

Fostering Reconciliation Through Historical Moral Exemplars in a Postconflict Society

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Damaged intergroup relations in postconflict contexts marked by histories of war and human rights violations constitute a major obstacle to peace-building and reconciliation. In addition, intergroup relations tend to be affected by polarized narratives about the past that inhibit the positive consequences of ingroup contact. In this article, we examined the effects of a contact intervention containing narratives of moral exemplars on reconciliation processes in the postgenocide setting of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Results from our 2 studies showed significant positive changes after the contact interventions that highlighted and focused on documented stories of individuals (moral exemplars) saving the lives of their adversaries. We found that focusing on moral exemplars increased reconciliatory beliefs due to enhanced forgiveness. The second study confirmed the positive effects of such interventions on more specific affective, cognitive and behavioral aspects of reconciliation among both former victims and perpetrators. We discuss the importance of the historical narratives used in intervention programs in postconflict settings and draw practical implications from our results.

Keywords: reconciliation, moral exemplars, contact intentions, Bosnia and Herzegovina

I was in the field when I heard gunshots from afar. When I went home, my neighbor Pemba came over in a hurry and said that someone had escaped an execution and had come to her door. She said that she had left him in her garden. I told her that we must save the man and that she should bring him to my house during the night. . . . (Male, 66, Bosnia, 1993)

In this quotation, we hear the voice of a man who, during the peak of war in Bosnia in 1993, decided to save another man's life

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while risking his own. This 66-year-old man knew what he had to do even though his actions put his own life in danger. Such examples of moral righteousness in times of injustice are not rare but unfortunately do not constitute the mainstream narrative about the outgroup (Nurnberger, 2009). In addition, the impact of this and similar examples of moral actions on intergroup relationship have not been examined. The aim of this article is to fill this theoretical and empirical gap in the psychological literature through investigating the impact of moral exemplars on intergroup reconciliation in the postconflict context of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BIH).

Not surprisingly, but unfortunately in most postconflict societies, intergroup reconciliation is neither a political nor social priority (Bar-Tal & Čehajić-Clancy, 2013; Čehajić-Clancy, Goldenberg, Gross, & Halperin, 2016). The establishment of truth, the prosecution and punishment of perpetrators, the search for missing people, and the restoration of homes are just a few of the many issues that postconflict societies are faced with and tend to prioritize. Moreover, the concept of reconciliation is very often associated with forgetting or historical closure, which many are reluctant to embrace (Čehajić, Brown, & Castano, 2008; Exline, Worthington, Hill, & McCullough, 2003; Hanke et al., 2013). In addition, intergroup reconciliation is limited by current representations of the past—including perceptions of historical perpetrators as a coherent group of immoral agents, motivated by their evil character and innate sadism (Miller, Buddie, & Kretschmar, 2002; Newman, 2002). Contrary to psychological theories explaining acts of mass violence committed by the perpetrator group (Bilewicz & Vollhardt, 2012; Staub, 1993), lay theories of such behavior tend to link it with the alleged immoral character of the entire ethnic group to which the perpetrators belonged, and this, in turn, decreases optimism about potential reconciliation. These perceptions pose a serious threat to contemporary contact between the

descendants of perpetrators and the descendants of victims. When historical issues are raised during intergroup encounters, the beneficial effects of contact on intergroup relations can be inhibited (Bilewicz, 2007). In this article, we focus on the role that moral exemplars can play as a strategy to improve the impact of cross-group contact interventions in such postconflict contexts. We argue and show that belief in intergroup reconciliation may be increased when participants are exposed to stories of heroic helpers.

Even though the conflict in BiH ended almost 20 years ago, intergroup relations between historical victims and perpetrators in these countries remain severely affected. The Dayton Peace Accord, determining the constitution of BiH, has divided the country into two self-governed entities (The Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska) and a neutral administrative district (Brčko District) created from the land of the other two. Such division has not only made the centralization of the government impossible, but it has also led to a territorial ethnic segregation resulting in an unnatural composition and construction of BiH as a country. This, in turn, has enabled further social and psychological separations for its three major ethnic communities (Bennett, 2015)—Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats—as well as the several other minority groups living in the country. Even though the majority of these groups share the same or similar cultural and linguistic heritage, these politically imposed divisions have slowly infiltrated into minds and hearts throughout the region (Čehajić-Clancy et al., 2016).

Indeed, recent research conducted in BiH has demonstrated low levels of intergroup contact, trust, forgiveness, and belief in reconciliation among its citizens (Čehajić et al., 2008). In addition, as a politically fragmented country, BiH remains stagnant on its road toward European Union integration. Across all levels of interaction (psychological, social or political), divisive and categorical discourse continues to prevail, which disables successful implementation and facilitation of reconciliation (Bar-Tal & Čehajić-Clancy, 2013).

Beliefs in Reconciliation as a Psychological Indicator of Reconciliation

We understand intergroup reconciliation as an emotion regulation process aimed at restoring or creating positive intergroup relations characterized by increased positive and decreased negative emotions (Čehajić-Clancy et al., 2016). Intergroup reconciliation requires a *change in* mutual perceptions, emotions and behavioral tendencies among former adversaries (Nadler & Liviatan, 2006). It is a long-lasting and multifaceted process that addresses both the past and the future of intergroup relations and as such requires not only psychological but also political and other social changes (Bar-Tal & Čehajić-Clancy, 2013). From a sociopsychological perspective, forgiveness is an important element in the process of reconciliation. Some authors even argue that intergroup forgiveness is a necessary antecedent of *sustainable* reconciliation (Auerbach, 2004; Čehajić et al., 2008; Tutu, 1999). Consistent with the conceptualization of interpersonal forgiveness (e.g., Enright, 1991; McCullough, Fincham, & Tsang, 2003), intergroup forgiveness coincides with the reduction of negative emotions, such as anger, toward the perpetrator group and with intentions

to understand, approach and engage with its members. Such engagement with the previous “enemy” ultimately leads to more positive intergroup relations (Lederach, 1997). The process of reconciliation occurs on the societal level, thus its measurement in individuals is always indirect: We can assess only antecedents or psychological consequences of reconciliatory processes.

By modifying the representations of the past, one could expect to influence both forgiveness and the anticipated prospects for *sustainable reconciliation*. This psychological aspect of sustainable reconciliation is a shared belief on both sides of a conflict that reconciliation is possible. This is why we consider beliefs in reconciliation as a key individual-level indicator of reconciliatory processes occurring at the societal level. Therefore, when thinking about sustainable reconciliation, it is important to take into account not only forgiveness as a prerequisite for reconciliation, but also its other antecedents: relational (e.g., decreased contact avoidance), belief systems (e.g., a general belief in humanity), and emotional processes (e.g., decreased fear or anxiety). All of them might lead to a belief that reconciliation with former adversaries is a possible scenario in their future relations.

One of the basic obstacles to achieving intergroup reconciliation is an impaired *belief in humanity* caused by wartime experiences. The belief that human nature is evil has been demonstrated to enhance support for further violence, to decrease support for nonviolent conflict resolutions (Campbell & Vollhardt, 2014) and to lead to harsher punishments for past crimes (Webster & Saucier, 2015). This phenomenon is known as “redemptive violence,” that ostensibly saves the world from the evil. Thus, one of the main prerequisites for successful reconciliation is the restoration of belief in the goodness of human nature.

On the affective side of the reconciliation process, one of the key obstacles is clearly *intergroup anxiety*—known as an inhibitor of contact intentions (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Intergroup anxiety is caused by negative historical relations between groups, negative intergroup cognitions and negative personal experiences with members of the outgroup. It is manifested by aversive emotional states during intergroup encounters, as well as by fear of negative evaluations by ingroup and outgroup members (Stephan & Stephan, 1985). Intergroup anxiety has been found to limit contact intentions in postconflict settings, such as Cyprus (Halperin et al., 2012) and Northern Ireland (Paolini, Hewstone, Cairns, & Voci, 2004).

Finally, a crucial obstacle to reconciliation is *contact avoidance*. Avoidance of interpersonal contact with outgroup members limits possible prospects for reconciliation on the intergroup level. Hewstone et al. (2008) describe intergroup contact as one of the key stepping stones toward reconciliation. Contact can overcome the voluntary segregation that is a natural outcome of cruel conflicts and genocides, and this, in turn, creates more positive prospects for reconciliatory policies.

In this article, we will examine the role of the abovementioned antecedents of reconciliation as potential mediators of the effects of proposed moral exemplars contact interventions. However, we need to indicate that in this article we do not attempt to measure actual reconciliation between groups but rather the psychological proxy of this process: a belief in reconciliation.

Facilitating Belief in Reconciliation in Postconflict Contexts

What we know so far is that intergroup contact has the potential to heal and improve intergroup relations (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Bringing group members involved in, or affected by, conflict together in a safe, supportive environment is a strategy that is frequently used in peace-building and reconciliation-oriented community projects. Indeed, studies conducted in postconflict settings identifies contact as one of the most effective sociopsychological processes in terms of facilitating reconciliation processes (Čehajić et al., 2008; Hewstone, Cairns, Voci, Hamberger, & Niens, 2006; Noor, Brown, & Prentice, 2008). For example, our research on intergroup forgiveness conducted in BiH showed that young Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims), who reported having frequent and good quality contact with members of the other group(s), were more willing to forgive outgroups for their past misdeeds than those who did not have such contact (Čehajić et al., 2008). However, that research was correlational and measured forgiveness and reported contact occurring during participants' daily lives. Thus, this research does not allow for the drawing of direct causal inferences. The question that is still open is whether contact interventions aimed at improving intergroup relationships, such as those used by local or international nongovernmental organizations, would yield such positive consequences and, if so, under which conditions.

Recent research conducted in the context of Polish–Jewish relations suggests that the effects of intergroup contact are not always straightforward or necessarily positive, particularly in the context of a troubled history that included massive human rights violations committed by outgroup members living within the same communities. Bilewicz (2007) showed that the effectiveness of interventions involving Polish–Jewish encounters was significantly affected by the content of participants' conversations. When Polish participants talked with their Jewish counterparts about history, intergroup contact did not have a positive influence on intergroup attitudes, affect or perceived similarity to outgroup members. However, when the same groups talked about present-day issues, intergroup relations improved. Bilewicz (2007) argued that intergroup contact with a focus on the past might inhibit the positive consequences of intergroup contact due to frustrated emotional needs related to the historical conflict (e.g., needs for control or social acceptance). Similarly, research by Čehajić (2009), which examined the effects of a contact intervention among the youth from different ethnic groups in BiH, found that contact led to negative social outcomes—an increase in ingroup identification and in perceived outgroup homogeneity. Therefore, the question is how should the content and conditions of contact interventions in postconflict settings be structured to effectively improve intergroup relations (such as reduce anxiety and contact avoidance) and facilitate reconciliation processes.

In the context of a violent intergroup conflict, narratives about the conflict held by each party are usually not only biased but they also accentuate the morality of the ingroup while demonizing the outgroup (Bar-Tal, 2007; Giner-Sorolla, Leidner, & Castano, 2011). Thus, these conflict narratives do not only stress homogeneity of beliefs or behaviors, but most importantly convey message about the outgroup's shared lack of morality. Not acknowledging variability in moral behavior of

outgroup members, may lead to justification of atrocities and human rights violations committed against this outgroup and, as a result, may become a major obstacle on the road to intergroup reconciliation. When people consider the outgroup to be entirely immoral, they have no basis to believe in future reconciliation. In the next section, we propose that the use of stories about moral exemplars may offer a means of overcoming these barriers and fostering the belief in reconciliation.

Moral Exemplars

Conflict narratives usually not only include perceptions of outgroup members as a single homogenous entity (e.g., "they are all the same") but also perceptions that "they are all immoral," perceptions that might inhibit the positive effects of intergroup contact. Contrary to these simplistic stereotypes, mass violence is marked by a large variety of behaviors, ranging from active harm, through passive bystandership, to active helping and rescue actions (Bilewicz & Vollhardt, 2012). This variability is usually not acknowledged in the lay theories of historical intergroup atrocities.

We propose that a key to strengthen optimistic beliefs in reconciliation is increasing one's awareness of historical *moral* variability of the outgroup, by showing that among outgroup members one can find not only perpetrators, but also victims, passive bystanders and even heroic helpers. Exposing people to individualized and personalized stories of moral outgroup members may influence current relations between historically conflicted groups by inducing positive changes, such as a decrease in intergroup anxiety or greater belief in humanity, ultimately resulting in higher prospects for reconciliation.

Recent research by Bilewicz and Jaworska (2013), conducted during Polish–Israeli encounter programs in Poland, demonstrated that exposing people to stories of heroic rescuers may be an effective strategy in overcoming the negative impact of the violent past on intergroup contact. Young Poles and Jews after meeting Polish heroic helpers (individuals who rescued Jews during World War II) reported more positive emotions toward the outgroup, a greater sense of being accepted and greater perceived similarity to one another, than before such meeting. Therefore, the authors argued that presenting people with stories of heroic helpers may be an important strategy in promoting reconciliation after mass violence, as such stories seem to undermine both ingroup and outgroup entitativity and the mutually exclusive categorization of groups as victims and perpetrators.

Although there is evidence for catalytic effects of moral exemplars on intergroup contact between historically conflicted groups, there is still no evidence regarding whether contact interventions employing stories of moral exemplars may influence beliefs about intergroup reconciliation. The novelty of the present research is that it looks explicitly at beliefs in reconciliation. We believe that several outcome variables observed in other studies (e.g., needs for acceptance and morality, perceived similarity to the outgroup, intergroup affect; Bilewicz & Jaworska, 2013) suggest that interventions based on moral exemplars could be used to promote forgiveness and induce reconciliation beliefs in group with more recent conflict experiences.

Current Research

We performed two intervention studies using community samples in BiH. These studies examined the effects of contact interventions implemented by the Postconflict Research Centre (a local nongovernmental organization working in the field of reconciliation), which included documented individual stories of heroic helpers from all sides of the 1992–1995 war. We assessed the effects of a contact intervention that focused on these stories about moral exemplars on beliefs in reconciliation as well as on its emotional, cognitive and relational antecedents.

The first study tested the effects of a moral-exemplar-based contact intervention on the belief in reconciliation and on intergroup forgiveness—a key antecedent of reconciliation. The second study measured three additional antecedents of reconciliation: affective (intergroup anxiety), cognitive (belief in humanity), and behavioral (intergroup contact intentions). Both studies used a pretest–posttest research design. Due to the character of this field research (an intervention occurring during real-life workshops in postconflict setting), we were not able to include control groups.

Study 1

Method

Participants. The group that took part in the first intervention consisted of 75 young people from eight different cities and towns across BiH: 46 females and 29 males ($M_{\text{age}} = 20.09$, $SD = 3.74$). The participants were recruited through youth associations located in their respective places of residence. They were young Bosniaks, Serbs, Croats, and those who identified themselves as Bosnians. In total, eight workshops (interventions) were organized, each consisting of eight to 10 participants. The workshops were conducted by two professional facilitators and included ethnically mixed groups and took place in rented spaces owned by the town/city municipality. Each intervention lasted for two days and consisted of presenting participants with documented stories of rescuers (films, testimonies, and photographs) from the 1992–1995 war. The effectiveness of the interventions was assessed with a pretest–posttest design. All the participants filled out a questionnaire before and after the workshop.

The structure of the intervention. Prior to beginning the intervention, the participants filled out the first questionnaire. As the first part of the intervention, they were presented with a trailer from an educational series about stories of rescuers. The participants were then introduced to the basic idea of the project and presented with the objectives and the workshop agenda. The facilitators introduced themselves and their organization (its mission, founders, projects, and activities), and the participants introduced themselves. Finally, the participants took part in a set of activities and social games to encourage self-disclosure.

The next part of the workshop consisted of defining key terms, such as *conflict*, *victim*, *perpetrator*, *active and passive bystander*, *rescue behavior*, and *moral courage*. The participants worked under the guidance of a facilitator to define these terms. The facilitator then presented a case study of a Bosnian rescuer and the participants identified examples of each term.

After a short break, the participants were divided into groups to work on their own case studies. The groups were created to include

members from each of the ethnic groups. After the group task, the participants reunited in a larger circle to present and discuss their findings.

The last part consisted of a film screening and a subsequent discussion of the film. The film *Ordinary Heroes* focused on the narratives of Bosnian wartime rescuers from all sides of the conflict (Postconflict Research Centre, 2012). In other words, the participants were exposed to stories of rescuers from both the ingroup and the outgroups. The discussion was followed by a closing session in which the participants summarized what they had learned from the workshop and were asked to link the concepts they had learned to everyday life situations. Immediately after the workshop and the closing session, the participants completed the postintervention questionnaire.

Materials. The participants completed the same questionnaire before and after the intervention. The questionnaire included scales measuring the willingness to forgive the outgroups for their previous misdeeds and the belief in reconciliation. Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) were used to assess participants' level of agreement with each item.

Forgiveness was measured with three items from the scale used by Čehajić et al. (2008): "I am ready to forgive other groups things that they have done during the war," "I could never forgive the committed crimes" (reverse coded), and "My group should never forgive other groups their misdeeds" (reverse coded). The reliability was good both before the intervention ($\alpha = .78$) and after the intervention ($\alpha = .83$).

Belief in reconciliation was measured with three items which were created for the purpose of this study: "I doubt that we will ever be able to live together in peace" (reverse coded), "I believe that we can cooperate together," and "I believe that we can build a country together." The reliability was $\alpha = .66$ before the intervention and $\alpha = .72$ after the intervention.

Results

In order to assess both the direct and indirect effects of the intervention on reconciliation beliefs we performed a longitudinal mediation analysis. In testing this, we applied MEMORE procedure designed by Montoya and Hayes (2015), which allows one to test indirect effects in within-subjects design, based on Judd, Kenny, and McClelland's (2001) strategy of testing mediations in repeated measures analyses. Means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations between measured variables are presented in Table 1.

The analysis was performed on centered variables with 5,000 bootstrap samples (see Figure 1). It revealed a significant effects of the intervention on reconciliation beliefs, $b = .18$,

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Bivariate Correlations
Between Studied Variables (Study 1)

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3
1. Forgiveness t1	3.85	.96	1		
2. Forgiveness t2	4.07	.82	.70**	1	
3. Belief in reconciliation t1	3.60	.96	.30**	.28*	1
4. Belief in reconciliation t2	3.79	.94	.21	.35**	.65**

Note. t = time.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

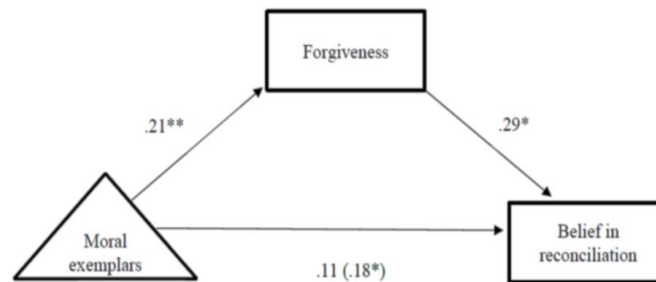


Figure 1. The longitudinal direct and indirect effects of moral exemplars-based intervention on belief in reconciliation (Study 1). Standardized regression coefficients (b) are reported. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

$SE = .09$, 95% confidence interval (CI) [.001, .36], and on intergroup forgiveness, $b = .22$, $SE = .08$, 95% CI [.06, .38]. Furthermore, it revealed a significant indirect effect of the moral exemplar intervention on beliefs in reconciliation through forgiveness, $IE = .06$, $SE = .03$, 95% CI [.01, .14]. The direct effect of the moral exemplar intervention on reconciliation dropped to a nonsignificant level, $b = .11$, $SE = .09$, $p = .21$, 95% CI [−.07, .30], thus suggesting a full mediation of this effect by forgiveness.

Discussion

The contact-based intervention that employed stories of moral exemplars—heroic helpers who risked their lives to rescue members from other groups during the time of war—significantly influenced participants' willingness to forgive the outgroup their previous misdeeds. In addition, such exposure increased participants' belief in reconciliation, and this effect was fully mediated by intergroup forgiveness. Intergroup contact in the presence of moral exemplar narratives was found to be effective in improving damaged intergroup relations. These results are in line with the recent study conducted by Bilewicz and Jaworska (2013), indicating that the positive effects of intergroup contact can be strengthened by focusing on positive stories from the war, namely, stories of moral exemplars.

To our knowledge, this is the first field study that has examined the effects of contact-based interventions in postconflict context on forgiveness—an important antecedent of sustainable intergroup reconciliation. As already mentioned, historical conflicts threaten basic beliefs about the human nature (e.g., those related to the belief in human goodness) evoke negative emotions (e.g., intergroup anxiety) and lead to contact avoidance. In order to test, whether a reconciliatory program based on stories about moral exemplars can affect these proposed psychological antecedents of beliefs in reconciliation, we performed another study applying the same intervention scheme, but using several additional measurements of its effectiveness.

Study 2

Method

Participants and design. Study 2, also conducted in BIH, employed the same design as Study 1. The goal of Study 2 was not only to replicate the findings obtained in the previous study, but

also to test the effectiveness of the moral exemplars intervention on other antecedents of the beliefs in reconciliation: behavioral (i.e., intergroup contact intentions), affective (i.e., intergroup anxiety), and cognitive (i.e., the belief that humans are not evil). A sample of 85 young people with an average age of 20 ($SD = 7.22$) from six different cities and towns participated in a total of nine workshops. As in Study 1, the workshops were conducted in ethnically mixed groups (including Serbs, Bosniaks, Croats, and Bosnians). The structure of the workshops was the same as in Study 1 and participants again completed pre- and postintervention questionnaires.

Materials. Participants were asked to indicate the degree to which they agreed with a series of statements. Ratings were made on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

Belief in humanity was measured with three items: "In principle, human beings are good," "Despite all, the good in people always prevails," and "There will always be more good than bad in this world." Reliability of the scale was satisfactory (before intervention $\alpha = .74$; after intervention $\alpha = .69$).

Intergroup anxiety was measured with five items indicating the level of several emotions experienced when encountering a member of the outgroup (feeling trusting, confident, worried, uncomfortable, and threatened). The scale was a simplified version of the Stephan and Stephan (1985) scale. The reliability was acceptable (before intervention $\alpha = .54$; after intervention $\alpha = .61$).

Contact intentions were measured with two items adopted from scales used previously in a similar context (Čehajić et al., 2008): "I would like to have better relationship with other groups" and "I would like to have more friends from other groups." Reliability of this scale was high both before and after the intervention ($\alpha = .92$ and $\alpha = .84$, respectively).

Belief in reconciliation was measured with two items: "I believe that we can cooperate together" and "I believe that we can build a country together" (preintervention reliability $\alpha = .76$, postintervention reliability $\alpha = .73$).

Results

To test the effects of our intervention on reconciliation beliefs and the mechanisms leading to enhanced reconciliation beliefs we performed a multiple longitudinal mediation test using the MEMORE syntax. The results are presented on Figure 2 and means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations in Table 2.

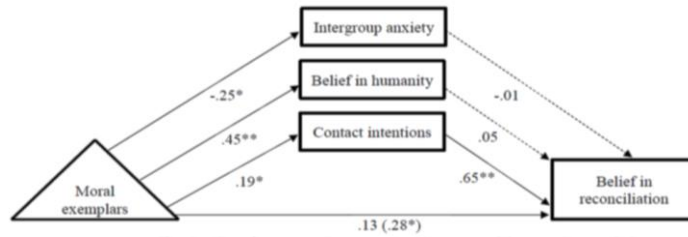


Figure 2. The longitudinal direct and indirect effects of moral exemplars-based intervention on belief in reconciliation (Study 2). Standardized regression coefficients (*b*) are reported. * *p* < .05. ** *p* < .01.

The analysis was performed on centered variables with 5,000 bootstrap samples (see Figure 2). It revealed significant effects of the intervention on reconciliation beliefs, *b* = .28, *SE* = .12, 95% CI [.04, .52], belief in humanity, *b* = .45, *SE* = .08, 95% CI [.29, .62], intergroup anxiety, *b* = -.25, *SE* = .10, 95% CI [-.46, -.04], and contact intentions, *b* = .19, *SE* = .09, 95% CI [.01, .38]. Increased belief in humanity had no effect on increases in reconciliatory beliefs, *b* = .05, *SE* = .14, 95% CI [-.24, .33] and neither did reduction of intergroup anxiety, *b* = -.01, *SE* = .11, 95% CI [-.23, .22]. On the contrary, increased contact intentions had significant effect on reconciliation beliefs, *b* = .65, *SE* = .14, 95% CI [.37, .93]. When testing these three mediators of the observed longitudinal effects, we found that the intervention based on moral exemplars increased beliefs in reconciliation by increasing contact intentions, *IE* = .13, *SE* = .07, 95% CI [.01, .20]. Indirect effects through decreased intergroup anxiety, *IE* = .00, *SE* = .03, 95% CI [-.06, .08] and belief in humanity, *IE* = .02, *SE* = .08, 95% CI [-.11, .20], did not prove significant.

The results show that the workshop significantly affected participants' beliefs about, and emotional orientation toward, the other groups. More specifically, after being exposed to an intervention based on moral exemplars stories, participants' belief in humanity (i.e., that people are good rather than evil) significantly increased; their anxiety level (i.e., feeling uncomfortable, anxious) in the presence of outgroup members significantly decreased, and their intentions to have better relationships and more friends from other groups significantly increased. After the workshop, the participants expressed a stronger belief that reconciliation is possible and that all ethnic groups can build a country together. The longitudinal effect on belief in reconciliation was significantly mediated by increased

contact intentions, but not by the other two variables (decreased anxiety or belief in humanity).

Discussion

Study 2 replicated the findings of Study 1 showing that the intervention focused on moral exemplars enhanced reconciliation beliefs. Beyond this, it demonstrated that the intervention also reduced intergroup anxiety, increased belief in humanity and contact intentions. In previous studies, intergroup anxiety has been found to be a crucial antecedent of forgiveness and reconciliation in contexts including Bosnia (Čehajić et al., 2008) and Northern Ireland (Tam et al., 2007), whereas the belief in the evil nature of humanity (as opposed to the belief in the goodness of humanity) has been found to be an antecedent of violence and punitiveness (Campbell & Vollhardt, 2014; Webster & Saucier, 2015). This study captured a rare example of an intervention strategy that successfully reduced levels of intergroup anxiety within a postgenocidal context and that successfully changed basic beliefs about human nature. However, in the current study neither of these processes affected general beliefs in reconciliation. The only process that led to more optimistic beliefs about reconciliation was the relational one, that is, increased intentions to engage in positive contact. Due to lack of a control group, the question as to the particular aspects of the intervention itself that produced the effects reported above remains open and should be examined in the future.

General Discussion

Psychologists interested in intergroup reconciliation have acknowledged that the nature and history of intergroup relations fundamentally shapes perceptions as well as emotional and behav-

Table 2
Means, Standard Deviations, and Bivariate Correlations Between Studied Variables (Study 2)

Variable	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Anxiety t1	2.45 (1.13)	1						
2. Anxiety t2	2.17 (.96)	.42**	1					
3. Contact intentions t1	4.53 (.84)	-.04	.04	1				
4. Contact intentions t2	4.63 (.69)	.08	-.08	.56**	1			
5. Belief in humanity t1	3.68 (.96)	.34**	.20	.29**	.10	1		
6. Belief in humanity t2	4.10 (.80)	.32**	.33**	.28*	.08	.64**	1	
7. Reconciliation beliefs t1	3.73 (1.03)	.09	-.19	.49**	.24*	.37**	.38**	1
8. Reconciliation beliefs t2	3.75 (.95)	.02	-.35**	.00	.22*	.18	.17	.49**

Note. t = time.
* *p* < .05. ** < .01.

ioral orientations between groups (Bilewicz & Jaworska, 2013; Noor, Brown, González, Manzi, & Lewis, 2008; Staub, 2006). The intergroup relationships investigated in our studies are characterized by a history of conflict, violence and mistrust. Eliciting more optimism about reconciliation in such conditions is an extremely difficult endeavor.

Two intervention-based studies demonstrate contact intervention that focused on stories of past moral exemplars could be a way to pave the road toward more positive intergroup relations in postconflict societies. People are very rarely exposed (e.g., in media, schools or other social outlets) to heroic stories of heroic outgroup members. This seem to be very unfortunate, as our results showed that presenting people with stories of rescue behavior during the 1992–1995 war increased their willingness to forgive and engage in contact with the outgroup.

Even though intergroup contact, as such, has been identified as a successful strategy to overcome negative perceptions and emotions about the other, in postconflict settings such encounters may backfire. Contact might not be effective as long as the basic needs of both victim and perpetrator group members have not been satisfied (Schnabel & Nadler, 2008) and as long as the majority of the perpetrator group members deny or, at least, justify their misdeeds (Bilewicz, 2016; Čehajić-Clancy, 2012). Such denials, lack of acknowledgment, withdrawal of reparations, absence of apology, and so forth, only reinforce the cycle of mistrust and the desire for separation. Unfortunately, the nature of current intergroup relations in BiH is characterized by such processes. In these social conditions, intergroup contact might not be able to produce its potentially positive effects.

To overcome some of these problems, we shifted participants' attention to positive stories from the past with a specific emphasis on moral exemplars. It is known that positive contacts in the past can immunize people against negative effects of current contacts—an effect observed in several conflict contexts (Paolini et al., 2014; Stasiuk & Bilewicz, 2013; Stefaniak & Bilewicz, 2016). In line with our prediction, exposure to these very positive heroic interactions between outgroup and ingroup members in the past increased levels of forgiveness and the belief in reconciliation (Study 1), as well as the desire to engage with the outgroup (Study 2). Thus, we have demonstrated that the potentially negative or less effective consequences of intergroup contact can be disabled through a focus on moral exemplar stories.

To summarize, our results indicate that narratives including outgroup moral behavior can help to restore broken relationships by creating a common space in which reconciliation can occur. An emphasis on, and the promotion of, positive intergroup experiences and cooperation with a focus on outgroup moral variability is a realistic way to promote reconciliation. Even in times of violence and gross human rights violations, there are examples of positive or moral human conduct on all sides of intergroup divides (such as saving the life of the "others"). Our research shows that such examples of outgroup morality communicate a narrative that differs from that which is likely to develop when postconflict groups remain in isolation, and that this new narrative appears to promote sociopsychological correlates of reconciliation. By increasing forgiveness and contact intentions, our intervention changed general beliefs about the societal-level reconciliation. Therefore, by motivating people to engage in everyday cross-group contacts while high-

lighting outgroup moral variability one could change more general processes occurring between two conflicted national or ethnic group.

However, we need to acknowledge two major limitations of these studies. First is the lack of a control group, which prevents us from knowing specifically which dimension of the intervention might have produced the positive outcomes. Future research should strongly consider inclusion of a control group in such interventions. Second, we remain unsure as to what mechanisms activated by the exposure to moral exemplars stories produced these positive outcomes. Although we point to the role of forgiveness and contact intentions as mediators of the effects, we still believe that other mechanisms may also be responsible for the obtained effects. In particular, future research needs to examine intergroup reconciliation as an *emotion regulation process*, where interventions aimed at increasing perceived group moral variability are conceptualized as decreasing intergroup hatred (Čehajić-Clancy et al., 2016). Hatred is not only a highly difficult emotional obstacle for reconciliation processes but can serve as an emotional platform for perceptions of out groups as immoral and homogenous entity (Halperin, 2011). Consequently, Čehajić-Clancy et al. (2016) have argued that increasing perceptions of outgroup moral variability might target and reduce the emotion of hate. We strongly encourage continued research in this direction as we believe moral exemplar interventions to be a very promising tool for those who would promote intergroup reconciliation.

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