The process of becoming ‘we’ in an intergroup conflict context

How enhancing intergroup moral similarities leads to common-ingroup identity

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Abstract

With four studies (N = 332) set in a post-conflict context of Bosnia and Herzegovina and with members of two different ethnic groups (Bosniaks and Serbs), we have demonstrated how perceptions of intergroup moral similarity can act as an important precursor of common-ingroup identity. Research on common-ingroup identity has mainly focused on consequences and benefits of such inclusive social categorizations. However, very little is yet known about processes and conditions that could facilitate such inclusive social categorizations. In this paper, we report both cross-sectional as well as experimental evidence demonstrating how perceptions of intergroup moral similarity boost common-ingroup identifications in socially relevant context using members of real adversary social groups. Moreover, we show that learning about outgroups’ morality (with one vignette and one longitudinal intervention study) can facilitate such inclusive social categorizations even long-term.

Keywords: common-ingroup identity, intergroup perceptions, groups’ morality, moral exemplars, post-conflict contexts

Introduction

Contexts defined by intergroup conflict, more so than any other social context, are the ultimate social-psychological environment for investigating conditions that can contribute to either further intergroup differentiation or some forms of intergroup inclusiveness. Given that both theory and practice demonstrate that various expressions of intergroup inclusiveness (e.g., inclusive social identifications) contribute to improvement of intergroup relations, the question of which social-psychological processes might facilitate such useful intergroup constellations appears to be relevant. In this research, we focus on one such societally useful and inclusive concept, common-ingroup identity, and investigate its potential precursors. The main contribution of this work lies in answering the question of possible social-psychological antecedents of common-ingroup identifications.

Social Categorizations: Us vs. Them

Social psychological literature, thus far, has documented a wide range of empirical evidence demonstrating possible detrimental consequences of the social categorization process differentiating “us” vs. “them” for intergroup relations (Allport, 1954; Tajfel, 1969; Brewer, 1979). Given that this process of social categorization is not only structural but also psychological in its nature, perceptions of differences between groups can exhibit malleability. Consequently, such malleability of social perceptions can result in different forms ranging from no (perceived) to exaggerated intergroup differences. So far, literature has consistently demonstrated that harsh intergroup differentiation (ingroup vs. outgroup) produce a range of biased intergroup responses: ingroup favoritism (Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971; Otten & Moskowitz, 2000); memory biases (Park & Rothbart, 1982); fundamental attribution error (Pettigrew, 1979); linguistic biases (Maass, Salvi, Arcuri, &

Preprint: THE PROCESS OF BECOMING “WE”

Semin, 1989), dehumanization (Demoulin, et al., 2009; Simon & Gutsell, 2021) and ultimately less prosocial intergroup behavior (Voci, 2006).

Common-Ingroup Identity Model

Fortunately, social categorization is also a dynamic process offering a psychological opportunity to alter the level of category differentiation and inclusiveness. One such approach is the common ingroup identity model proposed by Gaertner et al. (2000). By now, this approach has received wide empirical support for how social re-categorizations into more inclusive groups can reduce intergroup biases. Positive emotions, prosocial evaluations and prosocial behavior that initially were reserved for ingroup members are extended to former outgroup members as they are now perceived to be a part of the “we”.

The common ingroup identity model (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2014) proposes that different types of intergroup interdependence (e.g., intergroup contact), social context (e.g., social norms) or group differentiation processes (e.g., perceived similarity) can alter individuals’ cognitive representations into one group (“we”) or two subgroups within a more inclusive group (e.g., dual identity or “Us + Them = We”). Such social re-categorization ultimately results in more positive cognitive, affective and behavioral orientations towards former outgroup members.

In this paper we examine the effects of a specific group differentiation dimension (intergroup moral similarity) on inducing more socially inclusive identity categories for members of former adversary groups in a post-conflict setting. The social usefulness and applicability of the common ingroup identity approach to reduce intergroup biases and promote prosociality in conflict contexts has received empirical support. For example, Wohl and Branscombe (2005) showed that increasing the salience of Jewish students’ ‘human identity’ vs. “Jewish identity” increased their perceptions of similarity between Jews and

Germans and their willingness to forgive Germans for the Holocaust. Similarly, research in a post-conflict context by Čehajić, Brown and Castano (2008) demonstrated that former victim group members who reported to exhibit higher identification with a common ingroup category at the national level (which includes former adversary group) exhibited greater willingness to forgive and engage in more approach-oriented behavioral orientations. Additionally, research by Shnabel, Halabi and Noor (2013) conducted in an ongoing conflict context demonstrated how inducing Jews and Palestinians with a common victim identity increased forgiveness through decreasing competitive victimhood beliefs.

Although there is substantial evidence supportive of the usefulness of common ingroup identities for reducing intergroup biases even in highly demanding societal contexts such as conflict, a question of how to enable and facilitate such cognitive inclusive representations of social groups has been less examined.

It is plausible that accessibility of common ingroup category stems from perceived similarity between the ingroup and relevant outgroups. According to the well-established dual perspective model of social cognition (Abele & Wojciszke, 2014; Wojciszke, 2005; Leach, Ellemers, & Barreto, 2007), there are two central dimensions that people use for forming both individual and group perceptions. First of them is focused on competence-related traits, whereas the second is focused on communion-related traits (such as morality). In this paper, we would like to propose that perceived similarity in the domain of morality is an important antecedent of common ingroup identity. We present a set of studies that examine the effects of inducing perceptions of intergroup moral similarity (emphasizing similarities between ingroup and outgroup in the domain of morality) on common ingroup identification at a national level in a post-conflict context.

Why Perceptions of Intergroup Moral Similarity Matter

Interpersonal as well as intergroup research has established that morality judgments are fundamental in the evaluation of others (Brambilla, Rusconi, Sacchi, & Cherubini, 2011; Leach et al., 2007; Wojciszke, 2005) and, importantly, determine behavioral tendencies towards others. For example, people tend to avoid individuals depicted as lacking moral qualities in comparison to those depicted as highly moral (Brambilla, Sacchi, Pagliaro, & Ellemers, 2013). Information about the morality of others, perceptions of others' motives, and previous experiences with others jointly determine inference of morality (Reeder, Kumar, Hesson-McInnis, & Trafimow, 2002) which, in turn, act as the most important dimension of evaluation of both ingroups and outgroups. Furthermore, research by Brambilla and colleagues (Brambilla & Leach, 2014; Brambilla et al., 2011; Brambilla et al., 2013) has consistently demonstrated that perceptions and judgments of others' morality (rather than competence or other aspects of the warmth dimension such as sociability) are fundamental for impression formation as well as for determining human behavior towards outgroup members. Additionally, morality appears to be a domain that social groups wish to be associated with. Given the general and well-established tendency of humans to engage in more positive evaluations of their group, morality (among other dimensions) becomes something that people start to compete for (Brambilla & Leach, 2014). In other words, social groups are likely to engage in psychological competition for the higher moral status by ascribing more morality to their own group and stripping away some morality from other groups.

Furthermore, in intergroup conflict contexts, being harmed by outgroups additionally contributes to perceptions of outgroup immorality (Martijn, Spears, Van der Pligt, & Jakobs, 1992). In such contexts, immoral behavior perpetrated by outgroup members may encourage the inference that the outgroup is an essentially immoral entity (Reeder & Brewer, 1979). The

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outgroup is ascribed negative (such as immoral) essentialized traits whilst morality is seen as an exclusive property of the ingroup. These attributions can contribute to beliefs of intergroup moral differentiations or beliefs that ‘they’ are not as moral as ‘we’ are. Such beliefs, in turn, are strongly associated with more destructive intergroup emotions and discriminatory behavioral tendencies.

In our research, we have argued that recognizing the importance of morality judgements is vital in understanding and ultimately changing intergroup relations in conflict and post-conflict contexts. Furthermore, we have argued that creating perceptions of intergroup moral similarity could positively regulate intergroup relations by facilitating more inclusive social perceptions (Čehajić-Clancy & Bilewicz, 2021).

Inducing Changes in Beliefs about Groups

Research on implicit beliefs (Chiu, Dweck, Tong, & Fu, 1997) has a longstanding empirical record demonstrating that beliefs about human nature (fixed vs. malleable) have profound effects on human functioning across domains. Such implicit beliefs appear to also have effects on attitudes towards other groups (Hong et al., 2004; Levy, Stroessner, & Dweck, 1998). Relevant to this research, work by Halperin, Russell, Trzesniewski, Gross and Dweck (2011) shows that changing beliefs about outgroups (fixed vs. malleable nature of ‘who they are’) has significant effects on intergroup emotions (outgroup hatred) and attitudes towards peace processes in realistic conflict environments. Induction of this incremental theory about groups was accomplished by means of an article that argued that groups do not have an inherent moral or immoral character. Induction of this particular belief of malleability of group’s nature was effective for facilitating more prosocial intergroup responses.

Our current research builds on this empirical evidence which has demonstrated that it is indeed, at least psychologically, possible to induce perceptions about morality of former adversary groups and in that way deviate from default beliefs about outgroups’ immorality. In thinking about how to induce such perceptive changes, we borrow from the recent empirical evidence on moral exemplars.

Enhancing Intergroup Moral Similarity through Moral Exemplars

Recent empirical evidence on learning about relevant outgroup moral exemplars points to some promises in the domain of how to improve intergroup relations. More specifically, review of existing studies provided by Čehajić-Clancy and Bilewicz (2020) argues that stories about outgroup individuals who have risked some important aspects of their life to save the life of an ingroup member (historic moral exemplars) have the capacity to induce how we view outgroup, as a whole, and consequently determine our behavior towards relevant outgroup members. More specifically, research by Witkowska, Beneda, Čehajić-Clancy and Bilewicz (2019) conducted in Poland and investigating Polish-German relationships showed that Polish participants who learned about German historic moral exemplars (from the WWII) in comparison to those who did not read such a story, reported higher levels of intergroup trust and intentions to engage in contact with Germans as a whole. Furthermore, research by Beneda, Witkowska, Khachatryan, Grigoryan and Bilewicz (2019) set in the context of Armenia and investigating Armenians’ attitudes towards Turks reported increased perceptions of outgroup morality and intergroup forgiveness upon learning about Turkish moral exemplars who saved Armenians during the conflict at that time.

Recent research by Janković and Čehajić-Clancy (2021) investigated whether stories about present (not necessarily historic) moral exemplars could also facilitate more prosocial intergroup outcomes. They have found that Serbs who read a story about a Bosniak

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individual (as a member of a former adversary group) who came to a rescue of a Serbian women’s national volleyball team from in a public café reported significantly higher levels of outgroup morality, warmth, and trust in comparison to those participants who read the story about the same incident devoid of information about outgroup moral exemplar.

Considering the fact that people’s positive collective self-perception is based predominantly on morality dimension (Brambilla & Leach, 2014) and that self-morality is taken for granted (Abele & Wojciszke, 2014), we believe that narratives about outgroup moral exemplars could be considered as priming of intergroup moral similarity. As common people view their ingroup as highly moral, information about cases of outgroup morality should decrease ingroup moral distinctiveness and – instead – facilitate intergroup moral similarity.

Therefore, in the current research, we use the moral exemplar paradigm to experimentally manipulate perceptions of intergroup moral similarity and investigate the effects on inducing more inclusive social categorizations (common-ingroup identifications). We report findings from four studies (pilot, correlation, experimental and intervention study) set in a post-conflict context of Bosnia and Herzegovina using members of real antagonistic groups. Furthermore, the context of BIH is ideal and socially realistic for investigating common-ingroup identification as both more exclusive (e.g., identification with a primary ethno-national group such as Bosniaks) and more inclusive (identification with being Bosnian as a common-ingroup category) are both socially realistic and observable forms of social identifications.

Conceptualization and Measurement of the Common Ingroup Identification

One could argue that in contexts of highly salient social identities, demands to relinquish ‘primary’ group identities and to infuse both ingroup and outgroup members into

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exclusively one category might not be possible or even undesired. Maintaining and recognizing subgroups within the inclusive common group might actually be more effective for reducing intergroup biases (Allport, 1954) in specific social contexts simultaneously meeting the psychological demands for distinctiveness (Jetten, Spears, & Postmes, 2004). Such dual identity approach (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2014) allows for simultaneous salience of separate (subgroups) and superordinate (common ingroup) identities. Relevant to the context of this research, research by Richeson and Nussbaum (2004) show that interethnic attitudes are more favorable when primed with multicultural (dual identity) ideology in contrast to an assimilation (e.g., one-group representation) ideology. Thus, and in this research, we have measured common-ingroup identification as a category which does not exclude primary social (ethnic) identification but rather includes all relevant and realistic sub-categories.

Pilot Study

With this study we aimed to replicate the overarching idea of the research on common in-group identifications as being associated with positive intergroup responses. In that spirit, we aimed to compare realistic and pre-existing differences between different levels of social categorizations on intentions to engage in intergroup contact in a post-conflict country of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Method

Participants and Procedure. To examine and compare pre-existing differences between different levels of social categorizations, data was collected from one (ethnically heterogeneous) high school in Sarajevo (Sarajevo School of Science and Technology Gymnasium). Based on socio-demographic characteristics of students in this particular high school, we expected to find students who would self-categorize themselves as Bosnians

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(common-ingroup identity) in addition to a majority of students who identify themselves as Bosniaks (majority ethnic group living in Sarajevo).

Hence, the selection of such an ethnically and socially diversified high school was purposeful. Data was collected in one day using a short five-minute-long survey.

Participation was voluntary and completely anonymous. In total, 55 high school students with the average age of 16.64 years ($SD = 1.05$) filled out the survey (25 female, 28 male, and 2 not indicated).

Measures. *Self-categorization* was measured with one question: “*In the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina, I consider myself as belonging to _____ group.*” This way, participants were free to write (not choose) a social group that they consider themselves to be part of.

Contact intentions were measured with questions capturing prosocial contact intentions towards other ethnic groups. These items were adopted from the study by Čehajić et al. (2008) and used 1-5 (dis)agreement scale. Those items were: “*I am willing to have members of other nationalities as my neighbors*”; “*I am willing to have members of other nationalities as my close friends*”; “*I am willing to live in a country where we all live together*”; “*I am willing that member of my family marries someone who is a member of different ethnic group*”; “*I am willing to marry someone who is a member of other ethnic group*”. They formed a highly reliable scale with Cronbach’s alpha of .91.

Results

As expected, in this particular high school, 24 out of 55 participants identified as Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslim); 26 participants identified as Bosnians (common ingroup-identity) and five participants wrote other social categories that were not included in the later and main analysis.

The main question of this study was to examine whether prosocial contact intentions were indeed different between these two groups of participants (those who identify with more exclusive social categories such as Bosniaks and those who identify with a common or more inclusive social category of Bosnians). T-test for independent samples was conducted to examine these differences. The results indicate $t(48) = -3.34, p < .002$ that intentions to engage in prosocial intergroup contact was indeed lower for those who identify with the ingroup $M = 3.78, SD = .99$ in comparison to those who identify with a common-ingroup $M = 4.58, SD = .68$. In conclusion and in line with the literature, common-ingroup identification in socially diversified contexts do indeed predict more favorable intergroup orientations. The question that still remains under-examined in social-psychological research are precursors of such inclusive (e.g., common-ingroup) social categorization.

Study 1

The aim of study 1 was to examine the main question of this research hence the relationship between intergroup moral similarity and common-ingroup identification. We expected that participants who perceive higher levels of intergroup moral similarity (between the ingroup and other context-relevant social groups) would also be more likely to identify with a common-ingroup category.

Method

Participants and Procedure. The study was conducted at the SSST University (Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina) using a ten-minute-long paper and pencil survey. Data was collected in small groups of students over the course of three days. In total, data was collected from 90 participants who were asked to self-categorize themselves in the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina. 72 participants indicated that they self-categorize themselves as

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being Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims) and it was those 72 participants who remained in the further analyses (35 f, 25 m, 12 missing; average age of 20.86 years ($SD = 3.18$)).

Participation was voluntary and entirely anonymous.

Measures. *Intergroup moral similarity* was measured with two items. One item captured perception of intergroup similarity “*I think that people of other ethnic groups in BIH are just as same as people of my group*” and one item aimed at capturing perception of intergroup moral similarity “*I think that people of other ethnic groups are just as moral as people in my group*”. These two items were computed together to form a final scale of intergroup moral similarity with Cronbach’s alpha of .60.

Common-ingroup identity was measured with one item: “*I identify strongly with being Bosnian and Herzegovnian which includes all ethnic and national groups*”.

Contact intentions were measured with the same questions as in the pilot study forming a reliable scale with Cronbach’s alpha of .77.

All questions were answered on a 5-point (dis)agreement scale.

Results

As seen in table 1, all variables were positively and significantly correlated with each other. Additional examination of the relationship between intergroup moral similarity and common-ingroup identity was performed using partial correlations. We aimed to examine correlations between perception of a general intergroup similarity (first item) and common-ingroup identity (whilst controlling for the second item capturing a specific, moral, intergroup similarity) and vice versa. Partial correlations indicate that perception of intergroup moral similarity (second item) is significantly correlated with common-ingroup identity ($r = .28, p = .01$) when controlling for perception of general similarity. However, correlation between perception of general similarity and common-ingroup identity is not

Preprint: THE PROCESS OF BECOMING “WE”

significant when controlling for perception of moral similarity ($p = .11$). These results might indicate that moral, rather than general, similarity might be crucial for understanding potential precursors of more inclusive social categorizations.

Regression and Mediation Analyses. Finally, we aimed to test our predictive model of intergroup moral similarity predicting prosocial contact intentions through common ingroup identification. Given dual social identifications in this context, we aimed to control for the strength of ingroup identification. Using Hayes Process Macro bootstrapping method, the model indicated a good fit of the data with $F(3) = 11.76$; $p < .001$; $R^2 = .34$. More specifically, the effect of intergroup moral similarity on contact intentions was significantly mediated through common ingroup identification, $IE = .13$; $95\%CI = (.02, .28)$. The effects of ingroup identification were not significant ($p = .65$). See figure 1 for specific regression coefficients produced by regression and mediation analyses.

Given that the data obtained in this study was correlational, we performed the same regression analyses testing reverse mediation with common-ingroup identification predicting contact intentions through intergroup moral similarity. Even though this model fit the data equally well, the indirect effect of common-ingroup identification on contact intentions was not significant ($IE = .09$; $95\%CI = (.00, .21)$) indicating that creation of such social cognitions (intergroup moral similarity) might indeed be a precursor of more inclusive social categorizations (common-ingroup identity).

Discussion

This study conducted on a small sample of Bosniak students in a post-conflict setting of Bosnia and Herzegovina showed that the intention to engage in intergroup contact was affected by the strength of identification with a common ingroup. This identification was contingent on the perception of outgroup being similar to the ingroup in the domain of

morality. Although this study was performed on a small sample and its character was purely correlational, it seems that intergroup moral similarity is closely related to the ability to identify with a common ingroup and to a greater intention to engage in intergroup contact. Further studies, using experimental manipulations and larger samples were needed to accurately determine the direction and strength of these effects.

Study 2

The aim of this study was twofold. First, we aimed at replicating our predictive model on a different ethnic group living in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Serbs) whilst examining their levels of both exclusive (ingroup) and inclusive (common-ingroup) social identifications. This allowed us to assess the specificity of intergroup moral similarity in causing common ingroup identification as compared to other forms of identifications. The study was performed on a larger sample in order to accurately assess the strength of observed effects. Finally, we aimed at experimentally manipulating intergroup moral similarity, as the predicted precursor of common-ingroup identification, in order to confirm the causal relation between moral similarity and ability to identify with a common ingroup.

Method

Research design. For this study’s purpose, we employed an experimental design with two conditions. Perceptions of intergroup moral similarity were manipulated with a story of a moral exemplar – an individual who has risked an important aspect of his/her life to save the life of other social group members (Čehajić-Clancy & Bilewicz, 2020). Participants in both conditions read exactly the same story which was adopted from the recent published research set in the same context (Janković & Čehajić-Clancy, 2021). The story depicted a provocation and an attack of the female Serbian national volleyball team in a public bar. We manipulated

the identity of the moral exemplar of the individual who came to a rescue. In the experimental condition, participants were informed that the moral exemplar was a Bosniak (member of a context relevant outgroup). In the control condition, participants were told that the moral exemplar was a Serb (member of the ingroup). According to empirical evidence on the effects of learning about outgroup moral exemplars (Čehajić-Clancy & Bilewicz, 2020), we expected that participants in the outgroup moral exemplar condition (vs. ingroup) will be more likely to report greater perceptions of intergroup moral similarity.

Participants. Data was collected online using Qualtrics and accessing participants through targeted social media groups (different high schools across Republic of Srpska, a territory in Bosnia and Herzegovina mainly populated by Serbs). Data collection lasted five days and the final sample included 143 participants who all identified themselves as Serbs. Participants who did not indicate their ingroup identification were excluded from the analyses. Participants were randomly assigned to each condition resulting in 61 participants reading the outgroup moral exemplar story (experimental condition) and 82 participants reading the ingroup moral exemplar story (control condition).

Measures. All measures were exactly the same as in study 1 and formed reliable scales (Cronbach's alphas $> .75$). As in study 1, we measured the extent to which participants identify both with the ingroup (Serb) and the common-ingroup (Bosnian) in order to examine the unique and relative effects as well as relationships of common-ingroup identification with other variables. Main descriptive statistics is presented in table 2 indicating same patterns as in study 1.

Results

Manipulation checks. T-tests for independent samples were performed to investigate whether the story about outgroup (vs. ingroup) moral exemplar increased beliefs of

Preprint: THE PROCESS OF BECOMING “WE”

intergroup moral similarity. As expected, participants in the experimental condition ($N = 61$) reported (marginally) higher degree of intergroup moral similarity in comparison to participants in the control condition ($N = 82$). Furthermore, the experimental manipulation produced significant differences on common-ingroup identification as well as prosocial contact intentions (see table 3).

Regression and mediation analyses. As in study 1, we aimed to test our predictive model but this time using intergroup moral similarity as a dummy coded experimental manipulation where experimental condition was coded with +1 and the control condition with 0. As in study 1, we controlled for the effects of ingroup identification during the analyses. As predicted and in line with our previous results, experimentally manipulated intergroup moral similarity predicted both common-ingroup identification and contact intentions. Furthermore, the effects on prosocial contact intentions were significantly mediated through an increase in common-ingroup identification. Using Hayes Process Macro bootstrapping method, the model indicated a good fit of the data with $F(3) = 16.85$; $p < .001$; $R^2 = .26$. More specifically, the effect of experimentally manipulated intergroup moral similarity on contact intentions was significantly mediated through common ingroup identification, $IE = .16$; $95\%CI = (.02, .34)$. The effects of ingroup identification were not significant ($p = .06$) and, if anything, indicated a trend in a completely opposite direction. See figure 2 for regression coefficients.

Discussion

In this study and using a larger (and a different) sample from the same context we successfully manipulated perceptions of intergroup moral similarity. More specifically, we randomly presented young self-identified Serbs with stories of outgroup (Bosniak) moral exemplars and in that way boosted their perceptions of intergroup moral similarity. Central to

our research hypotheses, analyses showed that the effects of intergroup moral similarity on contact intentions can be explained by the strength of identification with a common-ingroup. The strength of this study is not only a replication of the previous study but determination of the direction of these hypothesized effects.

Study 3

Previous two studies demonstrated that perceptions of intergroup moral similarity can indeed be regarded as one important precursor of inclusive social categorizations. Perceiving members of relevant outgroups as not only similar but equally moral as the own group appears to be an important belief contributing to more inclusive social perceptions such as common-ingroup identification which, in turn, is related to a range of prosocial intergroup orientations.

Furthermore, and in line with existing evidence, study 2 demonstrated that learning about morally admirable behavior by an outgroup could be regarded as a meaningful social-psychological intervention contributing to more prosocial intergroup responses such as perceptions of intergroup moral similarity (Čehajić-Clancy & Bilewicz, 2021).

The goal of this study was to examine long-term effects of learning about outgroups' morality during conflict. This goal was achieved by examining the effects of youth peace education interventions on prosocial intergroup responses in a post-conflict society. Study 2 employed a vignette approach whereas this study examined how cooperative learning about morality of others through encounters or stories of moral exemplars might affect important prosocial outcomes such as intentions to engage in intergroup contact.

Method

Description of the intervention and procedure. This study gathered data from participants who participated in the youth peace education intervention during the summer of 2018 conducted in a post-conflict context of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The interventions were implemented through the collaborative effort of three non-governmental organizations (Youth Initiative for Human Rights in BiH; KVART Prijedor and Youth for Peace organization). The interventions were conducted in small groups of participants (8-12 participant per group). Data was collected from total six groups of participants.

The peace education intervention included:

- A) Contact with members from other ethnic group: groups of participants were ethnically mixed and included members from all relevant ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- B) Perspective-taking approach: all interventions aimed to teach the importance of perspective-taking and instructed participants to examine the conflict from the 90s also from the perspective of other ethnic groups
- C) Learning about morality of others: the ultimate goal of the intervention was to demonstrate that members from all ethnic groups, during the war, showed humanity and helped or rescued people who were not part of their own group. This goal was achieved through direct encounters or stories of historic moral exemplars.

In total, we gathered data from 62 participants (29 m, 33 f; average age 21.42 years ($SD = 2.41$)) who participated in these peace education interventions during the summer of 2018. Data was collected using surveys at three points of time: *time1* (just before the

Preprint: THE PROCESS OF BECOMING “WE”

intervention); *time2* (just after the intervention); and *time3* (eight months after the intervention). Participation in this intervention was entirely voluntary and all participants gave a consent to be surveyed. Data that was collected with surveys was anonymous.

Measures. *Outgroup heterogeneity* was measured with one item “*I think that members of other ethnic groups are all the same*” (recoded).

Empathy was measured with five items. Four items captured the ability and willingness to understand the conflict also from the perspective of other ethnic groups including an awareness that all ethnic groups have suffered (an emotional aspect of perspective-taking). Those items were: “*Sometimes I think of how members of other ethnic groups might have felt during the war.*”; “*I usually understand the standpoints of other ethnic groups.*”; “*I am trying to see things that happened during the war from the standpoint of other ethnic groups.*”; “*I am ready to accept the war perspectives and narratives other ethnic groups have.*” and “*I think all ethnic groups have suffered during the war.*”. All items formed a reliable scale at all three points of measurement with Cronbach’s alpha of .79; .83; and .79.

Common-ingroup identification was measured with two items. As in the previous studies, one item captured the extent to which participants identify with a common-ingroup category and one item measured feelings of pride for being a member of that common-ingroup identity.

Social distance was measured with two items: “*I would be reluctant to go to school where the majority of students are belonging to other ethnic groups.*” and “*I would be reluctant to move into a different town/village where other ethnic groups prevail.*”

All the above measures were adopted from the study by Čehajić et al. (2008) conducted in the same context. All items were measured on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Results

ANOVA for repeated measures was performed to examine the mean differences across three points of time using Bonferroni post-hoc comparisons.

Outgroup heterogeneity. The results indicate that the peace education intervention focused on learning about others’ morality marginally predicted changes in perceptions of outgroup heterogeneity $F(2,114.630) = 2.69; p = .07$. Even though the overall within-effects were marginal, Bonferroni post-hoc analysis indicated significant change between means at time 2 and time 3 ($p = .03$). Overall and as predicted, mean levels were higher after the intervention (see table).

Empathy. Same ANOVA for repeated measures was conducted to examine the mean differences of empathy across three time points. The results indicate a significant within-subjects effects with $F(2,122) = 8.47; p < .001$. Post-hoc Bonferroni tests revealed that the means at time 2 and time 3 were significantly higher in comparison to mean levels just before the intervention ($p = .002; p = .006$; respectively). Differences between time 2 and time 3 were not significant ($p > .05$).

Common-ingroup identification. The results indicate that the peace education intervention predicted changes in mean leaves across time only marginally with $F(2,119.96) = 2.72; p = .07$. Even though the changes were not significant at the .05 level, mean differences were going in the predicted direction with higher levels of common-ingroup identification reported after the peace education interventions.

Social distance. Finally, we performed the same analysis for examining the mean differences across time for social distance as reported by our participants. Results indicated a significant within-subjects effects with $F(2,115.716) = 8.81; p < .001$. Bonferroni post-hoc

comparison revealed that social distance was lowest at time 3 in comparison to time 1 with $p < .001$. Other mean differences were not significant with $ps > 0.05$.

Discussion

In this study we examined long-term effects of learning about outgroups' morality in a post-conflict context on a sample of 62 participants. More specifically and in line with our hypotheses, we expected that encounters or stories of outgroup moral exemplars will boost a range of prosocial intergroup responses such as common-ingroup identification and lower social distance. A major contribution of this study is investigation of these processes in a real-life environment over time. We have shown that learning about outgroups' morality (shown to boost perceptions of intergroup moral similarity in study 3) has a tendency to facilitate more common-ingroup identification and lower social distance even over time.

However, this study is not without limitations. One major limitation is the complexity of the intervention itself. Besides encounters and stories of outgroup moral exemplars, interventions were conducted using ethnically mixed groups. This automatically added a dimension of real-life intergroup encounters which, also, could be responsible for the observed effects. In other words, and with such a design it is difficult to disentangle the main precursor of observed effects. We aimed at addressing this limitation with some follow-up interviews reported below. Furthermore, participants who participated in these interventions were recruited on a voluntary basis increasing the likelihood of selection bias. This is an important caveat to keep in mind when interpreting the results of this but also other social-psychological interventions. In other words, it is reasonable to assume that participants who chose to participate in this (and other similar) interventions were already more open-minded and less biased towards relevant outgroups making them not only a less representative sample but also providing less space for self-reported changes.

Study 3b

Using semi-structured interviews, a follow-up with 20 participants (after time3 measurement) was conducted. The goal of this more qualitative follow-up was to gain a deeper understanding of the processes related to observed outcomes in study 3. More specifically, we aimed at understanding participants’ experience during indirect (stories) or direct encounters with historic moral exemplars.

Method

Procedure and data analyses. Interviews were conducted in the Bosnian language face-to-face. The average duration of each interview was ca. 40 minutes. Following a semi-structured approach, participants were asked to freely reflect on their experience and insights gained during the intervention. In particular, they were explicitly asked to elaborate on which part of the intervention impacted or changed them the most and why. All interviews were recorded and later on transcribed. The transcribed interviews were thematically analyzed. The overall analysis followed the thematic data analysis technique outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This technique included various phases of analysis such as familiarization with the data set, generating codes and defining and constructing themes. As constructing themes is a frequentative process (Braun & Clarke, 2006), the relevance of the themes to the purpose of this study was checked and rechecked throughout the analysis process. As a result, themes were constructed in a way that helped us to examine the profound impact the use of how stories of others’ humanity and morality had on the program participants.

Results

Results indicate that all participants were moved by hearing or meeting individuals who have risked some aspects of their life to save others during conflict. They all indicated

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how these stories have moved them profoundly and how they can still recall all story details. Even though these individuals (moral exemplars) were not introduced as heroes, a large proportion of interviewed participants referred to them as such. Furthermore, one 20-year-old male participant pointed to positive implications of being exposed to such stories of heroism:

“For me, a hero is a person who I admire for what they have done for an individual or group of people. Being a hero also means to risk your life in order to save someone else’s... Heroes help us have more profound feelings and possibly empathise more.”
(Male participant, 20 years, Stolac, 2018).

These insights are in line with data obtained with study 3 and using a more quantitative approach. Further data analyses revealed not only the positive implications of hearing about such moral exemplars stories but also participants’ need and demand for such stories. Another male participant (24 years old) explicitly indicated how people need to hear more about such stories.

“I guess everyone is really moved by listening to stories about killings of their own people. However, equally moving I find is listening to stories about humanity of others. These are the stories we need to hear more about.” (Male participant, 24 years, Kozarac, 2018).

Overall, all participants reported that learning about outgroups’ morality and humanity (during the conflict) had a tremendous effect on their views and understanding of the recent violent conflict in their country. Furthermore, and in an attempt to gain a deeper understanding into processes or as to why we have observed such positive effects, almost all participants mentioned how they found these stories or encounters with moral exemplars inspirational. Several interviewed participants reported that these stories were moving to the point that they

became the main topic of informal discussions among all participants. Moreover, some participants described these stories with a deep sense of admiration and respect making reference to moral exemplars as role models. In conclusion, results from study 3 indicate that learning about moral exemplars might create some sense of moral elevation, a likely emotional response arising from learning about morally admirable behavior (Haidt, 2000).

General Discussion

By now, it is a well-established fact that more inclusive social categorizations (such as common-ingroup identity) are associated with more prosocial intergroup orientations. Categorizing and identifying oneself with a social category which also includes outgroup members (e.g., European) can (and does) lead to less outgroup bias and more prosocial intergroup outcomes. This finding, in itself, is not surprising as (former) outgroup members are now perceived as part of the ingroup making them a target for more favorable (and less biased) attitudes. However, a question that is rather less explored is what psychological processes might act as relevant and significant precursors for formation of such inclusive social categorizations. Investigation of this and similar questions requires social contexts where people can (and consequently do) exhibit variation on social identification inclusivity. In this research, we examined this question in a post-conflict context of Bosnia and Herzegovina, country built by three constituent ethnic groups, where people can identify both with their primary ethnic group (e.g., Bosniak) and/or a more common-ingroup category (Bosnian).

In thinking about potential psychological precursors of such inclusive social categorizations, we relied on literature and empirical evidence from two streams of research in the field of social psychology. The first line of research on common-ingroup identity (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2014) proposes, among other processes, that specific group

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differentiation processes such as perceived similarity can alter individuals' cognitive representations into one group (“we”) or two subgroups within a more inclusive group (e.g., dual identity or “Us + Them = We”). In more colloquial terms, this would mean that perceiving relevant outgroups as similar to the ingroup increases the likelihood of social inclusion and consequent less biased responses. However, in this research, we went beyond general perceptions of intergroup similarity for thinking on how to shift peoples' social categorization levels. In that regard we relied heavily on a specific dimension of group perceptions, namely morality. We did so for two reasons. First, research on intergroup perceptions has established that morality judgments are fundamental in the evaluation of others (Brambilla et al., 2011; Leach et al., 2007; Wojciszke, 2005) and, importantly, determine behavioral tendencies towards others. Furthermore, research by Brambilla and colleagues (Brambilla & Leach, 2014; Brambilla et al., 2011; Brambilla et al., 2013) has consistently demonstrated that perceptions and judgments of others' morality (rather than competence or other aspects of the warmth dimension such as sociability) are fundamental for impression formation as well as for determining human behavior towards outgroup members. Additionally, and in (post)conflict contexts, morality domain is a highly salient domain determining not only intergroup perceptions but also behaviors. We have argued that recognizing the importance of morality perceptions is vital in understanding and ultimately changing intergroup relations in conflict and post-conflict contexts. In conclusion, these empirical but also contextual reasons have formed our hypothesis: creating perceptions of intergroup moral similarity can positively predict contact intentions (and other prosocial intergroup orientations) by facilitating more inclusive social categorizations such as common-ingroup identity.

We have examined this hypothesis with three studies (using correlational, experimental and intervention approach) using members of different ethnic groups in the

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post-conflict context of Bosnia and Herzegovina. We have shown that perceptions of intergroup moral similarity indeed act as an important social cognition for forming common-ingroup identity, which in turn, is related to increased prosocial contact intentions. This evidence is important as it identifies specific and societally useful social cognitions for improvement of intergroup relations.

Perceptions and narratives of intergroup differences could be overturned to ideas of moral similarity if we wish to create more psychologically beneficial social categorizations. Thinking and judging outgroup members as similar as the ingroup in the domain of morality could be crucial for creating and sustaining conditions aimed at improving intergroup relations in increasingly multicultural societies.

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Tables

Table 1

Study 1. Correlation coefficients, means and standard deviations.

Variable	1.	2.	3.	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. Intergroup moral similarity	-			3.78	.85
2. Common-ingroup identification	.45***	-		3.95	1.18
3. Contact intentions	.49***	.50***	-	4.08	.76

Note. $n = 72$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 2

Study 2. Correlation coefficients, means and standard deviations.

Variable	1.	2.	3.	4.	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. Intergroup moral similarity	-				4.17	.49
2. Common-ingroup identification	.44***	-			2.98	.72
3. Ingroup identification	-.06 [†]	-.19*	-		3.58	.94
4. Contact intentions	.58***	.47***	-.23***	-	3.66	1.08

Note. $n = 143$, *** $p < .001$, * $p < .05$, [†] $p > .05$.

Table 3

Study 2. Manipulation effects on main outcomes across conditions.

Variable	Condition	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Cohen's d</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Intergroup moral similarity	Experimental	4.30	.80	0.3	1.89	.06
	Control	4.07	.65			
Common-ingroup identification	Experimental	3.27	1.27	0.39	2.34	.02
	Control	2.76	1.29			
Ingroup identification	Experimental	3.52	.91	0.1	-.65	.51
	Control	3.62	.97			
Contact intentions	Experimental	3.96	1.07	0.5	2.97	.003
	Control	3.43	1.04			

Table 4

Study 3. Means and standard deviations across different timepoints.

Variable	time 1		time 2		time 3	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Outgroup heterogeneity	3.24	1.47	3.08 ³	1.58	3.55 ²	1.36
Empathy	4.11	.61	4.34 ¹	.49	4.35 ¹	.49
Common-ingroup identification	3.45	.94	3.38	1.02	3.57	.96
Social distance	1.84	.85	1.6	.81	1.39 ¹	.64

Note. ¹ significant difference in comparison to time 1 at $p < .05$, ² significant difference in comparison to time 2 at $p < .05$, ³ significant difference in comparison to time 3 at $p < .05$.

Figure Legends

$$F(3) = 11.76; p < .001; R^2 = .34$$

Figure 1. Intergroup moral similarity predicting contact intentions through common-ingroup identification (whilst controlling for ingroup identification).

$$F(3) = 16.85; p < .001; R^2 = .26$$

Figure 2. Intergroup moral similarity predicting contact intentions through common-ingroup identification (whilst controlling for ingroup identification).