in Chile (Constable & Valenzuela, 1991).

Such divergence in perception was most sharply reflected in the results of the 1988 plebiscite where more than 43% of the population voted in favour of the continuation of Pinochet's rule, despite the 15 years of a repressive regime. Even today, there is considerable debate about addressing the human right atrocities that marked the military rule (Roniger & Sznajder, 1999). On the other side, opponents of Pinochet also claimed their victims through their campaigns of political assassinations, bombings and kidnappings. Inevitably, these contrasting viewpoints have opened up controversial issues relating to the establishment of the truth, official apologies and, of major concern to the present research, requests for forgiveness. To illustrate, shortly after receiving the first commission report into the human rights violations during the military regime, Pinochet's elected successor, President Patricio Aylwin, stated: 'This is why I dare, in my position as President of the Republic, to assume the representation of the whole nation and, in its name, to beg forgiveness from the relatives of the victims (...)' (quoted in Roniger & Sznajder, 1999, p. 101). This is the context that provides the backdrop for our first study.

## Method

### *Participants*

The data for this study was collected in the autumn of 2004. Participants were 480 Chilean university students (287 men, 188 women and 5 participants who did not report their gender;  $M = 20.48$  years,  $SD = 2.17$ ). There were 261 participants who identified with the political Left, while 219 identified with the political Right. There were no participants identifying with both political orientations.

#### *Procedure & measures*

Participants completed a questionnaire under the supervision of a researcher and their lecturers. The questionnaire contained two sections: (A) one for participants with a right ideology, and another one (B) for participants with a left ideology. Participants were instructed to only complete the section that reflected their political orientation. The following measures were presented in Spanish and as 1-7-point Likert scales, where '1' indicated disagreement and '7' indicated agreement with the items.

*Ingroup identification measure* (derived from Brown et al., 1986) included four items: 'I identify with the left (right)', 'I feel strong ties with the left (right) and its people', 'I like being part of the left (right)' and 'I feel committed to the left (the right)'. The items produced a reliable scale (*Cronbach's*  $\alpha = .91$ ).

*Intergroup forgiveness* was assessed with four items: 'I feel resentment towards people from the right (left) for the misdeeds that they committed in the past' (reversed), 'I hold ill-thoughts about people from the right (left) for the misdeeds that they committed in the past' (reversed), 'I draw the conclusion that I am prepared to forgive people from the right (left) for the misdeeds that they committed in the past' and 'I am able to forgive people from the right (left) for the

misdeeds that they committed in the past'. These items formed a reliable scale (*Cronbach's*  $\alpha = .75$ ).

*Empathy* (adapted from Voci & Hewstone, 2003) had three items: 'Before judging the members of the right (left) for their past misdeeds, I always try to put myself into their shoes', 'When I hear the story of a person from the right (left) who has suffered from political violence, I try to see the situation from his/her perspective' and 'I can imagine the experience of the right (left) people who were made victims of violence and injustice.' This scale proved reliable (*Cronbach's*  $\alpha = .79$ ).

*Competitive victimhood* scale had three items. These items were: 'In the 70s and 80s people from the left (the right) suffered more than people from the right (left)', 'Victims from the left (the right and armed forces) need more protection than victims from the right (left)' and 'In general, the trauma of the events in the 70s and 80s has been more severe for the left (the right) than for the right (left).' This scale was also reliable (*Cronbach's*  $\alpha = .79$ ).

*Trust* (derived from Rosenberg, 1957; & Mitchell, 2000) was measured with four items: 'I believe that the majority of the right (left) people are fair', 'the majority of the right (left) are well-intended people', 'I believe that I can trust few people from the right (left)' (reversed) and 'The majority of the left (right) are opportunistic' (reversed). The reliability of this index was moderate (*Cronbach's*  $\alpha = .66$ ).

We measured *common ingroup identification* with two items: 'I am proud of being Chilean' and 'Being Chilean is an important part of my identity.' These items formed a reliable scale (*Cronbach's*  $\alpha = .86$ ).

Finally, participants were asked to specify their age and gender. Upon completion of the study, participants were thanked and debriefed.

### Results

Table 1 provides a summary of the correlations, means and standard deviations for all the measured variables.

*Predicting intergroup forgiveness.* Stepwise hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to examine how much of the variance in intergroup forgiveness was accounted for by each of the predictor variables identified earlier. Since we also wanted to check for possible differences in the predictive power of these variables across the Left and Right sub-samples, political ideology (dummy-coded -1 = Right and 1 = Left) was included in step 1. This step also included gender and age. To inspect the role of ingroup identification and common ingroup identification in predicting forgiveness attitudes - both primarily cognitive predictors - they were grouped into step 2. In step 3, trust, empathy and competitive victimhood were included. Finally, step 4 comprised the interaction terms between political ideology and each of the main predictors (Table 2). All continuous variables were centred.

Step 1 was significant and accounted for 15% of the variance,  $F_{change}(3,471) = 29.29, p < .001$ . This was due to the significant contribution of political

ideology, where the political Right reported greater forgiveness attitudes ( $M = 5.17, SD = 1.27$ ) than the political Left ( $M = 4.02, SD = 1.43$ ).

Step 2 explained a further 12% of the variance in intergroup forgiveness,  $F_{change}(2,469) = 37.46, p < .001$ . Consistent with CIIM's predictions, identification with the ingroup category was negatively associated with forgiveness attitude, while identification with the common ingroup category was positively correlated with outgroup forgiveness.

The affect-related predictors included in step 3 accounted for an additional 17% of the variance in forgiveness,  $F_{change}(3,466) = 47.97, p < .001$ . As expected, empathy and outgroup trust were associated with positive attitudes towards forgiving the outgroup. By contrast, as hypothesised, competition over victimhood was associated with forgiveness attitudes negatively. Finally, the interaction terms between political ideology and each of the above predictors in step 4 explained another 2% of the variance in forgiveness attitudes,  $F_{change}(5,461) = 3.39, p < .01$ . This step revealed that political ideology moderated the relationship between empathy and forgiveness, with the simple slope analyses indicating that it held more strongly for the Right ( $B = .38, t = 6.26, p < .001$ ) than for the Left ( $B = .18, t = 3.20, p < .01$ ). The relationship between trust and forgiveness was also moderated by political ideology. This time, however, the simple slopes revealed that this relationship was only significant for the Left ( $B = .35, t = 5.08, p < .001$ ), but not for the Right ( $B = .11, t = 1.57, p = .12$ ). Finally, political ideology also moderated the relationship between competitive victimhood and forgiveness, such that this association was



only present among the Left ( $B = -.32, t = -.4.31, p < .001$ ) but not among the Right ( $B = -.06, t = -.88, p = .38$ ).

In sum, the above analysis revealed that our predictors were able to explain a total of 45 % of variance in intergroup forgiveness, highlighting the differential roles of the predictor variables considered here and the role of political ideology as a moderator of the effects of empathy, trust and competitive victimhood.

### Discussion

Several aspects of study 1's findings need to be highlighted. Firstly, all the variables that we identified as predictors of intergroup forgiveness were reliable predictors. The negative association between identification with the ingroup identity and forgiveness, and the positive association between the latter and identification with the common ingroup identity, were consistent with the hypotheses of CIIM, and supported our rationale for the inclusion of social identities as predictors of forgiveness. This is an important extension of the interpersonal forgiveness research which so far has left the involvement of identity in forgiveness largely unaddressed. Equally, as expected, our data highlight the important role of empathy and trust as positive affective predictors in fostering intergroup forgiveness attitudes. Moreover, these associations seemed to be moderated by political ideology.

Study 1 also provided validation for our new concept of competitive victimhood. The results demonstrate that our participants in Chile could respond to the notion of competition over victimhood, and revealed that it is a potent

negative predictor of outgroup forgiveness, at least among the Left, the victimised group.

Of course, there may be intergroup contexts (e.g., the Holocaust) in which an objective level of suffering is easily determined and acknowledged, even by the perpetrator group. The above findings suggest that Chile may be one such intergroup setting, with little scope for the main Right wing perpetrator group and their supporters to deflect responsibility for the harm they did to the Left outgroup.

### Study 2

In order to provide a cross-cultural validation of study 1, we conducted a second study, with improved scales, in the context of the intergroup conflict between the Protestant and Catholic communities in Northern Ireland.

#### *Northern Irish research context*

The region of Northern Ireland (also referred to as Ulster) was partitioned from the rest of Ireland and constitutionally linked to Britain, in 1921. This partition has since fuelled the divergence in the desires and aspirations held by the Protestant community (subsuming Unionists & Loyalists) and the Catholic community (including Nationalists & Republicans) for Northern Ireland's future constitutional status (Hewstone et al., 2004). That is, while the wish for Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom forms an important identity dimension in the Protestant community, the aspiration to see the island of Ireland reunified constitutes a key identity dimension in the Catholic community. Such dissension regarding the content of the identities desired by the two communities

points to the importance of identity in the ‘the Northern Irish Troubles’, as locals euphemistically refer to their three-decade long conflict. The peak of this identity-based conflict stretched from the early 1970s until the late 1990s, costing nearly 4,000 lives (in a population of 1.7 million) (Fay, Morrissey, & Smyth, 1999). Consequently, intergroup tension, sectarian street violence and segregation are still very much in evidence, despite the emergence of the 1998 peace accord (Darby & Mac Ginty, 2000; Dixon, 2001). For example, Connolly and Healy (2003) showed that Northern Irish children, as young as three years old, can hold sectarian prejudice. Currently, 95% of schooling and 80% of social housing in Northern Ireland are segregated by religion (Schubotz, 2005).

Thus, given the nature of the Northern Irish conflict, with its peace process lagging about a decade behind that of Chile, we sought to examine our predictors of forgiveness in this intergroup setting of an ongoing and intense conflict.

### Method

#### *Participants*

The data were collected in the spring of 2004. Participants were 309 university students at two universities in Northern Ireland (90 men and 219 women;  $M = 20.71$  years,  $SD = 3.81$ ). They identified themselves with one of the two protagonist communities associated with the Northern Irish conflict; Protestant ( $N = 164$ ) and Catholic ( $N = 145$ ).

#### *Procedure and measures*

Participants completed a brief questionnaire under the supervision of a researcher and their lecturers. This questionnaire differed from the one used in

study 1 in four ways. First, we aimed at improving the reliability indices of the scales by adding new items with the intention to further clarify their conceptual meaning to participants. Second, in order to counter any potential fixed order effects on the main criterion variable (forgiveness), in the present study we placed the forgiveness scale at the end of the questionnaire. Fourth, we adapted all items to the Northern Irish context. Finally, all participants completed the same questionnaire in which the front page asked them to indicate their gender, age and the community to which they belonged<sup>3</sup>.

The following measures were 1-7-point Likert scales, where '1' indicated disagreement and '7' indicated agreement with the items.

*Ingroup identification measure* was assessed as in the Chile study. However, to capture the full complexity of such identification in the present study we used the complete six-item scale developed by (Brown et al., 1986). As in study 1, this scale proved reliable, (*Cronbach's*  $\alpha = .94$ ).

*Empathy* was measured as before. However, given that this scale previously mainly focused on the cognitive, and neglected the emotional, dimension of empathy, we added two new items. These were: 'I feel sympathy towards members of the other community<sup>2</sup>, considering their condition' and 'Thinking about the sectarian threat that the members of the other community face on a regular basis makes me feel sorry for them.' These items formed a more reliable scale (*Cronbach's*  $\alpha = .81$ ).

*Competitive victimhood* was assessed as before except for the addition of three new items which were included to improve scale reliability. These were:

'On average, the areas that have been most affected by the 'The Troubles' are those in which members of my community live', 'Overall, victims in my community have not received adequate attention to their needs compared to victims in the other community' and 'On average, throughout 'The Troubles', more harm has been done to my community than to the other community.' With the added items this scale proved more reliable than before (*Cronbach's*  $\alpha = .91$ ).

*Trust* was measured as in the Chile study. However, it proved to be more reliable than previously (*Cronbach's*  $\alpha = .81$ ).

To increase consistency between the categorisation scales, *Common ingroup identification* was assessed in exactly the same way as the above ingroup identification scale except for the substitution of the ingroup identity categories with the common ingroup identity category, 'Northern Irish'. Such regional common ingroup identity category referring to regional contiguity seems to be inclusive of both the Protestant and Catholic communities in Ulster and was also employed by previous research (Noor & Brown, 2007). Example items of the present scale are: 'I identify with the society in Northern Ireland,' or 'I like being a member of the society in Northern Ireland.' This scale was reliable (*Cronbach's*  $\alpha = .93$ ).

Finally, we added two new items, validated by research in interpersonal forgiveness, to our *intergroup forgiveness* scale. These were: 'I try not to hold a grudge against the other community for their misdeeds' (based on Takaku, Weiner, & Ohbuchi, 2001), and 'Getting even with the other community for their misdeeds is not important to me' (derived from McCullough et al., 1998).

These items also formed a more reliable scale than in study 1 (*Cronbach's*  $\alpha = .84$ ).

Upon completion of the study participants were thanked and debriefed.

### Results

Table 3 provides a summary of the correlations, means and standard deviations for all the measured variables.

*Predicting intergroup forgiveness.* To examine our hypotheses, we conducted a similar four-step hierarchical regression analysis as in study 1. As before, we wanted to check for possible differences across the Protestant and Catholic sub-samples, and therefore religious community membership (dummy-coded -1 = Protestant and 1 = Catholic) was included in step 1. This step further included gender and age. Ingroup identification and common ingroup identification were paired into step 2, trust, empathy and competitive victimhood were grouped into step 3 and, finally, step 4 comprised of the interaction terms between community membership and each of the main predictors (Table 4). All continuous variables were centred.

Step 1 explained almost no variance (.01) in forgiveness,  $F_{change}(3,305) = .86, p = .46$ . None of the variables included in the first step was a significant predictor of forgiveness. In contrast to the Chilean sub-samples, the Protestant and Catholic samples in the present study reported almost identical forgiveness attitudes ( $M = 5.15, SD = 1.36$ ) and ( $M = 5.01, SD = 1.16$ ) respectively.

Step 2 explained an additional 10% of the variance in intergroup forgiveness,  $F_{change}(2,303) = 17.18, p < .001$ . Again, results were consistent with

CIIM's predictions in that identification with the ingroup category was negatively associated with forgiveness attitudes, while identification with the common ingroup category was positively correlated with outgroup forgiveness.

The affect-related predictors in step 3 accounted for an extra 27% of the variance in forgiveness,  $F_{change}(3,300) = 44.13, p < .001$ . In line with our hypotheses, empathy and outgroup trust were associated positively with outgroup forgiveness, whereas competitive victimhood was associated negatively with forgiveness attitudes. Finally, step 4 explained another 3% of the variance in forgiveness attitudes,  $F_{change}(5,295) = 2.69, p < .05$ . This step revealed that community membership moderated the relationship between identification with the common ingroup category and forgiveness. The simple slopes analyses revealed that such identification had a positive association with forgiveness only in the Catholic sample ( $B = .23, t = 3.93, p < .001$ ), while there was no significant association observed in the Protestant sample ( $B = .02, t = .35, p = .73$ ). Moreover, the relationship between competitive victimhood and forgiveness was also moderated by community membership. The simple slopes indicated that the negative relationship between competitive victimhood and forgiveness was more accentuated for the Protestant sample ( $B = -.39, t = - 5.20, p < .001$ ) than for the Catholic sample ( $B = -.20, t = - 3.40, p = .001$ ).

In sum, the above results yielded a cross-cultural validation and extension of the findings from study 1, with a total of 41% of variance in intergroup forgiveness explained.

## Discussion

Study 2 provided a cross-cultural validation and extension of the findings from study 1. That is, despite historical and cultural differences between the contexts of Chile and Northern Ireland, a remarkable similarity characterised the patterns of the findings across studies 1 and 2.

Nonetheless, study 2 revealed an intriguing set of differences regarding the role of identification with the common ingroup identity in forgiveness between the two studies. These results seem to indicate that, while among the Catholics such identification and its positive association with forgiveness were in line with CIIM, the same variables bore no relationship among the Protestants. Looking at the high mean value of identification with 'Northern Ireland' for the Protestant group ( $M = 5.21, SD = 1.54$ ), we can eliminate the possibility that the lack of expected positive association was due to disidentification with the common ingroup identity. One way of explaining these results is that the Protestant sample may have not sufficiently differentiated the content of the common ingroup identity from the content of their ingroup identity. Examining the simple correlations between identification with the ingroup and common ingroup provides some support for this line of reasoning. That is, while there was no association between the two types of identity among the Catholic group ( $r = -.01, p = .45$ ), there was a moderate and positive correlation for the same variables in the Protestant group ( $r = .38, p < .001$ ). While there may be other explanations, a central implication of the current findings is that attempts to enhance intergroup harmony by way of introducing an inclusive superordinate



category may not always bring about the desired positive outcomes for all groups (Noor & Brown, 2007; Waldzus & Mummendey, 2003).

Regarding the involvement of intergroup emotions in predicting forgiveness, study 2 mirrored the positive associations of these predictors with forgiveness from study 1, adding further weight to the role of these positive intergroup emotions in fostering forgiveness attitudes.

Study 2 revealed that, although competition over victimhood status was negatively associated with forgiveness for both the Catholic and Protestant samples, this association was stronger for the latter sample. Northern Ireland has dealt with a combination of vertical (state violence against both communities) and horizontal violence (violence between the two communities) (Darby & MacGinty, 2000; Dixon, 2001). Thus, although one would have expected both groups in Northern Ireland to compete over their victimhood to an equal degree, above results do not support such expectation. These results in turn lead us to believe that we were successful in tapping the very *subjective* sense of victimhood of groups according to our conceptualisation of competitive victimhood.

What is equally interesting, as these findings display, is that such perceptions may still powerfully influence one's understanding of their group and their interactions with other relevant groups.

### Study 3

Studies 1 and 2 explored some traditional and novel variables and their associations with intergroup forgiveness across two very different intergroup

conflict settings. In study 3, we sought to go beyond identifying the predictors of intergroup forgiveness and to examine the power of forgiveness itself in predicting other outcome variables. One such outcome variable of interest is intergroup reconciliation (Noor et al., in press a & b). By reconciliation we mean a process that goes beyond the exoneration of the outgroup from their past injuries leading to a direct engagement with that outgroup. Thus, in study 3 our objective was to examine the power of forgiveness in predicting reconciliation attitudes. This will clarify whether forgiveness can indeed set the scene for opening up the course of reconciliation (Noor et al., in press a). Secondly, we also tested for the possible influence of reconciliation on levels of forgiveness. That is, it may be possible that the relationship between forgiveness and reconciliation, if any, may exist in a circular feedback loop. To test these speculations we conducted a longitudinal study in Northern Ireland.

### Method

#### *Participants*

In spring 2006, 155 Northern Irish university students participated in the time 1 (T1) data collection (93 Catholics, 62 Protestants, 142 females, 13 males; mean age 24.04 years). Of this sample, 108 also took part at time 2 (T2), approximately 4-6 weeks later (64 Catholics, 44 Protestants, 10 males, 98 females; mean age 23.36)<sup>3</sup>. This attrition rate (ca. 30%) was due to the second wave coinciding with the end of academic university term in Northern Ireland.

#### *Procedure and measures*

Participants completed a brief questionnaire under the supervision of a researcher and their lecturers.

*Demographics.* Participants were asked to specify their community membership, age and gender on the first page of the questionnaire.

The following measures were 1-7-point Likert scales, where '1' indicated disagreement and '7' indicated agreement with the items.

*Intergroup Forgiveness Scale.* We tried to further improve this scale. First, we wanted to make the *intergroup* nature of our scale more salient than previously by directly assessing participants' willingness to encourage his/her community to forgive the other community. Second, since it is possible that the term 'misdeed' may convey a moral judgement on the researchers' part, in the present study we replaced the word 'misdeed' with actual references to outgroup behaviours and cognitions, which served as more concrete and psychologically meaningful references than 'misdeed'. The scale was as follows: 'I would like my community not to hold a grudge against the other community for the things they've done to us', 'I would encourage my community to let the other community off for the things they've thought of us', 'Getting even with the other community for treating us badly is not important to me', 'I would like to ask my community to forgive the other community for their acts of violence', 'I would urge my community not to hold feelings of resentment towards the other community for their sectarianism', 'I would encourage my community not to have ill thoughts about the other community's

motives' and 'I would like my community to seek ways of forgiving the other community so that our lives are not dominated by bitterness.'

After these alterations, the present scale produced the best reliability (*Cronbach's*  $\alpha = .88$ ), relative to the forgiveness scales employed in study 1 and 2.

*Intergroup reconciliation* was measured by asking participants to respond to four items tapping their awareness for the need to reconcile with the other community and the content of that reconciliation. These items were: 'My community and the other community need to change our relationship with each other', 'Reconciliation requires that my community interacts respectfully with the other community', 'My community needs to talk with other community about issues that divide us', and 'Reconciliation between the two communities is not needed' (reversed). This scale had a good reliability (*Cronbach's*  $\alpha = .89$ ). All 10 items comprising the forgiveness and reconciliation scales were factor analysed using the principal axis factoring method with oblimin rotation. A two-factor solution was revealed in which all the forgiveness items loaded on the same factor (loadings .46 to .85) and all four reconciliation items loaded on a second factor only (loadings .44 to .83) (with cross-loadings .00 to .30). The two factors were positively correlated ( $r = .54$ ).

### Results

The findings are reported in three sections. First, we present the results from cross-sectional analyses of the T1 and T2 samples, considered separately. This will shed light on the pattern of association between our principal variables

in the short term. In the second section, we present the findings from the longitudinal analyses where we examine the power of intergroup forgiveness at T1 to predict intergroup reconciliation at T2, as expected by our above hypothesis. Lastly, as in any cross-lagged panel design, the possible ‘reverse’ or circular ‘causal’ association between forgiveness and reconciliation (i.e., prior reconciliation attitudes influencing subsequent forgiveness attitudes) was also explored.

#### *Panel attrition*

The complete panel data did not differ from those who ‘dropped out’ after T1. One-way ANOVAs on all the measures revealed no significant differences.

#### *Cross-sectional analyses*

The means and inter-correlations of the main variables are displayed in Table 5. Inspecting the pattern of correlations, as we expected, forgiveness correlated with reconciliation positively and moderately.

To ensure that these are ‘clean’ estimates of the link between forgiveness and reconciliation, we regressed reconciliation on forgiveness, while controlling for community membership, gender and age. A final step was included in the regression model, comprising the interaction term between community membership and forgiveness. All continuous variables were centred.

The multiple regression explained a reasonable amount of the variance ( $R^2 = .35$ ,  $F(5,147) = 17.06$ ,  $p < .001$ ) in which forgiveness was a significant predictor,  $B = .56$ ,  $p < .001$ . The regression including the interaction term was not significant,  $F_{\text{change}}(1, 147) = 2.07$ ,  $p = .15$ . Community membership did not

moderate the relationship between forgiveness and reconciliation,  $B = -.19$ ,  $p = .15$ .

At T2 the same regression analysis produced:  $R^2 = .21$ ,  $F(5,102) = 6.78$ ,  $p < .001$ . Once again, forgiveness was a reliable and positive predictor of reconciliation attitudes,  $B = .47$ ,  $p < .001$ . Community membership did not moderate the relationship between forgiveness and reconciliation,  $F_{\text{change}}(1, 102) = .20$ ,  $p = .65$ ,  $B = -.09$ ,  $p = .65$

#### *Longitudinal analysis*

To examine the longitudinal influence of forgiveness on reconciliation, we regressed T2 reconciliation on T1 forgiveness, whilst controlling for initial levels of reconciliation from T1 (Bijleveld & Van der Kamp, 1998; Finkel, 1995). As before, community, gender and age were controlled for.

This longitudinal analysis also explained a reasonable proportion of the variance in the criterion measure:  $R^2 = .30$ ,  $F(6,101) = 8.49$ ,  $p < .001$ . Unsurprisingly, the test-retest association for reconciliation was significant,  $F_{\text{change}}(1,103) = 32.42$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $B = .47$ ,  $p < .001$ . More importantly to our hypothesis, forgiveness still bore a positive association with reconciliation over and above the initial levels of reconciliation from T1,  $F_{\text{change}}(1,102) = 4.85$ ,  $B = .20$ ,  $p = .03$ . Community membership failed to moderate the relationship between T1 forgiveness and T2 reconciliation,  $F_{\text{change}}(1, 101) = .81$ ,  $B = -.14$ ,  $p = .37$ .

#### *Reverse direction*

As we have just seen, there is good evidence that forgiveness may have a 'causal' relationship in predicting reconciliation attitudes. However, it is possible that a circular relationship exists such that prior reconciliation attitudes might have an influence on subsequent levels of forgiveness. To examine this possibility, we reversed the logic of the longitudinal analysis in the previous section. This time we regressed T2 forgiveness on T1 reconciliation attitudes, whilst controlling for T1 values of forgiveness. As before, community, gender and age were added as controls. This analysis also accounted for respectable amounts of variance in the dependent measure:  $R^2 = .31$ ,  $F(6,101) = 8.87$ ,  $p < .001$ . Trivially, T1 forgiveness was a strong predictor,  $F_{\text{change}}(1,103) = 38.65$ ,  $B = .44$ ,  $p < .001$ . T1 reconciliation, however, was only a marginally reliable predictor of T2 forgiveness,  $F_{\text{change}}(1,102) = 3.08$ ,  $B = .15$ ,  $p = .082$ . Finally, community membership failed to moderate the relationship between T1 reconciliation and T2 forgiveness,  $F_{\text{change}}(1,101) = .52$ ,  $B = .10$ ,  $p = .47$ .

#### Discussion

There are a number of insightful findings in this study. First, it was revealed that forgiveness has a longitudinal, positive effect on reconciliation. We have some basis for inferring the direction of the relationship between forgiveness and reconciliation, since our analysis controlled for the initial levels of reconciliation (Finkel, 1995). Second, the above results also showed some limited support for the longitudinal reverse effects of reconciliation on forgiveness in our sample. Thus, based on the above findings we can conclude with some confidence that forgiveness can foster reconciliation attitudes, both in

the short and long term. However, a 'circular' longitudinal relationship between these variables cannot be ruled out conclusively. To our knowledge, this is the first time that the relationship between forgiveness and reconciliation has been scrutinised with empirical evidence from a field setting. Our findings, however, call for replication with a bigger sample and longer time lag.

#### General discussion

Our primary aim in this article was to widen the focus of the traditional social psychological research in understanding intergroup relation and conflict. While that tradition has predominantly attended to psychological processes that lead to the reduction of negative outcome variables (e.g., bias) among conflicting groups, we aimed to shed light on the promotion of positive outcomes, such as intergroup forgiveness and reconciliation in societies with past or current intergroup conflict.

In doing so, we provided cross-cultural evidence for the dynamic role of identity (in its different forms) in intergroup forgiveness attitudes. Here, the consistent negative association between ingroup identity and forgiveness highlights issues concerning threatened or insecure identity that may have to be addressed before groups can begin to consider any process that involves forgiveness. Moreover, at least among the sub-samples in Chile and for the Catholic sample in Northern Ireland, identification with a common ingroup identity was associated with forgiveness positively, thus linking this emerging line of research with already established social psychological theoretical models, such as CIIM (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). This finding is also



consistent with some other recent work of ours (Noor & Brown, 2007). There we reported a positive association between forgiveness attitudes and identification with the common ingroup identity 'Northern Irish' for the Catholic samples, while for the Protestant samples there existed again a negative (study 2) association between the same variables (Noor & Brown, 2007). Thus, the present research and our previous work draw attention to the great potential of CIIM, and simultaneously caution that CIIM may not work as a panacea for promoting positive intergroup attitudes across all groups and contexts.

Our current research further contributed to the role of positive emotions, such as trust and empathy, in forgiveness. The study of the emotional dimension of conflict is crucial if we are to grasp the full dynamics governing intergroup conflict. Pertinent to our focus on the affective predictors of intergroup forgiveness, Nadler and Liviatan (2004) have also highlighted in their work how these emotions are key to understanding the process of socio-emotional reconciliation between the Israeli and Palestinian groups in the Middle East.

Still, in trying to broaden the focus of the traditional research agenda of intergroup conflict, throughout our present research we attempted to use what we already know from decades of intergroup relations and link it to our novel approach. The development of the concept of competitive victimhood was directly born from such marriage. Competition over victimhood, a seemingly inevitable consequence of protracted conflict, was associated with forgiveness negatively across the two Chilean and Northern Irish settings. These findings are also consistent with our previous work where we developed and tested a

Reconciliation Orientation Model (ROM) within the Northern Irish conflict (Noor et al., in press a). Both then and now, we note that while the negative association between competitive victimhood and forgiveness seems to be robust, nevertheless such competition over victimhood may also be indicative of the need for an acknowledgement of one's group's suffering first before progress can be made regarding forgiveness (Lundy & McGovern, 2002). This point is particularly relevant for policy makers, as it highlights both a potential key factor contributing to the intractability of conflicts and a constructive strategy for resolving conflicts of this nature.

In making the above points, we also draw attention to an important limitation of the present first two studies; namely, while we focused on identifying the predictors of intergroup forgiveness in different field settings, a focus on the causal process intertwining these predictors with each other and with forgiveness was neglected. Given that intergroup forgiveness research is in its infancy, we deemed it important first to identify the key variables of this social phenomenon and to address the issues revolving around sequencing, process and mediators of these variables for future research.

That said, in study 3 we did attempt to explore the longitudinal effect of forgiveness on reconciliation attitudes. We inferred from this study that there exists good evidence for a positive association between these two variables cross-sectionally. More importantly, our data revealed a longitudinal effect of forgiveness on reconciliation, while the possibility for a 'circular' longitudinal relationship between forgiveness and reconciliation could not be ruled out.

Study 3 has both important theoretical and practical implications. First, its findings supported our previous work which was aimed at drawing a theoretical model of intergroup reconciliation (Noor et al., in press a). ROM highlights past intergroup injuries as a major obstacle to the course of reconciliation. ROM then suggested forgiveness as an effective strategy to overcome such an obstacle. The present results further validate this theoretical model and shed some light on the direction of the association between forgiveness and reconciliation.

These findings also contain a clear message for policy makers. That is, the genuine healing of fractured intergroup relations may usefully be initiated by addressing the divisive issues that have led to the intergroup estrangement. Our results indicate that forgiveness may be one effective strategy for acknowledging the past and simultaneously not letting it dominate the future.

#### Final thought

We acknowledge that the path of forgiving an outgroup for their past injuries may be a rather difficult one, and that the decision to offer or withdraw forgiveness lies ultimately with the victim groups alone (Exline et al., 2003). Acknowledging the above, we do see an important role in accumulating knowledge to assist victims in utilising forgiveness as a strategy to gain control over incidents which previously led to a diminution of their sense of agency. That is, while people may have had little control over what happened to them, forgiveness may offer them a way to produce responses that are under their control (Green, 2006).

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## Notes

1. We use prediction here in its statistical rather than causal sense.
2. Note that because of the dichotomised nature of society in Northern Ireland into the two main Protestant and Catholic communities, the term 'my community' is commonly understood as referring to one's ingroup, which is generally exclusive of 'the other community', i.e., the outgroup. This is common parlance in Northern Ireland.
3. There were no more than 10 participants in the Northern Irish samples who identified with both sides of the community. These were excluded from the analyses.

TABLE 1: Correlations, means and standard deviations for the total Chilean sample

(N = 480)						
Scale	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Intergroup forgiveness	-	-.23***	.26***	.48***	.40***	-.51***
2. Ingroup identity		-	-.13**	-.15**	-.21***	.08*
3. Common ingroup identity			-	.22***	.12**	-.30***
4. Empathy				-	.37***	-.33***
5. Outgroup trust					-	-.23***
6. Competitive victimhood						-
Mean	4.56	4.80	5.48	4.70	3.84	4.53
Standard deviation	1.47	1.52	1.71	1.41	1.13	1.74

Note. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ , two-tailed.

TABLE 2: Coefficients of regression models for forgiveness in Chile

	Intergroup Forgiveness		
	B	SE	$\beta$
<b>Step 1</b>			
Political ideology (PI)	-.57	.06	-.38***
Age	-.03	.03	.05
Gender	.17	.13	.06
<b>Step 2</b>			
Ingroup identity	-.30	.04	-.30***
Common ingroup identity	.17	.04	.20***
<b>Step 3</b>			
Empathy	.28	.04	.27***
Trust	.25	.05	.19***
Competitive Victimhood	-.17	.05	-.20***
<b>Step 4</b>			
Ingroup identity X PI	.00	.06	.00
Common ingroup identity X PI	-.02	.06	-.01
Empathy X PI	-.15	.06	-.10*
Trust X PI	.13	.06	.09*
Competitive Victimhood X PI	-.23	.08	-.10**

Note: \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , two-tailed.

TABLE 3: Correlations, means and standard deviations for the total Northern Irish sample

<u>(N = 309)</u>						
Scale	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Intergroup forgiveness	-	-.26***	.14*	.35***	.48***	-.51***
2. Ingroup identity		-	.06	-.10*	-.20***	.43***
3. Common ingroup identity			-	.08@	.10*	-.04
4. Empathy				-	.35***	-.22***
5. Outgroup trust					-	-.46***
6. Competitive victimhood						-
Mean	5.10	5.11	4.56	4.52	4.71	3.57
Standard deviation	1.27	1.52	1.69	1.28	1.13	1.50

Note. @ $p < .10$ , \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ , two-tailed.

TABLE 4: Coefficients of regression models for forgiveness in Northern Ireland

	Intergroup Forgiveness		
	B	SE B	$\beta$
<b>Step 1</b>			
Community (C)	-.07	.07	-.05
Age	.00	.02	.01
Gender	-.20	.16	-.07
<b>Step 2</b>			
Ingroup identity	-.27	.05	-.33***
Common ingroup identity	.16	.05	.22***
<b>Step 3</b>			
Empathy	.18	.05	.18***
Trust	.22	.05	.23***
Competitive Victimhood	-.28	.05	-.33***
<b>Step 4</b>			
Ingroup identity X C	-.09	.07	-.06
Common ingroup identity X C	.17	.07	.12*
Empathy X C	-.05	.06	-.04
Trust X C	-.03	.07	-.02
Competitive Victimhood X C	.15	.07	.12*

Note: \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , two-tailed.

TABLE 5: Correlations, means and standard deviations for measured variables

	M <sub>T1</sub>	SD	M <sub>T2</sub>	SD	Reconciliation	Forgiveness
Reconciliation	5.60	1.29	5.48	1.22	<b>.52***</b>	.59**/.45**
Forgiveness	5.17	1.33	5.23	1.10	<b>.44**</b>	<b>.55**</b>

*Note. The coefficient in bold type is the T1-T2 correlation, while coefficients in non-bold type are cross-sectional correlations at T1/T2, (\*\*  $p < .001$ , two tailed).*