

# INTERGROUP FORGIVENESS AND COMMON INGROUP IDENTITY

Title: Intergroup identity perceptions and their implications for intergroup forgiveness:

The Common Ingroup Identity Model and its efficacy in the field.

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## *Abstract*

Three studies revisited the application of the Common Ingroup Identity Model (CIIM) to the Northern Irish conflict and shed light on the factors that potentially limit the scope of the CIIM. Study 1 (N = 61) showed that both conflict protagonists unanimously viewed 'Northern Ireland' as the most inclusive superordinate category relative to other viable categories. Employing a longitudinal design, Study 2 (N = 67/43) examined the stability of the intergroup identity perceptions that the Northern Irish Protestant and Catholic groups hold in relation to the superordinate category 'Northern Ireland'. Moreover, Study 2 also provided evidence that the Protestant group engages in *ingroup projection* (i.e., perceiving a large overlap between their ingroup identity category and the superordinate category). Study 3 (N = 307) successfully replicated previous research revealing that, while the Catholic group's willingness to forgive the outgroup benefits from identifying with the superordinate category, the Protestants' willingness to forgive the outgroup does not. Results are discussed in terms of their theoretical and practical implications.

Keywords: Common Ingroup Identity Model, Ingroup Projection, Intergroup Forgiveness.

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Recent work in social psychology has expanded the study of intergroup relations from its traditional focus on the reduction of negative psychological outcomes (e.g., intergroup bias; Hewstone, Rubin and Willis, 2002) to the promotion of positive outcomes (e.g., forgiveness; Nadler & Livitan, 2006; Wohl & Branscombe, 2005). Building on this work, Noor, Brown, Gonzalez, Manzi and Lewis (2008) reported a series of field studies in which they identified a number of social psychological predictors of intergroup forgiveness within natural settings of past and on-going intergroup conflict (e.g., Northern Ireland). One set of predictors tested by these authors was derived from the theoretical framework of the Common Ingroup Identity Model (CIIM; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000).

In that work, Noor et al. (2008, study 2) reported that in the context of the Northern Irish conflict between the Protestant and Catholic communities the CIIM promotes intergroup forgiveness attitudes between these communities differentially. The objective of the current work is to revisit that earlier research. Specifically, we examine whether the reported differences between the two communities are due to the choice of the appropriate common ingroup identity category (Study 1). Then, in order to address the question concerning the stability of both groups' perceptions of themselves and each other in relation to the common ingroup identity, a longitudinal study is reported (Study 2). This study also tested the hypothesis that the Protestant group may be engaging in *ingroup projection* (Wenzel, Mummendey & Waldzus, 2007; Waldzus & Mummendey, 2004), which could explain why the two groups do not benefit equally from identifying with the superordinate category.

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Finally, in Study 3, we aim to replicate the previous findings regarding the relationship between the CIIM and intergroup forgiveness attitudes in Northern Ireland that were reported by Noor and colleagues (2008, study 2).

### **INTERGROUP FORGIVENESS**

Although far from being a panacea for resolving intergroup conflict, intergroup forgiveness has rightfully become the focus of recent research that explores ways of ameliorating hostile intergroup relations (Nadler & Liviatan, 2006; Noor, Brown & Prentice, 2008a & b; Noor, Brown, Gonzalez et al., 2008; Staub, 2006; Tam, Hewstone, Cairns, Tausch, Maio & Kenworthy, 2007; Wohl & Branscombe, 2005.)

To begin with, forgiving an outgroup for their past wrongs can potentially end the cycle of intergroup revenge. Breaking such a cycle through forgiveness can also help to protect the victims from becoming victimisers. Furthermore, forgiveness, whilst acknowledging the past, essentially shifts the focus of the intergroup relations to the future. Ultimately, forgiveness can be conceived of as a constructive strategy that provides rival groups with an opportunity to restore their damaged relationship (Minow, 1998; Noor, Brown & Prentice, 2008a & b; Noor, Brown, Gonzalez et al., 2008; for similar research on interpersonal forgiveness see Enright & North, 1998; McCullough, 2001; Scobie & Scobie, 1998; Zechmeister & Romero, 2002).

### **THE COMMON INGROUP IDENTITY MODEL**

The Common Ingroup Identity Model (Gaertner, Dovidio, Anastasio, Bachman & Rust, 1993; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000) has been influential in affording researchers with a theoretical framework for numerous intervention strategies to reduce intergroup prejudice (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000; Dovidio, Gaertner & Saguy,

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2007). Theoretically, the model rests on the core assumptions derived from the Social Identity and Social Categorisation Theories (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell, 1987). One such important assumption that the CIIM accepts is related to the process of social categorisation. Often, people tend to categorise themselves and others into an ingroup and an outgroup, which is subsequently used as a basis for favouring the ingroup and displaying bias against the outgroup (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000).

An attractive feature of the CIIM lies in its attempt to reduce intergroup bias through the modification of the perceptual boundaries that determine the categorisation process and, in turn, the inclusion and exclusion of individuals into the ingroup and outgroup. That is, through altering the intergroup boundaries the model offers a strategy with which the level of category inclusiveness can be changed. It is predicted that the more both groups identify with a common category, which is inclusive of both of them, the less likely that the intergroup interaction will be characterised by bias and prejudice.

For instance, students from two different degree courses (e.g., psychology and sociology) may behave towards each other in a discriminatory way based on their perceptions of studying two different courses. However, those students who identify with the superordinate category (e.g., students of social science), subsuming both sub-disciplines, are expected to engage in less outgroup derogation. An impressive body of work has investigated and validated the effectiveness of the CIIM for reducing intergroup bias across laboratory and field settings including organisational mergers, social justice, political coalitions, step-families, etc. (see for reviews Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000; Dovidio, Gaertner & Saguy, 2007).

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However, only a handful of studies have tested the efficacy of the CIIM on historically victimised groups' willingness to forgive their perpetrator groups (Noor, et al., 2008; Wohl & Branscombe, 2005). For example, it has been shown that in post-Pinochet Chile supporters and opponents of the regime were more willing to forgive each other, when they displayed a degree of identification with the common ingroup identity category (Chilean) (Noor et al., 2008, study 1). Similarly, Wohl and Branscombe have successfully demonstrated that Jews were more willing to forgive Germans for the Holocaust after the perpetrator group was recategorised into an inclusive superordinate category (humans). While the above research has successfully validated the predictions of the CIIM, the application of this model to the context of the Northern Irish conflict has raised a number of questions (Noor et al., 2008, study 2).

### *The CIIM and its application to the Northern Irish conflict*

The violent conflict between the Protestant and Catholic communities in Northern Ireland is epitomised in the dissensus concerning each community's desires for Northern Ireland's constitutional future (Hewstone et al., 2004; Dixon, 2001). The Protestant community, the historically advantaged group, wishes for Northern Ireland to remain part of the UK. By contrast, the Catholic community, the historically disadvantaged group, desires the re-unification of Northern Ireland with the rest of Ireland, thus aiming to undo the partition that took place in 1921. As a result of this dispute, a violent conflict has been fought for more than three decades, claiming almost 4,000 lives (Fay, Morrissey & Smyth, 1999).

Even in today's post-peace agreement era, Northern Ireland is characterised as a divided society displaying intermittent episodes of sectarian violence, intergroup distrust, and high levels of social segregation (Connolly & Healy, 2003; Darby &

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MacGinty, 2000; Dixon, 2001; Hewstone et al., 2008; Schubotz, 2005). This context was used as a backdrop for testing the scope of the CIIM in fostering intergroup forgiveness attitudes by Noor et al. (2008, study 2).

Those researchers examined the hypothesis that identification with a common ingroup identity category (i.e., Northern Ireland) would be a positive predictor of the willingness to forgive the outgroup. Conversely, it was expected that identification with an ingroup identity category (i.e., Protestant; Catholic) would be a negative predictor of outgroup forgiveness attitudes.

The findings reported by Noor et al. (2008) were intriguing in that it was revealed that the Catholic and Protestant samples benefited from the CIIM differentially. That is, for the Catholic group the data revealed that their willingness to forgive Protestants was positively related with their identification with the superordinate category (i.e., Northern Ireland). Moreover, as expected, Catholics' identification with their immediate subordinate category (i.e., Catholic) was a negative predictor of their forgiveness attitudes. These results were in line with the CIIM's predictions. For the Protestant sample, however, the findings failed to support the CIIM. Although the Protestant group reported a higher level of identification with the superordinate category than the Catholic sample ( $M_{\text{Protestant-id-Northern Ireland}} = 5.21$ ,  $M_{\text{Catholic-id-Northern Ireland}} = 3.83$ ), such an identification failed to predict their outgroup forgiveness attitudes. The Protestant sample's identification with the ingroup identity category (Protestant) predicted negatively their willingness to forgive Catholics, as hypothesised.

The above pattern of findings diverges in two important ways from the common trends reported by the research testing the CIIM. First, often it is expected from the low status group to display resistance to the idea of a common ingroup

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identity category due to their fears of having to abandon their group identity and its values (Fisher, Greitemeyer, Omay & Frey, 2007; Saguy, Dovidio & Pratto, 2008). Thus, it is argued that such threats to identity can undermine the beneficial impact of the CIIM for the low status group (Dovidio, Gaertner & Saguy, 2007).

By contrast, the high status group does not experience such threats to their identity in the process of recategorising into a common ingroup identity category. This is, because their powerful status ensures them the representation of their ingroup identity and interests. Consequently, they find it easy to endorse and benefit from a superordinate category (Devos & Banaji, 2005; Waldzus, Mummendey, Wenzel & Boettcher, 2004; Dovidio, Gaertner & Saguy, 2007).

The pattern of data from Northern Ireland, however, displays a reversed trend. It seems that, in Northern Ireland, the historically disadvantaged Catholic group, although they embrace the common ingroup identity category less readily, when they do so, it results in less bias. The same is not true for the Protestant group, the historically more advantaged group. These results are even more surprising, given the high level of identification with the common ingroup identity category reported by the Protestant sample (Noor, Brown, Gonzalez et al., 2008, study 2). A number of factors could potentially explain the above divergent set of results.

### *Adequacy of the common ingroup identity category*

First, there is the possibility that the common ingroup identity category, Northern Ireland, selected by Noor and colleagues in their study was not an appropriate superordinate category. The authors assumed - but did not test - that this category would be perceived by both groups as the most inclusive category, incorporating both communities of the region. Given that there are at least four other group labels that are used to refer to this region (i.e., 'The Six Counties', 'Ulster',



‘Ireland’ and ‘Britain’), an alternative superordinate category could result in findings that may be more consistent with the CIIM. To test this possibility, in Study 1, we asked participants from both communities about their perceptions of the group label that they conceived of as the most inclusive of both communities.

### *Unstable findings and ingroup projection*

A further factor that may explain Noor and colleagues’ findings could be that they may have been simply of temporary and non-enduring nature. This is possible, given how easily changes in the political arena associated with intergroup conflict settings can affect research findings (e.g., Duckitt & Mupfething, 1998). Therefore, Study 2 will use the superordinate category, tested by Study 1, and aim to observe the stability of intergroup perceptions concerning that category through the use of a longitudinal design.

To measure these intergroup identity perceptions, we borrow the conceptualisation of mental representation of ‘oneness’ developed by Cialdini, Brown, Lewis and Neuberg, 1997). Mental distance between ‘self’ and ‘other’ can be represented along a continuum ranging from one pole of complete separation to the other pole of complete overlap. Moreover, this particular way of measuring intergroup identity perceptions will also enable us to test Noor and colleagues’ speculation that the Protestant group may engage in ingroup projection (2008, study 2).

Ingroup projection denotes the phenomenon in which a group, typically of high status, views the characteristics of the superordinate category as representing its own ingroup values and qualities (Kessler & Mummendey, 2001; Waldzus & Mummendey, 2004). Such a projection can interfere with the positive effects of identification with the superordinate category on reducing outgroup bias. Thus, one reason why the Protestant sample in Noor et al.’s research did not benefit from

identifying with the superordinate category may have been due to their lack of sufficient differentiation between the superordinate category (Northern Ireland) and their immediate ingroup category (Protestant).

Noor and colleagues delivered correlational evidence in support of this explanation. While there was a sizeable positive correlation between the superordinate and subordinate categories for the Protestant sample, none existed for the Catholic participants. One possible conclusion to draw from these results is that the Protestant group may not have gained much from their identification with the common ingroup identity category because they perceived very little *psychological distance* between that category and their ingroup identity category. Put differently, if the Protestant group perceived a huge psychological overlap between the superordinate and subordinate categories, then naturally they would continue to perceive Catholics as outgroup members, or at best as suspicious ingroup deviants (Walczus & Mummendey, 2004). Such an overlap with its consequences, thus, would be an index of ingroup projection.

Study 2, therefore, examined if such an ingroup projection process occurs among the Protestants in Northern Ireland.

Finally, in Study 3, we tested the implications of the different identification modes for intergroup forgiveness as in the work by Noor and colleagues (2008, study 2) and, thus, aim to replicate their previous findings. If the authors had tapped some robust and enduring associations in their research, then it is expected that Study 3 should reveal a positive relationship between the willingness to forgive the outgroup and identification with the superordinate category only among the Catholic participants, but not among the Protestant participants.

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To sum up, the present research aims to identify which common ingroup identity category from a number of competing categories is perceived by the Protestant and Catholic groups as the most inclusive category. Secondly, the stability of intergroup identity perceptions was tested, as well as, the hypothesis that the Protestant group may engage in ingroup projection. Finally, we aimed to replicate the findings concerning the relationship between the CIIM and intergroup forgiveness attitudes in Northern Ireland, as reported by Noor et al. (2008, study 2).

### STUDY 1

The objective of study 1 was to test whether the category ‘Northern Ireland’ is indeed perceived as the most inclusive common ingroup identity category unanimously by both the Protestant and Catholic groups, as assumed by Noor et al. (2008, study 2). To this end, we presented both Catholic and Protestant participants with a range of competing labels that are commonly used to refer to this particular region. These labels included ‘The Six Counties’, ‘Ulster’, ‘Northern Ireland’, ‘Ireland’ and ‘Britain’. Given the complexity of finding potent superordinate categories in natural intergroup settings, the final list of these five categories was derived based on the first author’s consulting local community workers and conflict mediation organisations in Northern Ireland. Specifically, it was asked: ‘*What are the different labels that people here use to refer to this region?*’ Thus, the present labels were specifically chosen by the authors based on the insights offered by local practitioners.

#### *Method*

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*Participants.* Sixty-one university students at the University of Ulster took part in the study (59 women, 2 men, *Age* = 24.02 years, *SD* = 7.01). They could identify themselves with one of the two protagonist communities associated with the Northern Irish conflict or choose ‘*others*’: Catholic (*n* = 29) and Protestant (*n* = 32).

*Procedure and measures.* Participants completed a short questionnaire under the supervision of their lecturer. The questionnaire was prefaced by the following text: ‘Suppose you were asked for a group label that incorporates both the Catholic and Protestant communities in this region. What would that label be? Below are a number of labels provided. Please indicate how well each one of them captures the label that is most inclusive of both the Catholic and Protestant communities in this region.’

Participants then were presented randomly with the five labels, and each label was rated by them along a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree* and 7 = *strongly agree*). Each label was measured by the following two items, for example: ‘Ulster is the group label that incorporates best both the Catholic and Protestant communities in this region,’ and ‘Ulster is the group label that is most inclusive of both the Catholic and Protestant communities in this region.’ The correlation coefficients between each of the two items ranged from a minimum ( $r = .68$ ) to a maximum ( $r = .92$ ).

### *Results & Discussion*

Table 1 provides a summary of the means and standard deviations for all the measured labels. The data was submitted to a mixed ANOVA design with Community membership (Protestant/Catholic) as a between-subjects factor and Category (Northern Ireland, Ulster, The Six Counties, Ireland and Britain) as a within-subjects factor. Results showed a main effect for Category ( $F(4, 236) = 12.30$ ,

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$p < .001$ ) and an interaction effect for Community and Category ( $F(4, 236) = 7.38, p < .001$ ).

With regard to the main effect for Category, posthoc pairwise comparison tests revealed that this effect was due to the category 'Northern Ireland' being perceived as significantly different from the other four categories, using the Bonferroni correction method (all mean differences  $> 1.06$ , all  $ps < .001$ ). As for the interaction effect, pairwise comparison tests showed that the Protestant and Catholic communities differed in their perceptions concerning the category 'Ulster', 'Britain and 'Ireland'. The Protestant sample viewed 'Ulster' and 'Britain' as the more inclusive categories, whereas the Catholic sample regarded 'Ireland' as the more inclusive category, (using the Bonferroni correction method, mean differences  $> .83$ ,  $ps \leq .05$ ).

Importantly, the Protestant and Catholic communities' perceptions on the categories 'Northern Ireland' and 'The Six Counties' were far from significantly different, using the Bonferroni correction method (mean differences  $< .46$ , all  $ps > .2$ ). The above findings were further corroborated, as the one-sample t-tests yielded that, although the means for the above five categories were reliably different from the scale mid-point, only 'Northern Ireland' was above the scale mid-point (all  $|t\text{-values}| > 2.59$ , all  $ps < .05$ ). In other words, the category 'Northern Ireland' was perceived as the most inclusive category among the five categories that were available.

In summary, the above findings corroborated Noor and colleagues' assumption that 'Northern Ireland' is indeed perceived by both Catholics and Protestants as the most inclusive category (2008). This is certainly true when this category's inclusiveness is assessed in comparison to the perceptions of inclusiveness of the other four categories tested in this study.

## STUDY 2

Study 1 found evidence that our Catholic and Protestant participants perceived the category ‘Northern Ireland’ as the most inclusive superordinate category relative to other viable categories. However, given the cross-sectional nature of Study 1, the issue of how enduring these findings are still needs to be addressed. Thus, one objective of Study 2 was to examine the stability of the intergroup perceptions concerning this category, using a longitudinal design. A further objective of this study was to test the hypothesis that the Protestant group may be undergoing a process of ingroup projection (Waldzus & Mummendey, 2004), as formulated by previous research (Noor and colleagues, 2008, study 2). If the Protestant community perceives a large psychological overlap between their ingroup category (Protestant) and the superordinate category (Northern Ireland), then this may shed light on why Protestants’ identification with this superordinate category did not predict positive attitudes towards forgiving Catholics in previous research (Noor et al. 2008).

Aron, Aron and Smollan (1992) operationalised the concept of ‘oneness’ by presenting participants with a number of pictures of two circles that vary in their degrees of overlap. These two circles represent the self and the other, respectively. The task for participants is to indicate their subjective degree of perceived overlap by choosing one of the pictures that best depicts such an overlap.

The above operationalisation of ‘oneness’ lends itself nicely to observing groups’ perceptions of themselves and each other in relation to the superordinate category. Moreover, this method of measuring intergroup identity perceptions is a face valid test of ingroup projection, given it directly and graphically taps the psychological overlap between the ingroup category and the common ingroup identity.

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Following past research (Noor and colleagues, 2008), our hypothesis was that relative to the Catholic participants more overlap would be perceived between these two categories among our Protestant participants, which would be resistant to change over-time.

### *Method*

*Participants.* Sixty-seven Northern Irish university students participated in the Time 1 (T1) data collection (50 Protestants, 17 Catholics, 66 women, 1 man;  $M$  age = 23.30 years). The data for Time 2 (T2) was collected three months later. Of the original sample, 43 participants took part in the study (attrition rate 36%; 43 women;  $M$  age = 23.34).

*Procedure and measures.* Participants completed a brief questionnaire under the supervision of their lecturer.

*Demographics.* Participants were asked to specify their gender, age and community membership (including a choice of 'others') on the front page of the questionnaire.

*Oneness.* We developed an adapted version of Aron, Aron and Smollan's oneness measure (1992), prefaced with the following instructions: 'Different people and groups can be either separate from each other, or at one with each other. Which of these pictures describes best the relationship between the Catholic community [or the Protestant community] and Northern Ireland.' Thus, perceived overlap was measured for two pairs: 'Catholic community' and 'Northern Ireland'; 'Protestant community' and 'Northern Ireland'. The degree of overlap ranged from picture 1 (lowest perceived overlap) to 7 (highest perceived overlap).

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### *Results & Discussion*

*Panel attrition.* The complete panel data did not differ from those who dropped out after T1. A One-way ANOVA on the oneness measure detected no significant difference,  $F(1, 65) = .025, p > .10$ .

*Cross-sectional analyses.* The data was submitted to a repeated measures ANOVA where community membership (Protestant; Catholic) was defined as a between-subjects factor and perceptions of overlap between Northern Ireland and Protestant community and Northern Ireland and Catholic community were entered as a within-subjects factor. The analyses revealed a significant effect only for the within-subjects factor,  $F(1, 65) = 37.08, p < .001$ . The pattern of means lent strong support for our hypothesis (Table 2); namely, that there would be significantly more perceived overlap between the categories, Northern Ireland and Protestant community, than between the categories, Northern Ireland and Catholic community. Given that there was no significant interaction effect between the within-subjects factor and community membership, it can be concluded that both groups of participants perceived the above overlaps in an identical manner, thus further strengthening the case for support for our hypothesis.

At T2, the same repeated measures ANOVA produced a significant main effect for the within-subjects factor,  $F(1, 41) = 20.60, p < .001$ . Once again, both Protestant and Catholic participants were in agreement that there was more overlap between the categories, Northern Ireland and Protestant community, than between the former and Catholic community (Table 2).

*Longitudinal analysis.* To assess the stability of the above patterns of cross-sectional findings, another repeated measures ANOVA was conducted. This analysis



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included perceptions of overlap between Northern Ireland and Protestant community and the former and Catholic community as a within-subjects factor. Additionally, a further within-subjects factor consisted of the two levels of time (T1; T2). Finally, Community membership (Protestant; Catholic) was entered as a between-subjects factor. Results yielded a significant effect only for perceptions of overlap between the common ingroup identity and the ingroup categories,  $F(1, 41) = 26.00, p < .001$ . Similar to before, Protestant and Catholic participants reported to perceive more overlap between Northern Ireland and the Protestant Community than the former and the Catholic community (Table 2). Importantly, these perceptions did not change over-time,  $F(1, 41) = 1.23, p > .10$ . All other factors and their interactions failed to produce significant effects.

In summary, this study revealed two important insights. First, intergroup identity perceptions among our samples were stable over-time. Time as a factor did not exert any significant effects on these perceptions. Second, the findings yielded a larger overlap between the common ingroup category (Northern Ireland) and the ingroup identity category (Protestant) than between the former and the ingroup identity category (Catholic), suggesting the presence of ingroup projection among our Protestant participants.

### STUDY 3

The present research established that 'Northern Ireland' is perceived by the Protestant and Catholic groups as the most inclusive superordinate category. Secondly, longitudinal data provided evidence that these intergroup identity perceptions are of robust and enduring nature. Thirdly, the hypothesis that the Protestant group undergoes a process of ingroup projection - and therefore perceives a higher degree of

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overlap between their ingroup category and the superordinate category than the Catholic group - was also supported by longitudinal data. In the final study, we were interested in replicating the previous findings regarding the superordinate category (Northern Ireland) and its link to intergroup forgiveness attitudes (Noor et al., 2008, study 2).

To recap, then, it was found that identification with the immediate ingroup (i.e. Catholic or Protestant) predicted attitudes towards outgroup forgiveness negatively, while identification with the common ingroup identity category (i.e. 'Northern Ireland') predicted the same attitudes positively. However, this latter association was moderated by community membership, such that only the Catholic participants' attitudes towards outgroup forgiveness benefited from the identification with the common ingroup identity category. In contrast, such an identification failed to predict the Protestant sample's outgroup forgiveness attitudes. These findings were further made complicated by the fact that among the Protestants the absence of association between identification with the superordinate category and positive outgroup forgiveness attitudes could not be explained due to a lack of identification with 'Northern Ireland'. In fact, the strength of identification with this category was higher for Protestants than for Catholics. In Study 3, we aimed to replicate the above findings.

### *Method*

*Participants.* Three hundred and seven university students at two universities in Northern Ireland participated in the study (154 men, 153 women;  $M = 20.41$  years,  $SD = 3.60$ ). They identified themselves with the two major communities associated with the Northern Irish conflict: Catholic ( $n = 166$ ) and Protestant ( $n = 141$ ).

*Procedure and measures.* All participants completed the same questionnaire under the supervision of their lecturers. The front page of the questionnaire asked

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them to provide demographic information and to indicate the community to which they belonged (including a choice of 'others').

The following measures were 7-point Likert-type scales (1 = *strongly disagree* and 7 = *strongly agree*):

*Intergroup forgiveness.* Identical to Noor and colleagues' scale of intergroup forgiveness (2008, study 2), six items assessed participants' propensity to forgive the outgroup. For example: 'I am able to forgive the other community for their misdeeds' and 'Getting even with the other community for their misdeed is not important.' These items formed a reliable scale (*Cronbach's*  $\alpha = .82$ ).

*Categorisation measures.* Participants reported their degree of identification with the common ingroup identity category, followed by establishing the extent to which they identified with the ingroup category. Identification with these categories was measured in identical ways as assessed by Noor and colleagues (2008), using an adapted version of the six-item scale developed by (Brown, Condor, Matthews, Wade, & Williams, 1986). The essential difference between the two scales was the substitution of 'Northern Ireland' with 'my community'. Example items are as follows: 'I identify with the society in Northern Ireland' or 'I like being a member of my community.' Both scales proved reliable, (*Cronbach's*  $\alpha = .84$  and  $.90$  respectively).

The results from a factor analysis yielded that participants were able to discriminate between the super - and subordinate identity categories. Two factors were identified, with the items of the ingroup identification measure loading on the first factor (minimum loading =  $.58$ ; maximum loading  $.91$ ). The items of the common ingroup identification measure loaded on the second factor (minimum loading =  $.46$ ; maximum loading =  $.91$ ). The range of the cross-loadings was

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(minimum loading = .08; maximum loading = .25).

Upon completion of the study, participants were thanked and debriefed thoroughly.

### *Results & Discussion*

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

*Predicting intergroup forgiveness.* To test our hypotheses, we conducted a three step hierarchical regression analysis. We report here results from the three-step regression analysis without including gender and age as further predictor variables. This is because a previous analysis revealed no significant changes in the main results by including gender and age.

In order to replicate possible differences across the Catholic and Protestant sub-samples, religious community membership (dummy-coded -1 = *Protestant* and 1 = *Catholic*) was entered as Step 1. Ingroup identification and common ingroup identification were included in Step 2. Finally, Step 3 comprised the interaction terms between community membership and each of the main predictors (see Table 4). All continuous predictor variables were centred. The Catholic and Protestant samples reported almost identical forgiveness attitudes, ( $M_{Catholic} = 5.19$ ,  $SD = 1.31$ ;  $M_{Protestant} = 5.15$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ ).

Step 1 explained no variance (.00) in forgiveness,  $F_{change}(1, 305) = .08$ ,  $p = .77$ . Community membership did not predict forgiveness attitudes. Step 2 accounted for 20% of the variance in intergroup forgiveness attitudes,  $F_{change}(2, 303) = 38.08$ ,  $p < .001$ . In line with previous findings, ingroup identification predicted outgroup forgiveness attitudes negatively, whereas identification with the common ingroup category predicted outgroup forgiveness attitudes positively.

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Step 3 explained an additional 3 % of the variance in forgiveness,  $F_{change}(2, 301) = 5.00, p < .01$ . As expected, this step showed that community membership moderated the relationship between identification with the common ingroup category and forgiveness attitudes. The simple slope analyses revealed that this relationship was positive only for the Catholic participants ( $B = .42, t = 6.25, p < .001$ ), but non-significant for the Protestant sample ( $B = .07, t = .68, p = .50$ ).

The above results were a successful replication of the findings reported by Noor and colleagues (2008, study 2).

To recap, the findings of Study 3 replicated previous findings ensuring that they were robust, even in a politically unstable intergroup setting such as the one in Northern Ireland. Consistent with the CIIM's predictions, ingroup identification predicted outgroup forgiveness attitudes negatively, while identification with the common ingroup category predicted the same attitudes positively. Further, only the Catholic sample's forgiveness attitudes were positively predicted by the common ingroup category, while the Protestant sample's attitudes to forgive the outgroup were not. As previously found, the findings for the Protestant participants could not be explained due their disidentification with the common ingroup category ( $M_{Protestant-id-Northern\ Ireland} = 5.22$ , relative to  $M_{Catholic-id-Northern\ Ireland} = 4.39$ ).

Noor and colleagues (2008) interpreted this pattern of results among the Protestant participants due to their lack of sufficient differentiation between the content of the present common ingroup identity and their ingroup identity. This interpretation was supported by the positive and moderate correlation between these two modes of identification among the Protestant participants and the absence of a correlation between the same variables for the Catholic sample. The current study

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replicated the above pattern of findings by revealing a sizeable, positive correlation between the ingroup and common ingroup identification measures for the Protestant group ( $r = .61, p = .01$ ), whereas no correlation between the same measures was found for the Catholic sample ( $r = .09, p = .25$ ). The replication of these findings indicates that they are of potentially enduring nature.

### GENERAL DISCUSSION

In pursuit of expanding the focus of research on intergroup relations to the study of positive psychological outcomes, this article aimed to shed light on the application of the CIIM and its role in intergroup forgiveness within the context of an intense intergroup conflict. The current work contributed to answering some important questions that had arisen from the recent research examining the scope of the CIIM for fostering intergroup forgiveness attitudes among the conflicting Protestant and Catholic groups in Northern Ireland.

The CIIM is based on the core assumption that through the modification of categorisation processes, intergroup boundaries related to collective identities can be altered (Dovidio, Gaertner & Saguy, 2007). The ability to change perceptions of intergroup boundaries provides a useful intervention strategy for improving hostile intergroup relations. This strategy allows groups to recategorise their former outgroup members into new ingroup members and extend the ingroup favouring bias to them. Such an extension of ingroup favouring bias to the outgroup would be of huge importance concerning the decision to forgive the outgroup for its past wrongdoings. For example, it would be particularly helpful in terms of conflict de-escalation and ending the cycle of intergroup revenge.

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Initial research applying the CIIM to the field setting of the intergroup conflict between the Catholic and Protestant communities in Northern Ireland reported a mixed message on the usefulness of this model. Whereas the Catholic group's willingness to forgive Protestants benefited from identifying with the common ingroup identity category, such a relationship was non-existent among the Protestant sample (Noor et al., 2008, study 2). The present research's contribution was to test a number of possible factors that could plausibly explain the above findings.

First, we wanted to rule out that previous research may have used an inadequate common ingroup identity category - one which was not perceived as an inclusive category by both groups - and thereby failing to produce results in line with the CIIM's predictions. To do so, in Study 1 we examined the degree to which Protestant and Catholic participants unanimously perceived 'Northern Ireland' as the most inclusive superordinate category relative to a number of other viable categories. Our results yielded that the only category that both groups agreed to be the most inclusive and incorporating of both communities was 'Northern Ireland', as assumed by previous research. Therefore, the explanation for the absence of a significant relationship between the Protestant group's forgiveness attitudes and their identification with the superordinate category due to an inadequate choice of the superordinate category was not supported.

One could, however, argue that, for example, at least for the Catholic participants 'Ireland' was viewed as an inclusive category, almost to the same degree as 'Northern Ireland' (see Table 1). While the present data leave little doubt about 'Ireland' serving as a strong contender for a possible superordinate category for the Catholic participants, the objective of this study was to identify the category that was perceived as the most inclusive category by *both* of the groups. Looking at the mean

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value of inclusiveness assigned to 'Ireland' by the Protestant participants ( $M = 2.51$ ), clearly this category fails to qualify as a common ingroup identity category.

The current research also shed light on the stability of the intergroup identity perceptions held by the Protestant and Catholic groups. In spite of an unstable political context, both groups seemed to hold clear views of themselves and each other in terms of the various identity categories in that region. Moreover, in Study 2, we aimed to test the hypothesis that the Protestant group may undergo the process of ingroup projection (Noor and colleagues, 2008, study 2).

It was revealed that not only did the Protestant sample perceive a large overlap between the categories, Northern Ireland and Protestant, but, interestingly, the Catholic group seemed to agree with these outgroup perceptions. Agreement on issues between the two communities in Northern Ireland tend to be rare, thus to find an almost unanimous agreement over the psychological distance between important regional identity categories among our Protestant and Catholic participants in the current study gives us firm confidence in the above results. This unanimous agreement by the two groups over the psychological distance between the subordinate and superordinate categories also resisted change over-time. The findings, however, require further validation with a larger sample and longer time lag for a better test of stability of these findings.

Finally, we aimed to replicate the absence of association between the Protestant group's willingness to forgive Catholics and their identification with the superordinate category, as reported by Noor et al. 2008. Study 3, therefore, was an independent replication of this lack of association, using the same measures that were employed by previous research. The findings of this study yielded the exact pattern of



results reported by previous work, thus speaking in favour of their robustness. Once again, identification with the superordinate category predicted positive attitudes towards forgiving the outgroup for the Catholic participants, but not for the Protestant participants.

Theoretically, these results encourage the CIIM to make room within its framework for the critical role of the Ingroup Projection Model (IPM) / perceived psychological distance between the subordinate and superordinate categories (Wenzel et al., 2007). Thus, it may well be the case that the degree of success of a superordinate category is at least partly determined by such perceptions of psychological distance held by the conflicting groups. Calls of this nature echo previous calls made by researchers who have developed and found empirical support for the IPM (Kessler & Mummendey, 2001; Waldzus & Mummendey, 2004). The IPM proposes that dominant groups usually tend to project their ingroup values and other identity content onto the superordinate category. This is, of course, an effective way of increasing the psychological overlap between the subordinate and superordinate categories. The combined findings from our studies also indicate that our Protestant participants may have gone through a similar projection process. At this stage, the present research provides a basis for a call to seek the potential integration of the CIIM and the IPM in future works.

What is further interesting is that the overlap between the categories 'Protestant' and 'Northern Ireland' is also perceived by the Catholic sample. One possible reason for such an agreement between the Catholic and Protestant samples over this particular overlap could be that when Catholics think of 'Northern Ireland', the sheer numerical majority of Protestants in this region may influence the Catholics'

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perceptions concerning the overlap between these categories. Additionally, these perceptions might be further reinforced, given that historically Northern Ireland was established primarily to guard the Protestants' constitutional interests against the Catholic Irish republicanism in 1921.

Importantly, what these findings highlight is that, despite the fact that our Catholic samples viewed 'Northern Ireland' overlapping more with the 'Protestant' category and that there was no significant correlations between their identifications with the categories 'Catholic community & Northern Ireland', their identification with 'Northern Ireland' still predicted positive outgroup forgiveness attitudes. These results indicate that the post-conflict generation of Catholics seem to be able to embrace 'Northern Ireland' as a possible superordinate identity category, which appears to bear conflict-reducing consequences for their intergroup relations with the Protestant community.

The above findings have important complex implications for practitioners in the field of conflict mediation and community work. On one hand, the category 'Northern Ireland' seems to provide a promising path to the development of more positive outgroup attitudes among the Catholic participants, particularly in relation to their specific attitudes towards Protestants and the legacy of the conflict. On the other hand, no correlation was found between these positive attitudes and identification with 'Northern Ireland' in our Protestant sample. Thus, an important challenge for future research and practice to focus on would be to harvest the positive impact of such an identity category for the Catholic community, and simultaneously encourage the Protestant community to allow for a degree of differentiation between the contents of the categories 'Protestant & Northern Irish'.

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We acknowledge that in contexts of prolonged intergroup conflict finding the least contentious superordinate category, in which both sub-groups feel included, is rather complex. One plausible account of the complexity revolving around ‘Northern Ireland’ as a superordinate category is its connotations of the permanence of partition for the Catholics, in contrast to its apparent acceptance by the Protestant since it ensures remaining part of the UK. Another issue relates to whether an agreement between conflicting groups over the inclusiveness of a superordinate category necessarily qualifies the category as a common ingroup identity category. Put differently, can we assume that perceiving a social category, (e.g., ‘Northern Ireland’), as the most inclusive category by both sub-groups (e.g., Catholics & Protestants) indicates a possible common ingroup identity category? Although we are reminded by the original theoreticians of the CIIM (Gaertner et al., 1993; 2000; Dovidio et al., 2007) that the perceived inclusiveness of a superordinate category is core to its functioning as a common ingroup identity category, simply equating perceptions of inclusiveness with identification would be imprudent.

Given the complexity of natural intergroup settings, the final list of the five potential superordinate categories for Study 1, however, was derived based on the first author’s consulting local community workers and conflict mediation organisations in Northern Ireland. Specifically, it was asked: ‘*What are the different labels that people here use to refer to this region?*’ Thus, the present tested labels were specifically chosen by the authors based on the insights offered by local practitioners.

Relating the above raised issues to our own work, it could be argued that in Study 1 we make the assumption of viewing perceived inclusiveness as a proxy index

of social identification, because we did not measure the degree of participants' identification with each of the five available regional descriptors.

We acknowledge that Study 1 would have benefited from a direct identification measure. However, a lack of such a measure, we argue, still does not undermine our overall findings and conclusions because they are based on the combination of *all* three studies reported here. That is, although we mainly measured perceptions of inclusiveness of the potential common identity categories in Study 1, we did measure our participants' actual social identification with the category 'Northern Ireland' using a traditional and robust identification measure in Study 3. The presence of social identification with this category among both the Protestant and Catholic samples was testified through the mean scores, which were for both groups above the mid-point of the measured scale. More importantly, such an identification measure predicted positive outgroup forgiveness attitudes in the Catholic sample, further furnishing evidence for 'Northern Ireland' as a viable common ingroup identity category.

Acknowledging some limitations of the present work, we highlight the fact that, although all the reported studies were set in an intergroup conflict field setting, establishing causal processes was neglected. This was, in parts, due to the particular focus of our research to replicate previous research as exactly as possible. Nevertheless, in Study 2, we did examine the stability of perceptions of psychological distance between categories over-time, which further substantiated the robustness of our correlational evidence.

Another limitation that needs to be attended to in future research is whether the relationship between intergroup forgiveness attitudes and identification with the

superordinate category is indeed mediated by the perceived psychological overlap between the subordinate and superordinate categories. With the current research we have taken the first step towards establishing that the group for which there exists no significant relationship between its forgiveness attitudes and identification with the superordinate category (Study 3) also reports a large overlap between its subordinate and the superordinate categories (Study 2).

We would like to reiterate that the current research findings and conclusions are meant to be understood as a net result of *three* studies. We are fully aware that none of these studies could be considered alone. In fact, the real strength of this paper is that it identifies a somewhat anomalous finding from past research and explores it systematically within three neatly linked studies.

We also note that it would be imprudent to make hasty extrapolations about the general population trends from the current findings, given this work did not use representative samples. Nor can the potential effects of a host of other related factors (e.g., contact effects due to the participants attending the same university, see for a review Brown & Hewstone, 2005) on the present findings be ruled out. Moreover, due to the gender imbalance in our samples, the potential impact of gender differences on the present findings may not have been revealed. However, previous research conducted in Northern Ireland, employing larger samples with an adequate gender balance, failed to detect such differences (e.g., Noor et al., 2008, Study 2).

As this general discussion already indicates, broadening the focus of research on intergroup relations to the study of positive psychological outcomes seems to afford psychology with further fertile ground not only for theory and research advancement, but also for informing applied work.

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TABLE 1: Means and standard deviations of perceptions concerning superordinate categories

<u>Study 1: (N = 61)</u>			
Superordinate category	Community	Mean	Standard Deviation
1. Northern Ireland	Catholic	4.27 <sup>a</sup>	1.47
	Protestant	4.73 <sup>a</sup>	1.61
2. Ulster	Catholic	2.70 <sup>a</sup>	1.36
	Protestant	3.53 <sup>b</sup>	1.95
3. Six Counties	Catholic	3.50 <sup>a</sup>	1.30
	Protestant	3.37 <sup>a</sup>	1.31
4. Ireland	Catholic	3.98 <sup>a</sup>	1.80
	Protestant	2.51 <sup>b</sup>	1.45
5. Britain	Catholic	2.41 <sup>a</sup>	1.48
	Protestant	3.33 <sup>b</sup>	1.67

*Means within a category that do not share a superscript are significantly different ( $p < .05$ ).*

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TABLE 2: Means and standard deviations for measured variables

Study 2: Overlap	Community	Mean	Standard Deviation
Overlap-NI-Protestant			
Time 1	Protestant	5.20	1.41
	Catholic	5.41	1.23
Time 2	Protestant	5.23	1.17
	Catholic	5.75	1.05
Overlap-NI-Catholic			
Time 1	Protestant	3.74	1.57
	Catholic	3.35	1.50
Time 2	Protestant	3.93	1.81
	Catholic	3.83	1.53

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TABLE 3: Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations between forgiveness attitudes and the different identification modes

<u>(Study 3: N = 307)</u>	Catholic Sample			Protestant Sample		
	Scale	1	2	3	1	2
1. Intergroup forgiveness	-	-.32**	.40**		-.39**	-.21*
2. Ingroup identity		-	.09			.61**
3. Common ingroup identity			-			
Mean	5.19	5.42	4.39	5.15	5.00	5.22
Standard deviation	1.31	1.29	1.51	1.15	1.44	1.33

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

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

Study 3	Intergroup Forgiveness		
	B	SE	$\beta$
<b>Step 1</b>			
Community membership (CM)	-.04	.14	-.02
<b>Step 2</b>			
Ingroup identity	-.40	.05	-.45***
Common ingroup identity	.26	.05	.31***
<b>Step 3</b>			
Ingroup identity X CM	.02	.10	.02
Common ingroup identity X CM	-.31	.10	-.23**

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