Groups' Search for Meaning: Redemption on the Path to Intergroup Reconciliation

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Abstract

Four studies investigated the utility of finding meaning in past wrongdoing to promote

intergroup reconciliation. Studies 1a, 1b, and 2 demonstrated that prompting members of

perpetrator groups to engage in redemption narratives increases collective guilt and willingness

to make reparations—both important in obtaining victims' forgiveness. Further, Study 2 suggests

that redemption narratives (but not sense-making) increase willingness to reconcile and reduce

perceived justification. Study 3 suggests that perpetrators' redemption, but not simply sense-

making, narratives lead victims to perceive greater change in the perpetrator group and increased

victims' willingness to reconcile, but not forgive. Taken together, the present work highlights

the potential for redemption narratives to serve as an intervention for past intergroup conflict,

increasing the chance for intergroup reconciliation.

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Takashi Kawamura, the mayor of Nagoya, Japan, recently shocked the world by publicly stating to a group of visiting delegates from the Chinese city of Nanjing that the 1937 raping, looting, and murdering of hundreds of thousands of people known as the Nanjing Massacre "probably never happened" (Armstrong, 2012). Yet, the very same week, German politician Martin Schulz spoke in Marzabotto, Italy about German responsibility for commemorating war crimes in the town, the need for vigilance in preventing future atrocities, and the burden of responsibility for Germans, but also the pride of becoming leaders of democracy and tolerance worldwide (Schulz, 2012). Why was Schulz's response to ingroup wrongdoing so different from Kawamura's, and can such knowledge be used in interventions to promote intergroup reconciliation?

Schulz's words hint at a process known as "meaning-making" that is associated with positive outcomes among victims and perpetrators of interpersonal conflicts (Maruna, 2001; McAdams, Diamond, de St. Aubin, & Mansfield, 2001; Wright, Crawford, & Sebastian, 2007). The present work aims to test the viability of meaning-making as an intervention for inter*group* reconciliation. Specifically, does making meaning of past intergroup violence promote reconciliatory emotions (e.g., collective guilt) and intentions (e.g., reparative intentions, willingness to reconcile) among perpetrators? Further, how might victims of past atrocities respond to perpetrators' efforts to make-meaning out of their groups' wrongdoing?

Roadblocks to Reconciliation

In order to create an effective intervention, it is first important to understand why intergroup reconciliation is so difficult. Perpetrator groups must confront that their ingroup has committed serious transgressions, but people are strongly motivated to view important ingroups

as moral and deserving (Crocker & Luhtanen, 1990; Tajfel & Turner, 1986)—a perception threatened by information that paints the ingroup as the aggressor in intergroup conflict. Threats to the ingroup's moral identity can therefore lead to negative, defensive reactions. For example, people reminded of ingroup wrongdoing may engage in denial, distancing, or victim-blaming (Bilali, Tropp, & Dasgupta, 2012; Doosje et al., 1998; Peetz, Gunn, & Wilson, 2010). Another such defensive response is the reduction of collective guilt—indeed, many studies demonstrate that, particularly for strongly identified group members, reminders of ingroup wrongdoing can lead to lowered feelings of collective guilt (see Branscombe & Doosje, 2004; Branscombe & Miron, 2004; Doosje et al., 1998; Miron, Branscombe, & Biernat, 2010, Peetz et al., 2010; Rotella & Richeson, 2013a).

This lowered level of collective guilt is problematic as it is related to decreased willingness to offer reparations, acknowledge responsibility, or apologize for wrongdoing (Doosje et al., 1998; Lickel, Schmader, Curtis, Scarneier, & Ames, 2005; McGarty et al., 2005; Peetz et al., 2010). Unfortunately, these are the very concessions that victims desire from perpetrators and that promote forgiveness toward individuals (Lazare, 2004; Philpot & Hornsey, 2008). Indeed, victims frequently endorse justice, reparations, and acknowledgment of responsibility as *essential* preconditions to reconciliation (Rouhana, 2004). Consequently, it is essential to examine ways to avert these frequently used defenses. The present research examines whether the process known as meaning-making may be efficacious in this regard.

Making Meaning out of Negative Events

Research on meaning-making suggests that people often demonstrate resilience, growth, and prosocial behaviors in response to extremely negative life events (Gilbert, 2006). When people experience negative or unexpected events, they frequently begin searching for meaning

(Baumeister, 1991). Davis, Nolen-Hoeksma, and Larson (1998) differentiated two types of meaning-making: sense-making and benefit-finding. Sense-making refers to creating a coherent story to explain away the uncertainty frequently triggered by traumatic events and make the traumatic event understandable. For example, by attributing the event to a specific action performed (such as a robbery occurring because the homeowner left a door unlocked; Davis et al., 1998; Janoff-Bulman & Frantz, 1997). The second broad type of meaning-making, benefit-finding, pertains to the search for something of value to be gained by virtue of having experienced the trauma (see also Lerner, 1980).

Benefit-finding may seem surprising given the often devastating nature of the precipitating events, but many (and according to one meta-analysis, the majority of) trauma survivors actually report experiencing increased personal strength, priorities changed for the better, or richer spiritual and existential lives (Helgeson, Reynolds, & Tomich, 2006; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; Wright et al., 2007). Benefit-finding may be particularly effective, sustaining better well-being longer than sense-making (Davis et al., 1998). Importantly, benefit-finding leads to both personal growth *and* prosocial intentions. People prompted to write about potential benefits in the aftermath of interpersonal transgression reported greater forgiveness toward their transgressor (McCullough, Root, & Cohen, 2006). The present work focused primarily on the potential benefits of one form of benefit-finding—redemption narratives.

Redemption Narratives

In the life story model of identity, identity is viewed as a story narrated with a distinct plot and theme, imbuing autobiographical experiences with culturally significant meaning (McAdams, 2001). One such narrative is redemption, in which a distinct transformation occurs from an affectively negative life scene to an affectively positive one in which "the bad is

redeemed, salvaged, mitigated, or made better in light of the ensuing good" (McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patten, & Bowman, 2001, p. 474). Such narratives include nearly dying and thus appreciating life more, or experiencing abuse but becoming an advocate for other victims (McAdams, 2012; McAdams et al., 2001; McAdams et al., 1997). Importantly, redemption narratives are a special form of benefit-finding in that they can reflect events from the distant past but nevertheless imbue meaning for the present (McAdams et al., 2001).

Indeed, redemption narratives are a frequent and important component of people's life stories (McAdams, 2006a). People readily generate redemption narratives, and engaging in them predicts a number of positive outcomes. McAdams and colleagues (2001) found that people who described their lives with more redemption sequences scored significantly higher on measures of psychological well-being and generativity—the concern for and commitment to future generations. Highly generative people also score higher on indices of prosociality, are more involved parents, more civically engaged, and volunteer more often (McAdams, 2006b). This connection to something larger than oneself suggests that redemption narratives may be a particularly effective method to cope with personal, and perhaps also intergroup, trauma.

Meaning-Making Among Perpetrators

Although the vast majority of research on the benefits of meaning-making has focused on the victims of conflict or trauma, the same principles might also apply to perpetrators. Specifically, if perpetrators perceive their past wrongdoing or the aftermath as catalyzing some positive change in their own lives, this may reduce the wrongdoing's threat to their identities, allowing perpetrators to respond prosocially, rather than defensively. For example, narratives of living a sinful life but being 'saved' by a religious conversion or of hurting one's spouse but

ultimately receiving forgiveness are included among those life stories that predict better well-being and generativity (McAdams, 2012; McAdams et al., 2001).

Interestingly, investigations into meaning-making among convicted criminals suggest that redemption narratives promote both personal growth and prosocial outcomes. Maruna (2001) interviewed 65 former prisoners, half of whom had not reoffended since their release. Maruna discovered that these "desistors" were significantly more likely to frame their experiences as criminals and prisoners in terms of redemption. For example, some of the reformed convicts described their crimes and incarceration as valuable experiences for counseling youth, and some jailhouse converts recast the experiences as sources of inspiration for missionary work. Some desistors made meaning of their criminal pasts through a renewed sense of hope, control over their lives, and a desire to "give something back" to the community (Maruna, 2001; Maruna, Wilson, & Curran, 2006). Prompting people who have done wrong to think in terms of redemption may similarly yield prosocial intentions, although the implications of Maruna and colleagues' work for collective wrongdoing and reconciliation remain unknown.

Meaning-Making as an Intervention in Intergroup Conflict?

Considerable research demonstrates that finding meaning is an important, positive intervention for victims and perpetrators alike; but, does this extend to the collective level? There is some evidence suggesting that victims of intergroup aggression may indeed engage in collective meaning-making which in turn leads to similarly improved psychosocial outcomes. In one study, Updegraff, Silver, and Holman (2008) investigated Americans' responses to the collective trauma of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Specifically, they examined how people who were not directly harmed in the attacks coped with the cultural upheaval and trauma. For two years following the attacks, nearly all 931 participants reported searching for

meaning in the attacks and surrounding events; and, participants who reported actually finding meaning reported the lowest levels of post-traumatic stress symptoms. These results held even after controlling for pre-9/11 levels of mental health, level of exposure to the events, and acute stress responses in the two months immediately after the attacks.

While the Updegraff et al. (2008) study suggests the power of collective meaning-making, it is limited in several ways. Most notably, the study was non-experimental so it remains unclear whether meaning-making caused the positive psychological outcomes or visa-versa. Second, it did not investigate the potential effects of meaning-making on reconciliation with the outgroup. Importantly, the study focused solely on the victims of intergroup violence. To our knowledge, no studies, experimental or otherwise, have discerned the effects of meaning-making on the willingness of members of perpetrator groups to reconcile with or provide reparations to the victimized group. Considered in conjunction with Maruna and colleagues' (2001, 2006) work with criminal offenders, Updegraff et al.'s (2008) study suggests that collective meaning-making could support members of perpetrator groups engaging in behaviors that promote intergroup reconciliation. Potentially, perpetrator group members who perceive ingroup redemption, such as lessons learned or wrongdoing catalyzing a positive change in ingroup character or mission (such as in Schulz's comments), may respond to past ingroup wrongdoing prosocially, expressing guilt, offering reparations, and taking reconciliatory action. Also unknown are the interactive effects of collective meaning-making—will victims embrace or reject perpetrators' attempts to find meaning for themselves in the wrongdoing? While sense-making may offend victims by seeming to justify wrongdoing, messages of perpetrator group redemption should suggest transformation, and thus victims may see modern members as

fundamentally different from direct perpetrators, facilitating reconciliation. This dynamic is explored in the current research.

Overview of Studies

The current research investigates meaning-making as a potential intervention to promote intergroup reconciliation among members of both perpetrator and victim groups. Specifically, Studies 1a-2 prompted members of perpetrator groups to find meaning in the wrongdoing for their ingroup. We predicted that meaning-making, particularly redemption narratives, would increase collective guilt and reparative intentions. Study 1b tested whether changes in positive mood, rather than meaning-making per se, accounts for such reactions. Study 2 sought to demonstrate further that redemption narratives, but not sense-making, lead to greater collective guilt and willingness to make reparations and reconcile. Given the over-arching aim to investigate meaning-making's utility as an intervention, Study 3 examined the interactive dynamics of intergroup reconciliation—specifically, how members of victimized groups respond to perpetrators' meaning-making. We predicted that exposing victims to messages suggesting perpetrator redemption, but not sense-making, would increase intergroup trust, forgiveness, and willingness to reconcile.

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Study 1a

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Study 1a aimed to establish that collective, ingroup-focused meaning-making can be manipulated among members of perpetrator groups, and that its induction can increase prosocial responses among members of perpetrator groups, specifically, collective guilt and willingness to make reparations.

Participants

Seventy-three (53 female) White American undergraduates (M_{age} = 19.44), born and raised in the US, participated in exchange for either course credit or $8.

Materials & Measures

Writing prompts. A passage describing the internment of people of Japanese descent by the US government during World War II was followed by a five-minute writing task. In the *meaning-making* condition, participants wrote about how the event "changed America, Americans, or the American national identity," while in the *control* condition they simply wrote about their reactions to the information. Two independent raters blind to condition and hypotheses coded participants' essays using 15 items, rated on -3 (*strongly disagree*) to +3 (*strongly agree*) Likert-type scales assessing the use of redemption and sense-making narratives. Items reflecting redemption were drawn from McAdams' (2012) descriptions of redemptive narratives' characteristics and McAdams and Manczak's (in press) summary table of narrative coding schemes. For example, coders rated whether the essays depicted a positive transformation for the ingroup, "deep insight" into the events, or lessons the (perpetrator) ingroup learned. Items reflecting sense-making included the use of causal sequencing or explanations of 'why' and 'how' (see Davis et al., 1998).

Collective guilt. Collective guilt was measured using an adaptation of the collective guilt scale (CGS) developed by Branscombe, Slugoski, and Kappen (2004). Participants rated their agreement with 5 items, including "I feel regret for America's harmful past actions toward those interned" on 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) Likert-type scales.

Reparations. Seven items assessed participants' willingness to perform symbolic and financial acts of reparation (Rotella & Richeson, 2013a). Participants rated their agreement with statements such as "I think that the Japanese-Americans deserve an apology for the actions

described in the passage" and "I support giving some kind of financial reparations to the Japanese-Americans," on the above Likert-type scale.

American identification. To test whether American identity moderates the effects of redemption, and to ensure the conditions did not make identity differentially salient, the importance to identity and private regard subscales of the collective self-esteem scale (CSES; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992)—adapted for American identity—were administered. Four items per scale were rated on the above Likert-type scale.

Procedure

After providing informed consent, participants were randomly assigned to conditions. Participants then completed the writing task, CGS, reparations scale, and CSES before being debriefed, thanked, and credited for participation.

Results

Writing prompts. To ensure that the meaning-making prompt encouraged greater meaning-making, and especially redemption narratives, than the control prompt, coders' ratings of participants' essays were examined. Coders' ratings of redemption narratives and sense-making demonstrated somewhat low, albeit sufficient, interrater reliability ($r = .66, .59$), and as such were averaged and subjected to independent samples t-tests (meaning-making v. control prompt). The meaning-making condition ($M = 1.13, SD = 0.98$) led to greater ratings of redemption narratives than did the control prompt ($M = -0.18, SD = 1.09$), $t(72) = 3.94, p < .001$, $d = .70$. Interestingly, somewhat more sense-making occurred in the meaning-making condition ($M = -0.43, SD = 1.47$) compared to the control condition ($M = -0.97, SD = 1.24$), $t(72) = 1.70, p = .09, d = .40$. These results suggest that the meaning-making prompt successfully led

participants to engage in meaning-making in the form of redemption narratives (and sense-

making), compared with the control prompt.

Collective guilt. Responses to the CGS items (α = .87) were averaged and subjected to

the same independent samples t-test as above. Results revealed a trend for the meaning-making

condition (M = 6.09, SD = 0.91) to elicit higher levels of collective guilt than the control

condition (M = 5.65, SD = 1.14), $t(71)$ = 1.83, p = .07, d = .38.

Reparations. Responses to the reparations items (α = .76) were averaged and subjected

to an independent samples t-test. Results revealed that the meaning-making condition (M = 5.39,

SD = 0.80) elicited significantly greater willingness to make reparations than did the control

condition (M = 4.86, SD = 1.04), $t(71)$ = 2.48, p = .02, d = .47.

American identification. Responses to the private regard and importance to identity

CSES-subscale items were averaged (Chronbach's α's = .88, .90) then examined for differential

effects by condition; neither private regard [$t(71)$ = 1.37, p = .18] nor identity importance [$t(71)$

= 1.24, p = .22] differed between participants in the meaning-making (M = 5.44, SD = 1.22; M =

4.55, SD = 1.60) and control (M = 5.04, SD = 1.26; M = 3.99, SD = 1.56) conditions. Therefore,

differential salience or importance of American identity is an unlikely explanation for the

condition effect on reparations (or the trend in collective guilt). Both subscales were also

examined as possible moderators of the effect of condition on the primary dependent variables;

results offered no evidence for such moderation by either subscale (all t's < 1.34, all p's > .35).[1]

Discussion

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[1]No significant effects of condition on identification emerged across studies, except in Study 1b
wherein a tendency toward *lower* private regard in the meaning-making condition emerged.
Hence, it is highly unlikely that identity salience underlies the primary effects. American
identification was also examined as a potential moderator across studies, but no such effects
emerged (all t's < 1.41), thus, the results are not discussed in the main text.

Results suggest that participants prompted to engage in meaning-making to confront ingroup wrongdoing expressed somewhat greater feelings of collective guilt and significantly greater willingness to make reparations, compared with participants who simply responded to the information. Results were not moderated by group identification. A limitation of Study 1a, however, could be that the writing conditions caused participants to dwell on negative emotions differentially. Meaning-making might, therefore, merely distract from social identity threats, or concentrating on positive changes could increase positive mood. Positive emotions experienced after highly negative ones can "broaden and build" people's personal resources and lead to more prosocial behaviors (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). Thus, positive mood alone may have triggered the positive intergroup outcomes. Study 1b examined this alternate hypothesis by introducing a control condition evoking positive mood but *not* meaning-making. Further, because our ability to observe significant differences in collective guilt may have been due to the use of an event that is fairly universally condemned in the United States (the Japanese internment), reflected in the relatively high levels of collective guilt expressed across conditions, Study 1b employed an historical event about which opinion is more divided; the bombing of Hiroshima.

Study 1b

Participants

One hundred and fifty-four (80 female) users of Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) program participated online in exchange for $0.20 credited to their Amazon accounts. All participants were White Americans, born and raised in the US, ranging in age from 18 to 71 (M_{age} = 36.33).

Materials

Writing prompts. The manipulation was similar to Study 1a with two major exceptions. First, the instance of ingroup wrongdoing was the 1945 bombing of Hiroshima by American forces. The passage detailed the bombing and aftermath presenting modern scholarly opinions supporting and decrying the bombing (Rotella & Richeson, 2013b). Second, we added a positive mood induction condition, in which participants spent five minutes describing a person, event, or thing that made them extremely happy. Two independent coders blind to condition and hypotheses rated the control and meaning-making essays, using a 10-item version of the coding scheme described in Study 1a (i.e., redundant items were eliminated or combined and language simplified).

Collective guilt & reparations. Collective guilt and reparative intentions were assessed as in Study 1a.

Mood. Positive and negative mood were assessed using the positive and negative affective schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). The positive affect (PA) and negative affect (NA) subscales each contain ten items assessing to what degree participants are currently experiencing various emotions (i.e., *inspired, distressed*) on a 1 (*very slightly or not at all*) to 7 (*very much*) Likert-type scale.

Procedure

After logging into the MTurk system and providing informed consent, participants were randomly assigned to condition. After completing the writing task, participants completed the CGS, reparations scale, and PANAS, before being debriefed, thanked, and credited.

Results

Writing prompts. Coders' ratings of redemption narratives and sense-making demonstrated sufficient interrater reliability ($r = .66, .64$), and were averaged and subjected to an

independent samples t-test (meaning-making v. control prompt). As expected, participants in the

meaning-making condition ($M = 1.38$, $SD = 1.73$) generated more redemption narratives than did

participants in the control condition ($M = -0.06$, $SD = 1.80$), $t(99) = 4.06$, $p < .001$, $d = .82$. No

significant differences were observed between the control ($M = 1.32$, $SD = 1.67$) and meaning-

making ($M = 1.16$, $SD = 1.55$) conditions in the amount of sense-making, $t(99) = 0.51$, $p = .61$.

Thus, the meaning-making prompt appears to have successfully promoted greater use of

redemption narratives compared with the control prompt.

Mood. Responses to the NA ($\alpha = .88$) and PA ($\alpha = .93$) items were averaged and each

subjected to a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). For the NA subscale, no statistically

significant differences emerged between the control ($M = 1.54$, $SD = 0.80$), positive mood

induction ($M = 1.45$, $SD = 0.68$), and meaning-making ($M = 1.72$, $SD = 0.78$) conditions, $F(2,$

$151) = 1.62$, $p = .20$. However, a trend was observed on the PA subscale, $F(2, 151) = 2.41$, $p =$

$.09$, $\mu^2 = .02$, such that the control condition ($M = 2.30$, $SD = 0.78$) elicited somewhat less

positive affect than the positive mood induction ($M = 2.59$, $SD = 0.82$, $p = .15$) and meaning-

making ($M = 2.58$, $SD = 0.76$, $p = .14$) conditions. Interestingly, positive affect in the positive

mood induction and meaning-making conditions did not differ from each other, $p > .99$.

Coupled with the evidence that participants in the meaning-making condition generated

redemption, but not sense-making, more than did participants in the control condition, these

findings suggest that engaging in redemption narratives does seem to boost positive mood.

Collective guilt. Responses to the CGS items ($\alpha = .95$) were averaged and subjected to

the same ANOVA. As shown in Figure 1, results revealed significant differences among

conditions, $F(2, 151) = 3.71$, $p = .03$, $\mu^2 = .02$. A planned contrast comparing the meaning-

making condition with the positive mood induction and control conditions suggested that

meaning-making led participants to express significantly greater collective guilt compared with the other conditions, $t(151) = 2.61, p = .01, d = .44$.[2]

Reparations. Responses to the reparations scale items ($\alpha = .93$) were averaged and subjected to the same ANOVA. As shown in Figure 1, results revealed a significant difference across conditions, $F(2, 151) = 4.15, p = .02, \mu^2 = .03$. A planned contrast comparing the meaning-making condition with the positive mood induction and control conditions suggested that meaning-making led to significantly greater willingness to make reparations compared to the other two conditions, $t(151) = 2.84, p = .005, d = .47$.

Discussion

In Study 1b, individuals in the meaning-making condition expressed greater levels of collective guilt and willingness to make reparations, compared with participants in the other conditions. Given that the meaning-making prompt led to greater use of redemption narratives, but not sense-making, the results suggest meaning-making's positive effect on reconciliatory behaviors likely stems from engaging in redemption narratives. Importantly, Study 1b also suggests that these outcomes are not merely the byproduct of increased positive affect. Although engaging in meaning-making did lead to somewhat more positive affect compared with control, inducing positive affect directly (in the absence of meaning-making) did *not* promote greater reconciliatory intent, compared with control.

Taken together, these initial studies suggest meaning-making, particularly redemption narratives, may facilitate intergroup reconciliation. Nevertheless, the findings are somewhat

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[2] To ensure positive affect did not cause the differences between conditions, we conducted ANCOVAs controlling for positive affect. The effect of condition remained significant for both collective guilt, $F(2, 150) = 3.98, p = .02$, and reparations, $F(2, 150) = 4.70, p = .01$; and, positive affect tended to predict both DVs directly, $F(1, 150) = 3.07, p = .08$, and, $F(1, 151) = 2.75, p = .10$, respectively.

limited in that we did not separately manipulate redemption and sense-making narratives. Thus, Study 2 considered whether these different forms of meaning-making confer different intergroup benefits.

Study 2

Study 2 considered the separate effects of redemption and sense-making narratives on collective guilt and reparative intentions, as well as two additional intergroup outcomes—willingness to reconcile and perceived justification. Based on Studies 1a and 1b, and previous research (Maruna, 2001; McAdams et al., 2001), we predicted that participants prompted to generate redemption narratives would express greater collective guilt, perceive their ingroup's wrongdoing as least justified, and be most supportive of reconciliation and reparations, compared with participants prompted to generate sense-making narratives or those in a no-meaning-making control condition.

Participants

One hundred and thirty-six (73 female) MTurk users participated online in exchange for $0.20. All participants were White Americans, born and raised in the US, ranging in age from 18 to 70 (M_{age} = 32.49).

Materials

Meaning-making manipulation. Participants read the passage described in Study 1b, then engaged in the 5-minute writing manipulation. In the *redemption narrative* condition, participants wrote about how the historical events "transformed America, Americans, or the American national identity or character, and what lessons or insights might have been (or could be) gained by reflecting on this historical experience." In the sense-making condition, participants described how or why they believed the event occurred and tried to "make sense of

its occurrence in terms of cause-and-effect or logic". Participants in the *control* condition were simply asked to write their reactions to the event.

Collective guilt & reparations. Collective guilt and reparative intentions were assessed exactly as in the previous studies.

Reconciliation. Willingness to reconcile was measured using an adapted version of the scale by Shnabel and colleagues (2009). Participants rated to what extent each of ten statements reflect their beliefs on a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) Likert-type scale. Items included statements such as "I am willing to express good will toward the Japanese people" and "I would like to increase the proximity between Americans and the Japanese."

Perceived justification. Perception of the bombing as justified was measured using the scale used in Rotella and Richeson (2013b). Participants rated their agreement with 6 statements, including "I feel like the dropping of the bomb was a justified action" and "I think that, given the circumstances, America made the correct decision regarding the use of the atomic bomb in the war with Japan," using the same Likert-type scale described previously.

Procedure

The procedure was the same as in Study 1b.

Results

Writing prompts. Two independent coders blind to condition and hypotheses rated the essays for redemption and sense-making content, using the scheme from Study 1b. Coders' ratings of sense-making and redemption narratives demonstrated sufficient interrater reliability (respective *r's* = .82, .60) and were thus averaged and subjected to one-way ANOVAs comparing the three conditions. For sense-making use, results revealed a significant effect of condition, $F(2, 133) = 9.02$, $p < .001$, $\mu^2 = .08$. As shown in Table 1, the sense-making prompt

lead participants to engage in significantly greater amounts of sense-making than did the control or redemption narrative prompts (p = .0001, .004). The redemption narrative and control conditions did not differ in terms of the amount of sense-making contained in the essays (p = .89).

For redemption narrative use, results also revealed a significant effect of condition, $F(2, 133) = 5.15$, $p = .01$, $\mu^2 = .07$. Unexpectedly, both the redemption and sense-making prompt lead to more redemptive language than did the control prompt (p = .019, .024), but the two meaning-making conditions did not differ from one another (see Table 1). This finding suggests that sense-making and redemption may often co-occur, and is reminiscent of past work revealing Americans' prevalent, spontaneous use of redemption narratives in response to personal tragedy (see McAdams, 2006a). Nevertheless, in the current study, the sense-making and redemption narrative conditions are differentiated by the greater use of sense-making by participants in the sense-making prompt condition. Consequently, any observed differences on the main dependent variables is still likely to reflect the varying utility of engaging in redemption narratives relative to sense-making. If the responses to the main dependent variables in the two meaning-making conditions only differ from the control condition and not from each other, however, then the results would suggest that engagement in meaning-making per se, irrespective of type, can promote intergroup reconciliation among members of perpetrator groups.

Collective guilt. Responses to the CGS items ($\alpha = .94$) were averaged and subjected to the same ANOVA. As shown in Figure 2, results revealed significant differences among conditions, $F(2, 133) = 3.42$, $p = .04$, $\mu^2 = .05$. Importantly, and consistent with predictions, a planned contrast comparing the redemption narrative condition with the sense-making and control conditions suggested that the redemption narrative prompt led to significantly greater

levels of collective guilt compared to the other conditions, $t(133) = 2.56$, $p = .01$, $d = .48$. Given the results of the manipulation check, we also ran a post-hoc Tukey's test which revealed that the redemption narrative prompt elicited significantly higher levels of collective guilt relative to the sense-making prompt, $p = .03$. A trend existed such that the redemption narrative prompt led to somewhat more collective guilt than the control prompt, $p = .13$. No difference was observed between control and sense-making conditions, $p = .72$.

Reparations. Responses to the reparations scale items ($\alpha = .90$) were averaged and subjected to the same ANOVA. As shown in Figure 2, results revealed significant differences across conditions, $F(2, 133) = 3.74$, $p = .03$, $\mu^2 = .05$. A planned contrast comparing the redemption narrative condition with the sense-making and control conditions suggested that the redemption narrative prompt led to significantly greater willingness to make reparations, $t(133) = 2.28$, $p = .02$, $d = .43$. A post-hoc Tukey's test revealed that the redemption prompt promoted significantly greater willingness than the sense-making prompt, $p = .02$. The control condition did not differ significantly from either other condition, $p = .43, .21$.

Reconciliation. Responses to the reconciliation scale items ($\alpha = .87$) were averaged and subjected to the same ANOVA. As shown in Figure 3, results revealed significant differences across conditions, $F(2, 133) = 5.29$, $p = .006$, $\mu^2 = .07$. As predicted, a planned contrast comparing the redemption narrative condition with the sense-making and control conditions suggested that the redemption narrative prompt led to significantly greater willingness to reconcile compared to the other two conditions, $t(133) = 3.22$, $p = .002$, $d = .60$. A post-hoc Tukey's test revealed that the redemption narrative prompt elicited significantly greater willingness to reconcile relative to the sense-making, $p = .02$, or control, $p = .008$, prompts. The control and sense-making conditions did not differ significantly from one another, $p = .98$.

Perceived justification. Responses to the perceived justification scale items ($\alpha = .93$) were averaged and subjected to the same ANOVA. As shown in Figure 3, results revealed a significant difference across conditions, $F(2, 133) = 4.16$, $p = .02$, $\mu^2 = .06$. The planned contrast comparing the redemption narrative condition with the sense-making and control conditions suggested that the redemption narrative prompt led to significantly lower levels of perceived justification compared to the other conditions, $t(133) = 2.66$, $p < .01$, $d = .50$. A post-hoc Tukey's test revealed that those who received the redemption prompt perceived the bombing as significantly less justified relative to those who received the sense-making prompt, $p = .009$, and somewhat less justified relative to the control condition, $p = .19$. The control and sense-making conditions did not differ significantly from one another, $p = .38$.

Discussion

The present results offer compelling evidence for redemption narratives as a potential intervention for intergroup conflict. Specifically, participants prompted to engage in redemption narratives after reading about ingroup wrongdoing expressed greater collective guilt, willingness to make reparations and reconcile with victims, and reduced perceptions that the acts were justified, compared with participants prompted to engage in sense-making. These differences were observed despite participants in the sense-making condition tending to generate as much redemptive content as participants in the redemption narrative condition, although, importantly, participants in the sense-making condition also engaged in considerably more sense-making than did participants in the redemption prompt condition. Given that the sense-making condition did not result in more positive outcomes on any of the dependent measures compared with the control, furthermore, the present findings suggest that a reliance on sense-making may actually undermine any positive effects of generating redemption arcs. Because people likely rely on a

combination of these strategies, future studies should examine how the interplay of these two meaning-making strategies may shape intergroup outcomes. Still, when redemption narratives occurred largely in the absence of sense-making, relatively more prosocial outcomes followed; namely greater willingness to reconcile and reduced perceptions that the wrongdoing was justified. Future research using other methods to elicit either sense-making or redemption narratives, however, is necessary to support the present findings.

Nevertheless, the results of Study 2 clearly point to the promise of redemption narratives to promote reconciliation. Importantly, redemption narratives benefited affective (i.e., collective guilt), cognitive (i.e., perceived justification), and behavioral (i.e., reparations and reconciliation) outcomes, suggesting potentially widespread applications. However, for meaning-making to be a viable reconciliation strategy, it is important to understand how victims may react to its use by perpetrators. While redemption may make perpetrators more willing to apologize and offer reparations, victims may still reject these overtures and eschew forgiveness or reconciliation. Study 3, therefore, examined whether perpetrators' redemption narratives evoke positive or deleterious reactions among victimized group members.

Study 3

While meaning-making may indeed be beneficial to perpetrators of both interpersonal (Maruna, 2001; McAdams et al., 2001) and group wrongdoing, victims may reject perpetrators' efforts to imbue their own meaning to their group's suffering. Because victimization strips people of status and power (Shnabel & Nadler, 2008), victims frequently cite issues of justice and need for reparations as prerequisites for forgiveness and reconciliation (Philpot & Hornsey, 2008; Rouhana, 2004). Observing perpetrator groups "benefitting" from the ingroup's pain may therefore offend victims, and potentially invalidate meaning-making as an effective intervention.

Similarly, sense-making may appear to justify the wrongdoing, possibly reducing victims' faith in the reconciliatory process. Indeed, some evidence suggests that engaging in interventions designed to promote peace (including hearing life narratives from members of the opposing group) may polarize ideological positions and stall reconciliation, at least in cases of ongoing conflict in which each side has a legitimate claim to victimization (Hammack, 2006).

Some evidence, however, suggests victims may not react so harshly. In one study, simply spending time listening to others' descriptions of traumatic growth actually led to *vicarious* post-traumatic growth (Arnold, Calhoun, Tedeschi, & Cann, 2005). Although this study concerned third parties listening to victims' redemption narratives rather than victims listening to perpetrators' redemption narratives, it suggests that positive outcomes can be contagious. Further, because a redemption narrative approach suggests change over time in the perpetrator group, it may reduce the 'guilt by association' sometimes attached to contemporary group members (see Doosje et al., 1998) and enable reconciliation. Indeed, researchers found that Israeli Jews and Palestinians who believed, or were primed to believe, that groups are malleable (as opposed to having a fixed nature) reported more positive attitudes about the outgroup and greater willingness to compromise for peace (Halperin, Russell, Trzesniewski, Gross, & Dweck, 2011).

Given their focus on growth, redemption narratives may similarly make the distinction between direct perpetrators and modern group members salient. Such perceived generational discontinuity has been linked to improved intergroup attitudes following violence in Lebanon (Licata, Klein, Saade, Azzi, & Branscombe, 2012) and may facilitate reconciliation. Victims may also perceive such fundamental changes to the perpetrator group and the lessons it learned as reducing the risk of future conflict. Given research that finding any benefit led to increased

forgiveness toward individual offenders (McCullough et al., 2006), perpetrators' redemption may similarly increase collective forgiveness and reconciliation. More positive attitudes and reduced perceived risk may also increase intergroup trust, another predictor of willingness to accept overtures of reconciliation from a perceived perpetrator group (Nadler & Liviatan, 2006).

Study 3 investigated how victims react to sense-making and redemption narratives from the perpetrator group. Specifically, whether such messages increase victims' willingness to reconcile with, forgive, and trust the perpetrator group. Further, given that a central theme of redemption narratives is change, we assessed whether such messages from perpetrators cause victims to perceive more or less continuity between the past perpetrators and their modern day group members.

Participants

Seventy-five (47 female) White, American undergraduate students (M_{age} = 18.44) participated in exchange for partial course credit.

Materials

Meaning-making message manipulation. Participants read a passage describing ingroup victimization—specifically the inhumane treatment, including torture and medical experimentation, of American POWs in Japanese custody during World War II. The passage stated that current Japanese public opinion expressed regret for the past wrongdoing. This information was presented alone (control condition), with a message reiterating the coherency of the events (sense-making condition), or with a message describing positive changes for the perpetrating group and its identity (redemption narrative condition). Specifically, the sense-making prime suggested the group makes sense of what occurred by citing precipitating factors, the previous lack of international laws on the issue, contemporary Japanese logic, and the

mistaken beliefs Allied nations behaved similarly ("how and why"). In the redemption condition, the 'positive change' described Japan becoming a world leader in opposing inhumane treatment of POWs and unethical medical experimentation, popular rejection of non-defense military spending, and widespread positive changes in public opinion owing to collective reflection on these past events.

Reconciliation. Reconciliation was assessed using the scale described in Study 2.

Intergroup forgiveness. Intergroup forgiveness was measured using an adaptation of the intergroup forgiveness scale (IFS; see Tam et al., 2007). Participants rated 15 items, such as "I am able to view the offenders with compassion" and "I cannot forgive the Japanese for past wartime crimes against Americans" (reverse-coded), on the Likert-type scale described above.

Intergroup trust. Trust was measured using a 6-item scale adapted from that developed by Noor and colleagues (2008). Participants rated items such as "Few Japanese people can be trusted" (reverse-coded) on the Likert-type scale.

Group change. To assess perceived outgroup change over time, an adapted version of the trans-generational entity scale (TGES; Kahn, Klar, & Roccas, 2010) was employed. Participants rated their agreement with ten items on the Likert-type scale, including 5 original scale items, such as "I don't believe that there is a static Japanese identity that is carried from generation to generation" (reverse-coded). In addition, 5 new items were developed to tap perceived *positive* change, such as "Over time, I think that aspects of the Japanese national character have changed in a positive direction."

Procedure

After providing informed consent, participants were randomly assigned to read one of the primes. Participants then completed the reconciliation, intergroup forgiveness, intergroup trust, and perceived group change scales. Participants were then debriefed, thanked, and credited.

Results

Reconciliation. Responses to the reconciliation scale items (α = .83) were averaged and subjected to a one-way ANOVA, which hinted at significant differences among conditions, $F(2, 72) = 2.92$, $p = .06$, $\mu^2 = .04$. As shown in Figure 4 and consistent with predictions, a planned contrast comparing the redemption narrative condition with the sense-making and control conditions revealed that the redemption narrative message led to significantly greater willingness to reconcile compared to the other conditions, $t(72) = 2.41$, $p = .02$, $d = .58$.

Intergroup forgiveness. Responses to the IFS items (α = .78) were averaged and subjected to the same one-way ANOVA as above. No statistically significant differences emerged, $F(2, 72) = 0.10$, $p = .91$. Means and standard deviations are reported in Table 2.

Intergroup trust. Responses to the intergroup trust items (α = .77) were averaged and subjected to a one-way ANOVA. No statistically significant differences emerged, $F(2, 72) = 0.10$, $p = .90$. Means and standard deviations are reported in Table 2.

Group change. Responses to the group change items (α = .71) were averaged and subjected to the one-way ANOVA. Although the omnibus F did not reach conventional levels of statistical significance, $F(2, 72) = 2.08$, $p = .13$, $\mu^2 = .03$, the pattern of means was consistent with predictions. The planned contrast comparing the redemption narrative condition with the sense-making and control conditions revealed a trend, such that the redemption narrative message led to somewhat greater perceived group change compared to the other conditions, $t(72) = 1.62$, $p = .11$, $d = .39$. Means and standard deviations are again reported in Table 2.

Discussion

Study 3 provides intriguing, preliminary support for redemption narratives as an intervention in intergroup conflicts, from the perspective of victim groups. Specifically, when victims read messages suggesting perpetrators engaged in redemption narratives, they were somewhat more willing to reconcile, as compared to reading either messages of sense-making or simply expressing regret (control). Thus, despite signaling that perpetrators had in some sense 'benefitted' from victims' suffering, their use of redemption narratives did not appear to disrespect victims and, instead, increased the likelihood of reconciliation. Given that Studies 1a-2 found that engaging in redemption narratives prompts perpetrators to make the very concessions desired by victims (i.e., express guilt, apologize, and offer financial reparations), that victims do not reject this strategy makes it a practical and potentially effective intervention. In contrast, the sense-making passage elicited no more willingness to reconcile than control. Still, much like redemption, sense-making did not provoke defensiveness from victims, suggesting it was not interpreted as a form of victim-blaming or denial.

The findings of Study 3 also suggest that victims who read about perpetrators engaging in redemption narratives do not increase their level of intergroup forgiveness or trust. The lack of differences in intergroup trust could owe to the fact that Japan is a current ally and that overall levels of outgroup trust were already fairly high. While reconciliation involves *modern* outgroup members, forgiveness might be interpreted as extending toward those directly responsible for wrongdoing, which may be less palatable for victims (see Licata et al., 2012). Further, fellow group members might not feel they have the right to forgive on behalf of long deceased victims (Philpot & Hornsey, 2008), but may still be willing to engage with contemporary outgroup members. Whether reconciliation can truly exist without forgiveness (see Cairns, Tam,

Hewstone, & Niens, 2005) should be further examined in future research. Nevertheless, the dissociation found here between willingness to reconcile and forgiveness is intriguing.

Interestingly, participants exposed to the redemption narrative perceived that the perpetrator group had changed over time to a somewhat greater degree than did those in the other conditions. This perception that modern outgroup members have less in common with the direct perpetrators may explain the increased willingness to reconcile. However, this finding was only a trend and must be interpreted cautiously. A more direct test of the role of perceived group change, perhaps with better measures or manipulations of perceived group malleability (Halperin et al., 2011), is needed to discern its relation to redemption narratives and positive intergroup outcomes. Given that the current study implied a profound transformation of the perpetrator group, future research should also investigate how much change is required to elicit prosocial responses.

General Discussion

Three studies examined whether meaning-making promotes greater levels of collective guilt and willingness to make reparations among members of a perpetrator group—two factors that not only predict willingness to reconcile (Doosje et al., 1998; Lickel et al., 2005; McGarty et al., 2005; Peetz et al., 2010), but are also extremely important to victims of intergroup conflict (Rouhana, 2004). Studies 1a-1b demonstrated that participants who were prompted to engage in meaning-making (vs. control) reported greater levels of collective guilt and greater willingness to make symbolic and financial reparations. Study 2 demonstrated that a focused redemption narrative strategy, rather than one that incorporates sense-making, can increase collective guilt, reparative intentions, and willingness to reconcile, while diminishing perceptions that the ingroup's aggression was justified. Taken together, the current studies suggest that generating

redemption narratives (without a sense-making component) may thwart defensive reactions to ingroup wrongdoing and, instead, promote reconciliatory attitudes and behaviors.

Study 3 generally supported the idea that exposure to perpetrators' meaning-making did not reduce victims' prosocial responses in the face of past intergroup conflict. Perpetrators' redemption narratives actually led to somewhat greater willingness to reconcile among victims, compared with exposure to control or sense-making messages. Considered with the other studies, Study 3 suggests that redemption narratives may indeed prove to be a viable intervention to advance intergroup reconciliation.

Implications

A major implication of this work is the potential for meaning-making, especially in the form of redemption narratives, as an intervention for past intergroup conflicts. The current studies provide evidence that engaging in redemption narratives can promote reconciliatory intentions among perpetrators (e.g., collective guilt, willingness to make reparations), with seemingly little defensive responses from victims. Indeed, redemption messages from perpetrators were associated with greater willingness to reconcile among victims, compared with sense-making narratives or simple expressions of regret. Taken together, the present work offers initial evidence that redemption narratives are a promising intergroup conflict intervention strategy. While groups pass down cultural knowledge of victimhood (Noor et al., 2008; Staub, 2006), they may also pass down redemption narratives that support reconciliation. Similarly, when leaders like Martin Schulz make public statements incorporating redemption narratives with commitments to aid victims, such views appear to have institutional support and may influence a larger audience.

Redemption narratives may also improve the efficacy of intergroup apologies. While the

number of public intergroup apologies has skyrocketed, intergroup reconciliations have not. One

thorough set of studies found that apologies did not increase forgiveness or reconciliation and, if

anything, reduced collective forgiveness (Philpot & Hornsey, 2008). Intergroup apologies

improved attitudes toward the individual offering the apology but not the group as a whole.

Given the relative success of redemption messages in increasing the likelihood of reconciliation

among victims (Study 3), adding such messages into intergroup apologies may make these

offerings more effective. Future research should examine whether the combined effect of

apology and perceived redemption improves reconciliation *and* intergroup forgiveness.

Limitations

The current work is limited in that it specifically examined groups in a post-conflict

status. Indeed, the historical events occurred long before most participants were born and many

took place in distant lands. This temporal and psychological distance might have contributed to

the effect of the meaning-making manipulation. It is possible that such distant acts of

wrongdoing by ingroup members perceived to have little in common with current day group

members evoked less defensiveness. Consistent with this idea, Rotella and Richeson (2013a)

found that subtle differences in how perpetrators were framed (as either more or less like the

ingroup) significantly influenced memory for, and collective guilt regarding, historical

wrongdoing. Future research should investigate such potential boundary conditions.

Further, research on collective memory demonstrates that the initial aftermath of trauma

produces conflicting emotions that many people attempt to cope with by distancing themselves

from the event. There appears to be a 20-30 year lag between when a tragic event occurs and

when a community begins to memorialize it (Pennebaker & Banasik, 1997). If collectively

traumatic events spark such intense emotion for such long periods, interventions using meaning-

making conducted too soon after a conflict may be met with resistance or even evoke more severe forms of defensive reactions. Future research, therefore, should investigate how temporal distance might sometimes promote, and sometimes hinder, the utility of redemption narratives in intergroup reconciliation.

Conclusion

Taken together, the present studies introduce one potential route to resolving intergroup conflicts. Specifically, promoting former perpetrators and victims to engage in meaning-making, especially redemption narratives, may facilitate reconciliation. Indeed, redemption narratives appear to be a potentially effective method for promoting prosocial responses to intergroup wrongdoing. In other words, it may be possible to educate people about intergroup conflict in ways that make them react less like Mayor Kawamura and more like Representative Schulz, recognizing the importance of using a negative past to evoke new group identities that are better, more tolerant, and more engaged in intergroup cooperation.

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	Control $N=56$ *M(SD)*	Redemption Narrative $N=39$ *M(SD)*	Sense-Making $N=41$ *M(SD)*
Coded Redemption Narratives	.06 (.79)$_a$	.50 (.90)$_b$	.47 (.55)$_b$
Coded Sense-Making	.96 (.99)$_a$	1.04 (.76)$_a$	1.65 (.65)$_b$

Table 1. Study 2: Mean ratings and standard deviations on coded redemption narratives and sense-making as a function of condition. Different letter subscripts within each row indicate $p <$ .05.

	Control N=25 *M(SD)*	Redemption Narrative *N=25* *M(SD)*	Sense-Making *N=25* *M(SD)*
Forgiveness	4.70 (.56)$_a$	4.64 (.71)$_a$	4.71 (.75)$_a$
Trust	5.60 (.63)$_a$	5.49 (1.11)$_a$	5.51 (.84)$_a$
Group Change	4.70 (1.05)$_{a,1}$	5.22 (.80)$_{b,\ddagger}$	5.02 (.86)$_{1,\ddagger}$

Table 2. Study 3: Mean ratings and standard deviations on forgiveness, trust, and perceived group change scales as a function of condition. Different letter, number, or symbol subscripts within each row indicate *p* < .12.
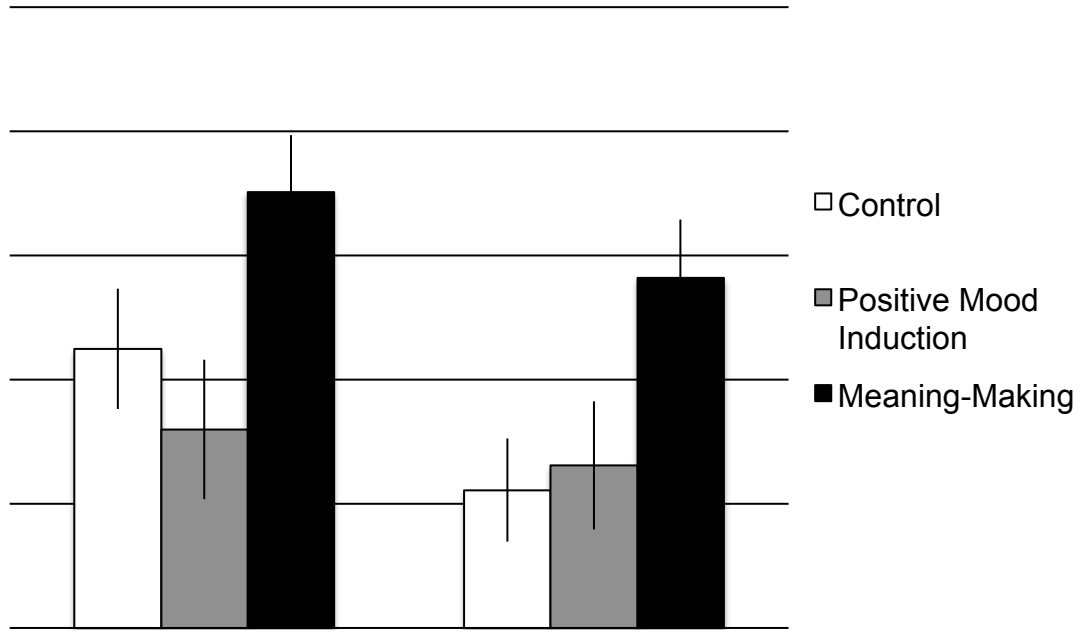
Figure 1. Study 1b: Mean ratings on the collective guilt scale (CGS) and willingness to make

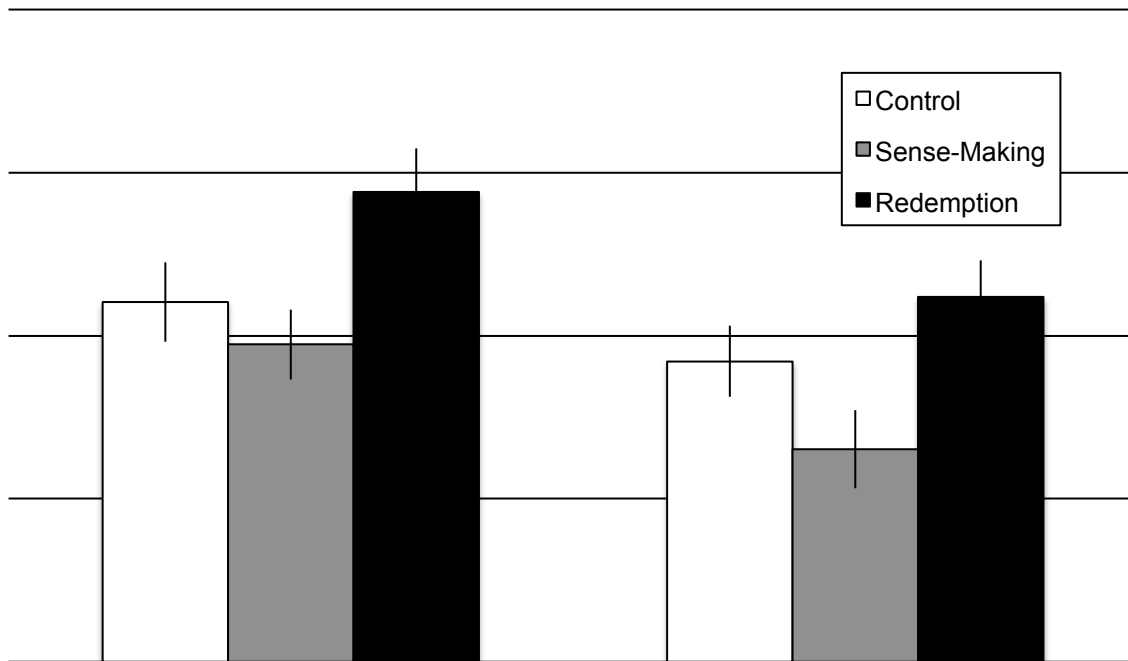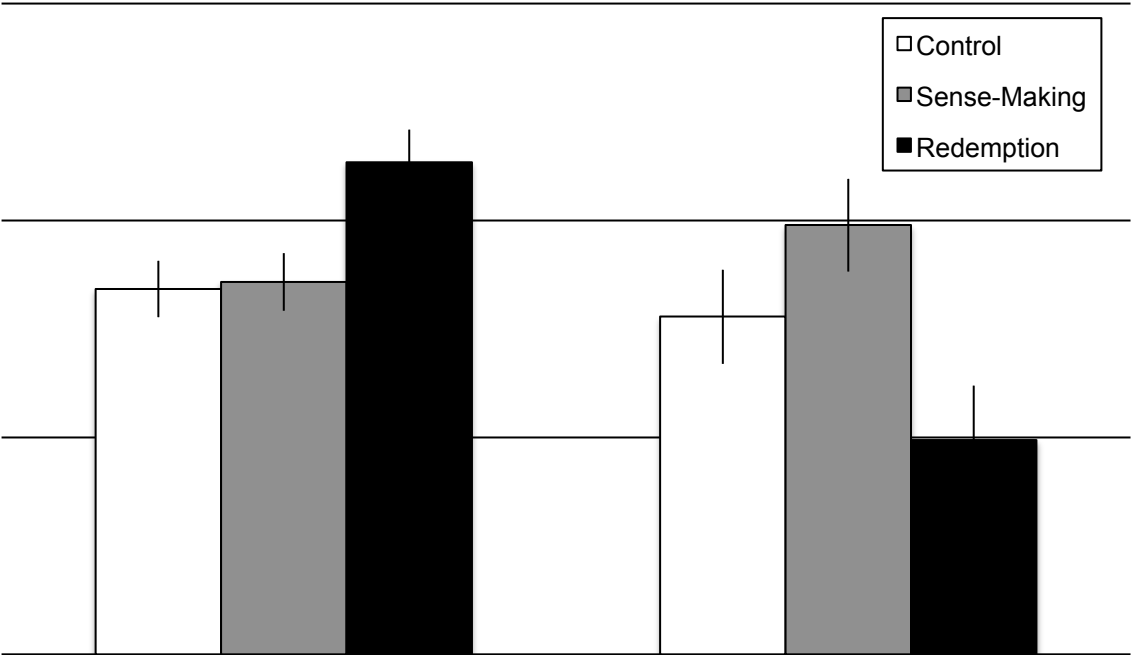reparations scale as a function of condition. Error bars represent +/-1 standard error.

Figure 2. Study 2: Mean ratings on the collective guilt scale (CGS) and willingness to make

reparations scale as a function of condition. Error bars represent +/-1 standard error.

Figure 3. Study 2: Mean ratings on the reconciliation and perceived justification scales as a function of condition. Error bars represent +/-1 standard error.

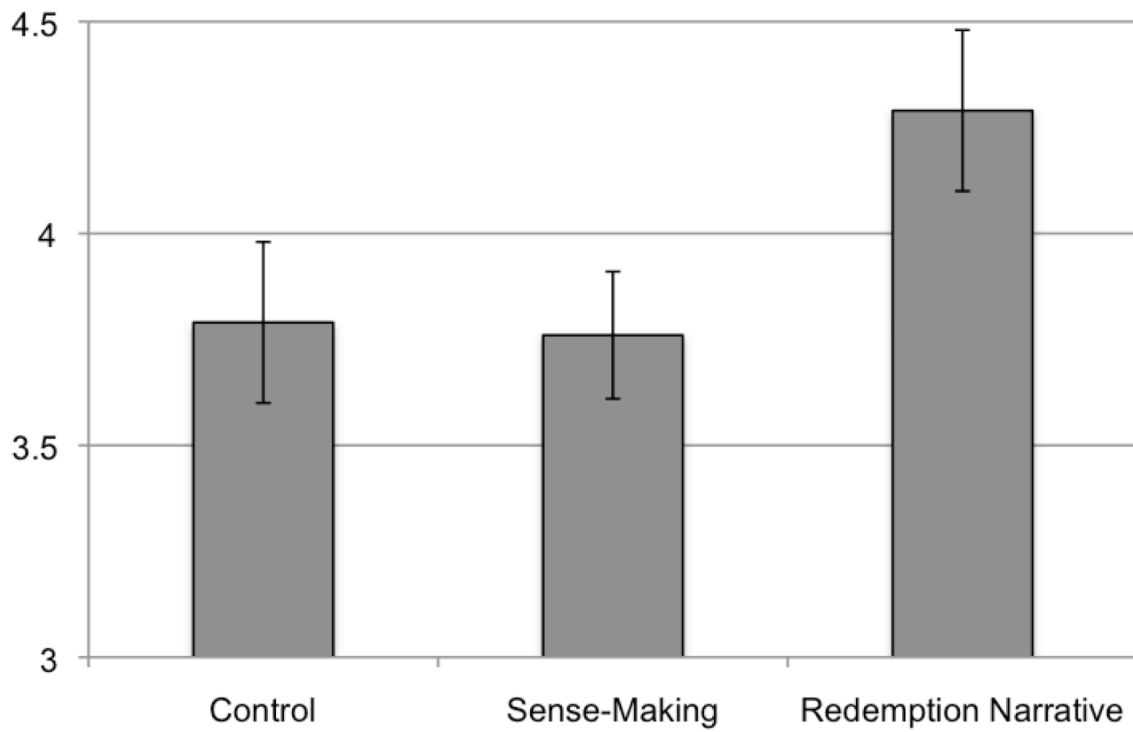*Figure 4.* Study 3: Willingness to reconcile with the perpetrator group as a function of condition.

Error bars represent +/-1 standard error.