

Proposal for a EASP Small Group Meeting:

Understanding and Transforming Challenging Relationships: Setting a Research Agenda for a 21st Century Social Psychology

(Proposed dates and location: 07-09 September 2018, San Sebastian, Basque Country/Spain)

1. Rationale and Background

Although our social relations can be harmonious, affirming of our identity, and nourishing of our development, individuals often encounter challenges and difficulties in their relationships throughout their lives. Conflicts across family settings, schools and other educational settings, neighbourhoods and wider communities and nations, work place, social media, etc. can all exert an adverse impact on individuals, threaten their identity, undermine their quality of life as well as harm their mental and physical health. Such conflicts can be further exacerbated due to environmental pressures, such as poverty, natural disasters and climate change, economic crises, international shake-ups (e.g., Brexit), etc.

Social psychologists have recently made some advances in studying aspects of difficult relationships, and in doing so, have introduced novel concepts and approaches to the literature. To illustrate, the concept of forgiveness has been studied across interpersonal and intergroup relations for its potential to resolve conflict but also for its impact on individuals' well-being and life expectancy (Noor, 2016; Noor, Branscombe, & Hewstone, 2015; Toussaint, Owens & Cheadle, 2012). In fact, recent work has also focused on children's understanding and practice of forgiveness (Vaish, 2017). Other researchers have focused on studying difficult relationships from the perpetrator's perspective. For example, research has addressed questions of when and how an apology may elicit a positive response from victims (Bobowik et al., 2017; Chan et al., 2017; Hornsey & Wohl, 2013). Relatedly, scholars have also investigated the intricacies of justice (Wenzel & Okimoto, 2012, 2015; Stott, Hoggett, & Pearson, 2012). Some work has also begun to examine the conditions that may aid the restoration of trust (Berdsen et al., 2015; Nadler & Liviatan, 2006) and respect (Nasie et al., 2017) between individuals and groups caught up in challenging relationships. Additionally, scholars have recently attended to the role of hope as a productive emotion that may predict

future conciliation and cooperation among adversaries (Leshem, Klar, & Flores, 2016; Cohen-Chen, Crisp, & Halperin, 2015). Finally, a defining feature of challenging relationships appears to be perceived or real power disparities (Saguy & Kteily, 2014).

As can be gleaned from this brief scan of the literature, seven major hot topics emerge which are key to understanding difficult relationships and to repairing the damage they cause to individuals and their communities. These are: *forgiveness, apology, justice, trust, respect, hope, and power*. Currently, researchers disparately theorise and produce empirical work on one or at most two of these concepts. Bringing together researchers and practitioners from around the world and providing them with a space in which they can integrate their theories and see the bigger and more complex picture framing difficult relationships is what is required to galvanise this field towards the next step in developing meta-theoretical approaches to and taxonomies of such challenging relationships.

2. Objectives

The proposed Small Group Meeting seeks to create an important space for the detailed and multifaceted analysis of different perspectives on the psychology of challenging relationships. What will be unique about this meeting is the opportunity to discuss theory and empirical findings on the psychological processes, dimensions, functions, antecedents, and consequences of the identified seven hot topics with a view to devise meta-theoretical approaches and effective strategies for addressing or coping with challenging relationships. This broad focus offers—possibly for the first time—researchers who study some of the above concepts from an intergroup perspective to converse and exchange with scholars with interests in similar topics but from an interpersonal perspective. Similarly, scholars who study these concepts among children will be afforded the opportunity to discuss their theories and empirical work with scholars who focus on adults, and vice versa.

Moreover, given that the above hot topics have been primarily studied separately, the planned meeting will provide a rare platform for EASP and other international scholars to advance and lead more coherent theoretical frameworks with a view to developing a meta-theoretical understanding of the nature of challenging relationships across a diverse range of conflict settings. Ultimately, this meeting will be critical for establishing the foundation of a comprehensive, social psychological taxonomy of challenging relationships.

Given the focus and scope of the proposed meeting, we aim to utilise it for establishing networks between junior and senior scholars who are keen to develop a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of challenging relationships. Additionally, as some of the members of the organising team belong to several minority groups, we are particularly aware of and will put significant efforts into including scholars from minority groups who are typically underrepresented at such meetings. To this end, we aim to live-stream the meeting through social media in order to reach a global audience.

Because of the unique nature of the proposed meeting, where scholars who study similar concepts across interpersonal, intergroup, and other domains meet together, naturally an exchange of their experiences and expertise will foster feedback and the development of a more critical perspective on studying the outlined hot topics. Further to this end, we will ensure sufficient representation of practitioners at the meeting who will share their professional experiences from the field and offer novel ways of thinking, as well as validate and challenge psychological theory and research.

Another objective of the meeting will be to discuss the ethical dimensions of studying challenging relationships, given the sensitivity surrounding the seven hot topics and the vulnerable nature of difficult relations.

To generate and maximise the long-term impact of the meeting, we will submit a proposal for journal special issues to assemble new theoretical and empirical advances on challenging relationships (possibly in EASP's main outlets, EJSP or SPPS), as well as a proposal for an edited book on the seven identified hot topics (e.g., SPSSI book series).

3. Structure, Location and Timing of the Meeting

Consistent with the European social psychology tradition, the meeting will go beyond the analysis of the micro processes involved in challenging relationships and direct the discussions towards a broad agenda that includes the analysis of social psychological factors at the macro level as well as policy recommendations.

Accordingly, papers will be selected so that they cover a healthy balance between (a) addressing conceptual issues (discussing different theoretical models, their antecedents, mediators and moderators, and consequences), (b) presenting empirical evidence from multi-methodological research, and (c) aiming to integrate existing theories and findings into an overarching theoretical framework. In addition to paper presentations, substantial time will be

dedicated to facilitated discussions following each plenary session, in which participants can exchange their views and insights in the interest of offering each other healthy critical feedback and opportunities to review and expand their perspectives. To further inform such discussions from an applied perspective, we plan to invite practitioners who work in the field of family and community conflict mediation, victim support groups, groups who work toward offender reintegration (e.g. The Forgiveness Project (UK-based NGO); SAV (the governmental Victim Attention Service); Bakeola, Center for Mediation and Regulation of Conflicts of the EDE Foundation (based in the Basque Country NGO); Amekadi (a Basque-based mediation association); Gernika Gogoratuz (a Basque-based Peace Research Center); The General Office for Peace and Coexistence of the Basque Government).

The proposed dates and location are: 07-09 September 2018; San Sebastian, Basque Country/Spain. The proposed location has been chosen to situate the meeting within a context that has real-life experience with challenging relations, which will serve as an ideal setting for applied discussions as well as consultation of local practitioner groups.

4. Organising Committee Members

Each of the organising members has expertise in different aspects of challenging relationships and across the seven hot topics. We come from different countries (Afghanistan/Germany, Hong Kong/Canada, Poland/Spain, USA/Germany, and Israel), are affiliated with different institutions, and each of us is associated with a different international collaborative network.

Masi Noor is a Lecturer in Social Psychology at the School of Psychology, Keele University, UK. His main line of research involves studying the role of forgiveness in ameliorating the negative impact of intergroup violence in post- or ongoing conflict settings. He has developed the Intergroup Competitive Victimhood Model and validated it across natural settings of intergroup conflict (e.g., Northern Ireland, Chile, etc.). He also pursues a strong interest in studying third parties' perceptions of victim groups and how they influence third parties' willingness to support (e.g. through monetary donations) one victim group over another equally deserving group. He has published in major international social psychological journals (PSPR, PSPB, EJSP, etc.) and was awarded the 2010 Peace Psychology Early Career Award of the Society for the Study of Peace, Conflict, and Violence (APA Division 48).

Magdalena Bobowik is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Department of Social Psychology and Methodology of Behaviour Sciences, University of the Basque Country, Spain. Her research interests embrace intergroup relations, including phenomena as prejudice, intergroup conflict, and collective victimhood, and intergroup apology, empathy and trust as pathways to forgiveness and reconciliation. Her recent research in this area focuses on how inclusive memories of the past and intergroup apologies promote reconciliation in such contexts as the Basque Country or Latin America. She also collaborated in research on social representations of history and how they predict attitudes towards future collective violence. She has published in relevant journals in social psychology and social sciences (BJSP, EJSP, PID, SSR, Ethnicity & Health, IJIR, among others). She has co-edited a special issue on colonial past and intercultural relations to be published in International Journal of Intercultural Relations. She also actively collaborates with non-governmental organizations (such as NGOs SOS Racism or Bakeola) oriented at peace-making and human rights defense.

Christian Chan is an assistant professor at The University of Hong Kong. He obtained a PhD in clinical psychology from UMass Boston in 2012. His background is in community mental health, especially in the areas of disaster mental health and positive youth development. His current focus includes intergroup relations, especially examining the moderators between apology and forgiveness, as well as the widening societal schism in Hong Kong since the 2014 Umbrella Movement.

Amrisha Vaish is Assistant Professor of Psychology at the University of Virginia. She researches early social and moral development, in particular, the development of social emotions such as sympathy, guilt, and gratitude, and children's moral evaluations and prosocial behavior. Currently, with funding from the Templeton Foundation, she is conducting a series of studies on the development of forgiveness in young children. Amrisha received the Outstanding Doctoral Dissertation Award from the Society for Research in Child Development in 2011 and the Division 7 Dissertation Award from the American Psychological Association in 2012. In 2015, she was designated a 'Rising Star' by the Association for Psychological Science. She has published 40 papers and chapters, including in journals such as *Child Development*, *Developmental Psychology*, *Psychological Science*, and *Psychological Bulletin*.

Meytal Nasie is a Lecturer at Levinsky College of Education, and a Post-Doctoral Fellow at MOFET Institute and Bar-Ilan University, Israel. Her doctoral dissertation explored the role

of respect and disrespect in relationships, particularly focusing on relationship between nations in intractable conflicts, using the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a case study. Her research interests are: political socialization, development of social categorization and intergroup attitudes, and constructive and obstructive socio-psychological processes in relationships, both in the general and specific context of conflicts. She was also involved in research project examining barriers to conflict resolution and ways of overcoming these barriers. Her work on some of these topics has been published in journals such as PSPR, PSPB, and IJBD.

Loren Toussaint is an associate professor in the department of psychology at Luther College in Decorah, Iowa. He is the associate director of the Sierra Leone Forgiveness Project. He is a consultant to the Mayo Clinic, the Department of Pastoral Care at Cancer Treatment Centers of America, and the Center for Health Policy at Boise State University. He is a former visiting scientist at Mayo Clinic. His research examines how religious and spiritual factors, especially forgiveness, are related to mental and physical health and well-being. He has published a number of peer-reviewed scientific journal articles and scientific book chapters and done invited talks and conference presentations in the United States and other countries. He has been involved in forgiveness research in Australia, Chile, Germany, India, Korea, Lithuania, Spain, Sierra Leone, South Africa, and Switzerland. Recently, he and colleagues published a comprehensive compendium of research on forgiveness and health <http://www.springer.com/gp/book/9789401799928#aboutBook>.

4. Participants

We envisage hosting approximately 30 participants with social psychological research expertise and interests as well as practitioners with professional experience in the seven hot topics. These scholars and practitioners will be invited from different European countries as well as from countries beyond Europe. We will ensure that half of the participants will be EASP members, and half will be female. In line with EASP's spirit, we will invite both established and junior scholars (PhD & postdoctoral researchers).

Currently we are approaching senior and junior scholars who are involved in research on the seven topics surrounding the transformation of challenging relationships. Their feedback and enthusiasm for our idea to organise a Small Group Meeting on the above theme has been very

positive. To illustrate, the kind of experts we have in mind include: Rupert Brown (University of Sussex, UK); Nyla Branscombe (University of Kansas, USA); Daniel Bar-Tal (Tel Aviv University, Israel); Rezarta Bilali (New York University, USA); Noa Shori-Eyal (University of Maryland, USA); Mathew Hornsey (University of Queensland, Australia); Marina Cantacuzino (Director of the Forgiveness Project, UK); Roberto González (P. Universidad Católica de Chile, Chile); Nurit Shnabel (Tel Aviv University, Israel); Michal Bilewicz (University of Warsaw, Poland); Mateusz Olechowski (University of Warsaw, Poland); Mari Fitzdoff (Brandeis University, USA); Samer Halabi (Tel Aviv Yaffo Academic College, Israel); Christopher Cohrs (Jacobs University Bremen, Germany); Laurent Licata (Université Libre de Bruxelles); Dario Spini (Université de Lausanne, Switzerland); Guy Elcheroth (Université de Lausanne, Switzerland); Nicole Harth (Friedrich-Schiller Universität, Germany); Steve Reicher (University of St. Andrews, UK); Katherine Greenaway (University of Queensland, Australia); Susan Optow (John Jay University, USA); Phil Hammack (University of California Santa Cruz, USA); Andrew Pilecki (University of California Santa Cruz, USA); Andrew McNeill (Queen's University Belfast, Northern Ireland); Mina Rauschenbach (University of Geneva, Switzerland); Michael Wohl (Carlton University, Canada); Sonia Roccas (Open University, Israel); Yechiel Klar (Tel Aviv University, Israel); Eman Nahhas (University of Tel Aviv, Israel); Neil Ferguson (Liverpool Hope University, UK); Katie Rotella (Northwestern University, USA); Minoru Karasawa (Nagoya University, Japan), Devin Atallah (Boston University, USA), Michael McCullough (University of Miami, USA), Iris Zezelj (University of Belgrade, Serbia), Borja Martinovic (Utrecht University, the Netherlands), Miren Harizmendi (Bakeola, University of the Basque Country, Spain), Maitane Arnosó (SOS Racism President, University of the Basque Country, Spain), Mirjana Rupar (Masaryk University, Brno); Gemma Varona (Basque Institute of Criminology); Monika Hernando (Director for Victims and Human Rights at the Office for Peace and Coexistence), etc.