Stepping Into Perpetrators’ Shoes: How Ingroup Transgressions and Victimization Shape Support for Justice Through Perspective-Taking with Perpetrators
Abstract

Three experiments examined the morally disengaging function of perspective-taking with perpetrators in intergroup conflict. In the context of the Iran-U.S. conflict, Experiment 1 demonstrated that American participants who strongly glorified their country showed increased perspective-taking with perpetrators and reduced support for justice in response to violence committed rather than suffered by the ingroup. Further, perpetrators perspective-taking explained the effect of ingroup’s role as the victim or perpetrator on support for justice. Experiment 2 compared people’s reactions following a conflict involving their ingroup to those following a conflict involving two third parties. The findings indicate that the morally disengaging function of perpetrators perspective-taking was more pronounced in conflicts that involve the ingroup than in conflicts that do not. By experimentally manipulating perpetrator perspective-taking, Experiment 3 demonstrated its causal effect on justice support, again moderated by ingroup glorification. The negative implications of understanding perpetrators for intergroup relations and conflict resolution are discussed.

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The ability to imagine how others think and feel is arguably one of the most intriguing and sophisticated attributes of human nature. For various reasons and to various degrees, people try to contemplate another person’s point of view, which is largely beneficial for social relations. Adopting another’s perspective can foster a sense of psychological connectedness between the self and the perspective-taking target (Davis, Conklin, Smith, & Luce, 1996; Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000), and promote pro-social and altruistic behavior (Toi & Batson, 1982). Very little of this work, however, has examined a less intuitive, and yet not uncommon, case of perspective-taking: the attempt to understand moral transgressions and those who commit them. After a transgression has occurred, there are often well-intentioned people calling for an understanding of the motivations behind the immoral act, even from the perspective of the perpetrator. The message seems reasonable and clear: we need to better understand the transgressors in order to prevent future transgressions. To understand is not to “forgive and forget,” we often hear. Or is it?

We propose that adopting the perspective of perpetrators can have undesirable consequences for addressing past wrongdoings, and hinder efforts to restore justice. In line with Baumeister’s (1997, 2012) analysis of evil, we suggest that attempts to understand the perpetrators’ perspective risk seeing their crimes as less heinous and them as less responsible for the crimes. Perpetrators tend to minimize the harm they have committed, and thus any effort to understand the situation from their perspective might fall into the trap of following similar “minimalist, distancing styles of thought” (Baumeister, 1997, p. 4). This potential pitfall of people’s attempts to take perpetrators’ perspective is especially worth discussing in the context
of intergroup transgressions. When the interests of one’s own group are at stake – for instance, when ingroup members have committed violence against outgroup members – individuals may even be motivated to appraise the transgression from the perpetrators’ perspective in an effort to make sense of it, perhaps at the cost of diminishing their responsibility. When the ingroup has been victimized by an outgroup, on the other hand, such perspective-taking seems rather unlikely to occur. Despite the importance of understanding perspective-taking in intergroup contexts, the majority of prior research has focused on interpersonal perspective-taking and in particular, perspective-taking with relatively vulnerable and harmless targets (e.g., Batson et al., 1997; Vescio, Sechrist, & Paolucci, 2003). The current research thus aimed to extend the existing literature to intergroup domains and to explore the consequences of perspective-taking with perpetrators of intergroup violence. We hypothesized that attempts to understand the perpetrators’ perspective serve an exonerating, morally disengaging function when the perpetrators belong to one’s own group.

The Ups and Downs of Perspective-taking in Intergroup Relations

**Perspective-taking with victims.** Prior work on perspective-taking and intergroup relations has focused almost exclusively on perspective-taking with victimized, marginalized, or negatively stereotyped groups. Adopting the perspective of such groups generally improves intergroup relations by decreasing prejudice and stereotyping (Dovidio et al., 2004; Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000; Vescio et al., 2003), and inducing positive feelings and helping behavior toward them (Baston et al., 1997; Baston, Chang, Orr, & Rowland, 2002). More recent research, however, has begun to examine the disruptive effects of perspective-taking on intergroup attitudes and behaviors (Epley, Bazerman, Caruso, 2006; Vorauer, Martens, & Sasaki, 2009; Zebel, Doosje, & Spears, 2009). Vorauer and colleagues (2009), for example, showed that
perspective-taking can lead lower-prejudiced individuals to be over-cautious about how to present themselves to the outgroup and thus inhibit positive behaviors toward an outgroup member, compared to when they adopt alternative mind-sets. In the context of group-based violence, it has been shown that taking the perspective of outgroup victims promotes collective guilt among low identifiers, but hinders guilt among high identifiers (Zebel et al., 2009). While the effects of victim perspective-taking on intergroup relations are complex, they are reasonably well understood, Much less is known, however, about the consequences of perpetrators perspective-taking.

**Perspective-taking with perpetrators.** In the context of interpersonal interactions, victims and bystanders who adopt the perspective of transgressors, compared to those who do not, tend to make more situational rather than dispositional attributions, experience more benevolent emotions, and are more likely to accept apologies from the transgressor (Experiment 3 in Baston et al., 1997; Takaku, 2001; Takaku, Weiner, & Ohbuchi, 2001; Witvliet, Ludwig, & Vander Laan, 2001). Extending these findings to the intergroup context, Exline and colleagues (2008) found that seeing one’s own group’s capability for wrongdoing can predict forgiveness of outgroup transgressors through reduced perceived severity of the offense, increased empathic understanding of and perceived similarity to the transgressors (Study 3). While these findings provide evidence that victims’ efforts to appreciate the perspective of perpetrators can reduce intergroup tensions and foster positive intergroup attitudes, Lucas, Galinsky, and Murnighan (2016) recently offered a more nuanced account of perspective-taking and its effects on attitudes toward moral transgressions. Perspective-taking with perpetrators, as their findings show, can either decrease or increase moral condemnation depending on the nature of the intentions attributed to the perpetrator.
Despite the generally positive consequences of perpetrator perspective-taking among victims, people’s natural and immediate response to victimization is perhaps not to understand perpetrators’ motivations and inner processes, but rather to demand justice and retribution (Carlsmith, Darley, & Robinson, 2002; Leidner, Castano, & Ginges, 2013; Lickel, Miller, Stenstrom, Denson, & Schmader, 2006). This is especially likely in intergroup contexts where members of the victim group may seek punitive justice on behalf of the entire group, even when they themselves are willing to forgo justice (FeldmanHall, Sokol-Hessner, Van Bavel, & Phelps, 2014). The ingroup’s experiences of perpetration (rather than suffering) of violence, on the other hand, might motivate group members to understand the perpetrators’ perspective. This perspective-taking with ingroup perpetrators might then be a key mechanism underlying the exonerating appraisals of ingroup-committed transgressions shown by other research (e.g., Castano & Giner-Sorolla, 2006; Leidner & Castano, 2012; Leidner, Castano, Zaiser, & Giner-Sorolla, 2010; Roccas, Klar, & Liviatan, 2006). The extent to which people take the perspective of the perpetrator should thus depend on their identification with either victim or perpetrator groups. These hypothesized divergent functions of perspective-taking among victim and perpetrator group members should have important implications for justice in the aftermath of intergroup transgressions.

**Justice, Perpetrator Perspective-taking, and Ingroup Glorification**

When faced with large-scale violence and injustices, people tend to adopt vastly different responses depending on the specific role their group played in the conflict (e.g., Leidner et al., 2010; Shnabel, Nadler, Ullrich, Dovidio, & Carmi, 2009). Whereas members of victim groups have a strong desire for justice and retribution (Leidner et al., 2013; Lickel et al., 2006), members of perpetrator groups are often motivated to morally disengage from ingroup-
committed transgressions and resist efforts to achieve justice (Leidner et al., 2010). While past research has focused primarily on the emotions and psychological needs of parties involved in intergroup conflict (e.g., Lickel et al., 2006; Shnabel et al., 2009), less attention has been devoted to the cognitive aspect of responses to ingroup victimization and perpetration. The notion that members of the perpetrator group actively engage in various moral disengagement strategies (Bandura, 1999, 2002) implies a basic, motivated cognitive process, in which individuals appraise the intergroup situation from the perspective of their fellow group members. Adopting the perspective of ingroup perpetrators can facilitate sense-making of their immoral behavior and make various types of justification possible. We therefore argue that perspective-taking with perpetrators can serve a morally disengaging function, leading to reduced support for justice in the face of ingroup-committed transgressions.

Not everyone, however, responds defensively to ingroup-committed transgressions, nor does everyone respond vengefully to ingroup-suffered transgressions. The inter-individual difference in responses to transgressions committed or suffered by one’s own group is directly related to the notion of ingroup identification, or the extent to which people are psychologically invested in their own group. Recent research on social identification advocates a multidimensional view of group identification, for instance distinguishing between ingroup attachment and glorification (Roccas et al., 2006). Whereas attachment refers to one’s subjective identification with the ingroup, glorification refers to beliefs in the ingroup’s superiority over outgroups and emphasizes loyalty to ingroup norms and authorities. These two dimensions of identification have different implications for intergroup attitudes and behavior. Whereas glorification is negatively related to group-based guilt, attachment does not directly correlate with group-based guilt (Roccas et al., 2006). More pertinent to the current research, when the
ingroup (rather than an outgroup) is responsible for intergroup violence, higher levels of glorification—but not attachment—predict dehumanization of outgroup victims, which in turn leads to decreased support for justice (Leidner et al., 2010). Lower levels of glorification, on the contrary, signal rather critical attitudes toward ingroup-committed transgressions (Leidner & Castano, 2012, Study 3).

Given the prominent role of glorification in intergroup conflict, the effects of the ingroup’s role as victim or perpetrator on group members’ tendency to adopt the perspective of perpetrators will likely depend on the extent to which people glorify their own group. Due to high glorifiers’ strong need to defend their ingroup, they should be particularly motivated to adopt the perspective of perpetrators when their ingroup has committed (rather than suffered) violence. Low glorifiers, on the other hand, are unlikely to exhibit the same bias in perspective-taking based on their ingroup’s role in the conflict; in fact, they might be motivated to break the bond with ingroup perpetrators (“black sheep effect”, Marques & Paez, 1994; Leidner, Li, & Kardos, in press) and refuse to take their perspective. Moreover, the extent to which people take the perspective of perpetrators should in turn lead to differential support for justice among members of victim and perpetrator groups (see Figure 1 for the full conceptual model).

**Overview**

We conducted three experiments to examine the morally disengaging function of perpetrator perspective-taking in the context of the conflict between the U.S. and Iran. Studies 1 and 2 tested the mediating role of perpetrator perspective-taking in the effects of ingroup perpetration versus victimization on group members’ support for justice, and the moderating role of ingroup glorification. Additionally, Study 3 experimentally induced perspective-taking with perpetrators, thereby providing evidence for its causal effects on support for justice.
Study 1

Study 1 tested the hypothesis that high (but not low) glorifiers will support less justice in response to ingroup perpetration than victimization, and their perspective-taking with ingroup perpetrators should explain why such a justice bias occurs. In the context of the conflict between the United States and Iran, we experimentally manipulated whether American citizens have committed or suffered human rights violations. The manipulation enabled us to investigate the extent to which Americans reacted differently to intergroup transgressions depending on their ingroup’s role in the conflict.

Method

Participants. The sample consisted of 191 participants recruited online through Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Our screening of the data quality indicated that 17 participants did not pay sufficient attention to the manipulation material, as indicated by their incorrect written summaries of it, false answers to manipulation check questions, and the little time they spent on reading the material. Three participants raised suspicions about the credibility of the material. Four participants reported to have close Iranian family members or friends. The data from the remaining 167 participants were used in the subsequent analyses (67% women; age $M = 33, SD = 11.12$).

Procedure. Participants were randomly assigned to read a fictitious, but allegedly real, New York Times article depicting cases of prisoner abuse in an underground prison at the Afghan-Iranian border. In the ingroup transgression condition, participants read about American soldiers capturing and torturing Iranian civilians, whereas in the ingroup victimization condition participants read about Iranian soldiers capturing and torturing American civilians. The reported acts of abuse included sleep deprivation, severe beatings, suffocation, and humiliating acts. In
one of the three cases, mistreatment and torture eventually led to the prisoner’s death. The news articles were identical across conditions except for the nationalities of the perpetrators and the victims. After the reading task, participants completed manipulation checks. To ensure that they read the article carefully, they also summarized it in their own words. Then, participants completed the following dependent measures, on 9-point scales (1=strongly disagree; 9=strongly agree), in the order outlined below.

**Materials.**

**Perspective-taking with perpetrators.** Adapted from the perspective-taking subscale of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1980), five items measured the extent to which American participants took the perspective of the perpetrators in the news article (e.g., “I tried to understand these American/Iranian soldiers better by imagining how things looked from their perspective.”).

**Support for justice.** Adapted from Leidner et al. (2013), justice was measured using five items tapping the retributive aspects of justice (e.g., “To restore justice, the U.S./Iran need(s) to be punished for its actions described in the news report.”).

**Ingroup attachment and glorification.** Adopted from Roccas et al. (2006), ingroup attachment was measured with eight statements, tapping the importance of the U.S. to participants’ identity and their commitment to the U.S. (e.g., “Being American is an important part of my identity.”). Ingroup glorification was measured with eight statements, tapping participants’ belief in the superiority of the U.S. over other nations (e.g., “The U.S. is better than other nations in all respects.”), and their deference to American authorities (e.g., “It is disloyal for Americans to criticize the U.S.”). Following others (e.g., Feygina, Jost, & Goldsmith, 2009;
Leidner et al., 2010; Leidner & Castano, 2012), the moderators were administered at the end of the study in order to avoid raising participants’ suspicion about the study goal.

Results

**Ingroup attachment and glorification.** Neither attachment ($\alpha = .96, M = 6.44, SD = 2.07), $F(1, 165) = 0.00, p = .991, \eta^2_p < .001$, nor glorification ($\alpha = .90, M = 4.69, SD = 1.65), $F(1, 165) = 0.14, p = .712, \eta^2_p < .001$, was affected by condition, thus allowing us to use them, together with condition, as independent variables (IVs) in subsequent general linear models (GLMs) carried out in SAS 9.4. Therefore, attachment and glorification were standardized (Aiken & West, 1991; Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). To capture glorification’s conceptual distinctness from attachment despite the overlaps between these two constructs (Roccas et al., 2006), the following analyses used glorification as a moderator while controlling for attachment as a covariate.¹

**Support for justice.** As predicted, analysis with support for justice ($\alpha = .88, M = 6.25, SD = 1.70$) as the DV yielded a significant two-way interaction between ingroup role and glorification (see Figure 2), $F(1, 162) = 13.19, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .08, 90\% CI [.02, .14]$. Simple effects revealed that participants who strongly glorified their ingroup (1 SD above the mean) supported significantly less retributive justice when the ingroup was the perpetrator ($M = 5.76$) rather than the victim ($M = 6.97$), $t(162) = -3.38, p = .001$. On the contrary, participants who weakly glorified their ingroup (1 SD below the mean) were somewhat more supportive of justice when the ingroup was the perpetrator ($M = 6.48$) rather than the victim ($M = 5.84$), $t(162) = 1.77, p = .078$. No main effects reached significance, $Fs(1, 162) < 1.30, ps > .258, \eta^2_ps < .01$.

¹ Using attachment as a moderator while controlling for glorification yielded similar patterns of results, suggesting that in this study attachment plays a similar role as glorification in moderating the effects of ingroup’s victim vs. perpetrator role on participants’ support for justice and perspective-taking with perpetrators.
Perspective-taking with perpetrators. Analysis with perspective-taking with perpetrators ($\alpha = .92$, $M = 4.57$, $SD = 2.09$) as DV yielded a significant two-way interaction between ingroup role and glorification (see Figure 3), $F(1, 162) = 14.13$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .08$, 90% CI [.03, .15]. Simple effects revealed that high glorifiers were significantly more likely to take the perspective of perpetrators when their ingroup was the perpetrator ($M = 5.31$) rather than the victim ($M = 3.79$), $t(162) = 3.45$, $p = .001$. Low glorifiers, in contrast, were somewhat less likely to take the perspective of perpetrators when their ingroup was the perpetrator ($M = 4.14$) rather than the victim ($M = 4.97$), $t(162) = -1.88$, $p = .062$. Again, no main effects reached significance, $Fs(1, 162) < 1.25$, $ps > .260$, $\eta^2_ps < .01$.

Mediation analyses. To test whether perspective-taking with perpetrators mediated the effect of ingroup role by glorification on support for justice, we conducted a moderated mediation analysis, in which ingroup role was introduced as the IV, perspective-taking as the mediator, glorification as a moderator, and justice as the DV, with attachment as a covariate (Hayes, 2012, model 8; see Figure 4 for all path coefficients at high and low levels of glorification). In line with our mediational hypothesis, there were significant indirect effects of ingroup role on justice through perspective-taking with perpetrators at high levels of glorification (+1 SD), boot coefficient = -.25, $p < .05$, 95% CI [-.614, -.047], as well as at low levels of glorification (-1 SD), but in the opposite direction, boot coefficient = .14, $p < .05$, 95% CI [.001, .425].

Statistical power. A post-hoc power analysis using the G*Power program (Erdfelder, Faul, & Buchner, 1996) revealed that based on the average effect size for the main effects of condition ($\eta_{avg}^2 = .08$) and a sample size of 167, the power to detect these main effects was 0.96.

Discussion
Study 1 demonstrated that individuals who strongly glorified their own group showed increased perspective-taking with perpetrators and reduced support for justice in response to violence committed rather than suffered by the ingroup. By contrast, low glorifiers exhibited the opposite pattern, taking less perspective of perpetrators and demanding more justice when their ingroup has committed rather than suffered violence. Furthermore, perspective-taking with perpetrators explained the diametrically opposed effects of ingroup victimization versus transgression on support for justice among both high and low glorifiers. The results provided initial evidence for our conceptualization of perspective-taking as a motivated cognition—that is, high glorifiers are motivated to adopt the perspective of ingroup perpetrators in an effort to exonerate them.

Although we focused on perspective-taking with perpetrators as the primary underlying mechanism, it is also possible that high glorifiers were motivated to reduce their perspective-taking with victims following transgressions committed (rather than suffered) by the ingroup, which in turn led to their reduced support for justice. This explanation, however, seems less plausible than perspective-taking with perpetrators as we measured perpetrator- rather than victim-centered justice (i.e., punishment of perpetrators). Study 2 nevertheless tested this possibility, also measuring perspective-taking with victims. Another alternative explanation of the findings in Study 1 is that high levels of glorification might predispose individuals to engaging in exonerating cognitions when perpetrators belong to high-power groups such as the U.S. (rather than low-power groups such as Iran), regardless of whether they belong to the group or not. If this were true, the effects of perpetration versus victimization on justice through perspective-taking would occur among high glorifiers regardless of whether the ingroup was involved in the conflict. To rule out this alternative explanation, Study 2 examined American
participants’ responses to either the Iran-U.S. conflict or a similar conflict between Iran and Australia.

**Study 2**

Study 2 aimed to replicate the findings of Study 1 and to provide a more stringent test of the hypothesis that perspective-taking with perpetrators serves the function to facilitate exonerating appraisals of intergroup transgressions (as manifested in reduced support for justice) when the transgressors are ingroup members. In addition to perspective-taking with perpetrators, we also investigated perspective-taking with victims as an alternative mechanism underlying the effect of ingroup victimization versus perpetration on support for justice. Study 2 further advanced the methodology used in Study 1 by introducing two control conditions in which Australians were depicted as either the victims or perpetrators in the conflict between Iran and Australia.

**Method**

**Participants.** The sample consisted of 413 American adult participants recruited online through MTurk. Our screening of the data quality indicated that 60 participants did not pay sufficient attention to the news article, as indicated by their incorrect written summaries of it, false answers to manipulation check questions, and the little time they spent on reading the article. Additionally, eleven participants spent significantly more time reading the news article and/or completing the survey compared to the rest of the sample, and ten participants spent not even 10 minutes\(^2\) to complete the survey. One participant raised suspicions about the credibility

\(^2\) The average amount of time that participants took to complete the survey was 19 minutes, and we used half of the average time as the cutoff. The results remained unchanged when including rather than excluding the ten participants below this cutoff, with the exception that the indirect effect of the interaction between ingroup involvement and group role manipulations on justice through perspective-taking with perpetrators at high levels of glorification became marginally significant \((p = .08\) rather than \(p < .05\)).
of the news article. These participants, along with five multivariate outliers (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007), were thus excluded from subsequent data analyses. Importantly, the 94 participants who were excluded were approximately evenly distributed across the study’s four conditions. The percentage of the sample (22%) excluded from data analysis was similar to the average benchmarks for online studies (Chandler, Mueller, & Paolacci, 2013). 326 participants were retained for subsequent analyses (48% women; age $M = 36$, $SD = 13.35$).

**Procedure.** To examine whether people respond differently to victimization and perpetration only when the conflict involves the ingroup, Study 2 employed a 2 (target group’s role: victim vs. perpetrator) × 2 (ingroup involvement: involved vs. un-involved) experimental design. In conditions where the conflict involved the ingroup, participants read about prisoner abuses committed either by American soldiers against Iranians or by Iranian soldiers against Americans. In conditions where the conflict did not involve the ingroup, participants read about the same prisoner abuses committed either by Australian soldiers against Iranians or by Iranian soldiers against Australians. The news articles were adapted from Study 1 with some minor modifications, including the individualization of responsibility by providing the names of one perpetrator (“Michael Smith”) and his victim (“Amir Mohsen”). Both the perpetrator and the victim were given male names that are relatively common in either Western or Middle Eastern countries, depending on condition.

**Materials.**

**Perspective-taking with perpetrators.** Based on the perspective-taking scale used in Study 1, four items measured the extent to which participants took the perspective of the perpetrators in the news article and, this time, all items were anchored to the individual perpetrator Michael Smith or Amir Mohsen (e.g., “I tried to see things from [Michael
Smith’s/Amir Mohsen’s] point of view;” “It was very easy for me to imagine how [Michael Smith/Amir Mohsen] was feeling.”

**Perspective-taking with victims.** A parallel set of four items measured the extent to which participants took the perspective of the victims in the news article and all items were anchored to the individual victim.

**Support for justice** was measured using the same items as in Study 1 for the “U.S.-Iran” conditions, and were adapted to the Australia-Iran context in the conditions where the conflict did not involve participants’ ingroup.

**Ingroup attachment and glorification** were measured using the same items as in Study 1.

**Results**

**National attachment and glorification.**

The distribution of attachment ($\alpha = .96$, $M = 6.32$, $SD = 1.95$) was moderately negatively skewed, necessitating a square root transformation based on a priori determined statistical decision making criteria. Neither (transformed or non-transformed) attachment, $F$s(1, 322) > .60, $ps > .590$, $\eta^2_p < .001$, nor glorification ($\alpha = .85$, $M = 4.85$, $SD = 1.57$), $F$(1, 322) = .40, $p = .757$, $\eta^2_p < .001$, was significantly affected by experimental manipulations, thus allowing us to use them, together with condition, as IVs in subsequent GLMs as specified in Study 1.

**Main Analyses.**

**Support for justice.** We predicted that highly glorifying Americans would be less supportive of justice when the U.S. was the perpetrator rather than the victim in the Iran-U.S. conflict. Moreover, such justice bias against Iranians should not generalize, at least not to the same extent, to intergroup violence between Iran and an outgroup of similar power/status as the

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3 The results remained unchanged when using the untransformed attachment variable.
U.S. (i.e., Australia). To test this hypothesis, we submitted support for justice \( (\alpha = .91, M = 6.03, SD = 1.92) \) as a DV to a GLM with target group’s role (victim vs. perpetrator) and ingroup involvement as IVs and glorification as a continuous moderating variable, while controlling for attachment. Our prediction was supported by a significant three-way interaction of glorification by group role and ingroup involvement,\(^4\) \( F(1, 317) = 14.36, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .04, 90\% CI [.01, .08] \) (see Figure 5). Simple effects indicated that high glorifiers demanded significantly less justice when the U.S. was the perpetrator \( (M = 3.60) \) rather than the victim \( (M = 7.11), t(317) = 8.22, p < .001 \), in the U.S.-Iran conflict conditions. The same pattern emerged in the Australia-Iran conflict conditions, but to a significantly lesser degree; high glorifiers also demanded less justice when Australia was the perpetrator \( (M = 5.76) \) rather than the victim \( (M = 7.07), t(317) = 3.51, p = .001 \). Looking at these simple effects from a different angle, high glorifiers were significantly less supportive of justice when the \textit{perpetrating} group was the U.S. \( (M = 3.60) \) rather than Australia \( (M = 5.76), t(317) = 5.07, p < .001 \). High glorifiers’ justice support did not significantly differ, however, depending on whether the \textit{victimized} group was the U.S. or Australia, \( t(317) = -.11, p = .914 \). Among low glorifiers, neither the manipulation of perpetrator nor the manipulation of victim group significantly affected support for justice, \( ts(317) < 1.61, ps > .100 \).

Besides the predicted three-way interaction, other effects were also significant and reported here for exhaustiveness; all of them followed expected patterns and were consistent with Study 1. The main effect of group role as the victim or perpetrator on support for justice was significant, \( F(1, 317) = 41.10, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .11, 90\% CI [.06, .17] \); portraying the target

\(^4\) Consistent with Study 1, using attachment as a moderator while controlling for glorification yielded similar patterns of results as using glorification as a moderator while controlling for attachment, suggesting that in Study 2 attachment played a similar role as glorification in moderating the effects of ingroup role (victim vs. perpetrator) on participants’ perspective-taking with perpetrators and support for justice.
group as the perpetrator ($M = 5.45$) decreased participants’ support for justice, compared to portraying the group as the victim ($M = 6.52$). Replicating the findings in Study 1, this main effect was further qualified by a two-way interaction between group role and glorification, $F(1, 317) = 34.33, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .10, 90\% CI [.05, .15]$. Simple effects revealed that among high glorifiers, portraying the target group as the perpetrator ($M = 4.68$) significantly decreased support for justice, compared to portraying the target group as the victim ($M = 7.09$), $t(317) = -8.50, p < .001$. Low glorifiers, on the other hand, did not differ depending on group role, $t(317) = -.13, p = .894$. The main effect of ingroup involvement was also significant, $F(1, 317) = 4.91, p = .027, \eta^2_p = .02, 90\% CI [.01, .04]$; reading about a conflict involving participants’ ingroup ($M = 5.87$) decreased support for justice, compared to reading about a conflict between two third-party countries ($M = 6.18$). This main effect was further qualified by a significant two-way interaction between ingroup involvement and glorification, $F(1, 317) = 10.01, p = .002, \eta^2_p = .03, 90\% CI [.01, .07]$. High glorifiers demanded significantly less justice when their ingroup was involved ($M = 5.36$), compared to when it was not ($M = 6.42$), $t(317) = -3.74, p < .001$. In contrast, low glorifiers did not differ depending on ingroup’s involvement in the conflict, $t(317) = .80, p = .422$. A two-way interaction between ingroup involvement and group role reached marginal significance, $F(1, 317) = 3.11, p = .079, \eta^2_p = .01, 90\% CI [.00, .03]$. In the U.S.-Iran conflict conditions, American participants demanded significantly less justice when the U.S. was portrayed as the perpetrator ($M = 4.99$) rather than the victim ($M = 6.50$), $t(317) = 5.48, p < .001$. The same pattern emerged in the Australia-Iran conflict conditions, but to a lesser degree. Participants demanded less justice when Australia was the perpetrator ($M = 5.71$) rather than the victim ($M = 6.59$), $t(317) = 3.35, p = .001$. The main effect of attachment was also marginally significant, $F(1, 317) = 2.82, p = .094, \eta^2_p = .01, 90\% CI [.00, .03]$, indicating that attachment
was somewhat positively associated with support for justice, $\beta = .43$. The main effect of glorification was not significant, $F(1, 317) = .17$, $p = .682$, $\eta^2_p = .01$, 90%.

**Perspective-taking with perpetrators.** We predicted that strongly glorifying Americans would engage in more perpetrator perspective-taking when the U.S. committed rather than suffered violence in the Iran-U.S. conflict. Again, this bias in perpetrator perspective-taking should be less likely to occur when the target group was an outgroup (i.e., Australia in the fictitious Australia-Iran conflict). The analysis with perpetrator perspective-taking ($\alpha = .75$, $M = 3.67$, $SD = 1.67$) as the DV partially supported this hypothesis. Instead of a three-way interaction of glorification by group role and ingroup involvement, we obtained a significant two-way interaction between group role and glorification (see Figure 6), $F(1, 317) = 12.78$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .04$, 90% CI [.01, .08]. Simple effects revealed that among high glorifiers, portraying the target group as the perpetrator ($M = 4.39$) significantly increased perspective-taking with the perpetrators, compared to portraying the target group as the victim ($M = 3.03$), $t(317) = 5.08$, $p < .001$. Low glorifiers, on the other hand, did not respond differently to perspective-taking depending on group role, $t(317) = -.03$, $p = .979$. This finding suggests that while we replicated the findings of Study 1, the increased perpetrator perspective-taking among strongly glorifying Americans was not limited to ingroup perpetrators; rather, the effects carried over to perpetrators of an outgroup of similar power/status as the ingroup. Importantly, however, strongly glorifying Americans did engage in more perpetrator perspective-taking when the ingroup committed (rather than suffered) violence. While they also engaged in more perpetrator perspective-taking when an outgroup similar to the ingroup committed (rather than suffered) violence, we know from the three-way interaction on support for justice that this increase in perspective-taking with

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5 Perpetrator perspective-taking was marginally correlated with victim perspective-taking, $r = .10$, $p = .076$. 

outgroup perpetrators translated into decreased support for justice to a much lesser extent as compared to when the conflict involved the ingroup.

The analysis also yielded a significant main effect of group role on perspective-taking with perpetrators, $F(1, 317) = 14.12, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .04$, 90% CI [.01, .08]; portraying Australia/the U.S. as the perpetrator ($M = 4.09$) increased perspective-taking with the perpetrators, compared to portraying either country as the victim ($M = 3.39$). The main effect of ingroup involvement was also significant, $F(1, 317) = 6.43, p = .012, \eta^2_p = .02$, 90% CI [.002, .05]; reading about a conflict involving the U.S. ($M = 3.87$) increased American participants’ perspective-taking with the perpetrators, compared to reading about a conflict that did not involve the U.S. ($M = 3.49$). A marginally significant two-way interaction between ingroup involvement and group role also emerged, $F(1, 317) = 2.95, p = .087, \eta^2_p = .01$, 90% CI [.00, .03]. In the U.S.-Iran conflict conditions, American participants took significantly more perspective of the perpetrators when the U.S. was the perpetrator ($M = 4.42$) rather than the victim ($M = 3.46$), $t(317) = -3.71, p < .001$. In the Australia-Iran conflict conditions, however, participants did not differ significantly depending on Australia’s role in the conflict, $t(317) = 1.44, p = .152$. No other effects reached significance, $Fs(1, 317) < .73, ps > .393, \eta^2_ps < .01$.

**Perspective-taking with victims.** To rule out the possibility that victim (rather than perpetrator) perspective-taking explained high glorifiers’ reduced support for justice in response to ingroup perpetration than victimization, we conducted the same analysis with perspective-taking with victims as the DV ($\alpha = .77, M = 5.82, SD = 1.70$). The analysis yielded a significant two-way interaction between target group’s role (perpetrator vs. victim) and glorification (see Figure 7), $F(1, 317) = 4.87, p = .028, \eta^2_p = .02$, 90% CI [.01, .08]. Among high glorifiers, portraying the target group as the perpetrator ($M = 5.29$) significantly decreased participants’
willingness to take the perspective of victims, compared to portraying the target group as the victim \((M = 5.95)\), \(t(317) = -2.33, p = .020\). Low glorifiers, in contrast, did not differ significantly depending on group role, \(t(317) = .85, p = .395\). There was also a marginally significant two-way interaction between ingroup’s involvement in the conflict and glorification, \(F(1, 317) = 3.18, p = .076, \eta^2_p = .01, 90\% CI [.00, .03]\). None of the simple effects, however, were significant, \(ts(317) < 1.39, ps > .163\). No other effects reached significance, \(Fs(1, 317) < 1.59, ps > .208, \eta^2_ps < .001\). These results suggest that the experimental manipulation also affected victim perspective-taking, in a similar but opposite way as it affected perpetrator perspective-taking. Yet, this analysis cannot answer the question of whether the effects of ingroup’s role as perpetrator or victim on support for justice were driven by perpetrator perspective-taking in particular or by perspective-taking in general (i.e., both perpetrator and victim perspective-taking). To test this alternative explanation fully and directly, we thus conducted the following mediation analyses.

**Mediation analyses.** To test the mediating roles of perspective-taking with perpetrators and victims in the joint effects of ingroup involvement and group role by glorification on support for justice, we conducted a series of moderated mediation analyses. In the first analysis, ingroup involvement, group role, and their interaction were introduced as the IVs, perspective-taking with perpetrators as the mediator, glorification as a moderator, and justice as the DV, with attachment as a covariate (see Figure 8 for all path coefficients at high and low levels of glorification). In line with our mediational hypothesis, there was a significant indirect effect of the interaction term on justice through perspective-taking with perpetrators when glorification was high, \(boot coefficient = -.23, p < .05, 95\% CI [-.598, -.003]\), but not when it was low, \(boot coefficient = -.07, p > .90, 10\% CI [-.396, .181]\).\(^6\) In the second analysis, perspective-taking with

\(\)\(^6\) We report the exact \(p\) values and the corresponding confidence intervals for non-significant \(p\) values.
victims was introduced as the mediator instead of perspective-taking with perpetrators and all the other variables remained the same in the model. This analysis, however, did not yield a significant indirect effect on support for justice through perspective-taking with victims at either high (boot coefficient = -.26, p > .25, 75% CI [-.527, .008]) or low (boot coefficient = .06, p > .90, 10% CI [-.329, .442]) levels of glorification. In the third analysis, we entered both perpetrator and victim perspective-taking as parallel mediators in the same model. The indirect effect through perpetrator perspective-taking was marginally significant when glorification was high, boot coefficient = -.28, p = .06, 94% CI [-.662, -.004], but not when it was low, boot coefficient = -.09, p > .90, 10% CI [-.430, .270]. The indirect effect through victim perspective-taking remained non-significant at both high (boot coefficient = -.28, p > .90, 10% CI [-.714, .239]) and low (boot coefficient = .06, p > .90, 10% CI [-.424, .398]) levels of glorification.

**Statistical power.** A post-hoc power analysis revealed that on the basis of the average effect size for three-way interactions of glorification by group role and ingroup involvement (\(\eta^2_{av} = .02\)), and a sample size of 326, the power to detect a three-way interaction was 0.71.

**Discussion**

Replicating the main findings in Study 1, Study 2 showed that high glorifiers reduced support for justice in response to ingroup perpetration than victimization. Importantly, such differential support for justice in response to perpetration versus victimization was more pronounced when the ingroup was involved than when it was not, suggesting that belonging to the perpetrator group gives extra motivation to take the perpetrators’ perspective in order to absolve them of responsibility. Furthermore, the mediation analyses confirmed our hypothesis that perspective-taking with perpetrators, but not with victims, explained the effects of ingroup involvement and ingroup role on support for justice among high glorifiers. Therefore, although
perspective-taking with victims was also affected by the experimental manipulation, it did not explain the reduction in support for justice among high glorifiers following ingroup perpetration as opposed to victimization.

It is worth noting that the American participants in this study showed a similar, albeit less strong, justice bias when the target group was Australia, compared to when it was the United States. We speculate that this effect emerged because Australia is one of the closest allies of the U.S., and that the glorification of one’s own group can potentially carry over, at least to a certain extent, to influence attitudes toward outgroups that share many similarities with the ingroup. This is particularly true for perspective-taking, since perspective-taking essentially reflects an increased self-other overlap (Galinsky et al., 2005). Due to the perceived overlap or similarities between the two target groups (Australia and the U.S.), strongly glorifying Americans increased their perspective-taking with perpetrators in response to Australia- (rather than Iran-) committed atrocities, to a similar degree as they did in response to U.S.- (rather than Iran-) committed atrocities. In other words, high glorifiers adopted more perspective of perpetrators when the target group has committed than suffered violence, regardless of whether the ingroup was involved in the conflict. This can therefore explain why for (perpetrator) perspective-taking we did not obtain a three-way interaction of glorification by target group’s role and ingroup involvement, but a more general two-way interaction of glorification by target group’s role. Essential to our hypothesis, however, the significant three-way interaction for justice support indicates that perspective-taking is much more likely to serve the function of exonerating perpetrators from punishment when they belong to the ingroup than a similar outgroup.

Although Studies 1 and 2 provided convergent evidence for the morally disengaging function of perpetrator perspective-taking among high glorifiers, the question remains whether
perspective-taking caused the observed differences in support for justice as a function of glorification. Study 3 addressed this limitation, experimentally manipulating both ingroup’s role in a conflict (victim or perpetrator) and perspective-taking with perpetrators.

**Study 3**

The primary goal of Study 3 was to provide further evidence for the causal chain depicted in Figure 1. By experimentally manipulating perpetrator perspective-taking, we aimed to establish its causal effects on support for justice. Specifically, we hypothesized that taking the perspective of perpetrators should reduce high glorifiers’ support for justice when the ingroup has committed violence, but not when it has suffered violence. Low glorifiers, in contrast, may not be affected by the perspective-taking manipulation in terms of their justice support. If anything, they might become even more critical of the ingroup, demanding more justice, after being instructed to take the perspective of ingroup perpetrators.

Study 3 also extended the first two studies by using a more elaborate measure of justice. In keeping with recent literature distinguishing retributive from restorative justice (e.g., Leidner et al., 2013; Wenzel, Okimoto, Feather, & Platow, 2008; Okimoto, Wenzel, & Feather, 2012), Study 3 also measured participants’ support for restorative justice. Emphasizing restoration of the relationship between perpetrators and victims, restorative forms of justice usually include symbolic (e.g., apologies) and material (e.g., financial reparations) compensation, and/or reaffirmation of shared norms and values (e.g., Braithwaite, 2002; Okimoto, Wenzel, & Feather, 2009; Wenzel, Okimoto, Feather, & Platow, 2010). Due to its bilateral focus (as opposed to the unilateral focus of retributive justice on punishing perpetrators), we expected that taking the perspective of ingroup perpetrators would be less likely to affect group members’ support for
restorative justice than their support for retributive justice. Thus, Study 3 also tested whether the morally disengaging function of perspective taking was limited to retributive justice.

Method

Participants. The sample consisted of 576 American adults recruited online through MTurk. Our screening of the data quality indicated that 77 participants did not pay sufficient attention to the news article, as indicated by their incorrect written summaries of the article, and incorrect answers to manipulation check questions. Additionally, one participant spent significantly more time completing the survey compared to the rest of the sample, and 24 participants spent less than seven minutes\(^7\) to complete the survey. Importantly, the 102 excluded participants (18% of the total sample) were approximately evenly distributed across the study’s four conditions. 474 participants were retained for subsequent analyses (58% women; age \(M = 39, SD = 12.84\)).

Procedure. We tested the causal effect of perpetrator perspective-taking on support for justice in a 2 (ingroup role: victim vs. perpetrator) × 2 (perpetrator perspective-taking manipulation: perspective-taking vs. objective) experimental design. The ingroup role manipulation was very similar to the one in Study 2, where participants read a news excerpt describing prisoner abuses either committed or suffered by Americans vis-à-vis Iranians. To manipulate perspective-taking, we used instructions very similar to those given by Batson and his colleagues (1997). Prior to reading the news excerpt, all participants were told that they were about to read an excerpt from a news story about an [American/Iranian] officer in a military prison at the border between Iran and Afghanistan. In the \textit{perspective-taking} condition,

\(^7\) The average amount of time that participants took to complete the survey was 13.4 minutes, and as in Study 2, we used half of the average time as the cutoff. Again, the results remained unchanged when including these 24 participants.
participants were then instructed to “take the perspective of the [American/Iranian] military officer described in the story” and also to “imagine what the officer was thinking and how he was feeling.” In the objective condition, participants were instructed to “take an objective perspective towards the acts of the [American/Iranian] military officer” and to “not get caught up in what the officer thinks and how he feels; just remain objective and detached.” Afterwards, participants completed manipulation checks regarding the ingroup’s role in the conflict and summarized the news excerpt in their own words. To reinforce the perspective-taking manipulation, participants were instructed to summarize the excerpt either from the perspective of the military officer (perspective-taking condition), or remain objective in their summaries (objective condition). Afterwards, participants completed measures of perspective-taking with perpetrators, support for retributive and restorative justice, and glorification and attachment.

Materials.

Perspective-taking manipulation check. To assess the effectiveness of the perspective-taking manipulation, we used the same four-item scale as in Study 2, measuring the extent to which participants took the perspective of the perpetrators in the news excerpt, and anchored to the individual perpetrator Michael Smith or Amir Mohsen.

Support for justice. Retributive justice was measured using the same items as in Studies 1 and 2. Restorative justice was measured by five items tapping apologetic behavior, financial reparation, and re-affirmation of shared values as ways to restore justice (e.g., “Without a sincere apology from [the U.S./Iran] for having acted wrongly, the injustice is not completely restored;” “To restore justice, the [Iranian/American] detainee and his family members needs to receive
financial compensation from [Michael Smith/Amir Mohsen] for what happened in the prison;”

“To restore justice, the U.S. and Iran need to agree on rules of a peaceful world.”

Ingroup attachment and glorification were measured using the same items as in Studies 1 and 2.

Results

Ingroup attachment and glorification. Neither attachment ($\alpha = .95$, $M = 6.60$, $SD = 1.83$), $Fs(1, 470) < 2.72$, $ps > .100$, $\eta^2_p < .01$, nor glorification ($\alpha = .89$, $M = 4.76$, $SD = 1.68$), $Fs(1, 470) < 2.73$, $ps > .100$, $\eta^2_p < .01$, was significantly affected by experimental manipulations, thus allowing us to use them, together with condition, as IVs in the GLMs reported below.

Perspective-taking manipulation check. To assess the effectiveness of the perspective-taking manipulation, we first subjected participants’ scores on the perpetrator perspective-taking measure ($\alpha = .80$, $M = 4.41$, $SD = 2.01$) to a GLM with the perspective-taking and ingroup-role manipulations as IVs and glorification as a continuous moderating variable, while controlling for attachment. The main effect of the perspective-taking manipulation was significant, such that participants in the perspective-taking condition took more perspective of the perpetrator ($M = 5.13$) than those in the objective condition ($M = 3.76$), regardless of the perpetrator’s group identity, $F(1, 465) = 61.26$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .12$, 90% CI [.07, .16]. There was also a significant main effect of ingroup role, such that participants engaged in more perpetrator perspective-taking when their ingroup committed ($M = 4.66$) rather than suffered violence ($M = 4.16$), $F(1, 465) = 5.30$, $p = .022$, $\eta^2_p = .01$, 90% CI [.001, .03]. The main effect of ingroup role was further qualified by an interaction with glorification, $F(1, 465) = 16.69$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .03$, 90% CI [.01, .07]. Simple effects revealed that high glorifiers took significantly more perspective of the
perpetrator when the ingroup committed ($M = 5.11$) rather than suffered violence ($M = 4.01$), $t(465) = 4.61, p < .001$, whereas low glorifiers did not ($M_{\text{perpetrator}} = 4.21, M_{\text{victim}} = 4.52$), $t(465) = 4.61, p < .001$. No other effects reached significance, $Fs(1, 465) < 1.76, ps > .180, \eta^2_{ps} < .01$.

These results indicate that the perspective-taking manipulation was successful and did not interact with the ingroup role manipulation or glorification.

**Support for justice.** Participants’ support for retributive justice was strongly correlated with their support for restorative justice, $r = .65, p < .001$. We thus conducted an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to examine whether these two types of justice indeed constituted two distinct constructs in our data. Two factors emerged from the analysis (as suggested by a scree plot and the “Eigenvalue > 1” criterion. All five retributive justice items and three restorative justice items tapping support for financial reparations and apologies as means to restore justice loaded onto one factor, while the other two restorative justice items tapping re-affirmation of shared values defined the second factor. This factor solution suggested that participants construed financial reparations and apologies as punitive, similar to retributive justice. Following the EFA, we created a new retributive justice variable, encompassing both the original five retributive items and the three restorative items ($\alpha = .93, M = 5.77, SD = 1.92$).\(^8\) We also created a new variable for value re-affirmation with the remaining two restorative items ($\alpha = .90, M = 6.95, SD = 1.89$).

**Retributive justice.** Support for retributive justice was submitted to a GLM with perspective-taking manipulation and ingroup role as IVs, glorification as a continuous moderator, and attachment as a covariate. Consistent with our hypothesis that taking the perpetrator’s perspective would reduce high (but not low) glorifiers’ justice support when the

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\(^8\) We also conducted analyses with the original retributive and restorative justice scales as the DVs, and both analyses yielded marginally three-way interactions of glorification by perspective-taking and ingroup role.
ingroup was the perpetrator (but not the victim) in the conflict, we obtained a significant three-way interaction of glorification by perspective-taking manipulation and ingroup role (see Figure 9).\(^9\) \(F(1, 465) = 4.17, p = .042, \eta^2_p = .01, 90\% CI [.00, .03].\) Among high glorifiers, taking the perpetrator’s perspective significantly reduced their support for retributive justice (\(M = 4.17\)), compared to not taking the perpetrator’s perspective (\(M = 4.78\)) when the ingroup committed violence, \(t(465) = -1.97, p = .050,\) but not when it suffered violence (\(M_{\text{perspective-taking}} = 6.75, M_{\text{objective}} = 6.93\)), \(t(465) = -.57, p = .572.\) Low glorifiers taking the perpetrator’s perspective (compared to not doing so), in contrast, significantly increased their support for retributive justice when the ingroup committed violence (\(M_{\text{perspective-taking}} = 6.48, M_{\text{objective}} = 5.82\)), \(t(465) = 2.14, p = .033,\) but not when it suffered violence (\(M_{\text{perspective-taking}} = 5.42, M_{\text{objective}} = 5.63\)), \(t(465) = - .62, p = .537.\)

The analysis also revealed a significant main effect of ingroup role, such that participants were less supportive of retributive justice when the ingroup was the perpetrator (\(M = 5.30\)) than the victim (\(M = 6.23\)), \(F(1, 465) = 30.02, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .06, 90\% CI [.03, .10].\) As in previous studies, the main effect of ingroup role was further qualified by an interaction with glorification, \(F(1, 465) = 87.19, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .16, 90\% CI [.11, .20].\) High glorifiers supported significantly less retributive justice when the ingroup was the perpetrator (\(M = 4.48\)) rather than the victim (\(M = 6.84\)), \(t(465) = -10.69, p < .001,\) whereas low glorifiers supported significantly more retributive justice when the ingroup was the perpetrator (\(M = 6.15\)) than the victim (\(M = 5.53\)), \(t(465) = -10.69, p = .007.\) There was also a marginally significant interaction between perspective-taking manipulation and glorification, \(F(1, 465) = 3.76, p = .053, \eta^2_p = .01, 90\% CI [.00, .03].\) Taking

\(^9\) Using attachment as the moderator while controlling for glorification also yielded a significant three-way interaction of attachment by perspective-taking and ingroup role. However, none of the predicted simple effects reached significance, thus rendering glorification the more prominent moderator in this study.
the perpetrator’s perspective somewhat reduced high glorifiers’ support for retributive justice ($M = 5.46$), compared to not taking the perpetrator’s perspective ($M = 5.85$), $t(465) = 1.79, p = .075$, whereas low glorifiers did not differ significantly depending on whether or not they took the perpetrator’s perspective ($M_{\text{perspective-taking}} = 5.95$, $M_{\text{objective}} = 5.72$), $t(465) = -.98, p = .326$. No other effects reached significance, $Fs(1, 465) < .65, ps > .400, \eta^2_p s < .01$.

**Re-affirmation of shared values.** The analysis with value re-affirmation as the DV revealed a significant main effect of ingroup role, such that participants were less in favor of value re-affirmation as a means to restore justice when the ingroup was the perpetrator ($M = 6.60$) than the victim ($M = 7.29$), $F(1, 465) = 16.65, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .03, 90\% CI [.01, .06]$. The main effect of glorification was marginally significant, $F(1, 465) = 3.17, p = .076, \eta^2_p = .01, 90\% CI [.00, .02]$, indicating that glorification was somewhat negatively associated with support for value re-affirmation efforts, $\beta = -.13$. No other effects reached significance, $Fs(1, 465) < 2.55, ps > .110, \eta^2_p s < .01$.

**Statistical power.** A post-hoc power analysis revealed that on the basis of the effect size for the three-way interaction of glorification by perpetrator perspective-taking and ingroup role ($\eta^2_p = .01$), and a sample size of 474, the power to detect a three-way interaction was 0.59.

**Discussion**

In Study 3, we experimentally manipulated both perpetrator perspective-taking and participants’ ingroup’s role as perpetrator or victim in the conflict. Consistent with our predictions, taking the perpetrator’s perspective reduced high glorifiers’ support for retributive justice (including apology and financial reparation) when the ingroup has committed harm against another group. Low glorifiers, by contrast, reacted in the opposite manner, demanding more justice after being instructed to take the perspective of ingroup perpetrators. Low glorifiers’
reactions are consistent with Lucas et al.’s (2016) finding that when people attribute malevolent intentions to the perpetrator, taking the perpetrator’s perspective increases their moral condemnation. As low levels of glorification are often associated with ingroup-critical attitudes when faced with ingroup-committed wrongdoings (e.g., Leidner & Castano, 2012), focusing attention toward ingroup perpetrators’ thoughts and feelings is likely to amplify the initially critical evaluation of the wrongdoing.

When the ingroup was the victim of intergroup transgressions, on the other hand, taking the perspective of (outgroup) perpetrators did not lead to reduced justice support among high glorifiers, further suggesting that perspective-taking serves a morally disengaging function when the perpetrator belongs to the ingroup. Study 3 thus provides additional evidence that perspective-taking can be a motivated cognitive process in intergroup relations, and that perpetrator perspective-taking is a causal mechanism underlying the effects of ingroup’s role in a conflict on group members’ support for justice. Moreover, by measuring both retributive and restorative justice, Study 3 showed that perspective-taking with ingroup perpetrators not only reduces support for punishment of perpetrators, but can also negatively affect support for apology and financial reparation.

**General Discussion**

Three experiments investigated perpetrator perspective-taking in the aftermath of intergroup transgressions and its implications for justice among both victim and perpetrator group members. Among Americans who strongly glorified their country, reminders of ingroup perpetration (as opposed to victimization) in the conflict between the U.S. and Iran increased their perspective-taking with perpetrators. Our mediation analyses further showed that adopting the perspective of ingroup perpetrators can have undesirable consequences for post-conflict
justice—namely, high glorifiers’ reduced support for justice in the form of perpetrator punishment (Study 1). Interestingly, American participants exhibited a similar tendency to adopt the perpetrators’ perspective when Australia committed rather than suffered violence in a fictitious conflict with Iran (Study 2). Such increased perspective-taking, however, did not translate into lowered support for justice to the same degree as when the ingroup was involved, suggesting that the exonerating function of perpetrator perspective-taking was more prominent when the perpetrators belonged to the ingroup. Furthermore, while high glorifiers were also less likely to adopt the perspective of victims after ingroup perpetration rather than victimization, this decrease in victim perspective-taking did not explain the reduction in support for justice, thus providing additional evidence for the mediating role of increased perspective-taking with (ingroup) perpetrators, not decreased perspective-taking with (outgroup) victims.

Finally, we presented causal evidence for the effect of perpetrator perspective-taking on support for justice, and extended the effect to apology and reparations, which are traditionally viewed as restorative forms of justice (Study 3). Taking the perspective of ingroup perpetrators significantly reduced high glorifiers’ support for retributive (but not restorative) justice. Although our sample sizes were relatively large (no less than 80 participants in each experimental condition) in all three studies, post-hoc power analyses revealed that the statistical power to detect the predicted three-way interactions in Studies 2 and 3 was not ideal (i.e., 0.71 and 0.59, respectively). However, the significant three-way interactions and simple effects we obtained were consistent with our a priori formed hypotheses.

By examining American participants’ responses to the conflict between the U.S. and Iran as well as the conflict between Australia and Iran, our methodological approach considers victim, perpetrator, and third-party perspectives in tandem. The current work thus complements
previous research that has almost exclusively focused on one or, more rarely, two of these perspectives, and provides a rather comprehensive outlook on the role of perspective-taking in the context of intergroup transgressions. It also brings together two independent lines of research – perspective-taking and moral disengagement – and demonstrates for the first time that taking the perspective of ingroup perpetrators can lead to morally exonerating outcomes such as reduced support for justice.

**Perspective-taking as Motivated Cognition**

Our findings highlight the motivated nature of perspective-taking in the context of intergroup relations. Substantial research has demonstrated that when confronted with ingroup-committed wrongdoings, people are motivated to execute various affective and cognitive strategies that allow them to morally disengage from the wrongdoings (e.g., Aquino, Reed, Thau, & Freeman, 2006; Bandura, 1999; Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996). Unlike more commonly studied moral disengagement strategies such as denial, victim dehumanization, and moral justification, adopting the perspective of ingroup perpetrators does not imply an explicit intention to disengage from moral transgressions. When motivated by ingroup-committed (rather than suffered) violence, however, this basic cognitive process does result in the exoneration of ingroup perpetrators from punishment, as is evident from the subsequent reduced support for justice in response to human rights violations by the ingroup (but not an equal-status outgroup). The present research thus also contributes to the existing literature by showing that even without any explicit intention to morally disengage, cognitively appraising the intergroup situation from the perpetrators’ perspective can take on an exonerating, morally disengaging function when the perpetrators belong to one’s ingroup. In other words, attempts to
understand ingroup perpetrators can be a slippery slope to injustice, and prevent accountability and improvement of the ingroup.

The observed moderating effect of glorification adds another layer of complexity to the motivational component of perspective-taking in response to intergroup conflict. Consistent with prior research on ingroup identification in general (Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999; Doosje et al., 1995) and ingroup glorification in particular (Bilali, 2013; Leidner & Castano, 2012; Leidner et al., 2010; Roccas et al., 2006), we demonstrated that members of the perpetrator group were motivated to adopt the perpetrators’ perspective only to the extent that they glorified their own group. Moreover, while we successfully induced perspective-taking with perpetrators among both high and low glorifies, it only reduced justice support in response to ingroup (compared to outgroup) atrocities among high glorifiers, while increasing it among low glorifiers. Therefore, perpetrator perspective-taking and its exonerating function are essentially motivated by the basic psychological need to defend against threats to the (glorified) moral image of the ingroup.

It should also be noted that in both Studies 1 and 2, using attachment as the moderator while controlling for glorification yielded similar results as using glorification as moderator while controlling for attachment. In Study 3, however, it did not produce predicted simple effects. As the moderating effects of glorification were thus more consistent across the three studies than any (unpredicted) moderating effects of attachment, and previous research has repeatedly shown the detrimental role of glorification – but not attachment – in intergroup conflicts (e.g., Leidner et al., 2010; Li, Leidner, Euh, & Choi, 2016; Roccas et al., 2006), we consider glorification a more important moderator than attachment in the present research.
Future research, however, is needed to investigate when and under what conditions attachment may or may not play a similar role as glorification.

**The Pitfalls of Understanding Evil**

The present research also bears on an intriguing philosophical and practical question in responding to acts of evil: should we attempt to understand them, to view things through the eyes of perpetrators, and to imagine their thoughts, feelings, and intentions? There certainly are benefits of understanding perpetrators and their actions, especially for victims who are struggling to forgive and move on (Takaku, 2001; Takaku et al., 2001; Witvliet et al., 2001). For observers of transgressions, however, it has been cautioned that understanding the perspective of perpetrators might carry the moral risk of diminishing the severity of their crimes (Baumeister, 1997). Indeed, very few people who have committed severe moral transgressions actually see their actions as evil. Understanding the perpetrators on their own terms, therefore, can come at the cost of impartial moral judgments. By showing that high glorifiers are particularly prone to adopting the perspective of ingroup perpetrators and hence seeing their crimes as less punishable, our findings offered empirical evidence for this risk, and established boundary conditions for its occurrence (levels of ingroup glorification).

Due to our focus on parties directly involved in acts of moral transgression, it will be important for future research to further investigate perpetrator perspective-taking and its implications among bystanders or uninvolved third parties of intergroup transgressions. Moreover, our cognitive rather than affective operationalization of “understanding perpetrators” does not address the emotional aspects of understanding moral transgressions. Empathizing with perpetrators, for example, may evoke intense emotional responses that can further cloud
observers’ moral judgments and eventually prevent pursuit of justice. Therefore, future work should examine affective and cognitive processes in tandem.

Conclusion

This research suggests that in response to intergroup violence, high glorifiers are more likely to take the perspective of perpetrators when their own group was the perpetrator rather than the victim of violence. Such increased perspective-taking further served the function to facilitate exonerating appraisals of the transgressions, as evidenced by high glorifiers’ reduced support for justice following transgressions committed rather than suffered by the ingroup. These findings uncovered the undesirable consequences of understanding acts of evil in the context of intergroup conflict, and can have important implications for the restoration of justice in post-conflict societies.
References


Figure 1. Conceptual model depicting the effects of ingroup role (perpetrator vs. victim) on support for justice through perspective-taking with perpetrators, moderated by ingroup glorification (controlling for ingroup attachment).
Figure 2. Support for justice as a function of ingroup’s role as perpetrator or victim and national glorification (Study 1).
Figure 3. Perspective-taking with perpetrators as a function of ingroup’s role as perpetrator or victim and national glorification (Study 1).
High glorifiers:

Figure 4. Moderated mediation models for high and low glorifiers, with attachment as a covariate (Study 1). All coefficients are unstandardized.
Figure 5. Support for justice as a function of ingroup’s role (perpetrator vs. victim), ingroup’s involvement in the conflict (involved vs. uninvolved), and national glorification (Study 2).
Figure 6. Perspective-taking with perpetrators as a function of ingroup’s role (perpetrator vs. victim), ingroup’s involvement in the conflict (involved vs. uninvolved), and national glorification (Study 2).
Figure 7. Perspective-taking with victims as a function of ingroup’s role (perpetrator vs. victim), ingroup’s involvement in the conflict (involved vs. uninvolved), and national glorification (Study 2).
High glorifiers:

Low glorifiers:

Figure 8. Moderated mediation models for high and low glorifiers, with attachment as a covariate (Study 2). All coefficients are unstandardized.
Figure 9. Support for retributive justice as a function of ingroup’s role (perpetrator vs. victim), perspective-taking with perpetrators (perspective-taking vs. objective), and national glorification (Study 3).