



Historical group victimization entails moral obligations for descendants



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HIGHLIGHTS

- For third-party observers, undeserved suffering threatens belief in justice.
- By expecting greater moral virtue of the descendants of historically victimized groups observers will not derogate them.
- Victim moral obligations to not harm others increase via observer benefit finding for victims.
- When the lesson of victimization is to not do harm, negative evaluations of contemporary groups who do so increases.
- Victimized groups are held to a higher moral standard than non-victimized groups.

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ABSTRACT

When is greater morality expected of groups that have experienced intergroup victimization? Six experiments illustrate that meaning making for the victims, but not the perpetrators, can lead observers to perceive the victims' descendants as morally obligated to refrain from harming others. Focusing on the lessons of the past for the victim group increases observers' expectations that contemporary victim group members should know better than harm others. Deriving benefits from a group's past suffering, for both a well-known instance such as the Holocaust or a previously unknown group, elevates victim moral obligations (but not victim moral rights or perpetrator moral obligations). When the descendants of a historically victimized group violate the perceived lesson derived from having suffered—to be more moral—and instead does harm to others, then observers respond more negatively toward them than harm-doers who lack a victimization history.

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Human tragedy is plentiful and exposure to it can be disturbing. Reminders of tragedies that have befallen single individuals or those experienced by large social groups can have psychological consequences for those who were victimized, their descendants, as well as third-party observers who merely learn of the victims' past suffering. Our research addresses why observers who are reminded of a group's historical victimization might come to perceive contemporary members of that group as especially obligated to be moral in their treatment of others, and the consequences when the descendants of those who suffered appear to be violating observers' expectations of them.

Tragedy represents a threat to belief in a just world

Exposure to innocent victims and awareness of their suffering can threaten people's belief in justice (Hafer, 2000) and lead to a search for meaning (Heine et al., 2006; Landau et al., 2004; Park, 2010; Updegraff et al., 2008). Although much research has focused on observers' willingness to derogate or blame victims for their bad outcomes (see Hafer and Bégué, 2005), this is by no means the only way that people can respond when they are confronted with the tragedy others have experienced. For observers to maintain their belief that the world is just when confronted with instances of injustice, they can engage in *benefit finding for the victim*, which entails interpreting the victims' suffering as resulting in growth and thereby having served a useful purpose (Lerner, 1980). Indeed, people can derive meaning from instances of victimization they learn about by believing that the victims have been compensated for their suffering by having learned something of importance

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(Hafer and Gosse, 2010; Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Silver and Wortman, 1980) and by perceiving the victims as having benefited from suffering because it led to the development of positive character traits (Gaucher et al., 2010; Kay et al., 2005; Warner and Branscombe, 2011).

To the extent that observers believe victims derive benefits in the form of becoming more benevolent, observers of even extreme forms of victimization can maintain their belief that the world is fair. Recent evidence indicates that when a threat to observers' belief in a just world exists, people perceive the victim of a personal tragedy as more likely to subsequently have a meaningful life compared to when that person has not experienced victimization (Anderson et al., 2010). Likewise, when observers consider the impact of injustice experienced by an individual in the form of childhood sexual abuse, they report expecting that as an adult that person should be a kinder and more ethical person compared to someone without a history of victimization (Warner et al., 2011).

The belief that victims should overcome their tragic experiences and become better people as a result of their suffering is deeply embedded in Western culture. This idea is prominent in contemporary Americans' descriptions of their lives where suffering is believed to ultimately bring redemption and fulfillment (Baumeister, 1991; McAdams, 2006). Indeed, victims themselves often report deriving benefits following traumatic experiences including learning what is really important in life and becoming a kinder, more understanding person (Affleck et al., 1987; Bower et al., 2009; Davis et al., 1998; Lazar et al., 2004; Poulin et al., 2009; Taylor, 1983). Witnesses of traumatic events can similarly make meaning of adversity by deriving benefits for the victims, which results in higher expectations that those victims will display tolerance toward others (Fernández et al., 2014). In fact, there is evidence that threat to belief in a just world is reduced, with observers exhibiting less distress, when a victim's suffering is subsequently reinterpreted as meaningful (Lazarus et al., 1965). Moreover, when observers' belief in a just world has been threatened, victims are assigned greater guilt when they fail to help others (Warner and Branscombe, 2012).

Such findings are consistent with Lerner's (1980) argument that threat to the belief in a just world can be psychologically managed without blaming victims for their outcomes when victims are perceived as having gained from their tragic experiences. Specifically, justice can be psychologically restored to the extent that "the victim's fate is seen as rather desirable, where the suffering had later greater benefit, was good for the soul, (or) made the victim a better person" (p. 20). We argue that the extent to which observers engage in benefit finding for victims has important implications for judgments regarding subsequent victim actions. Although one recent study has examined how observers who share a group membership with the victims attempt to derive meaning from their fellow group members' suffering as a result of the terrorist attack on 9/11 (see Poulin et al., 2009), the present research examines how third-party observers may come to expect the descendants of those who were victimized to be especially moral in their treatment of others. We assess whether the greater moral virtue that is expected of the descendants of those who suffered intergroup violence is linked with observers' benefit finding for the victims. Moreover, when the descendants of those whose ancestors suffered appear to have failed in their moral obligations and instead harm others, then observers will condemn them more than those whose ancestors have not suffered.

Linking historical group victimization to descendant moral obligations

Why might observers expect contemporary members of a group to have learned from their ancestors past victimization and, as a result, expect them to exhibit greater morality toward others in the present? Although such contemporary group members were not directly victimized themselves, we hypothesize that because observers perceive groups as entities that exist across time (Sani et al., 2007; Warner and

Branscombe, 2012), descendants of those who have been victimized will be perceived as "inheriting the lessons of their ancestors' past" and thereby be morally obligated to refrain from harming others. When the meaning made of historical victimization is that members of the victimized group should become more compassionate, then they will be seen as obligated not to harm others. Thus, when observers assess the meaning of the tragedy experienced for the victimized group, they will expect contemporary group members to have learned from the suffering of their ancestors, which will result in the victims' descendants being held to a higher moral standard of intergroup conduct.

Consider the most prototypical instance of intergroup victimization—the genocide that Nazi Germany committed against the Jews (Staub, 1989). Third-party observers, when reminded of Jewish suffering during the Holocaust, perceived Israelis as guilt worthy if they were seen as failing to help another currently suffering group, Sudanese genocide victims (Warner and Branscombe, 2012). Earlier historical instances of Jewish suffering at the hands of another group too may be seen as evoking elevated moral expectations of how their descendants should treat others. That is, the ancient Israelites, following their release from slavery, were commanded (by God) to remember their own suffering and not (mis)treat others as they had been: "You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the feelings of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt" (Exodus 23:9). Indeed, there are many such Biblical and other ancient religious texts that implore victims of injustice to act according to a higher moral standard in their treatment of others (Morenz, 1973).

To hold greater moral expectations of victim groups when their historical suffering is salient assumes that observers derive a particular meaning or lesson from that victimization experience. Yet, the meaning or lesson that people *can* derive from historical victimization is by no means fixed (see Bauer, 2002). Whenever justice is assessed, either moral obligations (duties) or moral rights (entitlement) can be emphasized (Finkel and Moghaddam, 2005). Thus, there are at least two distinct meanings or lessons that could be potentially derived from a group's historical victimization: 1) that victimization brings moral obligations to not harm others as was done to them, or 2) that past victimization entails moral rights to do harm, particularly as a means of defense against others who might harm them (see Klar et al., 2013). We argue that victims and observers tend to differ in which of these possible meanings or lessons to be derived from victimization they are likely to favor.

There is plenty of evidence that reminders of past suffering in victims themselves increases their perceived right to harm others. Among individuals who have been personally victimized by another person, the likelihood of subsequent moral action decreases, and this is mediated by perceived moral entitlement to behave selfishly toward other people (Zitek et al., 2010). Likewise, when Jewish North Americans are reminded of their group's Holocaust history, it reduces the extent to which they feel collective guilt for their group's current harm doing toward Palestinians (Wohl and Branscombe, 2008). Similarly, American participants who are reminded of their group's historical victimization—either the 9/11 terrorist attacks or the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor—express greater forgiveness of their ingroup for its harm doing in Iraq compared to those not reminded of their ingroup's victimization (Wohl and Branscombe, 2009). Among Israelis, of the possible lessons that can be drawn from the Holocaust—which vary from strong entitlement to do harm to moral obligation not to do so, the former is endorsed more frequently than the latter (Klar et al., 2013). Thus, not only do the victims of personal and intergroup violence make meaning of their harmful experiences (Barel et al., 2010; Herek et al., 1999; Janoff-Bulman, 1992), but the meaning victims and their fellow group members derive is often one of moral rights or entitlement to do harm to others (Chaitin and Steinberg, 2013; Klar et al., 2013; Nadler and Shnabel, 2006; Warner et al., 2014).

In contrast to victims and their fellow group members, we argue that third-parties are more likely to draw the alternative lesson

from others' past victimization. Particularly when extreme forms of victimization such as genocide are considered, observers may be prone to perceive those who "know what suffering is" as morally obligated to refrain from inflicting harm on others. Indeed, observers are especially apt to apply general ethical prescriptions such as the "Silver Rule" to victim groups whose past suffering is salient, expecting that they "should not do unto others what was done to them" (Terry, 2004). Expectations that Jews specifically should exhibit greater morality than other groups—that the Holocaust experience obligates sensitivity to oppression and atrocity—has been widely noted by legal and historical commentators (Dershowitz, 2003; Grob and Roth, 2008; Novick, 1999).

Overview

We present evidence that observers do hold expectations that the descendants of groups who have overcome past group-based violence be particularly moral in their treatment of others, even when little else is known about a group besides its victimization history. In addition, we compare observers' relative endorsement of victim moral entitlement to do harm versus victim moral obligation to refrain from harming others, and predict that the latter will outweigh the former. Precisely when a group's history of victimization—having been a target of genocide—is salient, it should threaten observers' belief in a just world and elicit benefit finding for the victims as a means of making meaning of such injustice. Moreover, we illustrate that such benefit finding on the part of observers can account for the greater moral obligations assigned to the descendants of historically victimized groups. By comparing the perceived moral obligations of the perpetrator and victim groups, we reveal whether even for groups with a well-known past—Jews and Germans—this process is specific to victim group moral obligations and not perpetrator group moral obligations. To illustrate how fundamental the moral obligations of groups with a history of victimization can be, we create previously unknown groups and vary whether they have a history of victimization or not. Finally, we reveal important consequences of such heightened moral obligations when the descendants of a group with a victimized past appear not to be living up to observers' expectations that they refrain from harming others. When the descendants of a victimized group are seen as violating observers' expectations by doing harm to others, they will be subjected to negative evaluations compared to when the descendants do harm but the group lacks a history of victimization.

Experiment 1

In this study, we test our hypothesis concerning observers' meaning making for victims with known groups. The victim group we describe in this experiment—Jews who suffered during the Holocaust—is the most prototypical instance of group-based violence in human history (Liu et al., 2005). Therefore, if non-Jewish American observers who are reminded of this group's historical suffering consider its meaning for those descendants (rather than the perpetrators), we should find that perceived victim moral obligations to not harm others increase. In contrast, lesson focus should not differentially affect perpetrator group moral obligations because, we claim, it is the benefits derived from having suffered victimization that drives the moral obligation process. To test these hypotheses, we asked participants to think about the lessons of the Holocaust for descendants of the victimized group (Jews) or the perpetrator group (Germans) and measured both Jewish and German moral obligations to not harm other groups, as well as Jewish moral rights to do harm to others in order to protect themselves. We expect that observers will not perceive the descendants of this well-known victim group to be entitled to harm others, regardless of lesson focus.

Method

Participants were 96 non-Jewish American (69 women, 27 men) undergraduates ($M_{\text{age}} = 19.31$, $SD = 1.52$) at a large Midwestern university. Participants indicated that their ethnicity was 89% White, 4% Black, 2% Hispanic, 1% Native, and 4% Other. In terms of religious group membership, 78% were Christians and 22% Other. All participants were first given the following information about the Holocaust:

From 1935–1945 nearly six million Jews were killed in Nazi Germany. For many Holocaust survivors, Israel became their homeland. In fact, Israel became the focus of the Jewish tradition even for those living outside of Israel. Many historians have discussed the meaning and lessons to be learned from the Holocaust.

After reading this background information, participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions and were asked to consider the "implications or lessons of the Holocaust that you see for Jews [or for Germans] today." Participants were then asked to write their opinion concerning "what values Jewish [or German] people should hold today, what rights Jewish [or German] people deserve, what obligations Jewish [or German] people have to others, and the implications of the Holocaust for the way Jewish [or German] people should act toward other groups today."

After completing the writing task concerning the lesson derived from this historical event for Jewish people ($N = 54$) or German people ($N = 42$), participants indicated how much they agreed with statements assessing three constructs on a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) scale. Order of completing the moral obligations measure (with either Jews or Germans as referent) was counterbalanced across participants. When referencing Jewish obligations ($\alpha = .80$) the four items were: 1) "When people have been victimized as a group, they are morally obligated to ensure that they never act toward others in the same way," 2) "A central lesson from the Holocaust is that Jews must take care not to inflict suffering upon other groups," 3) "A central lesson from the Holocaust is that Jewish people should assist weak and persecuted peoples around the world," and 4) "A central lesson from the Holocaust is that Jews should have a better understanding of groups who are suffering from persecution." After changing the group referenced to Germans, the perpetrator group ($\alpha = .83$), and adjusting the first item to "When people have victimized a group, they are morally obligated to ensure that they never act toward others in the same way," the same set of items was used to assess German moral obligations.

The Jewish rights measure ($\alpha = .78$) consisted of four items: 1) "When people have been victimized as a group, they are morally entitled to do whatever is necessary to survive," 2) "A central lesson from the Holocaust is that Jews are entitled to do everything in their power to survive," 3) "A central lesson from the Holocaust is that in order to protect themselves, Jews can harm other groups that threaten them," and 4) "A central lesson from the Holocaust is that Jews should immediately respond with force to any threat to their existence."

Results and discussion

We examined participants' written responses to ensure that they focused on the correct target (Jewish versus German people) and were not differentially involved in the task as indicated by writing word count. Participants did focus on the target group that they were assigned to in their written responses, and their word count did not differ by lesson focus condition ($M = 47.52$, $SD = 30.18$), $F(1, 93) = 0.43$, $p = .51$, $\eta_p^2 = .005$.

Next, we tested whether, as predicted, target group focus affected the assignment of moral obligations differentially to the two groups. A 2 (Focus: Jews or Germans) \times 2 (Measure: Jewish obligations or German obligations) mixed analysis was employed, with the latter

factor within-subjects. The main effect of measure [Jewish obligations ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 1.39$) versus German obligations ($M = 4.32$, $SD = 1.39$)] was not significant, $F(1, 89) = .47$, $p = .50$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$, nor was the main effect of focus, $F(1, 93) = 2.89$, $p = .09$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$. However, as expected, the two-way interaction was significant, $F(1, 89) = 5.31$, $p < .025$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$. As shown in Fig. 1, participants perceived Jews as having greater moral obligations to not harm others when the lesson focus was on the Jewish victims ($M = 4.59$, $SD = 1.61$) compared to when the lesson focus was on the German perpetrators ($M = 3.90$, $SD = .99$), $F(1, 93) = 5.48$, $p < .025$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$. There was no effect on the moral obligations of Germans, regardless of lesson focus condition [Jewish focus ($M = 4.43$, $SD = 1.55$) versus German focus ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 1.17$)], $F(1, 93) = .91$, $p = .40$, $\eta_p^2 = .001$.

We then assessed the effect of lesson focus on Jewish rights. As expected, endorsement of victim group entitlement to do harm was generally low and there was no effect of lesson focus on Jewish rights [Jewish focus ($M = 3.07$, $SD = 1.21$) versus German focus ($M = 3.15$, $SD = 1.15$)], $F(1, 93) = .11$, $p = .76$, $\eta_p^2 = .001$. Therefore, it is not simply that all expectations referencing the victim group (i.e., Jewish moral obligations and Jewish moral rights) increase when they are the focus of the historical lesson; our effect of lesson focus was specific to Jewish moral obligations to not do harm to others. Focusing on the lesson for the perpetrator group, Germans, did not raise their perceived moral obligations to not harm others.

Experiment 2

Despite the evidence obtained indicating that focusing on the lessons of the past for the victim group elevates their descendants' moral obligations, it might still be the case that focusing on the perpetrator group lowers victim obligations. To rule out this interpretation of the focus difference on victim moral obligations, in Experiment 2 we included a new condition to test the effect of thinking about the lessons of the Holocaust when neither perpetrator nor victim group focus is specified. Participants in this new control condition are asked to consider the lessons of the Holocaust for *Humans* today. Inclusion of this condition allows us to determine whether it is meaning making for the victim group that uniquely elevates perceived Jewish obligations. We expected that participants would perceive Jews as more morally obligated to not do harm when they were the focus of the lesson compared to when either Germans or Humans were the focus of the lesson. If it were the case that Jewish obligations were lowered because the perpetrators were the focus of the lesson rather than Jewish obligations increased when the victims were the focus, then this difference would be absent when the Jewish focus condition is compared to the Humans control condition. Further, we again assessed perceived victim moral rights, predicting that agreement with Jewish entitlement to harm others would be on the whole low and would not vary by focus condition.

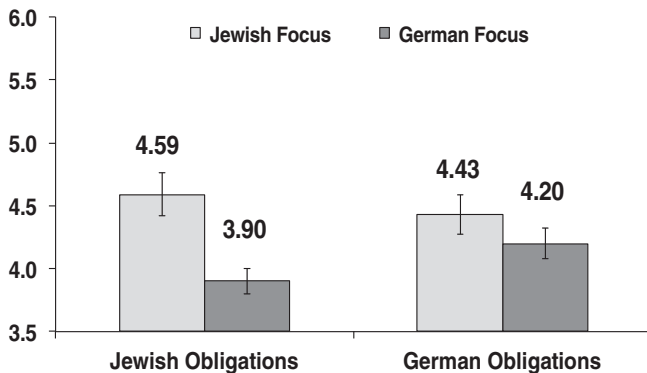


Fig. 1. Mean Jewish and German obligations by lesson focus condition, Experiment 1. Error bars indicate standard errors of the mean.

Method

Non-Jewish American undergraduates ($N = 73$; 40 women, 33 men; $M_{age} = 19.51$, $SD = 1.93$) at a large Midwestern university indicated that their ethnicity was 84% White, 4% Black, 7% Asian, 2% Hispanic, and 3% Other. Their religious group membership was 73% Christians and 27% Other.

All participants were given the same background information about the Holocaust as in the prior study, after which they were randomly assigned to consider the “implications or lessons of the Holocaust that you see for Jews ($N = 25$), Germans ($N = 23$), or Humans ($N = 25$) today.” Participants were then asked to write their opinion concerning “what values Jews [or Germans or Humans] should hold today, if Jews [or Germans or Humans] deserve any special rights because of the Holocaust, if Jews [or Germans or Humans] have any special obligations to others, and the implications of the Holocaust for the way Jewish people [or Germans or Humans] should relate to others today.” Participants then completed the Jewish obligations ($\alpha = .59$) and Jewish rights ($\alpha = .68$) measures used previously.

Results and discussion

We examined participants' written responses to ensure that they focused on the correct target (Jews, Germans, or Humans) based on the condition to which they were assigned, which they did. Again, word count of participant written responses did not differ by condition, indicating that the writing task was not differentially involving by lesson focus ($M = 112.36$, $SD = 48.34$), $F(1, 69) = 0.68$, $p = .51$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$.

A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect of lesson focus on Jewish obligations, $F(2, 69) = 8.69$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .21$. As shown in Fig. 2, participants endorsed Jewish obligations more when the lesson focus was on Jews ($M = 5.33$, $SD = .99$) compared to Germans ($M = 4.61$, $SD = 1.05$), $F(1, 69) = 5.15$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$, or Humans ($M = 4.06$, $SD = 1.19$), $F(1, 69) = 17.29$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .20$, which did not differ from each other, $F(1, 69) = 3.08$, $p = .08$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$. Again, agreement with the idea that the victims' descendants acquire rights to do harm because of their ancestors past suffering was low and there was no significant effect of lesson focus on the Jewish rights measure [Jewish focus ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 1.07$) versus German focus ($M = 3.50$, $SD = .75$) versus Human focus ($M = 3.15$, $SD = 1.08$)], $F(2, 69) = .51$, $p = .60$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$. As predicted, Jewish moral obligations were highest in the Jewish focus condition, replicating the effect observed in the previous study. Considering the lesson of historical victimization for humans more generally, like the perpetrators, does not imply that the victim group specifically should be more moral than others.

In the next study we sought to illuminate the underlying process by which focusing on the lesson for the victim group elevates their moral obligations. Therefore, we assessed the extent to which Jewish people

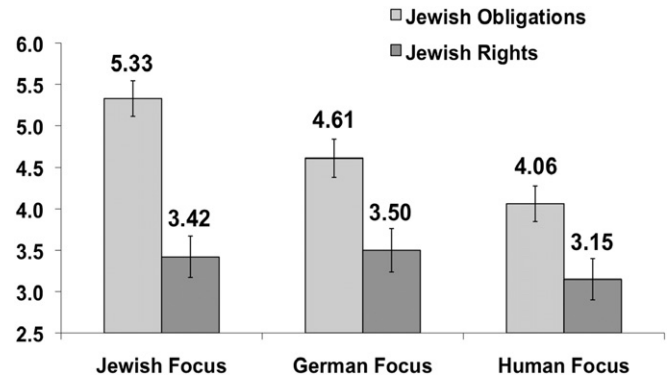


Fig. 2. Mean Jewish obligations and Jewish rights by lesson focus condition, Experiment 2. Error bars indicate standard errors of the mean.

are expected to have derived benefits from their group's past victimization. We predicted that to the extent observers believe Jewish people have grown and thereby derived character benefits from their ancestors' suffering, they will be expected to know better than to harm to others and will be perceived as morally obligated not to do so.

Experiment 3

We argue that because observers engage in benefit finding for the victim group, Jewish people will be seen as morally obligated to not harm others when their past history of victimization is considered. Not only does victimization not bring with it the right to do harm to others, even as a means of protecting the group in the present, but we contend that observers come to believe that the victims' descendants should have learned to be better people—more moral—precisely because of their group's victimization experiences. To the extent that observers do expect victims to have learned something important from their historical suffering, benefit finding in the victim focus condition should account for the greater perceived moral obligations of descendants of the victim group when the lesson from their victimization history is considered. Therefore, we predict that the effect of the lesson focus manipulation on Jewish moral obligations will be mediated by observer benefit finding for the victims.

To assess whether engaging in benefit finding for victims is essential for elevating victim descendants' moral obligations, we include in this study a condition in which the victimized history is made salient but no lesson of the past is contemplated at all. Further, to determine whether observers might simply fail to derive any lessons from such a severe victimization past as the Holocaust, particularly when asked to focus on the lesson for the victim group, we include a measure directly assessing this possibility.

Method

Non-Jewish American undergraduates ($N = 67$; 43 women, 23 men, 1 unknown; $M_{\text{age}} = 19.73$, $SD = 1.88$) at a large Midwestern university indicated that their ethnicity was 89% White, 5% Hispanic, 1.5% Black, 1.5% Asian, 1.5% Native, and 1.5% Other. Their religious group membership was 96% Christians and 4% Other.

All participants were provided with the same background information about the Holocaust as in the previous studies. After reading these basic historical facts, participants were randomly assigned to consider the “implications or lessons of the Holocaust” for Jews ($N = 22$), Germans ($N = 21$), or a control condition ($N = 24$) where they did not consider any lesson for today. Participants then completed a 4-item measure of benefit finding ($\alpha = .84$): “Because of their victimization history, Jewish people should: 1) become stronger, 2) be kinder to others, 3) appreciate their lives more, and 4) be more ethical.” The same measure of Jewish obligations was completed as was used previously, along with a fifth item (“A central lesson from the Holocaust is that Jewish people should know better than commit harm as was done to them”) ($\alpha = .85$). A 3-item measure assessing rejection of the idea that past victimization has any lessons for contemporary group members was also completed ($\alpha = .86$): 1) There is no lesson to be learned from the Holocaust past, 2) It is pointless to try to find meaning in the Holocaust past, and 3) There are no lessons or implications of the Holocaust for Jews today.

Results and discussion

We examined participants' written responses in the two conditions where they were asked to write about the lessons of the past to ensure that they focused on the correct target (Jews or Germans), which they did. Writing word count did not significantly differ by condition: ($M = 40.07$, $SD = 19.46$), $F(1, 41) = 3.03$, $p = .09$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$.

To ensure that our mediator, benefit finding, and central dependent measure, moral obligations, formed separate factors, we conducted a principal components analysis with varimax rotation. As expected, the 4 benefit finding items loaded highly on the first factor (all loadings $> .58$) and the 5 moral obligation items loaded highly on the second factor (all loadings $> .60$). All item cross-loadings were low, with the exception of the “stronger” benefit finding item, which in this study had a cross-loading on the moral obligations factor of .43. These two factors accounted for 67.1% of the variance in the items.

A one-way ANOVA showed that lesson focus exerted a significant effect on benefit finding, $F(1, 64) = 3.65$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .10$. As shown in Fig. 3, participants endorsed the idea that the victim group should derive benefits from having endured the Holocaust more when the target of the lesson was Jews ($M = 3.92$; $SD = 1.37$) compared to Germans ($M = 3.01$; $SD = 1.35$), $F(1, 64) = 5.56$, $p < .025$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$, or the no lesson control condition ($M = 3.05$; $SD = 1.07$), $F(1, 64) = 5.43$, $p < .025$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$. The German lesson condition did not differ from the no lesson condition, $F(1, 64) = .01$, $p = .92$, $\eta_p^2 = .00$.

A one-way ANOVA revealed that lesson focus exerted a significant effect on Jewish obligations, $F(1, 64) = 3.29$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$. Participants endorsed Jewish moral obligations more when the target of the lesson was Jews ($M = 4.28$; $SD = .81$) compared to Germans ($M = 3.50$; $SD = 1.69$), $F(1, 64) = 4.01$, $p = .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$, or the no lesson control condition ($M = 3.38$; $SD = 1.10$), $F(1, 64) = 5.72$, $p < .025$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$. The German lesson condition did not differ from the no lesson condition, $F(1, 64) = .10$, $p = .75$, $\eta_p^2 = .00$.

A one-way ANOVA showed that lesson focus did not exert a significant effect on the belief that there was no lesson to be derived from the Holocaust, $F(1, 62) = 1.30$, $p = .28$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$. On the whole, participants strongly disagreed with the notion that there was no lesson to be derived from this historical victimization event ($M = 1.62$; $SD = 1.10$).

Mediation analyses

Because there were no significant differences between the German lesson and no lesson control condition on benefit finding and Jewish moral obligations, they were combined and coded as -1 . The Jewish lesson condition was coded as 1. Lesson focus significantly predicted Jewish obligations, $b = .42$, $t(66) = 2.56$, $p < .025$, and significantly predicted benefit finding, $b = .44$, $t(66) = 2.72$, $p < .01$. The effect of lesson focus on Jewish obligations became non-significant when benefit finding was included as a predictor, $b = .22$, $t(66) = 1.41$, $p = .16$, while the effect of benefit finding on Jewish obligations was significant, $b = .45$, $t(66) = 4.04$, $p < .01$. A bootstrapping procedure (Preacher and Hayes, 2008) was used to test whether participants' benefit finding for

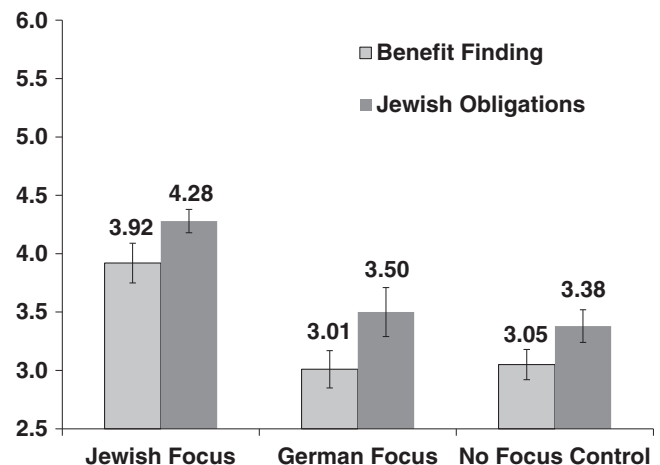


Fig. 3. Mean benefit finding and Jewish obligations by lesson focus condition, Experiment 3. Error bars indicate standard errors of the mean.

the victim group mediated the effect of lesson focus on Jewish obligations. The 95% bias corrected confidence interval did not include zero (.03, .44), indicating that the indirect effect was significant.

This study revealed that when observers focused on the lesson of historical victimization for the victim group, benefit finding and moral expectations for contemporary Jewish peoples' treatment of others increased. Considering the lesson to be derived for the victims of the Nazi genocide—an event of unprecedented injustice—led observers to expect the descendants of the victim group to have gained character benefits from their ancestors' suffering and to have learned something important from it, specifically to not do harm to others.

To test the generalizability of the process identified, in the next experiment we present participants with a previously unknown group's history of victimization and again vary the focus of meaning making—victim group, perpetrator group, or no focus control. We predicted that only in the victim focus condition would observers engage in benefit finding, and expect the descendants of the victim group to have learned to be better people as a result of their group's violent past. Victim moral obligations to not harm others were expected to be highest when observers focus on the lesson for the victim group, with benefit finding mediating this effect. Further, we address whether historical victimization elevates an unknown victim groups' rights; specifically, we test whether focusing on the lesson of the past for the victim group entitles descendants to subsequently harm others.

Experiment 4

Method

Participants and procedure

American adults ($N = 81$; 59 women, 21 men; $M_{\text{age}} = 35.38$, $SD = 14.28$) completed the experiment online via Amazon's MTurk. Participants indicated that their ethnicity was 83% White, 7% Black, 4% Asian, 2.5% Hispanic, 1% Native, and 2.5% Other. In terms of religious group membership, 53% were Christians, 4% Muslims, 41% Other, and 2% Missing.

All participants first read:

The following questions refer to Group A and Group B, and the historical events that occurred between them. Group A was victimized by Group B. The suffering experienced by members of Group A at the hands of Group B was substantial. Group B did grave harm to Group A, killing many members of Group A. Today, with more than 50 years passed since these violent events, Group A and Group B are no longer in conflict.

Participants were then randomly assigned to focus on the implications of the past for the victims (Group A; $N = 29$), the perpetrators (Group B; $N = 24$), or a control condition ($N = 28$). In the victims' condition, participants were told that “we are interested in the implications of Group A's suffering that you see for members of Group A today. Please write a few sentences about what you think the primary lessons of Group A's past suffering are for Group A.” In the perpetrators condition, participants were told that “we are interested in the implications of Group A's suffering that you see for members of Group B today. Please write a few sentences about what you think the primary lessons of Group A's past suffering are for Group B.” In the control condition, participants were asked to write that “you read the above paragraph.”

Dependent measures

Each measure was responded to on a 1 = *Strongly disagree* to 7 = *Strongly agree* scale.

Benefit finding ($\alpha = .83$) was assessed with 4 items: Because of their victimization history, Group A should: 1) become stronger, 2) be kinder to others, 3) appreciate their lives more, and 4) be more moral.

Victim obligations ($\alpha = .88$) was assessed with 5 items: A central lesson for a victimized group like Group A is that they: 1) “take care not to inflict suffering upon other groups,” 2) “should have a better understanding of other groups who are suffering from persecution,” 3) “must not inflict suffering upon other groups,” 4) “Members of a victimized group are morally obligated to ensure that they never act toward others in a harmful way,” and 5) “Members of a victimized group should know better than to do harm to another group.”

Victim entitlement ($r = .58$). The possibility that victimization might be perceived as entailing entitlement to harm others was assessed with the following two items: 1) “Because of a group's own past suffering, a victimized group should be forgiven if they harm other groups,” and 2) “Given the severity of their suffering, a victimized group should be granted leeway to harm another group if they feel it necessary to their survival.”

Results and discussion

We examined participants' written responses in the two conditions where they wrote about the lesson of the past to ensure that they were focused on the correct target (Group A, the victim group, or Group B, the perpetrator group) and were not differentially involved in the task as indicated by word count. Participants correctly focused on the target group assigned (victim or perpetrator), and their writing word count did not differ by lesson focus ($M = 37.91$, $SD = 19.95$), $F(1, 51) = 2.53$, $p = .12$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$.

To ensure that our mediator, benefit finding, and central dependent measure, moral obligations, formed separate factors, we conducted a principal components analysis with varimax rotation. As expected, the five moral obligation items loaded highly on the first factor (all loadings $> .60$) and the four benefit finding items loaded highly on the second factor (all loadings $> .60$). All item cross-loadings were low, with the exception of the “kinder” benefit finding item, which in this study had a cross-loading on the moral obligations factor of .42. These two factors accounted for 68.3% of the variance in the items.

A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect of lesson focus on benefit finding, $F(1, 78) = 3.59$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$. As shown in Fig. 4, participants perceived the victimized group as deriving greater benefits when they focused on the lesson for the victimized group ($M = 4.85$, $SD = 1.18$) compared to when they focused on the lesson for the perpetrator group ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 1.14$), $F(1, 78) = 5.33$, $p < .025$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$, or the control condition where there was no lesson focus, ($M = 4.07$, $SD = 1.51$), $F(1, 78) = 5.23$, $p = .025$, $\eta_p^2 < .06$. There was no difference between the perpetrator group focus and the no focus condition, $F(1, 78) = .01$, $p = .91$, $\eta_p^2 = .00$.

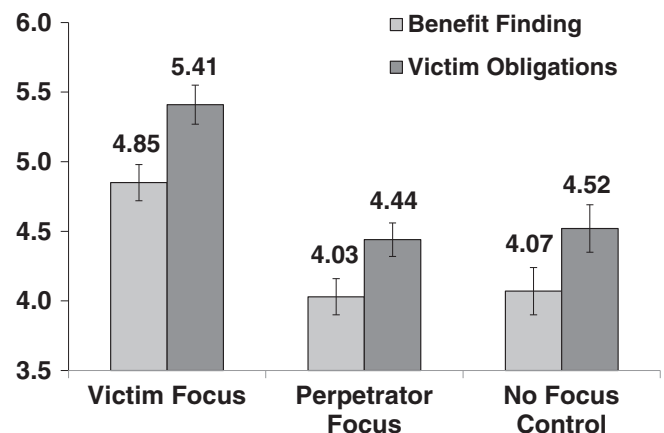


Fig. 4. Mean benefit finding and victim obligations by lesson focus condition for unknown Group A, Experiment 4. Error bars indicate standard errors of the mean.

A one-way ANOVA likewise revealed a significant effect of lesson focus on the victim groups' moral obligations, $F(1, 78) = 4.63$, $p < .025$, $\eta_p^2 = .11$. Participants perceived the victimized group as having significantly greater moral obligations to not harm others when the lesson focus was on the victimized group ($M = 5.41$, $SD = 1.27$) compared to when the lesson focus was on the perpetrator group ($M = 4.44$, $SD = 1.05$), $F(1, 78) = 7.11$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$, and compared to the control condition where there was no lesson focus, ($M = 4.52$, $SD = 1.53$), $F(1, 78) = 6.49$, $p < .025$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$. Again, as shown in Fig. 4, there was no difference between the perpetrator group focus and no focus control condition, $F(1, 78) = .05$, $p = .83$, $\eta_p^2 = .00$.

There was no significant effect of lesson focus on victim entitlement, $F(1, 78) = .66$, $p = .52$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$. Overall, there was little agreement that descendants of the victimized group are entitled to do harm to others because of their group's past suffering ($M = 2.40$, $SD = 1.46$). This result rules out the possibility that focusing on the victim group simply increases agreement with any expectation referencing that group. The effects of focusing on the lesson for the victim group were specific to the benefits they should derive and their moral obligations to not harm others, and did not extend to increased victim rights to do harm.

Mediation analyses

Because there were no significant differences between the perpetrator focus and no focus control condition on benefit finding and victim obligations, they were combined and coded as -1 . The victim lesson condition was coded as 1 . Lesson focus significantly predicted victim obligations, $b = .46$, $t(78) = 3.05$, $p < .01$, and also significantly predicted benefit finding, $b = .40$, $t(78) = 2.69$, $p < .01$. The effect of lesson focus on victim obligations became non-significant when benefit finding was included as a predictor, $b = .21$, $t(78) = 1.67$, $p = .10$, while the effect of benefit finding on victim obligations was significant, $b = .63$, $t(78) = 7.05$, $p < .01$. The 95% bias corrected confidence interval did not include zero (.08, .47), indicating that the indirect effect was significant.

These results provide clear evidence that deriving meaning from historical victimization by focusing on the victim group uniquely elevates the moral obligations of the victims' descendants, and does so via benefit finding. Although historical victimization was salient in all conditions, it was only when observers considered the implications of the past suffering for the victim groups' descendants that moral obligations were elevated. There was no evidence that past victimization entitles the victim groups' descendants to subsequently harm others.

Experiment 5

We next test whether any group—even a previously unknown group—with a history of victimization will be perceived as more morally obligated to refrain from doing harm in the present compared to a group without a history of victimization. We expected that observers would derive greater benefits based on the groups' past when it entailed victimization compared to when it did not, and that descendants of the victimized group would be seen as morally obligated to refrain from harming others compared to the group that had not been victimized. We predicted that observers who learn of the violence experienced by a group in the past will believe descendants of that group should have learned from their ancestors' suffering and, as a result, become more benevolent than those who have not suffered.

Method

American adults ($N = 60$; 29 women, 30 men, 1 unknown; $M_{\text{age}} = 37.02$, $SD = 14.13$) were randomly assigned to one of two conditions when they accessed the experiment online through Amazon's MTurk. Participants indicated that their ethnicity was 75% White, 7%

Black, 5% Asian, 3% Hispanic, and 10% Other. In terms of religious group membership, 61% were Christians, 7% Jewish, 2% Muslims, and 30% Other. Participants in both conditions first read:

The following questions refer to Group A and the historical events its members experienced. Group A developed from an agricultural economy to a more industrial economy during the 20th century.

Participants in the *history of victimization* condition ($N = 34$) then read:

Group A was victimized by another group. The suffering experienced by members of Group A at the hands of this other group was substantial. Many members of Group A were killed by the other group. Today, with more than 50 years passed since these violent events, Group A and this other group are no longer in conflict and Group A has recovered well from the victimization experienced. We are interested in any implications of Group A's past experiences that you see for members of Group A today.

Participants in the *no history of victimization* ($N = 25$) condition read:

Group A was never victimized by any other group so its members never experienced violence at the hands of another group. Group A is doing well today. We are interested in any implications of Group A's past experiences that you see for members of Group A today.

All participants were then asked to write a few sentences about the lessons of Group A's past—which entailed either victimization or no victimization—for members of Group A today.

Dependent measures

Participants completed the same benefit finding measure as used in Experiments 1 and 4, including all five items ($\alpha = .86$), although the wording was changed slightly because in one condition of this study there was no victimization history (e.g., "Because of their past, Group A should become stronger"). Participants completed the same five-item victim moral obligation measure ($\alpha = .87$) used previously, again with a slight wording change (e.g., "A central lesson for Group A is that they must take care not to inflict suffering upon other groups").

Two items assessed perceived injustice of the group's past ($r = .93$): "Group A's past is: 1) unfair, 2) unjust." Perceived likability of the group was measured with the item: "I think I would like members of Group A." Lastly, participants indicated whether Group A had been victimized or had not been victimized in the past as a manipulation check.

Results and discussion

We first examined participants' written responses to ensure that they focused on Group A's history—whether it entailed victimization or not—which all participants did. Furthermore, all participants correctly identified whether they had read about a group with a victimization history or one without a victimized past.

As expected, participants viewed Group A's past as more unjust in the history of victimization condition ($M = 5.97$, $SD = 1.38$) compared to the no history of victimization condition ($M = 2.31$, $SD = 2.00$), $F(1, 58) = 70.33$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .55$. Thus, participants were clearly confronted with a greater threat to their belief in a just world in the history of victimization condition compared to the no history of victimization condition. There was no difference in liking of members of Group A in the victimization condition ($M = 4.88$, $SD = 1.59$) compared to the no history of victimization condition ($M = 5.00$, $SD = 1.60$), $F(1, 58) = .08$, $p = .78$, $\eta_p^2 = .00$. These results provide clear evidence that participants did not derogate the group with a victimization history, which they clearly perceived as unjust. Thus, the common strategy that observers can employ to deal with threat to their just world

beliefs—victim derogation—was not how participants managed the threat to justice posed by exposure to Group A's historical victimization.

As predicted, participants perceived Group A as gaining greater benefits in the history of victimization condition ($M = 5.31, SD = .94$) compared to the no history of victimization condition ($M = 4.62, SD = 1.49$), $F(1, 58) = 4.79, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .08$. Participants also perceived Group A as having greater moral obligations to not do harm to others in the history of victimization condition ($M = 5.67, SD = 1.02$) compared to the no history of victimization condition ($M = 4.91, SD = 1.43$), $F(1, 58) = 5.80, p < .025, \eta_p^2 = .09$.

Mediation analyses

To test whether observer benefit finding for the victims accounts for the effect of having or not having a victimized past on descendants' perceived moral obligations to not harm others, a mediation analysis was performed. The no history of victimization condition was coded as -1 and the history of victimization condition was coded as 1 . History of victimization significantly predicted moral obligations, $b = .38, t(59) = 2.41, p < .025$, and significantly predicted benefit finding, $b = .34, t(59) = 2.19, p < .05$. The effect of history of victimization on moral obligations became non-significant when benefit finding was included as a predictor, $b = .19, t(59) = 1.37, p = .18$, while the effect of benefit finding on moral obligations was significant, $b = .56, t(59) = 5.03, p < .01$. A bootstrapping procedure (Preacher and Hayes, 2008) was used to test whether participants' benefit finding for the victims mediated the effect of history of victimization on moral obligations. The 95% bias corrected confidence interval did not include zero (.01, .40), indicating that the indirect effect was significant.

These results provide strong support for our hypothesis that among observers a salient history of victimization elevates descendants' perceived moral obligations to not harm others compared to a group that lacks a victimization history. Furthermore, the effect of victimization history on moral obligations was not due to observers derogating those who have suffered, but instead was due to observers' making meaning for the victims by deriving benefits from their prior suffering.

In the final experiment we identify the evaluative consequences for members of a historically victimized group should they be seen as violating observers' expectations that they not do harm. We predicted that former victims, who are expected to gain benefits as a consequence of their past suffering, will be seen as more immoral and evoke more negative affect than those who have not been victimized when their current actions are harmful and therefore inconsistent with the higher moral expectations placed on them.

Experiment 6

Method

We test whether observers' moral evaluations of victimized groups and affective reactions toward those groups are contingent on the victimized groups' descendants behaving according to observers' higher moral expectations of them. To do so, we orthogonally manipulated both the victimization history of an unknown group, as well as that group's current actions toward another group—whether they are currently perpetrating harm or helping another group. We expected that participants would judge current perpetrators whose ancestors had been victimized as particularly immoral compared to current perpetrators whose ancestors had not been victimized. Likewise, we expected that participants would report more negative affect when the current perpetrators were members of a previously victimized group compared to when they lacked a victimization history. Only when a group with a victimized past behaves in a way that is inconsistent with observers' higher moral expectations and does harm to another group will they be seen as immoral and evoke negative reactions. Thus, the effect of a group's victimization history on moral assessment and affective reactions should be moderated by the group's current actions.

Method

Participants ($N = 197$; 146 women, 48 men, 3 unknown, $M = 32.96$ age, $SD = 9.23$) were undergraduates at UNED, Madrid, and they completed the study in Spanish. The design of the study was a 2 (Victimization history: victimized or non-victimized) \times 2 (Current group behavior: current perpetrator or current helper). Upon accessing the experiment online, participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions ($N = 53$ Victimized, Current Perpetrator; $N = 43$ Non-victimized, Current Perpetrator; $N = 52$ Victimized, Current Helper; $N = 49$ Non-victimized, Current Helper).

All participants were first told that they would be reading about "real situations that have occurred among neighboring countries, but we will refer to the nations as 'Country A and Country B' so that you are not influenced by knowing the particular nation that performed the actions described." After this introduction, participants read one of two versions of Country A's history. In the *Victimized History* condition, participants learned that:

The citizens of Country A have been victims of physical brutality and persecution for decades. Citizens of Country A suffered a lot from violence, which was caused by the cruelty of the countries surrounding Country A over many years. Those countries carried out abusive actions toward citizens of Country A. These actions had a very negative impact on the citizens of Country A.

Participants in the *Non-victimized History* condition read that:

The citizens of Country A have experienced an optimal situation in terms of their liberty and well-being for decades. Citizens of Country A have therefore never suffered physical brutality or persecution by other surrounding countries.

After learning the history of Country A, but before being told about Country A's current actions toward another nation, Country B, participants indicated the extent to which they perceived the citizens of Country A as having been victims ($0 = \text{not at all victims}$; $6 = \text{extremely victimized}$). Participants then completed a 4-item benefit finding measure ($\alpha = .79$), using the sentence stem: "Due to its past situation, I believe that citizens of Country A in general should now: 1) appreciate life more; 2) be better persons in terms of their moral qualities; 3) be motivated to succeed; and 4) be stronger people in terms of moral qualities." To check whether participants engaged in direct victim blaming, participants indicated the extent to which they disagreed (0) or agreed (6) with the following three items ($\alpha = .71$): 1) "I believe that the citizens of Country A are responsible for the situation they had", 2) "The situation of Country A in the past was, to a great extent, due to mistakes made by their own citizens"; and 3) "Country A had the situation its citizens deserved."

At this point, information about the current suffering of a different country, Country B, was introduced: "Currently, the citizens of Country B are being subjected to extreme physical violence, perpetrated by another nation." Participants were then told that we will provide them with information about the attitudes and actions of the citizens of Country A toward Country B. In the *Current Perpetrator* condition, participants learned that:

The citizens of Country A widely support very aggressive policies toward Country B. Because of Country A's abusive practices, they are causing citizens of Country B to suffer further extreme brutality.

Participants in the *Current Helper* condition read that:

The citizens of Country A widely support policies aimed at helping Country B. Because of Country A's supportive practices, they are significantly contributing to the improvement of the situation in Country B.

To ensure that participants understood the current role of Country A in either harming or helping another group (Country B), participants were asked to indicate their degree of agreement (6) or disagreement (1) with two items ($r = .87, p < .001$): “The general attitude of citizens of Country A toward the situation of Country B is: 1) positive and supportive; and 2) negative and cruel (reverse-scored).”

The central dependent variables measuring moral evaluation of the citizens of Country A and affective reactions to them were then assessed. The extent to which the citizens of Country A were deemed moral people was indicated on the following 5 items ($\alpha = .89$): “The citizens of Country A are: 1) fair, 2) wise, 3) peaceful, 4) educated, and 5) morally admirable.” Affective reactions toward citizens of Country A were indicated on 3 items ($\alpha = .91$): “I feel: 1) admiration, 2) cold (reverse-scored), and 3) trust toward the citizens of Country A.”

Results and discussion

Preliminary analyses

Participants perceived Country A as having a greater history of victimization in the *Victimized History* condition ($M = 4.83, SD = 1.01$) than in the *Non-Victimized* condition ($M = 1.26, SD = 1.53$), $F(1, 193) = 363.06, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .65$. Participants strongly disagreed that citizens of Country A deserved the treatment they received in the *Victimized History* condition ($M = 1.09, SD = .96$) compared to the *Non-Victimized* condition ($M = 2.89, SD = 1.23$), $F(1, 193) = 130.82, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .41$. Indeed, the more participants perceived Country A's history as victimized, the less that treatment was perceived as deserved, $r = -.51, p < .001$. These results indicate that participants accurately perceived Country A's victimization history, and they did not derogate the victims based on that past. Because both these measures were taken before the second manipulation was introduced, they could not be affected by the current role of Country A.

As expected and consistent with Experiment 5, participants did engage in more benefit finding in the *Victimized History* condition ($M = 4.17, SD = 1.24$) than in the *Non-Victimized* condition ($M = 3.30, SD = 1.14$), $F(1, 193) = 25.93, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .12$. Again, because benefit finding was measured before the manipulation of Group A's current role, responses on this measure could not have been affected by that manipulation.

The second manipulation of the group's current actions was also perceived as intended. A 2 (Victimization history: victimized or non-victimized) \times 2 (Current group behavior: current perpetrator or current helper) ANOVA on the measure used to check the effectiveness of this manipulation indicated that participants in the *Current Helper* condition agreed more strongly that Country A's treatment of Country B was positive ($M = 5.03, SD = .91$) compared to the *Current Perpetrator* condition ($M = .81, SD = 1.10$), $F(1, 181) = 779.60, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .82$. Neither the main effect of victimization history, nor the interaction was significant, $F_s < .70, p_s > .41$.

Moral evaluation and affective reactions

A 2 (Victimization history: victimized or non-victimized) \times 2 (Current group behavior: current perpetrator or current helper) ANOVA on moral evaluation of the citizens of Country A revealed a significant main effect of current actions, $F(1, 182) = 412.39, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .70$, where the group was perceived as more moral when they helped another suffering group ($M = 4.18, SD = .89$) compared to when they perpetrated harm ($M = 1.44, SD = .94$). The main effect of victimization history was not significant, $F(1, 182) = 2.82, p = .10, \eta_p^2 = .02$, but as expected, the two-way interaction was significant, $F(1, 182) = 6.11, p < .025, \eta_p^2 = .03$. In both the victimized history condition ($M = 4.24, SD = .86$) and the non-victimized condition ($M = 4.13, SD = .93$) when Country A was said to be currently helping a new suffering group, its citizens were seen as similarly moral, $F(1, 91) = .32, p = .58, \eta_p^2 = .00$. In contrast, moral evaluations of the

citizens of Country A when they were currently harming another group depended on Country A's history, $F(1, 91) = 8.56, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .09$. When Country A had a victimized past, its citizens were seen as less moral when they were currently perpetrating harm ($M = 1.19, SD = .72$) compared to when Country A lacked a history of victimization and was currently perpetrating harm ($M = 1.75, SD = 1.08$).

The same pattern of effects was obtained for observers' affective reactions. A 2 (Victimization history: victimized or non-victimized) \times 2 (Current group behavior: current perpetrator or current helper) ANOVA on feelings toward citizens of Country A revealed a significant main effect of current actions, $F(1, 182) = 554.85, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .76$, where more positive affect was evoked when they helped another group ($M = 4.38, SD = .97$) compared to when they perpetrated harm ($M = 1.05, SD = .93$). The main effect of victimization history was not significant, $F(1, 182) = .39, p = .53, \eta_p^2 = .00$, but as expected, the two-way interaction was significant, $F(1, 182) = 4.52, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .03$. Positive feelings toward the citizens of Country A were expressed, regardless of the group's history [Victimized ($M = 4.49, SD = .93$) versus Non-Victimized ($M = 4.27, SD = 1.01$)], in the *Current Helper* condition, $F(1, 91) = 1.08, p = .30, \eta_p^2 = .01$. However, affective reactions significantly differed by history condition in the *Current Perpetrator* case, $F(1, 91) = 3.99, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .04$. Less positive affect was evident when Country A had a victimized past ($M = .87, SD = .72$) and perpetrated harm compared to when it lacked a victimized past ($M = 1.26, SD = 1.11$) and was currently perpetrating harm toward another group.

This experiment revealed that moral assessment and affective reactions toward a group with a victimization history critically depend on that group's current treatment of others—whether they are seen as living up to or failing in their moral obligations to not do harm. Observers do not simply engage in victim derogation; not only was the victimized group's past suffering not seen as deserved, but the victimized group was responded to equally as positively as the non-victimized group when the group's current actions were perceived as helpful to others. However, when the group was perceived as currently harming another group, having a victimized past led to a more harsh moral assessment and negative affective reactions compared to when the group lacked a victimized history. Thus, there are clear moral and evaluative consequences for victimized groups who appear to be violating their moral obligations to not do harm to others.

General discussion

The present studies reveal how third-party observers, when they make meaning of historical injustice, come to expect groups with a victimized past to be more moral in their treatment of others and respond more negatively toward them when they appear to violate their obligations by harming others. Experiments 1 and 2 confirmed that when meaning is made for a well-known victim group—Jews and the Holocaust—moral obligations of that group's descendants are increased. Experiment 3 revealed the operation of a benefit finding mediation process. In this case, non-Jewish observers expected the descendants of those who directly experienced genocide to have derived character benefits from their ancestors suffering and thereby perceive contemporary Jewish people as morally obligated to not harm others. Experiment 4 revealed the same increased moral obligations in the context of an unfamiliar group with a history of victimization when observers considered the implications of this group's victimization history for its descendants. By deriving benefits for the victims based on the suffering experienced, observers came to expect their descendants to be more moral in their treatment of others. Experiment 5 provided clear evidence that an unknown group with a history of victimization is expected to be more moral than a group that has not been victimized, and that benefit finding for the victims plays a mediating role in their greater moral obligations. Experiment 6 illuminated the evaluative

consequences for victimized group members who appear to be violating observers' moral expectancies by engaging in harm doing. The group with a victimized history was not responded to more negatively than the group lacking a victimized history—unless it was believed to be currently perpetrating harm toward another group.

It is not the case that merely making historical victimization salient leads observers to expect victims to be better; when the lesson of the past for the German perpetrators (Experiment 1), for Humans (Experiment 2), or no lesson (Experiment 3) was considered, the moral obligations of the victim group did not increase. Moral obligations of the victimized group were uniquely elevated when meaning making was focused on the growth the victim group should have experienced as a result of their suffering. Further, no support emerged for the idea that observers make meaning of prior suffering by increasing victims' entitlement to do harm either when the group was previously unknown (Experiment 4) or for the prototypical victim group (Jews in Experiments 1 and 2). Moral entitlement to do harm as a result of past suffering was consistently lower than moral obligations to not do harm, and never differed as a function of lesson focus. It also was not the case that participants believed no lesson can be derived for the victims of atrocity (Experiment 3); observers strongly believed there is a lesson of the Holocaust for contemporary Jewish people and when meaning making efforts were focused on the victim group it consistently elevated moral obligations.

Consistent with just world theory, both Experiments 5 and 6 demonstrated that exposure to past injustice need not lead observers to directly derogate the victimized group (Lerner, 1980). Learning of injustice can instigate meaning making in the form of benefit finding, implying that groups that have suffered compared to those that have not are morally obligated to refrain from harming others. The present research adds to the growing literature showing how observers restore a sense of justice after exposure to individuals who have experienced tragedy by believing that good can emerge from suffering (Anderson et al., 2010; Fernández et al., 2014; Warner and Branscombe, 2011). The current studies go beyond prior work in demonstrating how the process underlying this effect—benefit finding for the victims—has consequences for groups who violate observers' expectations and engage in harm doing toward a new group. We showed the operation of this psychological process and its moral evaluative consequences for descendants of those who suffered even when the injustice was experienced by a previously unknown group. Benefit finding for the victims suggests to observers that victimized group members should act more morally than those who have not suffered. Use of this justice restoration strategy, despite it not involving overt victim derogation, elevates expectations that those who have been victimized should not harm others and has consequences for judgments of them when they appear to be violating those expectations.

Experiment 6 revealed that victimized groups who do not fulfill the higher moral expectations held by observers are perceived as particularly immoral perpetrators, more immoral than perpetrators lacking a history of victimization. This has important implications for descendants of those who have been victimized who not only have to deal with the suffering their ancestors experienced, but also the additional burden of being held to a higher moral standard in terms of their actions in the present. There is a longstanding belief that “suffering purifies the soul,” which provides for a “happy ending” for observers following exposure to others' traumatic experiences. Although victims too may engage in benefit finding and doing so predicts victim resilience (Affleck et al., 1987; Bower et al., 2009; Davis et al., 1998), as we showed in the current studies observers do so as a means of protecting their own belief that the world is just. It may even be that such meaning making among perpetrator groups could also serve to restore justice without victim derogation. Rotella et al. (in press) examined the use of redemption narratives, where positive benefits are seen as emerging from negative events, in groups that had perpetrated intergroup harm (e.g., Americans interned Japanese-Americans during World War II).

When perpetrator group members were prompted to make meaning of their group's past harm doing, they used redemptive narratives referencing their own group, experienced greater collective guilt for their group's actions, and were more likely to support reparations for the victimized group. Further, when Rotella et al. (in press) exposed victim group members to perpetrator groups' positive character growth narratives, they were more willing to reconcile with the perpetrator group. Future research might examine how third-party observers, to the extent that they engage in such character growth meaning making for perpetrator groups, might then expect their descendants to display greater morality in their treatment of others.

The current studies illustrate that shifting the focus of the lesson of historical victimization from the perpetrator group (Germans) to the victim group (Jews) increases the perceived moral obligations of the victimized group. In fact, when observers elaborated on the lesson to be drawn from the Holocaust for Jews, then the moral obligations of the victimized group increased to be equal to that of the perpetrator group. In contrast, perceived Jewish rights were not affected by shifting the focus of the lesson to be drawn from the perpetrators to the victims. Our studies are the first to examine victim moral rights from the perspective of third-party observers and we found that Jewish rights were consistently lower than their obligations and, critically, were not affected by lesson focus. Third-party observers may be generally uncomfortable with granting victims a moral license to do harm, given that doing so would almost certainly continue the cycle of violence. Consistent with the general ethical prescription found in the “Silver Rule” (Terry, 2004), observers do not perceive victims as entitled to do to others what was done to them. The exception to this may be when victims do harm to the original perpetrator group, instead of a different target which we investigated. In cases of revenge against the original harm perpetrator, observers may still be conflicted over this method of restoring justice although they may be more likely to endorse the right of victims to do harm in that case (Bies and Tripp, 2001).

Observers vs. victims and perpetrators

Reminding third party observers of the victimized group's historical suffering elevates expectations that they should be more moral as a consequence. This expectation stands in sharp contrast to how victimized group members themselves interpret the meaning of their victimized history and its relevance for present-day actions. Wohl and Branscombe (2008) found that when Jewish North Americans were reminded of the Holocaust it resulted in *lessened* guilt assignment to Israel for current harm to Palestinians. Similarly, making White women's suffering due to pervasive sexism salient decreased their pro-Black responses compared to when sexism was not salient (Craig et al., 2012). Research with victims of the Holocaust and their descendants too supports the argument that victimization salience often decreases, rather than increases, prosocial emotional responses to others' suffering (Chaitin and Steinberg, 2008). Indeed, Klar et al. (2013) report that among Israelis, the most common interpretation of the Holocaust is a moral rights one (“never be a victim again”), whereas the moral obligations interpretation (“never become a perpetrator”) is considerably less frequent. Particularly when the suffering outgroup is a current adversary—Palestinians in the case of Jews, sexist men in the case of women—reminders of one's own group's historical suffering undermines victim group members' moral obligations to help (Warner et al., 2014).

Once observers consider a group's victimization history and perceive the lesson of the past to be one of moral obligations, victimized groups are more likely to be condemned when they violate these expectations and instead are seen as harming others. This effect can be considered a form of secondary victimization given that more negative judgments following harm to others occurs for those with a victimization history than for those without a victimization history. In the present research, we examined how observers condemned present harm doing in an

unknown victimized group rather than a known intergroup conflict. Thus, we do not have direct evidence in the current studies that condemnation of harm doing in specific intergroup contexts (e.g., criticism of Israel's policy toward and current treatment of Palestinians) is driven by perceiving the historically victimized group as morally obligated to not do harm.

Although our studies suggest that reminding third-parties of victims' past suffering can result in descendants being held to a higher standard of intergroup conduct, it is unknown how victim group members are likely to react were they to recognize the "double moral standard" they are subjected to (Grob and Roth, 2008). We suggest that victim group members are likely to respond with considerable anger and indignation were they to realize that third-parties expect them to be more moral than those without a history of suffering. On the other hand, such third-party moral obligations, to the extent that victims are aware of them, could act as a constraint on victim groups' intergroup actions. Knowing that one's group may lose the support of the international community if harmful actions are undertaken toward another group might temper any inclination of groups with a victimized past from doing so.

No previous research has compared perceptions of victim entitlement and victim obligations, or benefit finding at the collective level from the perspective of third-party observers. Because the perspective of perpetrator and victim group members is likely to differ from that of third-parties, future research should compare the moral expectations held by perpetrator, victim, and observer group members. If the expectations of these different types of groups for historically victimized groups' present-day conduct do differ, this can potentially create conflicts between parties in judging the current actions of a group with a history of victimization. We suggest that the process through which moral obligations would be elevated is likely to differ between these different groups. To the extent that benefit finding serves to alleviate observers' threat to belief in a just world, this mechanism may be less likely among perpetrator and victim group members. Future research manipulating benefit finding directly among all three types of groups would be especially useful.

As Furnham (2001) has illustrated, individuals in high power-distance countries are more likely to believe in a just world relative to those in low power-distance countries. For this reason, national context might moderate the extent to which exposure to clear instances of injustice are distressing, and consequently instigate meaning making. Our research was conducted in a relatively low power-distance nation (the USA), as well as a relatively high power-distance nation (Spain), according to Hofstede's (1984) ranking of nations. Yet, in both of these national contexts, we observed similar processes operating. We suggest that extreme forms of victimization such as genocide are likely to be threatening to most individuals' belief in a just world and therefore provoke responses aimed at reducing the threat. Use of benefit finding for groups with a victimized history may be especially likely for those who have seemingly fully recovered from their traumatic past. If the historically victimized groups we examined were believed to be continuing to suffer in the present, it is unlikely that observers would hold them to a higher moral standard of conduct. That is, without some passage of time during which recovery might be expected to take place, observers are unlikely to expect character growth and engage in benefit finding for the victims' descendants (Fernández et al., 2014).

Our participants largely rejected the idea that there was no lesson or meaning to be taken from historical victimization, even when they were not explicitly asked to think about the implications of victimization. Moral obligations to not harm others were consistently higher for those with a history of victimization, compared to those lacking such history. This was the case for both previously unknown groups as well as for the most well known historically victimized group. For observers, believing that negative events serve some purpose or teach some lesson helps people make sense of the world and allows people to continue to believe that good will ultimately redeem bad (Lerner, 1980; McAdams,

2006). When the lesson is that victimized groups should become more moral as a result of having suffered, victimized groups will be expected to know better than to harm others. If, however, victimized groups appear to have failed in learning this lesson, only then will observers react negatively to those with a victimized history.

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