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Parental competitive victimhood and interethnic discrimination among their children: The mediating role of ethnic socialization and symbolic threat to the in-group

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The mediating role of ethnic socialization and symbolic threat to the in-group

Abstract

Links between competitive victimhood and discrimination are well-documented. However, the mechanisms how victimhood beliefs remain relevant for decades and how conflict survivors can shape attitudes and behaviours of the post-conflict generations are little understood. Following the Transgenerational Transmission Hypothesis and the Integrated Threat Theory, we propose that the link between parental competitive victimhood and discrimination among their children is mediated through family ethnic socialization and symbolic threat to the in-group. Participants were families that included youth (N=227) and their parents (172 mothers, 150 fathers) in Vukovar, Croatia. A multiple group, chain mediation model was conducted with parental competitive victimhood as the predictor; youth ethnic socialization and symbolic threat as sequential mediators; and youth tendency to discriminate against the out-group and perceived ethnic in-group discrimination as outcomes. The findings revealed significant indirect effects of the competitive victimhood on both outcomes, via the proposed mediators. The only difference in the model between majority Croats and minority Serbs, was the path from symbolic threat to tendency to discriminate, which was positive and significant for both groups, but stronger among Croats. The findings imply that interventions in post-conflict settings need to address family ethnic socialization processes in addition to directly working with youth.

Keywords: competitive victimhood, ethnic socialization, symbolic threat, out-group discrimination, perceived ethnic in-group discrimination

Post-conflict communities are a challenging environment to grow up in. Children and youth[1] develop their views about self, others, and the future in a shadow of past conflict and

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[1] We use the terms *children* or *youth* considering the age of the research participants. Term *children* refers to the participants up to 11 years, and *youth* for those who are aged 12 or older (Barber, 2009; Fowler, Tompsett, Braciszewski, Jacques-Tiura, & Baltes, 2009). We use the term *children* independently of age when it signifies family role.

ongoing division (Bar-Tal, Diamond, & Nasie, 2017). Many communities around the world, such as Israel, Northern Ireland, and former Yugoslavia, have witnessed that the formal signing of peace agreement does not immediately alleviate tension nor make communities functional (Mac Ginty, Muldoon, & Ferguson, 2007). Moreover, Cairns and Roe (2003) pointed out that formal political solutions can be fragile if members of communities, especially young people, continue to maintain intergroup hostilities.

The interpretation and integration of past suffering is an important issue for post-conflict communities, particularly when previously conflicting groups continue to live together. Victimhood status can have positive effects such as boosting in-group cohesion and gathering moral and material support from third parties (Gonzalez, Manzi, & Noor, 2011; Wohl & Branscombe, 2010). However, it can contribute to the justification and legitimisation of revenge against former rivals or denying responsibility for past wrongdoings (Corkalo et al., 2004; Van Tongeren, Burnette, O'Boyle, Worthington, & Forsyth, 2013; Wohl & Branscombe, 2008).

Family members' stories about victimhood can include not only direct descriptions of collective violence, but also broader messages about desirable intergroup behaviour as well as transmitting awareness of the group membership relevance (Vollhardt, 2012). In doing so, family members who have witnessed the violence can shape intergroup views, expectations, and behaviours of the generations born after the formal end of conflict.

Noor, Vollhardt, Mari, and Nadler (2017) pointed out that besides a general sense of victimhood, group members may also use different ways to construe their sense of victimhood, which has a distinct impact on intergroup relations. Thus, we focus on specific comparative victimhood belief – competitive victimhood. Following the Transgenerational Transmission Hypothesis (Danieli, 1998; Vollhardt, 2012) and the Integrated Threat Theory (ITT; Stephan & Renfro, 2002), we examine the role of the family in transmitting competitive victimhood beliefs to the post-conflict generation and the implications for youth outcomes. We propose that the link from parental competitive victimhood to children's intergroup attitudes and behaviours is mediated by ethnic socialization within the family and symbolic threat to the in-group.

Competitive Victimhood

Collective victimization results from group-based violence committed by one group against another (Vollhardt, 2012). Consequently, the targeted group may form the sense of collective victimhood, i.e. a set of strong affects, cognitions, and behaviours related to the victimisation that shape collective in-group memory and interactions with other groups (Bar-Tal, Chernyak-Hai, Schori, & Gundar, 2009; Noor et al., 2017). A number of studies have shown that collective victimhood hinders reconciliation by reducing collective guilt acceptance and readiness for intergroup forgiveness (Jelić, Čorkalo Biruški & Ajduković, 2017; Wohl & Branscombe, 2008; Van Tongeren et al., 2013), justifying in-group misdeeds (Čorkalo Biruški & Magoč, 2009) and reducing intergroup trust toward the out-group (Rotella, Richeson, Chiao, & Bean, 2013).

Recent studies have shown that along with the belief that the in-group is a victim, it is important how in-group members construe their victim beliefs using intergroup comparison. Though there are a number of comparative victim beliefs, competitive victimhood has particularly severe negative effects on intergroup relations (for review see Szabó, in press). Noor, Brown, Gonzalez, Manzi, and Lewis (2008a) introduced the model of competitive victimhood which proposed victimhood status as a unique psychological resource. Thus, conflicting groups each hold the belief that the in-group suffered more than the out-group, irrespective of their role

in the conflict. Competitive victimhood was associated with less trust and less willingness to forgive and reconcile (Noor et al., 2008a; Noor, Brown, & Prentice, 2008b), negative intergroup attitudes and the desire to politically exclude the out-groups (Vollhardt & Bilali, 2015).

Studies on collective victimhood deal mostly with responses to violence that were not personally experienced or those that even happened generations ago (Vollhardt, 2012). Past in-group suffering can be conveyed on the societal level by transmission of victimhood narratives through education, social movements, media, and through cultural processes like commemorations, memorials and political speeches (Vollhardt, 2012). More proximally, family members are the most influential agents of victimhood transmission. Previous studies have studied the transmission of victimhood in general (e.g. Reidy et al., 2015), but have not considered different patterns of transmission for specific victimhood beliefs. More clinically oriented studies focused on the transmission of the trauma symptoms to second and third generation of survivors, e.g. among descendants of Holocaust survivors (Danieli, Norris, & Engdahl, 2016), war veterans (Dekel & Goldblatt, 2008) and families in Northern Ireland after the Troubles (Downes, Harrison, Curran, & Kavanagh, 2013).

However, the mechanisms of transmission are less understood. Several authors (Felsen, 1998; Schwartz, Dohrenwend, & Levav, 1994) suggested two broader sets of mechanisms: direct (specific) and indirect (general). According to the direct (specific) hypothesis, children develop difficulties by mimicking parents' behaviour and symptom patterns or due to vicarious exposure to traumatic events through parental stories of victimization. The indirect (general) hypothesis suggests differences in parenting as the origin of changes in children's attitudes, moods and behaviours. Advancing our understanding of how victimhood entitlement is sustained, we propose ethnic socialization within the family as an indirect (general) transmission mechanism.

Ethnic Socialization within Family

Through ethnic socialization, parents transmit to their children information, values, and perspectives about ethnicity (Hughes et. al, 2006). Interpretation of past conflict and ongoing intergroup relations is a challenge for successful parenting in any multiethnic setting. It may be especially demanding for parents who have witnessed collective violence or strongly identify with the in-group suffering. Despite the lack of empirical evidence, but in line with indirect (general) transmission, it is plausible that these parents shape ethnic socialization in accordance with their beliefs about victimhood and group membership. Making the ethnicity salient in family life is also expected because believing in greater in-group victimhood is associated with increased group identification (David & Bar-Tal, 2009).

Ethnic socialization can be an important factor in how children and youth shape their identity, develop adjustment difficulties, and cope with prejudice and discrimination (Hughes et al., 2006; Priest et al., 2014). Teaching young people about their origin and group pride has consistently been shown as a protective developmental factor associated with more mature and positive ethnic identity (Umaña-Taylor & Fine, 2004), higher self-esteem (Constantine & Blackmon, 2002), and fewer behavioural problems (Caughy, O'Campo, Randolph, & Nickerson, 2002).

Toward late childhood and early adolescence, youth begin to explore their identities, including ethnic identity (Erikson, 1968; Phinney, 1990), while their perception of discrimination and accompanying stress intensifies (Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000). Accordingly, parents start to prepare children for biases they will most likely encounter (Hughes, 2003; Hughes & Chen, 1997). Parents may convey this message more frequently if they have personal experiences with discrimination (Crouter, Baril, Davis, & McHale, 2008; Hughes & Chen, 1997) or if they

believe their children face discrimination (Lalonde, Jones, & Stroinkom, 2008; Taylor & McKeown, 2018). This parental behaviour can protect children from negative consequences of discrimination (Riina & McHale, 2012).

In some situations, rather than preparing children for bias, parents promote out-group mistrust. Parental experience of discrimination and their belief that their children experience unfair treatment by others, are related to emphasizing the need for caution and mistrust in interaction with out-group members (Hughes & Chen, 1997). Promoting mistrust as an aspect of ethnic socialization could be a developmental risk factor, since it is associated with children's deviant behaviour and an expectation of discrimination and unfair treatment (Biafora, Warheit, Zimmerman, & Gil, 1993; Tran & Lee, 2010).

Accentuation of group membership through ethnic socialization can shape children's interpretation of new events. For example, when ethnic group membership is highly salient, it is more likely that everyday events will be perceived and interpreted in terms of ethnicity (Reidy et al., 2015). Thus, ethnic socialization in the home may be related to the perception of school and community events as dangerous and contribute to a greater sense of in-group threat.

Symbolic Threat to the In-group

Individuals perceive threats in the environment, evaluate them, and consequently form beliefs about their personal sense of security (Bar-Tal & Jacobson, 1998). Group status differences intensify the perception of threat, negative intergroup emotions, and negative out-group orientation. The sense of being under threat also elicits strong negative out-group emotions, such as anxiety, fear, and anger (Stephan, Ybarra, & Morrison, 2009). Thus, perceiving threat makes people more afraid and cautious in contact with the out-group.

In line with the ITT (Stephan & Renfro, 2002), competition between groups is one of the contextual antecedents of perceived threat from the out-group, encouraging realistic threat (threat to resources, power and status) and/or symbolic threat (threat to group identity). Perceiving threat enhances prejudice in both majority and minority groups (Riek, Mania, & Gaertner, 2006) and leads to discrimination and opposition to policies that favour out-groups (Renfro, Duran, Stephan, & Clason, 2006; Sawires & Peacock, 2000). As competitive victimhood is a form of intergroup competition, we extend past research that has focused primarily on intergroup attitudes and argue that competitive victimhood may also transgenerationally and indirectly relate to changes in behaviour, such as out-group discrimination.

We focused on symbolic threat since victimhood status is an inherent foundation for the group identity in post-conflict contexts (Bar-Tal et al., 2009). Furthermore, findings from the study context showed the importance of symbolic, but not realistic threat, in mediating relations between intergroup contact and a variety of intergroup outcomes (Löw Stanić, 2014). Moreover, there is a prominent belief that victim and perpetrator status are mutually exclusive, i.e. if one group is considered a victim, the other group is labelled a perpetrator (Jelić et al., 2017). Therefore, out-group claims of victimhood status may be considered as a symbolic threat to the in-group identity; competitive victimhood may fuel tensions.

The ITT also proposes different reactions to potential threats depending on the majority-minority group status. Majority groups are, in general, more likely to react when threatened because they are not used to that feeling, are relatively more powerful, have enough resources to react, and perceive a loss of resources as more dramatic than less privileged groups (Stephan et al., 2009). Stronger reactions to threats in majority, than in minority groups, cohere with Prospect Theory (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979), postulating that individuals are more sensitive to a potential loss than to a potential gain. Furthermore, the in-group's perception of potential loss of

resources is more aversive than not having resources in the first place, and consequently leads to destructive intergroup competition (Halevy, Chou, Cohen & Bornstein, 2010).

Although fear of losing resources represents a realistic threat, it could also be perceived as a symbolic threat – in terms of endangering the in-group value of dominance (O'Connor, 2013), group status and esteem (Branscombe, Spears, Ellemers, & Doosje, 2002). Furthermore, fear of losing the in-group (privileged) status is moderated by perceived status legitimacy (LeBlanc, Beaton & Walker, 2015), or how much the in-group's status is considered fair or justified. This notion is especially important in post-conflict settings where groups compete over the victimhood status. A majority group may believe that its higher status is based on legitimate grounds, regarding the different role that groups had during the conflict.

Youth in the Context of a Post-conflict Ethnic Divide: City of Vukovar

The collapse of the former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s brought a massive and devastating war to the previously economically rich and well-integrated multi-ethnic community of Vukovar. The extent and intensity of injury was physical – destroying people's lives and their environment, psychological – spreading fear and terror, and symbolic – destroying signs of identity, flags, cemeteries, monuments and churches (Čorkalo Biruški & Ajduković, 2009). The destruction aimed to eliminate any trace of the out-group in the attempt to prevent the possibility of a multi-ethnic future. The peace accord was signed in 1995 and regulated gradual peaceful reintegration of the area over the next three years.

Today, Vukovar has about 27,700 inhabitants (57% Croats and 35% Serbs; Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2013). The reconstruction of the urban infrastructure is mostly completed, but in social reconstruction, only minor improvements can be seen (Čorkalo Biruški, 2016). One of the major obstacles to social reconstruction is the difference between Croats' and Serbs' interpretations of war-related events. While Croats resent Serbs for not expressing an unequivocal and strong acknowledgment for the Croatian war victimization, Serbs complain that Croats do not acknowledge the discrimination and hostilities toward Serbs in the post-war period (Čorkalo Biruški & Ajduković, 2009; Jelić et al., 2017). Both groups also compete over victimhood and show little responsibility for and/or justify in-group misdeeds committed during and after the war (Čorkalo Biruški & Magoč, 2009; Jelić et al., 2017). Consequently, competitive victimhood beliefs are shaped and sustained: Croats' based on recent war victimization and Serbs' based on the post-war discrimination they experience in contemporary Croatia and historical grievances from World War II (for more on historical context see Čorkalo Biruški, 2012).

Children and youth born in post-war Vukovar face clear social norms about undesirability of interethnic contact, views of ethnicity as dominant information about the other and have very few models for learning interethnic cooperation. Division in young people's lives is further sustained by the separated education system in Croatian and Serbian language (Čorkalo Biruški & Ajduković, 2007). Accordingly, compared to adults, children show more negative out-group attitudes and behaviours (Ajduković & Čorkalo Biruški, 2008; Čorkalo Biruški & Ajduković, 2007). Constant division along ethnic lines and frequent social comparisons highlight ethnic group membership. Ethnicity becomes the key foundation around which children and youth build their social identity. In line with the Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), youth value in-group peers more and use ethnicity as a source of self-esteem. In other words, growing up in this kind of community clearly keeps children and youth "caught between the ethnic sides" (Ajduković & Čorkalo Biruški, 2008, p. 337). As part of navigating troubled interethnic relations in community, children and youth have a demanding task of constructing and interpreting the victimization that their parents' generation experienced during the war.

Current Study

The present study examined family dynamics and youth experiences in the post-conflict setting of Vukovar, Croatia. We hypothesized that parents' perception of their in-group being a greater victim would be related to a more pronounced tendency to discriminate against the out-group and also to an elevated perception that the in-group is being discriminated among their children. Regarding the mediators, we hypothesized that more intensive ethnic socialization, which boosts the relevance of ethnicity, will sensitize youth to perceive greater symbolic intergroup threats. Consequently, the youth will be more prone to both discriminate and perceive discrimination.

We focused on adolescence for several reasons. First, adolescents have an important role in maintaining current division in the community, but also a potential for advancing social change (McEvoy-Levy, 2006). Second, adolescents have a major developmental task of exploring and establishing identity (Erikson, 1968). Ethnicity becomes a salient part of their social identity and seeking what this group membership means becomes very important (Phinney, 1990). Finally, although youth start to spend more time outside the home and their social world expands exposing them to various environmental influences, their family remains an important factor in their lives (Reidy et al., 2015; Steinberg, 2001; Taylor et al., 2017b).

Previous research on ethnic socialization was primarily conducted with minority families (Hughes et al., 2006; Priest et al., 2014). This tendency reveals an assumption that majority-group parents do not perceive intergroup issues as important due to their privileged status in the social hierarchy. However, considering the importance of ethnicity for both Croats and Serbs in Vukovar (Ajduković & Čorkalo Biruški, 2008), we test for group differences in the proposed chain mediation model. This is an exploratory analysis due to theoretical ambiguity regarding group status, competing stories of victimhood, and the groups' roles in historical conflicts.

Method

Participants and Procedures

Data collection was conducted in spring of 2011. Participants were recruited through six schools in Vukovar. The sample was purposefully selected to include schools that taught classes in either Croatian or Serbian language[2]. After initial contact with administrators, all approached schools agreed to participate. First, parents of primary school children were invited to a school meeting to learn about the study. Then, a letter was sent home explaining the goals of the research and signed parental consent forms for primary school children were returned to the

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[2] In Vukovar, there are seven primary schools, three that teach in Croatian only, and four where classes are taught separately in either Croatian or Serbian language. In the four secondary schools, classes are taught separately in either Croatian or Serbian. Only schools that teach in both languages were included in this study to ensure a balanced sample.

child's teacher. Only 6 parents of primary school children refused participation in the study for their children. In accordance with *Ethical code for research with children* in Croatia for children older than 14 years (youth in secondary schools), no parental written consent was asked; however, those parents also received a letter with information about the study. All children provided their own assent before completing the questionnaire.

Youth paper-and-pencil surveys were administered in one classroom period (45 minutes) in the children's mother tongue by the University of Zagreb team. Parental surveys were sent home through the child and returned to the classroom teacher in a sealed envelope to be collected by the research team. To be included in the study, at least one parent participated for each child. When possible, each parent completed the questionnaire independently. The institutional review boards of University of Zagreb and University of Notre Dame approved all procedures.

In total, 227 families participated in the study. The families were comprised of mothers (n = 172; age: $M = 41.93$, $SD = 5.00$, range: 32 to 59 years; ethnicity: 53% Croat, 47% Serb), fathers ($n = 150$; age: $M = 45.54$, $SD = 5.51$, range: 35 to 67 years; ethnicity: 51% Croat, 49% Serb), and adolescents ($n = 227$; 59% male; 51% Croat; 49% Serb) who were in the last year of primary school and the second year of secondary school ($M = 15.88$ years, $SD = 1.12$). In this sample, 191 (84%) participants came from two-parent households. For families in which both parents returned questionnaires, there were 14 cases of interethnic Croat-Serb marriages (6% of total sample).

Measures

We analysed data provided by family members: the child and one or two parents. Parents reported on the competitive victimhood, while youth reported on the ethnic socialization within family, symbolic threat to the in-group, tendency to discriminate against the out-group and perceived ethnic in-group discrimination.

Competitive victimhood (CV). Mothers and fathers reported on two items that assessed the degree to which they perceived each ethnic group (Croat/Serb) to be a victim in the past war (Čorkalo Biruški, Ajduković, Löw, & Barić, 2016). The scale for each item ranged from 0 (*not a victim at all*) to 100 (*greatest victim*). Based on previous literature which has taken the difference of two groups on self-reported scales (Andrighetto, Mari, Volpato, & Behluli, 2012; Shnabel, Halabi, & Noor, 2013), in this study competitive victimhood was calculated by the difference score of these two items. The parental score was either the single score if only one of the parents responded, or the average of mother and father reports if both parents returned questionnaires. The final scores represented the degree to which parents felt their in-group was a greater victim. This construct assessed the collective suffering of each side, but by taking a difference score, the competitive nature of victimhood was assessed. Compared to other measures of this construct, the current study did not force a direct comparison (i.e. asking participants which group suffered more or less; Sullivan, Landau, Branscombe, & Rothschild, 2012), but rather allowed for independent measure for each group. This is a conflict-specific (vs. global, see Vollhardt & Bilali, 2015) measure of victimhood by referring to a discrete period of violence between the two groups. Higher positive scores indicate that parents felt their in-group was a greater war victim compared to the out-group.

Ethnic socialization within family (ESF). This scale was developed for the study context (Štambuk & Čorkalo Biruški, 2011). Youth responded on a 4-point scale from (*never*) to 4 (*very often*) to six items about how often they discuss ethnicity issues within family. Sample items included: "My parents teach me to never forget my origin (heritage)" and "My parents share with me their experiences of discrimination due to ethnicity." Higher scores indicate more frequent socialization practices that make ethnicity a salient issue in family life as well as the

source of possible discrimination and unjust practices in the community. The scale had adequate internal consistency (Table 1).

Symbolic threat to the in-group (STI). This scale was developed in the study context (Taylor, Merrilees, Ajduković, Čorkalo Biruški, & Cummings, 2017a). Youth responded to eight items on a 4-point Likert-type scale from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 4 (*completely agree*). Items included statements such as "Youth from the other ethnic group do not value my language" and "Our Serbian/Croatian peers do not accept our culture, national symbols and customs." The scale had an adequate internal consistency (Table 1) and higher scores reflect greater symbolic threat.

Tendency to discriminate against the out-group (TTD). This scale is designed as a set of vignettes describing everyday situations (e.g. helping with homework, choosing partners for sport and science competitions, approaching a boy or a girl the participant likes, sharing a room on a school trip, etc.). Youth responded with 1 (*Yes*) or 0 (*No*) if they would necessarily choose in-group member as a partner in the activity (Čorkalo Biruški & Ajduković, 2007; Ajduković & Čorkalo Biruški, 2008). Illustrative examples of vignettes is: "If I had to decide who is going to join the school sport team, between the two students I would choose a Croat/Serb even if the other one was a better sportsman." The total score was created by summing up response on eight vignettes. The scale had excellent internal consistency (Table 1). Higher scores indicated a stronger tendency to socially discriminate against the out-group.

Perceived ethnic in-group discrimination (PEID). In order to assess the degree in which youth perceived in-group as discriminated due to ethnicity, we developed a six items scale with two reverse-coded items (Čorkalo Biruški & Ajduković, 2011). The participants responded on a 5-point Likert-type scale from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 5 (*completely agree*); thus, higher scores indicated more perceived discrimination. Example items included "It is more likely for a Serb (Croat) to get a job in Vukovar than a Croat (Serb)" and "Children enrolled in the Serbian

(Croat) language school programs have worse equipment and classrooms" - reversed. Overall internal consistency for this scale was adequate (Table 1).

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations for the study variables and results for the mean difference tests between Croats and Serbs are shown in Table 1.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

Measurement invariance for each scale was tested using Mplus 7 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2011); a multiple group, fixed-factor approach was used for ethnic socialization, symbolic threat and perceived discrimination. Because of the categorical responses multiple-indicators multiple-causes (MIMIC) modelling was used for tendency to discriminate. Model fit was assessed using the following guidelines: Tucker Lewis Index (TLI) and comparative fit index (CFI) ≥ .90, root mean square residual (RMSEA) and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) ≤ .08 (Hu & Bentler, 1999). For the MIMIC model, the Weighted Root Mean Square Residual (WRMR) with a cut-off of < 1.0 was also used (Yu, 2002). Nested models were evaluated using chi-square difference test and a change in the CFI less than .01 (Cheung & Renswold, 2002). That is, if the model did not fit significantly worse, the estimated values (e.g., factor loadings) were constrained to be equal across groups (Widaman & Reise, 1997).

Table 3 reports the model fit indices for the measurement invariance tests. First, for ethnic socialization, configural invariance was established with all factor loadings freely estimated across both Croat and Serb youth. Next, weak invariance, i.e. constraining the factor loadings to be equal across groups, was established. Strong factorial invariance, i.e. constraining the factor means to be equal across group, could not be established. However, only weak invariance is

needed to proceed to test the structural model (Little, Preacher, Selig, & Card, 2007). Following these same procedures, weak invariance was established for symbolic threat, while perceived discrimination met the criteria for configural invariance. Finally, for tendency to discriminate, the adequate model fit of the MIMIC approach suggested measurement invariance in intercepts/thresholds across groups. Given these findings, the manifest variables were used to test the structural path model.

Primary Analyses

To test the primary hypotheses, multiple group chain mediation was conducted using path analysis with manifest variables in Mplus 7 by adapting procedures from Stride, Gardner, Catley, and Thomas (2015) to account for multivariate outcomes. The purpose of this approach is to identify if the hypothesized process unfolds in a similar manner for both groups, that is, if the mediated effects are the same for Croat and Serb families. The control variables of adolescents' age and gender were modelled as exogenous variables and allowed to correlate with each other and with the primary predictor of parental competitive victimhood. Youth reports of ethnic socialization and symbolic threat were modelled as sequential mediators. Finally, the two dependent variables of interest, youth report of tendency to discriminate and perceived discrimination, were entered as the final endogenous variables. The error variances of the outcomes were allowed to correlate.

Maximum likelihood estimation was used under the assumption that missing data is random (Enders & Bandalos, 2001). Using bootstrapped chain mediation, appropriate for smaller sample sizes (Fritz & MacKinnon, 2007), all direct and indirect effects were estimated in a single model. To estimate the indirect effects, 1,000 replications and a 95% confidence interval was used (Fritz & MacKinnon, 2007; MacKinnon, Lockwood, & Williams, 2004).

First, Model 1 tested chain mediation across the full sample; that is, all paths were constrained to be the same across Croats and Serbs. Model 1 had acceptable fit ($N = 227$, $\chi^2(4) = 15.78$, $p < .05$; CFI = .96; TLI = .83; SRMR = .052; RMSEA = .111 (CI: .060, .175)) and significant indirect effects for both tendency to discriminate against the out-group (b = .064, 95% CI: .032, .091) and perceived ethnic in-group discrimination (b = .064, 95% CI: .027, .095)[3]. Using the multiple group procedure, Model 2 tested the same chain mediation, but allowed all structural paths to be estimated separately by group. This fully unconstrained model also had acceptable model fit (Model 2: $N = 227$, $\chi^2(8) = 21.55$, $p < .05$; CFI = .95; TLI = .78; SRMR = .060; RMSEA = .126 (CI: .063 .192)) and significant indirect effects for both outcomes for both Croats (TTD: b = .008, 95% CI: .017, .091; PIED: b = .002, 95% CI: .002, .019) and Serbs (TTD: b = .003, 95% CI: .001, .009; PIED: b = .008, 95% CI: .001, .023)[4].

Given that there may be differences in how the process unfolds for majority and minority groups, a series of nested models were tested with the aim of identifying the most parsimonious model, but also one that allowed for potential group differences. Using the step-up approach (Brown, 2006) in which the structural paths are constrained one-by-one across groups, the chi-square difference test and a CFI change less than .01 (Cheung & Renswold, 2002) were used to assess changes in model fit (online appendix: Table A3). If constraining the structural paths across groups to be equal did not worsen model fit, the constraint was retained, and the next structural path was tested. This step-up process yielded a final model (Model 3) in which all the structural paths, including control variables and correlations among exogenous and endogenous variables, were constrained to be equal. The only exception, i.e., in which model fit worsened when comparing nested models, was the structural path from symbolic threat to tendency to

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[3] Online Appendix: Table A1.
[4] Online Appendix: Table A2.

discriminate. That is, the step-up process revealed that although this structural path was positive and significant for both groups, it was significantly stronger among Croat compared to Serb youth. Compared to the fully constrained (Model 1) and fully unconstrained (Model 2) approaches, the final step-up Model 3 was a significantly better fit to the data ($N = 227$, $\chi^2(24) = 30.14$, $p > .05$; CFI = .98; TLI = .97; SRMR = .068; RMSEA = .049 (CI: .000, .098)) and explained 61% and 37% of the variance in tendency to discriminate for Croats and Serbs, respectively, and 21% and 29% of the variance in perceived discrimination for Croats and Serbs, respectively.

For the final model (Model 3), direct and indirect structural paths from parental competitive victimhood to the children's intergroup relations in the chain mediation path model are depicted in Figure 1 and Table 4. For both groups, greater parental competitive victimhood was positively related to ethnic socialization; if parents perceived their group as a greater victim during the war, their children reported more conversations about ethnicity in the home. Ethnic socialization, in turn, was related to higher levels of symbolic threat. More symbolic threat was related to greater tendency to discriminate, more pronounced among Croats, as well as more perceived ethnic in-group discrimination. The indirect effects were significant for both groups. The remaining direct effects from parental competitive victimhood to tendency to discriminate ($\beta = .11$, $p = .06$) and perceived ethnic in-group discrimination ($\beta = .05$, $p = .47$) were non-significant. The control variables of age and gender were not significantly related to either outcome. In summary, the chain mediation found significant effects for the impact of parental competitive victimhood through ethnic socialization and symbolic threat on both outcomes of tendency to discriminate and perceived discrimination for youth in Vukovar.

<center>INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE</center>

Discussion

These findings contribute to the literature on how competitive victimhood feeds intractable conflicts (Noor, Shnabel, Halabi, & Nadler, 2012), focusing on how it stays transgenerationally relevant for youth in a multi-ethnic, post-conflict community. The findings revealed significant effects of the parental competitive victimhood on both, tendency to discriminate against the out-group and perceived ethnic in-group discrimination among youth, via ethnic socialization within family and symbolic threat to the in-group. The only difference in the structural model between Croats and Serbs was the path from symbolic threat to tendency to discriminate, which was positive and significant for both groups, but was stronger for Croat majority youth.

Perception of greater in-group victimhood can justify different forms of revenge (Noor et al., 2008a, 2008b; 2012; Vollhardt & Bilali, 2015), which can also be manifested transgenerationally. Among young adults and victims in war-affected areas of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, it was found that the status of a greater victim can form the belief that out-group ethnic discrimination is not undesirable social behaviour, rather something victims are entitled to (Corkalo et al., 2004). Regarding perceived ethnic in-group discrimination, it is noteworthy that victimhood status can be a valuable psychological resource, suggesting the in-group deserves empathy, alliance, and support from third party groups (Noor et al., 2012). Thus, perceived discrimination reinforces victimhood status and opens access to valuable symbolic and material resources.

In prolonged conflicts, personal experiences and a range of socialization agents shape children's system of beliefs, attitudes, and emotions regarding the conflict (Bar-Tal et al., 2017; O'Driscoll, Taylor & Dautel, 2018). In Vukovar, although the conflict formally ended more than 20 years ago, current interethnic divisions, tensions, and discrimination still maintain mistrust and

the *ethos of conflict*. That is, a set of shared beliefs about the conflict are still relevant to the public agenda, frequently discussed in the media and by politicians, and reinforced through the educational system. Similar to Northern Ireland, the collective memory of past in-group victimization has become entrenched in the culture, which increases the potential for retaliation and continuation of the cycle of violence (Cairns & Hewstone, 2011; Taylor, Merrilees, Goeke-Morey, Shirlow, & Cummings, 2016).

While these narratives about suffering are transmitted on broader societal level, our study emphasizes those on the proximal level – among family members. Parental competitive victimhood beliefs are relevant, even though their children have not personally experienced war victimization. Considering that the belief that one's group is a greater victim is associated with increased group identification (David & Bar-Tal, 2009), more frequent family ethnic socialization was expected. Parental messages about the relevance of the ethnic group membership can be interpreted in terms of the indirect (general) hypothesis of victimhood transmission (Felsen, 1998; Schwartz et al., 1994). In the recent qualitative study with adolescents and parents from Vukovar (Reidy et al., 2015), parents were described as the filter through which messages from peers, school, and media are processed, modified or reinforced. Our results corroborate these findings by showing that more intensive ethnic socialization was related to higher levels of symbolic threat. In the post-conflict context, it is relatively easy to interpret various community events or neutral cues as expressions of ethnic intolerance (Taylor & McKeown, 2017, in press). Thus, it is reasonable that boosting ethnic group relevance through ethnic socialization strengthens the interpretation of community events in terms of ethnicity, and consequently, adds to feeling threatened by out-group members. In accordance to the ITT (Stephan & Renfro, 2002), the sense of being under threat is further related to attitudinal changes – more perceived ethnic in-

group discrimination and behavioural outcomes – and more discriminatory tendencies toward the out-group.

Besides broadening our understanding of the processes making competitive victimhood transgenerationally relevant, our results deepen understanding of majority/minority differences. Previous research on ethnic socialization was mostly conducted in minority families under the assumption that group membership is not a very relevant issue for majority group parents. Thus, lower ethnic socialization reported by minority (Serbian) youth is somewhat unexpected but may serve as an adaptive strategy to the post-conflict context. Intergroup relations between Serbs and Croats in Vukovar cannot be described only in terms of traditional minority and majority status (Ajduković & Čorkalo Biruški, 2008). Serbs, as a group, still evoke painful memories of the recent war. Thus, it is possible that Serbian parents have difficulties integrating the conflicting narratives about their in-group role in the recent conflict and their need to teach the children about ethnic origin and in-group pride. One way of coping with these conflicting narratives could be the avoidance of discussing ethnicity with their children. Despite this mean difference, the indirect effects through family ethnic socialization held for both groups.

More in line with the minority/majority status, Croat youth reported a stronger tendency to discriminate than Serb youth, and we found a stronger link from symbolic threat to tendency to discriminate among Croat compared to Serb youth. Based on the ITT (Stephan & Renfro, 2002) these findings could be attributed to the power differences. For majority Croats it is expected that they would be more likely to respond when feeling threatened, in comparison to minority Serbs. In this study, we have focused on symbolic threat based on the premise that victimhood status is an important foundation for the group identity in the post-conflict context (Bar-Tal et al., 2009). Besides, previous findings in Vukovar emphasized the importance of symbolic, but not realistic threat (Low Stanić, 2014). Since among Serbian youth the results showed a weaker link from

symbolic threat to the tendency to discriminate, future research could examine if realistic threat, e.g. fear of losing resources, jobs, etc., has additional value in explaining this relation for Serbs in Vukovar.

Finally, as predicted, Serb youth reported more perceived in-group discrimination, and Croats parents believed that their group was a greater war victim. This finding supports research with adults in Vukovar (Čorkalo Biruški & Ajduković, 2009) which showed that Croats were more traumatized in the war and that Serbs felt more discriminated in the post-war period.

Our model relating parental competitive victimhood to youth perceived and intended discrimination fitted the data well while controlling for adolescents' age and gender. However, regarding youth age, in line with previous studies (Hughes et al., 2006; Priest et al., 2014), we found more frequent ethnic socialization for older children. In addition, boys showed stronger tendency to discriminate. This finding is similar to other results from Vukovar (Ajduković & Čorkalo Biruški, 2008), where girls reported more contact with the out-group than boys, which may make them less prone to discriminate. Furthermore, in early adolescence boys are more group-oriented than girls in their relationships with peers (Rose & Rudolph, 2006). According to SIT, this gender difference can add to boys' more pronounced tendency to discriminate.

Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations apply to the present research and can be useful guidelines for future studies. First, given the correlational and cross-sectional design, it is not possible to infer about causality and developmental changes over time. Second, it would be informative to have multiple reporters on some of the measures, e. g., to collect data on competitive victimhood from children, and on ethnic socialization from their parents. Third, in the context where previously conflicted groups continue to live together, strength of ethnic identity as well as level of contact with the out-group could be a valuable control variable in future research.

Fourth, in adolescence, peer groups may become a relevant source of social influence. Future research should explore peer influences on youth discriminatory tendencies and perceptions (McKeown & Taylor, 2018). Fifth, the measure of ethnic socialization was developed for this context. Future research may consider the multidimensionality of this construct, which could enable more precise answers about what kind of ethnic socialization intensifies the negative effects of competitive victimhood or, alternatively, serves as a protective factor.

Sixth, in the existing research competitive victimhood has been measured twofold (for review see Szabó, in press). Some researchers used direct comparison, e.g. "The [in-group] suffered more than the [out-group]" (Noor et al., 2008a, 2008b;). To avoid socially desirable answers and reactance in our participants we used an approach that removes explicit comparison from the items' wording and asks participants to separately estimate the degree to which they perceive each group was a victim. However, this represents a general measure of competitive victimhood based on the difference regarding group (Croat/Serb) victimization in the past war. Future research should consider a multidimensional measure of competitive victimhood (e.g. Noor et al., 2008a) as the physical, material, and cultural dimensions of suffering may vary across direct and structural violence. Each aspect, as well as their combination, can shape distinct patterns of the psychological dimension of suffering (Bar-Tal & Salomon, 2006; Noor et al., 2017).

Finally, to better understand social reconstruction after conflict, it is important to extend the current findings to study determinants of forming and maintaining constructive and positive intergroup relations despite difficult circumstances (McKeown & Taylor, 2017; Taylor & McKeown, 2017; Taylor et al., 2018).

Conclusion and Implications

A competitive mind-set between conflicting groups prevents the reciprocal exchange of understanding and empathy (Noor et al. 2008a, 2008b), inhibiting the acknowledgment of the out-group's suffering and possibility of repairing disrupted intergroup relations. Reinforcing this,

our findings show the transgenerational effects of parental competition over suffering on youths' ethnic beliefs and behavioural tendencies. These negative effects are present more than 20 years after the conflict officially ended, among young people born after the war.

The existing literature offers several means for overcoming the negative effects of competitive victimhood. First, the Needs-Based Model (Nadler & Shnabel, 2008) stresses the importance of exchanging, empowering and accepting messages between conflicted groups. In war-affected areas of Croatia, however, there have been no such initiatives. Instead, formal public apologies by politicians are perceived as insincere and irrelevant for the local communities (Ajduković, Čorkalo Biruški, Kardov, Löw, & Štambuk, 2018). Thus, future efforts to improve intergroup relations may focus less on formal, elite-level exchanges, and instead seek ways for individuals and groups to share experiences in settings that facilitate listening and reciprocal exchange.

Second, our findings support previous research which suggests that, in an ethnically divided community, parents can serve as a filter for the messages that youth absorb from the wider environment. Parents teaching their children about their origin and in-group pride has been shown to be a protective factor for child development in USA (Priest et al., 2014). However, in a post-conflict community where the relevance of ethnicity is already stressed, further emphasis through ethnic socialization could be counterproductive. Thus, we believe that ethnic socialization should encourage youth to accept ethnic diversity and interethnic cooperation as well as to learn about the other group's suffering.

Finally, it is important that, for adolescents, a major developmental task is exploring and establishing one's own identity (Erikson, 1968), including ethnic identity (Phinney, 1990). Consequently, adolescents become especially vulnerable to ethnic messages. In a divided community, relevance of ethnicity as an identity component is often overemphasized. Given that

studies show that high social identity complexity relates to more positive intergroup attitudes (Knifsend & Juvonen, 2013), it is important to recognize diversity and encourage youth to build social identities based on a variety of characteristics, not only ethnicity.

In achieving these goals, it is crucial to work on providing various opportunities for intergroup contact, be it direct or extended, which may help in reducing prejudice, discrimination and competitive victimhood (Andrighetto et al., 2012; Schofield & Eurich-Fulcer, 2003). This is especially important in Vukovar, since previous studies showed that children and youth reported fewer out-group friends, less contact, and lower contact quality compared to their parents and teachers (Ajduković & Čorkalo Biruški, 2008; Čorkalo Biruški & Ajduković, 2007; Reidy et al., 2015). Given that children in Vukovar have never experienced a life in a functional multi-ethnic community, contact programs that focus on the complexity of social identities, beyond the binary ethnic distinctions that dominate post-conflict life, may be particularly important. Furthermore, tailoring these programs should bear in mind differences between majority and minority youth, such as in the link from symbolic threat to outgroup discrimination.

Overall, this study extended previous research by exploring the mechanisms between competitive victimhood and negative intergroup relations. Parental competitive victimhood related to more discussions about ethnicity in the home. In this context, parents served as the filter for understanding the legacy of the conflict, which in turn related to greater sensitivity to symbolic in-group threat. Higher levels of symbolic threat were related to both greater out-group discrimination as well as more perceived in-group discrimination. To counteract competitive victimhood, interventions need to address family ethnic socialization processes in addition to working with youth directly. These findings may have implications for social practice and intervention programs in other post-conflict settings.

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Table 1

Independent t-tests for group differences and scales' internal consistency by group

	Total sample	Croats		Serbs				t-test
	α	M	SD	α	M	SD	α	
Competitive victimhood [p]	n/a	66.25	31.99	n/a	8.04	22.68	n/a	13.61***
Ethnic socialization within family [c]	.78	14.85	4.30	.76	13.26	4.27	.81	2.67**
Symbolic threat to the in-group [c]	.76	22.58	5.30	.80	22.72	4.95	.77	-0.17
Tendency to discriminate against the out-group [c]	.90	3.20	2.86	.89	1.62	2.43	.89	4.31***
Perceived ethnic in-group discrimination [c]	.75	19.23	5.20	.74	24.22	4.11	.64	7.72***

Note. **p < .01; ***p < .001. [p] parental report; [c] child report.

Table 2
Means, standard deviations, ranges, and bivariate correlations for all study variables (N = 227)

	M	SD	Range	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Age	15.88	1.12	13 to 18	-	.00	.06	.14	.26**	.05	.28**
2. Gender	59% male (0)	41% female(1)		-.01	-	.10	-.15	-.17	-.25*	-.03
3. Competitive victimhood [p]	40.99	41.61	-100 to 100	.11	-.01	-	.16	.18	.20	.10
4. Ethnic socialization within family [c]	14.12	4.32	6 to 24	.11	.18	.34**	-	.49***	.51***	.22*
5. Symbolic threat to the in-group [c]	22.64	5.12	10 to 32	.16	-.11	.23*	.49***	-	.50***	.53***
6. Tendency to discriminate against the out-group [c]	2.43	2.75	0 to 8	.04	-.18	.34**	.47***	.74**	-	.22*
7. Perceived ethnic in-group discrimination [c]	21.70	5.38	6 to 30	.16	.20*	.20	.35**	.40***	.33**	-

Note. [p] parental report; [c] child report. Croat subsample displayed below the line; Serb subsample displayed above the line. *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

Table 3
Model fit indices for measurement invariance (N = 211)

	χ2	df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	LLCI	ULCI	SRMR	WRMR
Ethnic socialization within family									
Configural Invariance	47.23	18	0.91	0.85	0.124	0.081	0.0168	0.05	n/a
Weak Invariance	48.68	24	0.92	0.90	0.099	0.058	0.0139	0.06	n/a
Strong Invariance	70.05	30	0.87	0.87	0.115	0.081	0.150	0.10	n/a
Symbolic threat to the in-group									
Configural Invariance	76.11	40	0.91	0.87	0.092	0.060	0.124	0.06	n/a
Weak Invariance	82.30	48	0.91	0.87	0.082	0.051	0.112	0.08	n/a
Strong Invariance	223.9	56	0.56	0.56	0.168	0.145	0.195	0.15	n/a
Perceived ethnic in-group discrimination									
Configural Invariance	44.54	18	0.90	0.84	0.118	0.075	0.162	0.08	n/a
Weak Invariance	53.96	24	0.89	0.87	0.109	0.070	0.147	0.15	n/a
Strong Invariance	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Tendency to discriminate against the out-group									
Invariance of intercepts/thresholds	39.05	20	0.99	0.99	0.067	0.035	0.098	n/a	0.77

Note: Lower-limit (LLCI) and upper-limit (ULCI) of the 95% confidence interval for RMSEA

Table 4
Model 3: Bootstrapped unstandardized estimates for the structural paths of the final multiple group chain mediation model (N=227)

	Croat (n=109)			Serb (n=103)		
	Estimate	LLCI	ULCI	Estimate	LLCI	ULCI
Direct Paths						
Competitive victimhood [p] → Ethnic socialization [c]	0.039	0.016	0.059	0.039	0.016	0.064
Competitive victimhood [p] → Symbolic threat [c]	0.020	-0.006	0.045	0.020	-0.006	0.045
Ethnic socialization [c] → Symbolic threat [c]	0.550	0.390	0.662	0.550	0.390	0.687
Competitive victimhood [p] → Tendency to discriminate [c]	0.012	<0.001	0.025	0.012	<0.001	0.025
Ethnic socialization [c] → Tendency to discriminate [c]	0.139	0.066	0.215	0.139	0.066	0.215
Symbolic threat [c] → Tendency to discriminate [c]	0.327	0.254	0.392	0.183	0.107	0.269
Gender [c] → Tendency to discriminate [c]	-0.777	-1.329	-0.293	-0.777	-1.329	-0.293
Age [c] → Tendency to discriminate [c]	-0.206	-0.469	0.056	-0.206	-0.469	0.056
Competitive victimhood [p] → Perceived ethnic in-group discrimination	0.008	-0.140	0.026	0.008	-0.014	0.026
Ethnic socialization [c] → Perceived ethnic in-group discrimination	0.042	-0.096	0.189	0.042	-0.096	0.189
Symbolic threat [c] → Perceived ethnic in-group discrimination [c]	0.387	0.232	0.506	0.387	0.232	0.506
Gender [c] → Perceived ethnic in-group discrimination [c]	1.250	0.225	2.360	1.250	0.225	2.360
Age [c] → Perceived ethnic in-group discrimination [c]	0.508	0.009	0.987	0.508	0.009	0.987
Indirect Paths						
Competitive victimhood [p] → Tendency to discriminate [c]	0.014	0.006	0.026	0.008	0.002	0.017
Competitive victimhood [p] → Ethnic socialization [c] → Symbolic threat [c] → Tendency to discriminate [c]	0.007	0.003	0.013	0.004	0.002	0.009
Competitive victimhood [p] → Perceived ethnic in-group discrimination [c]	0.017	0.007	0.032	0.017	0.007	0.032
Competitive victimhood [p] → Ethnic socialization [c] → Symbolic threat [c] → Perceived ethnic in-group discrimination [c]	0.008	0.004	0.016	0.008	0.004	0.016

Note. p = parental report; c = child report; youth's gender (female = 1); LLCI = lower limit of the 95% confidence interval; ULCI = upper limit of the 95% confidence interval.
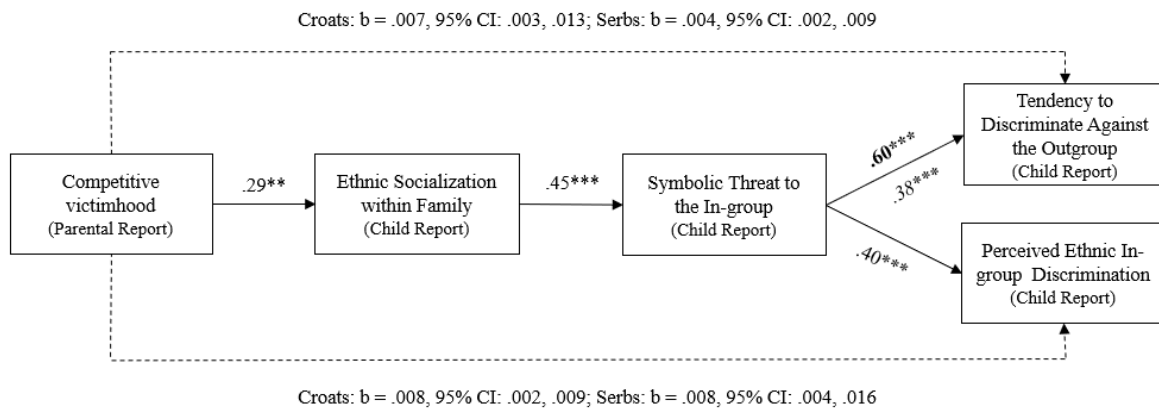
Croats: b = .007, 95% CI: .003, .013; Serbs: b = .004, 95% CI: .002, .009

Figure 1

Chain mediation path model (Model 3) demonstrating the mediated effect of parental competitive victimhood through ethnic socialization and symbolic threat on intergroup relations of youth growing up in Vukovar.

Note. Control variables of age and gender are not depicted for readability. All exogenous variables were allowed to correlate; the errors for the two outcome variables were also allowed to correlate. Indirect effects are depicted with dotted lines. Standardized regression coefficients are reported, unless otherwise noted. Structural coefficients were constrained to be equal across groups, therefore, there is only one estimate; the exception is the structural path from symbolic threat to the in-group on tendency to discriminate which is different for Croats and Serbs. **Bold** values are for the Croat sample; *italics* are for the Serb sample. *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.