

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Keeping score: Past victimization reduces offenders' conciliatory sentiments for their present transgressions

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Abstract

Many relationships within which interpersonal transgressions transpire often involve histories of reciprocal wrongdoing, where each party has occupied both the role of victim *and* offender. We investigate whether past incidents of being wronged by the victim of a present transgression may dampen offenders' conciliatory sentiments for their present wrongdoing. Across four studies (combined $N = 1037$), we find evidence that past victimization experiences within the context of an interpersonal relationship can blur offenders' construal of their role as offender and elicit feelings of victimhood, allowing them to exonerate themselves and feel less guilt for their present wrongdoing, display less empathy for the present victim, and reduce their willingness to reconcile with the present victim. These findings highlight the importance of taking into account historical transgressions within a relationship as a determinant of relationship repair in the aftermath of present wrongdoings.

KEYWORDS

interpersonal transgressions, offenders, past victimization, reconciliation, victimhood

1 | INTRODUCTION

Interpersonal transgressions are typically empirically treated as standalone incidents involving a 'victim' and an 'offender' (Woodyatt et al., 2022). However, the reality is that the interpersonal relationships in which these transgressions transpire often contain histories of reciprocal wrongdoing, whereby each party has occupied both victim and offender roles at different points in time. When a person commits wrongdoing, they may scrutinize the history of their relationship and recall past instances where the other party had inflicted the wrong. Having access to such past victimization may allow them to re-evaluate their role as the offender in the current transgression.

The present research aims to investigate whether a history of being wronged by the victim of a present transgression may diminish offend-

ers' conciliatory sentiments for their present wrongdoing. In particular, we propose that past victimization may blur offenders' construal of their role, decreasing the extent to which they perceive themselves as offenders and increasing their self-perceived victimhood. This may allow them to brush off their present wrongdoing in pseudo self-forgiveness, feel less guilt for this wrongdoing and less empathy for the present victim, and reduce their willingness to reconcile with the present victim.

1.1 | Dynamic roles in interpersonal transgressions

Interpersonal transgressions are acts of wrongdoing committed by one party (i.e., an 'offender') against another (i.e., a 'victim'). A common empirical approach for examining interpersonal transgressions in the

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literature has been to treat the roles of 'victim' and 'offender' as static and tied to the particular transgression at hand. That is, one party is typically considered to embody the role of 'victim', and the other, the role of 'offender'. This distinction is useful for defining roles in specific wrongdoings; however, interpersonal transgressions do not transpire in a vacuum. Pre-existing qualities of a relationship can determine how individuals within that relationship approach and interpret new transgressions (Schumann, 2012). Within the context of an interpersonal relationship between two parties (e.g., friends, family, work colleagues, romantic partners), individuals often experience multiple transgressions (Polman et al., 2023), within which they may have played the role of both 'victim' and 'offender'; the offender of a present transgression may have previously been the victim of past transgression and vice versa.

This is not lost on those who work in the field; researchers often acknowledge the possibility of reciprocal wrongdoing in close relationships (Stillwell et al., 2008; Takaku, 2001) and practitioners typically take this into account in practice. For example, work on forgiveness motivation demonstrates that one trajectory victims can take after their own victimization is to enact revenge; or, in other words, to become offenders themselves (McCullough et al., 2003). Such relationship histories may create a complicated picture of who is the 'victim' and who is the 'offender'. Accordingly, relationship counsellors often consult with both parties to attain a holistic understanding of a relationship and the transgressions that have transpired within it, often to promote empathy, forgiveness, and conflict resolution (Worthington et al., 2015).

Indeed, we propose that individuals' psychological constructions of their roles as 'victims' and 'offenders' for a current transgression may not be bound to that transgression alone. Instead, because relationships can include instances of reciprocal transgressions, both parties' view of themselves as 'victim' or 'offender' can be influenced by psychological spill-over from previous transgressions. This can affect the way victims and offenders interpret and respond to present transgressions, and effectively change the manner in which they approach the process of relationship repair in the wake of such transgressions.

Empirical work already demonstrates that being reminded of their own past offenses can promote pro-relational sentiments in present victims (Takaku, 2001). Victims instructed to recall previous transgressions where they had been offenders were more likely to forgive offenders of present transgressions, due to a combination of perspective-taking and dissonance processes (i.e., victims may feel they are acting hypocritically if they do not forgive, knowing that they have also offended previously). This research demonstrates that present victims who are cognizant of past wrongdoings approach their interactions with current offenders in a positive and conciliatory manner.

By the same token, being cognizant of past instances of victimization may also affect the way in which present offenders approach the process of relationship repair. However, the effects of past victimization on current offenders' conciliatory sentiments have been subject to little empirical enquiry. The present work aims to address this gap. We argue – contrary to the restorative effects of victims recalling past offenses

(Takaku, 2001) – that past instances of victimization may inhibit, rather than facilitate, conciliatory sentiment in offenders towards the victim of their present transgression.

1.2 | Past victimization as a barrier to reconciliation for offenders

Offenders play an important role in determining the trajectory of relationship repair in the aftermath of an interpersonal transgression. For example, apologies and other amend-making behaviours have been shown to facilitate the process of reconciliation by meeting victims' psychological needs (Shnabel & Nadler, 2008). These offender-initiated prosocial processes, however, are often subverted by a number of psychological barriers (Schumann, 2018; Schumann & Dweck, 2014). For example, the act of apology can be threatening to offenders, given that it is an acknowledgement of responsibility for a transgression (Okimoto et al., 2013). Indeed, offenders often downplay the severity of their wrongdoings, sometimes even construing their offenses as justifiable (Baumeister et al., 1990; Mummendey et al., 1984, 1989; Stillwell & Baumeister, 1997). Thus, those who have offended are motivated to protect themselves, which can result in tendencies to deflect blame and evade accountability (Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a).

These processes become even more complicated when there is a history of past victimization. Past victimization experiences may make the offender's role in present transgressions less defined and more ambiguous, reducing their self-construal as an offender and instead arousing feelings of victimhood. In these situations, they may view their own actions through their own past victimization; current offenses can become (or be interpreted as) the social reciprocation of past hurts. Under some circumstances, these present offenses may indeed constitute direct retaliation against a past wrong (Christian et al., 2012). Other times, past unrelated, or even trivial, incidents of victimization may be drawn upon to excuse offenders' present wrongs. Regardless of the chain of events leading up to the present transgression, to the extent that offenders interpret their current actions through the lens of their past victimization, this may bolster offenders' defensiveness and allow them to more easily self-exonerate for their current wrongs (Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a; Cornish et al., 2018), feel less guilt for these actions (Wohl & Branscombe, 2008) and less empathy for the affected victim, and reduce their willingness to reconcile.

Preliminary evidence of these processes comes from work showing that offenders sometimes cite provocation as a reason for their own wrongdoing (Baumeister et al., 1990) as well as the research examining pseudo self-forgiveness as a defensive response in offenders that see them justify their present transgressions by shifting blame onto victims and exonerating themselves for these transgressions (Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a). There is also work demonstrating that people feel more entitled and behave more selfishly after recalling past victimization experiences (Zitek et al., 2010). Extending upon this, it is possible that prior victimization experiences within a shared relationship history may give offenders a reason, legitimate or otherwise, to question their role in, and reinterpret, present transgressions.

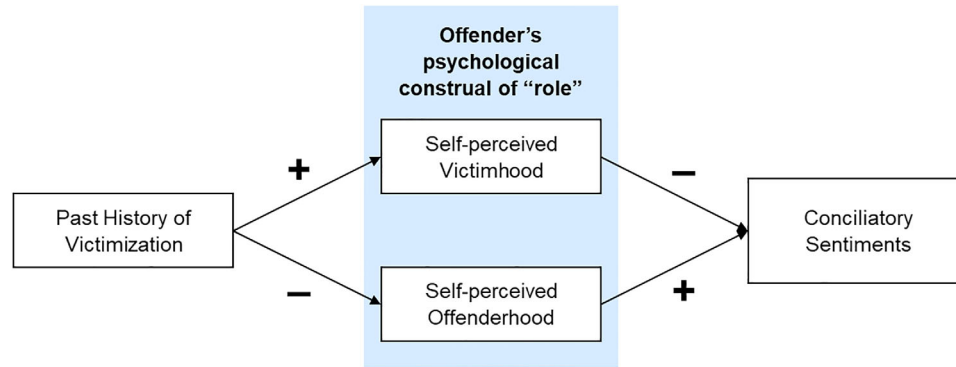


FIGURE 1 Proposed theoretical model linking past victimization to conciliatory sentiments through self-perceived victimhood and offenderhood in offenders.

The idea that past experiences of victimization can inhibit present offenders' conciliatory sentiments parallels the work examining claims to victimhood at the intergroup level (Wohl & Branscombe, 2008). As with interpersonal transgressions, intergroup transgressions are also sometimes perpetrated against a backdrop of intergroup conflict between two groups, where both groups have been historically responsible for perpetrating wrongdoings against one another. Competitive victimhood refers to the phenomenon in intergroup conflicts where members of either group claim that their own group has endured greater injustice and suffering than the outgroup has (Noor et al., 2012; Sullivan et al., 2012). Such beliefs reduce the perceived need for the ingroup to make reparations (Noor et al., 2012). The present work explores whether similar processes play out at the interpersonal level.

1.3 | The present research

The present research aims to investigate the effect of past victimization experiences on individuals' (non)conciliatory responses for present transgressions they have committed. We predict that offenders may be less willing to make amends for their present wrongdoing if they were victimized in the past by the person they have presently wronged. Specifically, we hypothesize that past victimization experiences may alter the extent to which offenders perceive themselves as a victim or an offender, and through this, elicit more negative conciliatory sentiments (e.g., greater pseudo self-forgiveness, lower guilt, lower empathy, lower willingness to reconcile; see Figure 1). Data and materials for all four studies can be found at <https://osf.io/juydw/>

2 | STUDY 1

Study 1 provided a preliminary test of the idea that present offenders' past histories of being wronged in the context of a relationship are associated with less prosocial responses towards victims of present transgressions. Participants in an international online psychology course were asked to recall an interpersonal transgression where they were the offender. They reported the extent to which, after this transgression, they had thought about previous wrongdo-

ings the victim of their present transgression had committed towards them. They then indicated their feelings about the recalled incident on a range of variables, including how much they felt like 'victims' and 'offenders' in the situation, pseudo self-forgiveness, their guilt for their wrongdoing, their empathy towards the victim, and their willingness to reconcile with the victim. We hypothesized that thoughts about past wrongdoings committed by the present victim would be associated with more negative relational outcomes (i.e., greater pseudo self-forgiveness, lower empathy for the victim, lower guilt for the wrongdoing, and lower willingness to reconcile), through greater self-perceived victimhood and lower self-perceived offenderhood, as outlined in Figure 1.

2.1 | Method

2.1.1 | Participants

Participants were students in an international open online psychology course, who received course credit for participation. The study was left on the research participation platform until at least 200 participants had been recruited. Data collection stopped after 201 participants had completed the study, and there was no topping up of data after initial collection. Of these participants, four provided incomplete data and were removed. A further nine did not input a written response to the recall task. However, because (a) they responded to the questions in relation to the incident, and (b) omission of their data did not ultimately alter the interpretation of results, the data were retained for the analyses below.

The final sample comprised 197 participants ($M_{age} = 28.92$, $SD = 13.13$; 171 female, 22 male, 2 nonbinary, 2 'Other'-identifying). In terms of racial background, the sample was made up of 77 White (39.1%), 43 Asian (21.8%), 20 South Asian (10.2%), 15 Black/African (7.6%), 14 Hispanic/Latino (7.1%), 11 Middle-Eastern (5.6%), 3 Indigenous/First Nations (1.5%) and 14 'Other'-identifying (7.1%) participants. As expected from an international course, participants came from over 62 nations (full breakdown of country of origin is presented in the [Supporting Information](#)).

TABLE 1 Correlations between all variables.

Variables	M(SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Thoughts of past victimization (by present victim)	3.28 (2.28)	-							
2. Thoughts of past victimization (general)	3.70 (2.38)	.60***	-						
3. Self-perceived victimhood	3.14 (2.03)	.40***	.36***	-					
4. Self-perceived offenderhood	4.96 (1.92)	-.28***	-.05	-.34***	-				
5. Pseudo self-forgiveness	3.20 (1.38)	.54***	.35***	.62***	-.55***	-			
6. Guilt	5.48 (1.64)	-.21**	.00	-.12	.48***	-.42***	-		
7. Empathy	5.43 (1.76)	-.26***	-.10	-.27***	.45***	-.54***	.67***	-	
8. Willingness to reconcile	5.00 (1.31)	-.19**	-.08	-.27***	.21**	-.37***	.37***	.42***	-

2.1.2 | Design and procedure

Participants were asked to recall an incident, as recent as possible, where they had committed a wrongdoing against someone else. After writing about their wrongdoing, participants responded to a series of questions in reference to this incident.

2.1.3 | Measures

Thoughts of past victimization (from the present victim). Participants responded to a block of questions asking them what they thought about after the transgression. Embedded within this block of questions was a measure of the extent to which participants thought about past wrongdoings committed by the present victim towards them (i.e., 'I thought about all the times the other person had wronged me.'). 1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*).

Thoughts of past victimization (general). Within the same block of questions asking them about their thoughts after the transgression, participants also responded to a measure gauging the extent to which they thought about the times they had been wronged in the past, more generally (i.e., 'I thought about all the times I have been wronged in the past.'). 1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). This was asked to determine whether past victimization experiences needed to be tied to the victim of the present transgression in order to be associated with negative sentiments in the context of the present transgression.

Self-perceived victimhood and offenderhood. Two items adapted from Thai et al. (2023) were used to measure the extent to which participants felt like they were a victim or an offender (i.e., 'To what extent did you feel like a victim/offender in this situation?'). 1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). Past work shows that these are distinct and independent perceptions that are predictive of different outcomes (Thai et al., 2023) – thus, these two items were kept separate.

Pseudo self-forgiveness. The Differential Process Scales of Self-Forgiveness (Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013b) were administered to participants. This comprised the six-item pseudo self-forgiveness subscale ($\alpha = .82$), which measured the extent to which participants engaged in pseudo self-forgiveness and deflected blame for the transgression (e.g., 'I feel those involved got what they deserved.'). 'I feel what happened was my fault.' (reverse-coded); 1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

Guilt. A three-item scale ($\alpha = .93$) was used to measure the extent to which participants felt guilty for their wrongdoing (e.g., 'How guilty did you feel about your wrongdoing?'). 1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*).

Empathy. A two-item scale ($\alpha = .89$) was used to measure the extent to which participants felt empathetic towards the victim of their present transgression (e.g., 'I felt empathetic towards the person I wronged.'). 1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*).

Willingness to reconcile. An eight-item scale ($\alpha = .85$) comprising items adapted from Thai et al. (2023) was used to measure the extent to which participants were willing to reconcile with the victim of their transgression (e.g., 'I tried harder to make amends with this person.' 'I found it difficult to act warmly towards this person.' (reverse-coded); 1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

2.2 | Results

2.2.1 | Correlations

Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations are presented in Table 1. As expected, thoughts of victim-specific past victimization were significantly associated with greater self-perceived victimhood ($p < .001$) and lower self-perceived offenderhood ($p < .001$), as well as greater pseudo self-forgiveness ($p < .001$), lower guilt ($p = .004$), lower empathy ($p < .001$) and lower willingness to reconcile ($p = .008$). On the other hand, thoughts of past victimization untied to the victim of the present transgression were only significantly associated with greater self-perceived victimhood ($p < .001$) and greater pseudo self-forgiveness ($p < .001$).

2.2.2 | Path analysis

Path analysis was used to test the proposed model linking thoughts of victim-specific past victimization to the conciliatory outcomes (i.e., pseudo self-forgiveness, guilt, empathy, willingness to reconcile) through self-perceived victimhood and offenderhood (see Figure 1). The initial model mapping only the paths hypothesized in Figure 1 provided support for most hypothesized links, but poor fit to the data, $\chi^2(4, N = 197) = 29.85$, $\chi^2/df = 7.46$, $p < .001$, Comparative Fit Index

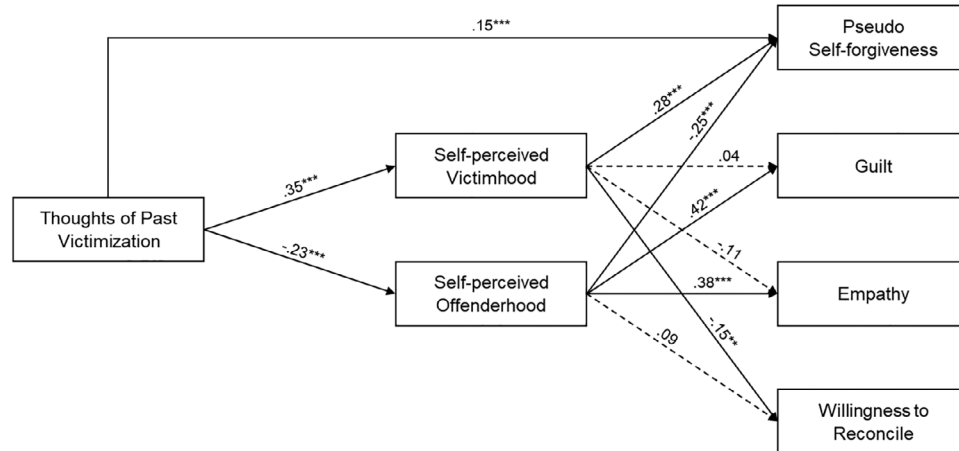


FIGURE 2 Path model linking thoughts of partner-specific past victimization to conciliatory sentiments through self-perceived victimhood and offenderhood (Study 1). Unstandardized coefficients displayed. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

(CFI) = .95, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = .18, Standardized Root Mean-Square Residual (SRMR) = .05. Modification indices suggested that a direct path from thoughts of victim-specific past victimization to pseudo self-forgiveness could be freed to improve model fit. Given this made theoretical sense, the path was freed, improving model fit substantially, $\chi^2(3, N = 197) = 3.41$, $\chi^2/df = 1.14$, $p = .332$, CFI = .99, RMSEA = .03, SRMR = .03. The final path model is displayed in Figure 2.¹

Thinking about victim-specific past victimization predicted greater self-perceived victimhood ($p < .001$) and lower self-perceived offenderhood ($p < .001$). Greater self-perceived victimhood, in turn, predicted greater pseudo self-forgiveness ($p < .001$) and lower willingness to reconcile ($p = .002$). Lower self-perceived offenderhood, on the other hand, predicted greater pseudo self-forgiveness ($p < .001$), lower guilt ($p < .001$) and lower empathy ($p < .001$). Thinking about victim-specific past victimization also directly predicted greater pseudo self-forgiveness ($p < .001$).

2.3 | Discussion

In Study 1, we found that thinking about past victimization experiences was associated with greater self-perceived victimhood and lower self-perceived offenderhood, and through these construals, lower conciliatory sentiment in offenders for their present transgressions. Specifically, these associations were strongest for offenders who thought about past incidents where they had been wronged by the victim of their *present* transgression, rather than simply thinking about past incidents where they had been wronged, more generally. These findings provide preliminary evidence for the idea that offenders' perceptions of present transgressions can be shaped by previous experiences of victimization within the same relationship.

Our method of asking participants about the extent to which they *thought* about past victimization experiences, however, conflated (a) participants who may not have had any victimization experiences with (b) participants who may have simply not thought about previous victimization experiences. Given the current predictions focus on the role that past victimization *per se*, plays in offenders' approaches to current transgressions (rather than individual inclinations to recall such victimization), Study 2 more explicitly compared offenders who did versus did not report having past victimization experiences.

3 | STUDY 2

Study 2 examined whether present offenders with past histories of being wronged in the context of a relationship approached present transgressions less prosocially compared to offenders who did not have such histories. Participants were asked to recall a transgression where they were the offender. They were also asked whether or not they had ever been wronged by that person in the past. Following from Study 1, we hypothesized that offenders who had a history of past victimization from the victim of the present transgression would report greater pseudo self-forgiveness, and lower guilt, empathy and willingness to reconcile with the victim than those who did not have such a history, through greater self-perceived victimhood and lower self-perceived offenderhood.

As an exploratory question, we also assessed whether being forgiven by the victim for the present transgression would qualify the influence of past victimization experiences on offenders' sentiments. Given previous work showing that non-forgiveness increases offenders' motivations to claim victimhood (Thai et al., 2023), it is possible that not being forgiven by the present victim (i.e., past offender) might increase offenders' readiness to draw upon past victimization experiences to dampen their perceived need to atone for their present offenses.

¹ Total, direct, and indirect effects corresponding to all path models are presented in the Supporting Information.

3.1 | Method

3.1.1 | Participants

A power analysis determined that at least 64 participants per cell would be required for an 80% chance of detecting an effect at a magnitude of $d = 0.50$ between two independent groups, which would allow us to test our key hypothesis regarding differences in offenders' sentiments as a function of whether or not they had experienced past victimization. We collected data from 200 U.S. American participants from Prolific, an online participant recruitment platform. There was no topping up of data after initial collection. The final sample comprised 200 participants ($M_{\text{age}} = 31.78, SD = 12.12$; 101 male, 97 female, 1 nonbinary, 1 'Other'-identifying). In terms of racial background, the sample was made up of 147 White (73.5%), 18 Hispanic/Latino (9.0%), 13 Black/African (6.5%), 11 Asian (5.5%), 3 Native American (1.5%), 2 Middle-Eastern (1.0%), 1 South Asian (0.5%), and 5 'Other'-identifying (2.5%) participants. A sensitivity analysis showed that, with this sample size, the study had 80% power to detect main effects and interaction effects at a magnitude of $f = 0.20$.

3.1.2 | Design and procedure

Participants were asked to recall a recent incident where they committed a wrongdoing against someone else. After recalling their transgression, participants responded to a series of questions referring to this incident.²

3.1.3 | Measures

Self-perceived victimhood and offenderhood, pseudo self-forgiveness ($\alpha = .83$), guilt ($\alpha = .96$), empathy ($\alpha = .96$), and willingness to reconcile ($\alpha = .90$) were measured as per Study 1. After these measures were administered, participants were asked the following:

Past victimization. Participants indicated whether or not they had ever been victimized by the victim of the present transgression (i.e., 'Has the person who you recalled committing a wrongdoing against ever committed a wrongdoing against you?'; 0 = no, 1 = yes).

Victim forgiveness. Participants indicated whether or not the victim had forgiven them for their present transgression (i.e., 'Has the person who you recalled committing a wrongdoing against forgiven you for your wrongdoing?'; 0 = no, 1 = yes).

3.2 | Results

Cell means and standard deviations, and omnibus analysis of variance (ANOVA) results are presented in Table 2.

3.2.1 | Tests of mean differences

A series of 2×2 between-groups factorial ANOVA were conducted to test the effects of past victimization, victim forgiveness, and their interaction on the dependent measures.

Past victimization. Main effects of past victimization emerged on self-perceived victimhood, pseudo self-forgiveness, empathy and willingness to reconcile. Offenders who had been previously victimized by the present victim generally reported greater self-perceived victimhood, greater pseudo self-forgiveness, lower empathy and lower willingness to reconcile compared to those who had not. There were no significant main effects of past victimization on self-perceived offenderhood or guilt.

Victim forgiveness. Main effects of victim forgiveness emerged on self-perceived victimhood, self-perceived offenderhood (marginally), pseudo self-forgiveness and willingness to reconcile. Offenders who had not been forgiven by the victim generally reported greater self-perceived victimhood, marginally lower self-perceived offenderhood, greater pseudo self-forgiveness and lower willingness to reconcile compared to those who had been forgiven. There were no significant main effects of victim forgiveness on guilt or empathy.

Past victimization \times victim forgiveness interaction. The effects of past victimization on self-perceived victimhood, pseudo self-forgiveness and willingness to reconcile were qualified by an interaction with victim forgiveness. These effects were significant when the victim had not forgiven the offender, $d_s > 0.54, p_s < .014$, but not when the victim had forgiven, $d_s < 0.33, p_s > .108$. No other significant interactions emerged.

3.2.2 | Path analysis

Multigroup path analysis was conducted to test the proposed model (see Figure 1). Past victimization was effect-coded ($-1 = no, 1 = yes$), and victim forgiveness was used as the grouping variable. The initial model mapping only the paths hypothesized in Figure 1 provided good fit to the data, $\chi^2(8, N = 200) = 11.29, \chi^2/df = 1.41, p = .186, CFI = .99, RMSEA = .05, SRMR = .06$. A structural weights model in which all path coefficients were constrained to be equal across the forgiven group and non-forgiven group was computed to test for invariance between the groups. This fully constrained model provided worse fit to the data, $\chi^2(18, N = 200) = 30.50, \chi^2/df = 1.70, p = .033, CFI = .98, RMSEA = .06$,

² Study 2 was originally designed as an experiment. After writing about their wrongdoing, participants were randomly allocated to one of two conditions where they were either asked to write about a previous wrongdoing that had been perpetrated against them (thoughts of past victimization condition) versus asked to write about their original transgression in greater detail (control condition). This manipulation did not produce any main effects, nor did it interact with victim forgiveness. Examination of the written responses revealed that a large portion of participants in the past victimization condition could not recall any past transgression committed by the victim. It was also possible that participants in the control condition could have thought about past victimization, even if they were not instructed to. These findings suggested that past victimization experiences would be challenging to manipulate or make salient within a recall paradigm (this informed our choice for the experimental scenario paradigm used in Studies 3 and 4). We anticipated that this may have been an issue and included a back-up question asking participants to report whether or not they had been wronged by the victim in the past, which we report in Study 2 in place of the manipulation of recalled past victimization. Including the manipulation as a blocking variable in the design did not alter the interpretation of results. We therefore omit the manipulation completely for parsimony. Data can be accessed from <https://osf.io/juydw/>

TABLE 2 Cell means and standard deviations as a function of past victimization and victim forgi, with mean difference tests (Study 2).

	Victim forgiveness		Victim non-forgiveness		ANOVA effects	
	No past victimization	Past victimization	No past victimization	Past victimization	Past victimization	Interaction
Self-perceived victimhood	1.77 (1.32)	2.19 (1.61)	1.72 (1.07)	3.55 (2.05)	F(1,196) = 17.97, $p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .08$	F(1,196) = 6.11, $p = .014, \eta_p^2 = .03$
Self-perceived offenderhood	5.15 (1.86)	5.04 (1.73)	4.56 (2.31)	4.42 (1.84)	$F(1,196) = 0.15,$ $p = .704, \eta_p^2 < .01$	$F(1,196) < 0.01,$ $p = .966, \eta_p^2 < .01$
Pseudo self-forgiveness	2.41 (1.00)	2.78 (1.20)	2.75 (1.31)	3.93 (1.42)	F(1,196) = 14.83, $p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .07$	F(1,196) = 3.99, $p = .047, \eta_p^2 = .02$
Guilt	4.89 (1.77)	4.89 (1.76)	4.72 (2.12)	4.23 (2.10)	$F(1,196) = 0.63,$ $p = .428, \eta_p^2 < .01$	$F(1,196) = 0.60,$ $p = .441, \eta_p^2 < .01$
Empathy	5.64 (1.48)	5.45 (1.77)	5.72 (1.68)	4.58 (2.13)	F(1,196) = 5.16, $p = .024, \eta_p^2 = .03$	$F(1,196) = 1.81,$ $p = .180, \eta_p^2 = .01$
Willingness to reconcile	5.66 (0.88)	5.71 (0.97)	4.61 (1.49)	3.82 (1.45)	F(1,196) = 4.06, $p = .045, \eta_p^2 = .02$	F(1,196) = 63.96, $p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .25$

Bolded values represent significant effects.

SRMR = .11. A chi-square difference test indicated that this decrease in fit was significant, $\Delta\chi^2(10) = 19.22, p = .038$, suggesting that the model differed as a function of victim forgiveness. Each path was, therefore, constrained individually to examine which paths significantly differed across the forgiveness and non-forgiveness conditions.

Chi-square difference tests between the original unconstrained model and all individual path constrained models showed that two structural paths significantly differed across conditions: past victimization to self-perceived victimhood, $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 5.81, p = .016$; and self-perceived offenderhood to empathy, $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 5.40, p = .020$ (all other $\Delta\chi^2s \leq 1.90, ps \geq .168$). A partially constrained model allowing only these two structural paths to be freely estimated across both conditions fit the data well, $\chi^2(16, N = 200) = 19.53, \chi^2/df = 1.22, p = .242$, CFI = .99, RMSEA = .03, SRMR = .07 and did not significantly differ in fit from the unconstrained model, $\Delta\chi^2(8) = 8.24, p = .411$. This model is presented in Figure 3.¹

Offenders' past victimization predicted greater self-perceived victimhood when victims had not forgiven ($p < .001$) but not when victims had forgiven ($p = .089$). However, past victimization was not associated with self-perceived offenderhood ($p = .676$). Greater self-perceived victimhood, in turn, predicted greater pseudo self-forgiveness ($p < .001$), lower empathy ($p = .003$) and lower willingness to reconcile ($p < .001$). Although self-perceived offenderhood was not predicted by past victimization, it was predictive of lower pseudo self-forgiveness ($p < .001$), greater guilt ($p < .001$) greater empathy ($p < .001$; this effect was stronger if the victim had not forgiven) and greater willingness to reconcile ($p < .001$).

3.3 | Discussion

Consistent with Study 1, Study 2 found that offenders who reported having been victimized in the past by the victim of their present transgression reported greater self-perceived victimhood, greater pseudo self-forgiveness, lower empathy and less willingness to reconcile. Unlike in Study 1, past victimization was not associated with self-perceived offenderhood. Instead, indirect effects of past victimization on the conciliatory outcome variables only emerged through self-perceived victimhood. Past research also shows that offenders' self-perceptions of victimhood and offenderhood are not always mutually related, can be predicted by different precipitants, and can be predictive of different outcomes (Thai et al., 2023). When it comes to the present research question, past victimization may be more reliably associated with offenders' self-perceived victimhood. There was some preliminary evidence that the effects of past victimization on self-perceived victimhood, pseudo self-forgiveness and willingness to reconcile were diminished when the victim had forgiven the offender for their present transgression.

Study 2 contributed additional evidence to support the idea that offenders' constructions of their role in present transgressions can be influenced by past victimization within the relationship. It should be noted, however, that the retrospective recall paradigm used did not allow for tight experimental control over the presence and absence

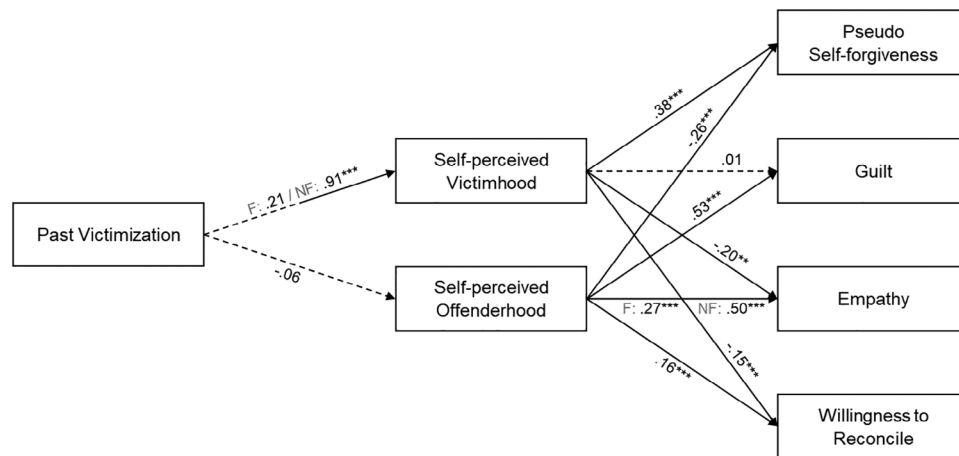


FIGURE 3 Path model linking past victimization to conciliatory sentiments through self-perceived victimhood and offenderhood (Study 2). F = victim forgiveness, NF = victim non-forgiveness. Unstandardized coefficients displayed. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

of past victimization. Instead, it relied on participants' own reporting of whether they had these experiences. While this permitted the proposed model to be tested across a broad range of potential scenarios and transgressions, it precluded causal conclusions over the effect of past victimization on the outcome variables. For example, it is possible that offenders who perceive themselves to be victims in the context of their own transgressions may be more motivated to (mis)interpret past victim behaviour as transgressions to align with this label. Furthermore, the recall paradigm produced uneven cell sizes, due to the imbalanced number of participants reporting past victimization (vs. not) and being forgiven (vs. not). Study 3 was designed to account for these limitations.

4 | STUDY 3

Study 3 investigated the effects of past victimization and victim forgiveness on offenders' post-transgression sentiments, this time using an experimental scenario paradigm. Participants were asked to imagine they had committed a transgression, assuming the offender role. Within the vignette, we manipulated whether or not the victim had transgressed against them in the past, and whether or not the victim had forgiven them for their present wrongdoing. Participants reported their sentiments about their present transgression on the same variables as in the first two studies.

We hypothesized that offenders presented with information about their own past victimization would report more negative relational sentiments than those not presented with this information. We proposed that these effects would be explained by greater self-perceived victimhood and lower self-perceived offenderhood, as per our model. We again explored whether victim non-forgiveness might exacerbate these predicted effects as it did for some variables in Study 2. The methodology, hypotheses and analysis plan for this study were preregistered at <https://osf.io/js2r7/>

4.1 | Method

4.1.1 | Participants

A power analysis determined that at least 64 participants per cell would be required for an 80% chance of detecting an effect at a magnitude of $d = 0.50$ between two independent groups (for pairwise comparisons). For a 2×2 experimental design, 256 participants were required. Thus, we aimed to collect data from 260 U.S. American participants from Prolific. We used filters to ensure all participants were currently students, so that they could easily imagine themselves in the scenario we used (explained in the following section). There was no topping up of data after initial collection. The final sample comprised 260 participants ($M_{\text{age}} = 23.05$, $SD = 3.32$; 142 male, 108 female, 10 nonbinary). In terms of racial background, the sample was made up of 155 Whites (59.6%), 30 Hispanic/Latino (11.5%), 29 Asian/Pacific Islander (11.2%), 13 Black/African American (10.0%), 1 Native American/Alaskan Native (0.4%), 18 Multiracial/Biracial (6.9%) and 1 'Other'-identifying (0.4%) participants. A sensitivity analysis showed that, with this sample size, the study had 80% power to detect main effects and interaction effects at a magnitude of $f = 0.17$.

4.1.2 | Design and procedure

The study had a 2 (past victimization) \times 2 (victim forgiveness) between-groups experimental design. Using a scenario paradigm (see Wenzel & Okimoto, 2010; Thai et al., 2023), participants read a vignette and imagined they had committed a wrongdoing against someone else. In the scenario, participants assumed the role of a student who had been paired with another student to work on a joint assignment. They had planned to meet up with the other student to work on the assignment over the weekend but had forgotten, only realizing their mistake when they received a text message from the other student asking them

where they were. The entire vignette is available in the [Supporting Information](#).

Past victimization manipulation. Participants were either given information about the other student's past wrongdoings (i.e., 'The other student has had a history of not completing the tasks they have needed to complete before each meeting with you.') or were not given such information.

Victim forgiveness manipulation. After reading the vignette, participants were asked to apologize to the other student in writing via a text message. In response, they received either a forgiving message (i.e., 'This sort of stuff happens! Don't worry about it! I'll just wait around for you I guess.') or a nonforgiving message (i.e., 'This is not cool! What a waste of time! I'll just wait around for you I guess.').

4.1.3 | Measures

Self-perceived victimhood and offenderhood, pseudo self-forgiveness ($\alpha = .78$), guilt ($\alpha = .92$), empathy ($\alpha = .91$) and willingness to reconcile ($\alpha = .91$) were measured using the same scales from the previous study, adapted for the scenario paradigm.

Manipulation checks. Two items were included to determine the success of the manipulations of victim forgiveness (i.e., 'Based on their response, how much do you think this person has forgiven you?'; 1 = not at all, 7 = very much) and past victimization (i.e., 'To what extent would you say they had wronged you in the past?'; 1 = not at all, 7 = very much).

4.2 | Results

Cell means and standard deviations and omnibus ANOVA results are presented in Table 3.

4.2.1 | Manipulation checks

A series of 2×2 between-groups factorial ANOVA were conducted on the manipulation check items. A strong main effect of past victimization emerged on the past victimization manipulation check; participants felt significantly more previously wronged when informed of the other student's past transgressions than when not. A strong main effect of victim forgiveness emerged on the victim forgiveness manipulation check; participants felt like the victim had forgiven them more in the forgiveness condition compared to the non-forgiveness condition. Thus, the manipulations were successful.

4.2.2 | Tests of mean differences

A series of 2×2 between-groups factorial ANOVA were conducted to test the effects of past victimization, victim forgiveness, and their interaction on the dependent measures.

Past victimization. Main effects of past victimization emerged on all dependent variables. Offenders who had been previously victimized by the present victim generally reported greater self-perceived victimhood, lower self-perceived offenderhood, greater pseudo self-forgiveness, lower guilt, lower empathy and lower willingness to reconcile compared to those who had not.

Victim forgiveness. Main effects of victim forgiveness emerged on self-perceived victimhood, self-perceived offenderhood, pseudo self-forgiveness, empathy and willingness to reconcile. Offenders who had not been forgiven by the victim generally reported greater self-perceived victimhood, lower self-perceived offenderhood, greater pseudo self-forgiveness, lower empathy and lower willingness to reconcile compared to those who had been forgiven. There were no significant main effects of victim forgiveness on guilt.

Past victimization \times victim forgiveness interaction. There were no significant interactions between past victimization and victim forgiveness for any dependent variable.

4.2.3 | Path analysis

Multigroup path analysis was conducted to test the proposed model (see Figure 1). Past victimization was effect-coded ($-1 = no$, $1 = yes$), and victim forgiveness condition was used as the grouping variable. The initial model mapping only the paths hypothesized in Figure 1 provided a poor fit to the data, $\chi^2(8, N = 260) = 35.81$, $\chi^2/df = 4.48$, $p < .001$, CFI = .96, RMSEA = .12, SRMR = .04. Modification indices suggested that additional structural paths could be freed to improve model fit. The suggested paths were all theoretically viable and included direct paths from past victimization to pseudo self-forgiveness, empathy and willingness to reconcile. Freeing these paths improved model fit, $\chi^2(2, N = 260) = 4.68$, $p = .096$, $\chi^2/df = 2.34$, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = .07, SRMR = .02.

A structural weights model in which all path coefficients were constrained to be equal across forgiveness and non-forgiveness conditions was computed to test for invariance between the conditions. This fully constrained model provided better fit to the data than the unconstrained model, $\chi^2(15, N = 260) = 22.06$, $\chi^2/df = 1.47$, $p = .106$, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = .04, SRMR = .05. A chi-square difference test indicated that this change in fit was not significant, $\Delta\chi^2(13) = 17.38$, $p = .183$, suggesting that the model did not differ as a function of victim forgiveness. Thus, this fully constrained model is reported. This model is presented in Figure 4.¹

Offenders' past victimization predicted greater self-perceived victimhood ($p = .026$) and lower self-perceived offenderhood ($p = .002$). Greater self-perceived victimhood, in turn, predicted greater pseudo self-forgiveness ($p < .001$), lower empathy ($p < .001$), and lower willingness to reconcile ($p < .001$). Lower self-perceived offenderhood predicted greater pseudo self-forgiveness ($p < .001$), lower guilt ($p < .001$), lower empathy ($p < .001$) and lower willingness to reconcile ($p < .001$). Past victimization also directly predicted greater pseudo self-forgiveness ($p = .011$), lower empathy ($p = .008$) and lower willingness to reconcile ($p < .001$).

TABLE 3 Cell means and standard deviations as a function of past victimization and victim forgiveness, with mean difference tests (Study 3).

	Victim forgiveness		Victim Non-Forgiveness		ANOVA effects		Interaction
	No past victimization	Past victimization	No past victimization	Past victimization	Past victimization	Victim forgiveness	
MC: Past victimization	1.39 (0.75)	4.29 (1.66)	1.91 (1.35)	4.73 (1.49)	$F(1,256) = 288.21$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .53$	$F(1,256) = 8.17$, $p = .005$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$	$F(1,256) = 0.05$, $p = .816$, $\eta_p^2 < .01$
MC: Victim forgiveness	5.22 (1.42)	4.94 (1.35)	1.87 (1.04)	1.97 (1.30)	$F(1,256) = 0.31$, $p = .577$, $\eta_p^2 < .01$	$F(1,256) = 393.11$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .61$	$F(1,256) = 1.47$, $p = .227$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$
Self-perceived victimhood	1.44 (1.05)	1.59 (0.98)	1.96 (1.20)	2.59 (1.53)	$F(1,256) = 6.83$, $p = .010$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$	$F(1,256) = 25.60$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$	$F(1,256) = 2.61$, $p = .107$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$
Self-perceived offenderhood	5.87 (1.16)	5.46 (1.42)	5.70 (1.18)	4.94 (1.74)	$F(1,256) = 11.51$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$	$F(1,256) = 4.01$, $p = .046$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$	$F(1,256) = 1.00$, $p = .318$, $\eta_p^2 < .01$
Pseudo self-forgiveness	1.55 (0.68)	2.07 (0.87)	2.08 (0.77)	2.53 (0.96)	$F(1,256) = 21.74$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$	$F(1,256) = 23.44$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$	$F(1,256) = 0.15$, $p = .703$, $\eta_p^2 < .01$
Guilt	5.69 (1.14)	5.22 (1.27)	5.74 (1.07)	5.01 (1.53)	$F(1,256) = 14.75$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$	$F(1,256) = 0.29$, $p = .593$, $\eta_p^2 < .01$	$F(1,256) = 0.66$, $p = .417$, $\eta_p^2 < .01$
Empathy	6.23 (0.75)	5.48 (1.29)	5.67 (1.29)	4.89 (1.66)	$F(1,256) = 23.18$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$	$F(1,256) = 12.92$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$	$F(1,256) = 0.01$, $p = .933$, $\eta_p^2 < .01$
Willingness to reconcile	6.09 (0.71)	5.25 (0.96)	5.12 (1.17)	4.34 (1.24)	$F(1,256) = 39.12$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .13$	$F(1,256) = 52.99$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .17$	$F(1,256) = 0.06$, $p = .807$, $\eta_p^2 < .01$

Note: MC = Manipulation Check.

Bolded values represent significant effects.

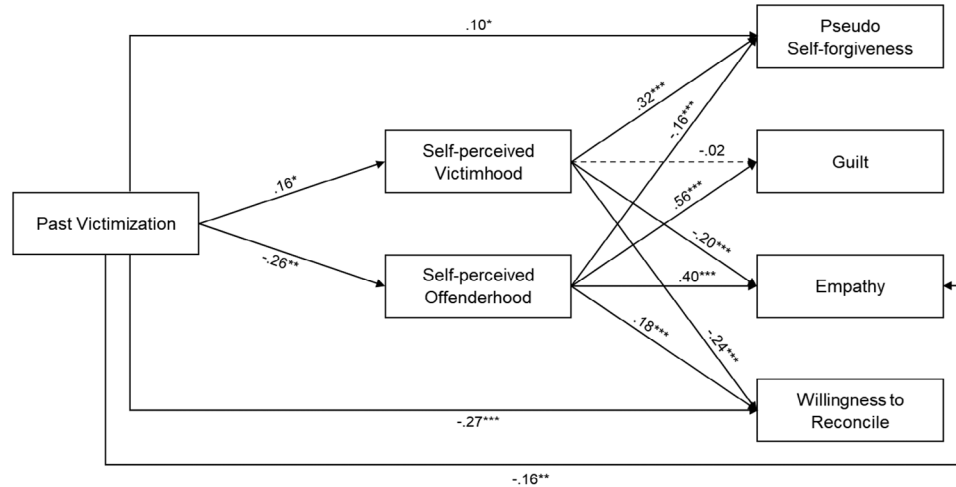


FIGURE 4 Path model linking past victimization to conciliatory sentiments through self-perceived victimhood and offenderhood (Study 3). Unstandardized coefficients displayed. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

4.3 | Discussion

Consistent with the previous studies, Study 3 found that offenders who had previously been victimized by the victim of their present transgression reported greater self-perceived victimhood, lower self-perceived offenderhood, greater pseudo self-forgiveness, lower empathy and lower willingness to reconcile. In this study, they also reported lower guilt. As in Study 1, both self-perceived victimhood and offenderhood mediated the relationship between past victimization experiences and conciliatory sentiments. One explanation for the more consistent effects of past victimization across all dependent measures in this study could be that the scenario paradigm allowed for the effects of past victimization to be more cleanly isolated, removing noise associated with actual recalled transgressions and relationship histories.

Unlike in Study 2, the effects of past victimization were not qualified by victim forgiveness, suggesting that offenders may defensively hold past instances of victimization against current victims who have previously done wrong to them, even after amicable interactions. We decided to follow up Study 3 with a fourth study using the same scenario paradigm in an attempt to replicate the present effects and extend upon the present study by examining whether the effect of past victimization would be exacerbated even further if the victim's past wrongdoings were *identical* to the offenders' present transgression.

5 | STUDY 4

Study 4 was an extension of the previous study, which used the same experimental scenario paradigm. Here, we again investigated the effects of past victimization and victim forgiveness on offenders' post-transgression sentiment, but manipulated whether the past victimization experienced by the present offender was identical to or distinct from their present offense. Participants read a vignette wherein they had committed a transgression against someone who

had committed identical wrongdoings against them in the past, distinct wrongdoings against them in the past, or no wrongdoing. The victim had either forgiven them or had not forgiven them for their current wrongdoing. Participants indicated their sentiments about the present transgression on the same variables as in the first three studies.

We hypothesized that offenders presented with information about past victimization would report more negative relational sentiments than those not presented with this information, irrespective of whether the past transgressions were identical to or distinct from the present transgression. Again, we proposed that these effects would be explained by greater self-perceived victimhood and lower self-perceived offenderhood. We again explored whether victim (non-)forgiveness might moderate these predicted effects. Given the mixed findings across Studies 2 and 3, we made no firm predictions about interactive effects. The methodology, hypotheses, and analysis plan for this study were preregistered at <https://osf.io/z5p82/>

5.1 | Method

5.1.1 | Participants

A power analysis determined that at least 64 participants per cell would be required for an 80% chance of detecting an effect at a magnitude of $d = 0.50$ between two independent groups (for pairwise comparisons). For a 3×2 experimental design, 384 participants were required. Thus, we aimed to collect data from 384 Australian psychology undergraduate students. A total of 400 participants signed up for the study. There was no topping up of data after initial collection. Of these, 20 participants failed to complete the entire survey and were thus removed from the analysis. The final sample comprised 380 participants ($M_{\text{age}} = 20.59$, $SD = 4.65$; 263 female, 110 male, 6 non-binary, 1 other). In terms of racial background, the sample was made up of 211 White (55.5%), 118 Asian (31.1%), 22 South Asian (5.8%),

6 Middle-Eastern (1.6%), 5 Hispanic/Latino (1.3%), 2 Black/African (0.5%), 1 Indigenous Australian (0.3%), and 15 'Other'-identifying (3.9%) participants. A sensitivity analysis showed that, with this sample size, the study had 80% power to detect main effects of past victimization and interaction effects at a magnitude of $f = 0.16$, and main effects of victim forgiveness at a magnitude of $f = 0.14$.

5.1.2 | Design and procedure

The study had a 3 (past victimization) \times 2 (victim forgiveness) between-groups experimental design. Participants read a vignette depicting the same scenario used in Study 3, wherein they had failed to meet with another student to work on an assignment.

Past victimization manipulation. Participants were given information that the other student had committed identical wrongdoings in the past (i.e., 'The other student has had a history of being late to a number of meetings with you.'), distinct wrongdoings (i.e., 'The other student has had a history of not completing the tasks they have needed to complete before each meeting with you.') or were not given any information about past wrongdoings.

Victim forgiveness manipulation. After reading the vignette, participants were asked to apologize to the other student in writing via a text message. In response, they either received a forgiving message or a nonforgiving message, as in Study 3.

5.1.3 | Measures

Self-perceived victimhood and offenderhood, pseudo self-forgiveness ($\alpha = .71$), guilt ($\alpha = .90$), empathy ($\alpha = .77$) and willingness to reconcile ($\alpha = .88$) were measured as per Study 3.

Manipulation check. One item was included to determine the success of the manipulation of past victimization, and to explore whether identical and distinct past wrongdoings were perceived differently ('To what extent would you say they had wronged you in the past?'; 1 = not at all, 7 = very much).³

5.2 | Results

Cell means and standard deviations, and omnibus ANOVA results are presented in Table 4. Follow-up comparisons for the main effects of past victimization are presented in Table 5.

5.2.1 | Manipulation check

A 3×2 between-groups factorial ANOVA testing the effect of the past victimization manipulation on the manipulation check revealed a signif-

icant main effect of past victimization. Follow-up comparisons showed that participants felt significantly more wronged when informed of the other student's identical or distinct past wrongdoings than when not, confirming the success of the manipulation. There was no difference between the identical and distinct past wrongdoing conditions in how wronged participants felt.

5.2.2 | Tests of mean differences

A series of 3×2 between-groups factorial ANOVA were conducted to test the effects of past victimization, victim forgiveness, and their interaction on the dependent measures.

Past victimization. Main effects of past victimization emerged on all dependent variables. Offenders who had been previously victimized by the present victim generally reported greater self-perceived victimhood, greater pseudo self-forgiveness, lower empathy and lower willingness to reconcile compared to those who had not, irrespective of whether the past wrongdoing was identical to or distinct from their present wrongdoing. They also generally reported lower self-perceived offenderhood and lower guilt, but only when the past wrongdoings were identical to their present wrongdoing. No other significant differences emerged.

Victim forgiveness. Main effects of victim forgiveness emerged on self-perceived victimhood, pseudo self-forgiveness, empathy and willingness to reconcile. Offenders who had not been forgiven by the victim generally reported greater self-perceived victimhood, greater pseudo self-forgiveness, lower empathy and lower willingness to reconcile compared to those who had been forgiven. There were no significant main effects of victim forgiveness on self-perceived offenderhood or guilt.

Past victimization \times victim forgiveness interaction. The effects of past victimization on self-perceived victimhood and willingness to reconcile were qualified by an interaction with victim forgiveness. The above effects of past victimization on self-perceived victimhood and willingness to reconcile were significant when the victim had not forgiven them. When the victim had forgiven them, the only effect that remained significant was offenders' lower willingness to reconcile following a victim's distinct (but not identical) past wrongdoing. No other significant interactions emerged.

5.2.3 | Path analysis

Multigroup path analysis was conducted to test the proposed model (see Figure 1). Two effect-coded variables representing the presence of past victimization ($-2 = control$, $1 = distinct$, $1 = identical$) and the type of past transgression ($0 = control$, $-1 = distinct$, $1 = identical$) were computed, and victim forgiveness condition was used as the grouping variable. The initial model mapping only the paths hypothesized in Figure 1 provided a poor fit to the data, $\chi^2(16, N = 380) = 43.94$, $\chi^2/df = 2.75$, $p < .001$, CFI = .95, RMSEA = .07, SRMR = .05. Modification indices suggested that additional structural paths could be

³ Due to human error, a manipulation check for the forgiveness manipulation was omitted from the survey materials in Study 4. The manipulation, however, was identical to the successful manipulation from Study 3 (and largely produced the same effects).

TABLE 4 Cell means and standard deviations as a function of past victimization and victim forgiveness, with mean difference tests (Study 4).

	Victim forgiveness				Victim non-forgiveness				ANOVA effects				
	No PV	Distinct PV	Identical PV	No PV	No PV	Distinct PV	Identical PV	Past victimization	Victim forgiveness	Interaction	Past victimization	Victim forgiveness	Interaction
MC: Past victimization	2.00 (1.36)	4.37 (1.54)	4.41 (1.29)	2.69 (1.61)	4.57 (1.41)	5.02 (1.30)	5.02 (1.30)	F(2,374) = 106.74, $p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .36$	F(2,374) = 11.68, $p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .03$	F(2,374) = 106.74, $p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .36$	F(2,374) = 11.68, $p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .03$	F(2,374) = 106.74, $p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .36$	F(2,374) = 106.74, $p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .36$
Self-perceived victimhood	1.88 (1.45)	1.84 (1.26)	2.00 (1.33)	2.72 (1.55)	3.48 (1.73)	3.67 (1.71)	3.67 (1.71)	F(2,374) = 4.15, $p = .017, \eta_p^2 = .02$	F(1,374) = 78.96, $p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .17$	F(2,374) = 3.02, $p = .050, \eta_p^2 = .02$	F(2,374) = 4.15, $p = .017, \eta_p^2 = .02$	F(1,374) = 78.96, $p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .17$	F(2,374) = 3.02, $p = .050, \eta_p^2 = .02$
Self-perceived offenderhood	5.78 (1.52)	5.05 (1.62)	4.94 (1.60)	5.14 (1.51)	5.24 (1.39)	4.65 (1.54)	4.65 (1.54)	F(2,374) = 6.05, $p = .003, \eta_p^2 = .03$	F(1,374) = 2.45, $p = .118, \eta_p^2 = .01$	F(2,374) = 2.34, $p = .098, \eta_p^2 = .01$	F(2,374) = 6.05, $p = .003, \eta_p^2 = .03$	F(1,374) = 2.45, $p = .118, \eta_p^2 = .01$	F(2,374) = 2.34, $p = .098, \eta_p^2 = .01$
Pseudo self-forgiveness	1.90 (0.93)	2.06 (0.83)	2.19 (0.79)	2.42 (0.85)	2.83 (0.89)	2.99 (0.71)	2.99 (0.71)	F(2,374) = 8.87, $p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .05$	F(1,374) = 65.57, $p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .15$	F(2,374) = 105, $p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .15$	F(2,374) = 8.87, $p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .05$	F(1,374) = 65.57, $p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .15$	F(2,374) = 105, $p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .15$
Guilt	5.65 (1.13)	5.34 (1.38)	5.41 (1.10)	5.55 (1.21)	5.29 (1.36)	4.91 (1.46)	4.91 (1.46)	F(2,374) = 3.85, $p = .022, \eta_p^2 = .02$	F(1,374) = 2.67, $p = .103, \eta_p^2 = .01$	F(2,374) = 1.21, $p = .300, \eta_p^2 = .01$	F(2,374) = 3.85, $p = .022, \eta_p^2 = .02$	F(1,374) = 2.67, $p = .103, \eta_p^2 = .01$	F(2,374) = 1.21, $p = .300, \eta_p^2 = .01$
Empathy	6.04 (0.92)	5.47 (1.30)	5.59 (1.11)	5.43 (1.16)	4.88 (1.26)	4.61 (1.33)	4.61 (1.33)	F(2,374) = 10.91, $p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .06$	F(1,374) = 35.31, $p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .09$	F(2,374) = 10.7, $p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .06$	F(2,374) = 10.91, $p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .06$	F(1,374) = 35.31, $p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .09$	F(2,374) = 10.7, $p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .06$
Willingness to reconcile	5.78 (0.70)	5.35 (0.95)	5.53 (0.84)	5.01 (0.99)	4.67 (1.11)	4.07 (1.01)	4.07 (1.01)	F(2,374) = 13.24, $p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .07$	F(1,374) = 101.46, $p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .21$	F(2,374) = 6.58, $p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .02$	F(2,374) = 13.24, $p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .07$	F(1,374) = 101.46, $p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .21$	F(2,374) = 6.58, $p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .02$

Abbreviations: MC, manipulation check; PV, past victimization.

Bolded values represent significant effects.

TABLE 5 Follow-up comparisons for the main effects of past victimization (Study 4).

	No PV versus distinct PV		No PV versus identical PV		Distinct PV versus identical PV	
	<i>d</i> [95%CI]	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i> [95%CI]	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i> [95%CI]	<i>p</i>
MC: Past victimization	1.42 [1.14, 1.69]	< .001	1.66 [1.37, 1.94]	< .001	0.17 [−0.08, 0.42]	.182
Self-perceived victimhood	0.22 [−0.03, 0.47]	.059	0.32 [0.07, 0.57]	.005	0.10 [−0.15, 0.35]	.358
Self-perceived offenderhood	−0.21 [−0.46, 0.04]	.100	−0.42 [−0.67, −0.17]	< .001	−0.22 [−0.47, 0.03]	.071
Pseudo self-forgiveness	0.31 [0.06, 0.56]	.006	0.48 [0.23, 0.73]	< .001	0.15 [−0.09, 0.40]	.170
Guilt	−0.22 [−0.47, 0.02]	.078	−0.35 [−0.60, −0.10]	.007	−0.11 [−0.36, 0.13]	.339
Empathy	−0.47 [−0.72, −0.22]	< .001	−0.52 [−0.77, −0.27]	< .001	−0.05 [−0.30, 0.19]	.612
Willingness to reconcile	−0.38 [−0.63, −0.13]	.001	−0.56 [−0.80, −0.30]	< .001	−0.18 [−0.43, 0.07]	.073

Abbreviations: CI, confidence interval; MC, manipulation check; PV, past victimization.

freed to improve model fit. The suggested paths were all theoretically viable and included direct paths from past victimization to empathy and willingness to reconcile, and from past transgression type (identical vs. distinct) to willingness to reconcile. Freeing these paths improved model fit, $\chi^2(10, N = 380) = 14.93, p = .135, \chi^2/df = 1.49, CFI = .99, RMSEA = .04, SRMR = .02$.

A structural weights model in which all path coefficients were constrained to be equal across forgiveness and non-forgiveness conditions was computed to test for invariance between the conditions. This fully constrained model provided a poorer fit to the data, $\chi^2(25, N = 380) = 53.22, \chi^2/df = 2.13, p = .001, CFI = .95, RMSEA = .06, SRMR = .05$. A chi-square difference test indicated that this decrease in fit was significant, $\Delta\chi^2(15) = 38.29, p = .001$, suggesting that the model differed as a function of victim forgiveness. Each path was therefore constrained individually to examine which paths significantly differed across the forgiveness and non-forgiveness conditions.

Chi-square difference tests between the original unconstrained model and all individual path constrained models showed that three structural paths significantly differed across conditions: past victimization to self-perceived victimhood, $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 6.04, p = .014$; past transgression type to willingness to reconcile, $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 5.17, p = .023$; and self-perceived victimhood to pseudo self-forgiveness, $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 11.34, p = .001$ (all other $\Delta\chi^2$ s $\leq 3.19, ps \geq .074$). A partially constrained model allowing only these three structural paths to be freely estimated across both conditions fit the data well, $\chi^2(22, N = 380) = 28.38, \chi^2/df = 1.29, p = .163, CFI = .99, RMSEA = .03, SRMR = .04$, and did not significantly differ in fit from the unconstrained model, $\Delta\chi^2(12) = 13.45, p = .337$. This model is presented in Figure 5.¹

Offenders' past victimization predicted greater self-perceived victimhood when victims had not forgiven ($p < .001$) but not when victims had forgiven ($p = .923$). However, it predicted lower self-perceived offenderhood, irrespective of victim forgiveness ($p = .005$). Greater self-perceived victimhood, in turn, predicted greater pseudo self-forgiveness ($p < .001$; this effect was stronger if the victim had forgiven) and lower willingness to reconcile ($p = .002$). Lower self-perceived offenderhood, in turn, was predictive of greater pseudo self-forgiveness ($p < .001$), lower guilt ($p < .001$), lower empathy ($p < .001$) and lower willingness to reconcile ($p = .012$). Past victimization also directly predicted lower empathy ($p = .002$) and lower willingness to reconcile ($p = .002$). The type of past transgression did not matter for offenders' willingness to reconcile when victims had forgiven ($p = .070$). When victims had not forgiven, however, offenders felt even less willingness to reconcile when the victim's past transgression was identical to their own present transgression ($p = .004$).

5.3 | Discussion

Study 4 supported the prediction that past victimization experiences would be associated with less conciliatory sentiment in offenders for their present transgressions. Consistent with findings from Study 3, offenders who had previously been victimized by the victim of their present transgression reported greater self-perceived victimhood,

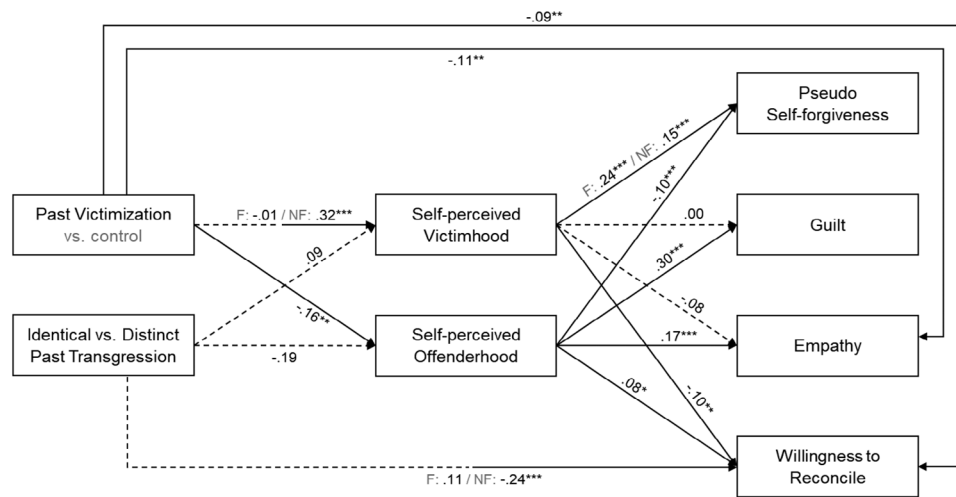


FIGURE 5 Path model linking past victimization to conciliatory sentiments through self-perceived victimhood and offenderhood (Study 4). F = victim forgiveness, NF = victim non-forgiveness. Unstandardized coefficients displayed. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

lower self-perceived offenderhood, greater pseudo self-forgiveness, lower guilt, lower empathy and lower willingness to reconcile. Extending on this, Study 4 distinguished between identical and distinct past wrongdoings to explore their specific effects on offender perceptions. Identical past wrongdoings exhibited stronger and more consistent effects than distinct past wrongdoings, suggesting that offenders differentiate between past victimization experiences and are more likely to downplay their own transgressions when the other person has been guilty of the same type of transgression previously.

As in Study 2, there was some evidence that the effects of past victimization on self-perceived victimhood and willingness to reconcile were qualified by victim forgiveness. When the victim had forgiven the offender for their present wrongdoing, having a history of victimization did not lead offenders to consider themselves victims and did not reliably reduce their willingness to reconcile. When the victim had *not* forgiven the offender for their present wrongdoing, however, offenders felt more like victims and were generally less willing to reconcile if the victim had previously committed wrongdoings against them, particularly if the wrongdoing was identical to their present wrongdoing.

The indirect effects of past victimization on the conciliatory outcome variables via self-perceived victimhood and offenderhood were complex. Past victimization consistently predicted lower self-perceived offenderhood, which then went on to predict lower conciliatory sentiment. It appeared then that participants used past victimization to assuage negative feelings about the offense and their role in enacting it. Past victimization also predicted greater self-perceived victimhood (however, this seemed limited to conditions under which the victim had not forgiven them), which then went on to predict greater defensiveness in the form of pseudo self-forgiveness and lower willingness to reconcile. This was potentially driven by perceived hypocrisy or inconsistency in the victim being unforgiving, despite having previously offended, themselves.

Both identical and distinct past victimization were directly negatively associated with empathy and willingness to reconcile with the victim, and this could not be explained by self-perceived victimhood or offenderhood. This suggests that, beyond affecting construals of their role as 'victim' or 'offender', past victimization may simply take a toll on relationships; people may lack empathy for those who have done wrong to them and may not be motivated to maintain relationships that have been tainted by histories of their own victimization.

6 | GENERAL DISCUSSION

A common approach to the study of interpersonal transgressions typically considers the roles of 'victim' and 'offender' in a way that is fixed and tied to the transgression at hand. These roles, however, are dynamic within interpersonal relationships; across the multiple wrongdoings that have transpired within a relationship, both parties may have experiences of being both 'victim' and 'offender' (Baumeister et al., 1997; Worthington et al., 2015). Although this is widely understood and accepted, little work has empirically examined the cognitive processes through which prior transgressions may taint impressions of present transgressions. The present work contributes to this literature by testing the impact of past victimization experiences on individuals' conciliatory sentiments for their present offenses. We find evidence that past victimization can inhibit present offenders' conciliatory sentiments towards victims of their present transgressions, partly through changing how they construe their role in the ongoing conflict.

Through recall paradigms assessing offenders' interpretations and processing of real-life transgressions (Studies 1 and 2) as well as scenario paradigms allowing for the experimental isolation of past victimization effects (Studies 3 and 4), we demonstrate that past victimization experiences can change offenders' psychological construction of their role in the context of their present transgressions,

decreasing the extent to which they see themselves as offenders and increasing their self-perceived victimhood. This, in turn, predicts greater pseudo self-forgiveness, lower empathy for the present victim, lower willingness to reconcile, and lower guilt for their wrongdoing. We also find evidence that these effects may be more reliable when the present victim's past transgressions are identical to the present transgression (Study 4). These findings build upon previous work examining offender defensiveness and pseudo self-forgiveness (Baumeister, 1990; Cornish et al., 2018; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a) by elucidating the role that past victimization experiences play in enabling these processes.

The present findings also highlight possible boundary conditions to the effects of past victimization. There was some evidence from Studies 2 and 4 that past victimization experiences showed less reliable effects on offenders' construal of themselves as 'victims' and their willingness to reconcile if they were forgiven by the victims of their present transgressions. Conversely, the effects of past victimization were more pronounced if the victims of their present transgressions had *not* forgiven. This suggests that present offenders may be more motivated to draw upon past victimization experiences when present victims do not respond to them benevolently.

We note, however, that the interactive effects above were not observed for all variables, nor did they emerge in Study 3. Here, past victimization negatively affected offenders' conciliatory sentiments, irrespective of whether or not the present victim had forgiven them. Also, in Studies 3 and 4, past victimization experiences still led offenders to perceive themselves less as offenders, even when present victims had forgiven. This suggests that the negative effects of past victimization do not only come into play when the present victim slights the offender in some way. It is possible that offenders have a general inclination to defensively protect their moral image after committing a wrongdoing (Schumann, 2018; Shnabel & Nadler, 2008; Shnabel et al., 2013) and past victimization experiences may provide them with a moral safety blanket to do so.

It should be noted that, although we had sufficient power to detect the focal main effect of past victimization across our studies, we had comparatively lower power to test for interactions by victim forgiveness. We expected that victim forgiveness might attenuate the effect of past victimization on the dependent variables – such an interaction, particularly one where an effect is only partially attenuated, typically requires greater power to detect (Sommet et al., 2023). Assuming a fully attenuated interaction, our studies only had adequate power to detect interaction effects where the unattenuated simple effect would be larger in size (i.e., $d = 0.66$ – 0.80) and were underpowered to detect any potential smaller interaction effects. Thus, any observed interaction, or lack thereof, should be interpreted with caution. Future research should continue to explore when, and under what conditions, past victimization experiences affect offenders' interpretation of their role in present wrongdoings using larger samples. This would allow for more confident assertions regarding the conditions under which past victimization experiences are more or less likely to play a role in influencing offenders' sentiments for their present transgressions.

6.1 | Theoretical and practical implications

Our findings have broad implications for the literature on interpersonal transgressions and relationship repair. They elucidate the potential effects of past transgressions on how parties interpret present transgressions within a relationship. Specifically, they highlight the dynamic nature of victimhood and offenderhood, showing that present offenders can reconstrue their role within present wrongdoings as a function of a shared history of reciprocal wrongdoing, assuaging their concerns for the present victim and their perceived need to offer amends or make reparations. This illuminates a pattern of thinking in offenders that can intensify conflict and inhibit reconciliation. This interpersonal phenomenon mirrors that of competitive victimhood, which has been studied in the domain of intergroup transgressions (Noor et al., 2012; Sullivan et al., 2012).

The potentially destructive consequences of making salient offenders' past victimization lies in stark contrast to the restorative and forgiveness-promoting effects observed for victims who bring to mind their own past histories of offending (Exline et al., 2008; Takaku, 2001). Practitioners should be mindful of these differential effects when encouraging relationship partners to engage in perspective-taking exercises or when prompting them to recount their relationship histories. When discussing past wrongdoings, practitioners should frame them in a way that draws focus to past *offending* rather than past victimization in order to maximize the potential for relationship repair (assuming relationship repair is desired by all parties involved). Indeed, the present work shows that acknowledging one's offenderhood is reliably associated with greater conciliatory sentiment in offenders (in terms of lower pseudo self-forgiveness, along with greater guilt, empathy, and willingness to reconcile).

It is important to note, however, that conciliation may not always be the most adaptive or healthy outcome for all interpersonal relationships affected by reciprocal transgressions. For example, individuals in abusive relationships who retaliate against their abusers may not necessarily wish for the relationship to heal. Reconciliation may in fact put these individuals at risk of further harm (McNulty, 2011). Indeed, recognizing one's own victimhood and stepping away from a relationship may represent a constructive response pattern for individuals who have endured a history of victimization. Thus, the processes we have uncovered can be framed as either a barrier to reconciliation or a path to deliverance. We stress that they are not necessarily maladaptive or 'erroneous'; in some cases, they may be a legitimate means for individuals to cope with, and move on from, their past victimization. In any case, our findings emphasize how important it is for practitioners to understand the complete history of a relationship – including the root cause of any enduring cycles of reciprocal wrongdoing – and teach each offending party alternative, non-transgressive strategies to break such cycles, whether that results in relationship repair or dissolution.

The present work raises new questions for the field to tackle. For example, they introduce a potential caveat to our understanding of longstanding relationships – that is, although greater relationship length may be characterized by greater commitment and investment

(Guerrero & Bachman, 2008), those in longer relationships can also carry the burden of an extended history of reciprocal wrongdoing. Indeed, more established relationships go hand in hand with greater accumulation of wrongdoings enacted by both parties. These potential countervailing effects can perhaps explain why relationship length often shows negligible effects on conciliatory sentiments (e.g., Schumann, 2012; Ysseldyk & Wohl, 2012) and should be considered in future work examining relationship length as a predictor of relationship outcomes – both relationship quality (e.g., number of past transgressions) and quantity (i.e., length) are likely to be relevant predictors of ongoing longevity.

6.2 | Limitations and other future directions

The recall (Studies 1 and 2) and scenario (Studies 3 and 4) paradigms used in the present research each had limitations that were offset by the other. For example, whereas the recall paradigm could not provide causal evidence for the effects of past victimization experiences on offender perceptions, the experimental scenario paradigm allowed for causal inferences to be made. The experimental scenario paradigm, however, relied on vignettes that were constrained to a single imagined scenario depicting a specific wrongdoing, limiting the generalizability of the findings. The recall paradigm corroborated these findings by having participants recall their own broad range of offenses from real, lived transgressions. Notwithstanding the value of this varied methodology, future work would benefit from longitudinal designs that would allow for the temporal relationships between past victimization, self-perceived victimhood and offenderhood, and conciliatory sentiments to be established using real transgressions within real relationships.

Across all studies, we also tested a specific path model linking past victimization and a range of conciliatory sentiments through self-perceived victimhood and offenderhood. Although our proposed model was theoretically grounded, our inferential testing of this model relied on assessments of correlational relationships between the proposed mediators and outcome variables. Thus, these relationships should be interpreted with caution. Future work could employ ‘manipulation-of-mediator’ designs to (see Bullock et al., 2010) further assess whether *manipulated* victimhood and offenderhood do causally predict conciliatory sentiments in line with what we propose. In any case, the present research provides clear evidence (particularly through the experimental designs in Studies 3 and 4) that past victimization has reliable *direct* effects on self-perceived victimhood and offenderhood, as well as all conciliatory sentiments.

While the present research established that past victimization can influence offender sentiments, future work should explore *how* past wrongdoings are psychologically stored and come to affect interpretations of present wrongdoings. Our findings could not disentangle whether the effects of past victimization could be explained by a ‘credentials’ or a ‘credits’ system (see Merritt et al., 2010). On the one hand, past instances of victimization may give present offenders ‘victim credentials’; that is, merely having any victimization experience in

the past can provide enough justification for offenders to reconstrue their roles in the context of their present transgressions. Alternatively (or concurrently), a ‘credits’ system may be at play; through a book-keeping process, both parties in a relationship may keep a running tally of the number of times they have been victims and offenders within a relationship and approach new transgressions with an idea of the existing ‘scoreboard’ of transgressions. It is possible that past experiences of victimization are only used to justify present offenses if they have accrued more ‘victim credits’ relative to ‘offender credits’.

Future research should also investigate the other factors that may qualify the effects of past victimization. Transgression-specific factors such as perceived transgression severity or intentionality of past victimization may moderate the effects of past victimization observed here. Such factors may even determine whether the effects of past victimization experiences are governed by a ‘credentials’ or ‘credits’ system. For example, being the victim of a relatively severe past transgression may grant offenders ‘victim credentials’ that can psychologically offset any minor offenses they themselves commit moving forward. Future work should explore these possibilities.

Finally, we must acknowledge that our approach to this research topic, our interpretation of the results, and the recommendations we have derived from these results reflect a Western-centric perspective. This cultural lens has informed certain assumptions and presuppositions, such as our framing of reciprocal wrongdoing as a destructive force in interpersonal relationships. Within some cultures, reciprocal wrongdoing may be a culturally normative or even obligatory response to being the previous victim of wrongdoing. For example, responding to past victimization with vengeance may be deemed an admirable course of action that can improve the reputation of individuals who reside in cultures of honour (Uskul et al., 2018). We are mindful of the theoretical and cultural bounds of this work and hopeful that future researchers will be able to explore these questions from alternative cultural perspectives.

6.3 | Conclusions

The present work investigated the impact of past victimization experiences on offenders’ perception of their role in, and consequent conciliatory sentiments felt towards the victim of, their present transgressions. We found that being previously victimized by the person they had presently wronged could lead offenders to see themselves less as offenders and more as victims. The combination of these processes predicted defensive self-exoneration in the form of pseudo self-forgiveness, diminished empathy with the present victim and guilt for their present actions, and greater reluctance to reconcile with the present victim. These effects were complex, however, and appeared to vary based on factors such as whether the present victim’s previous transgressions were identical or distinct from the offender’s present transgression, and whether the present victim had forgiven the offender for their present transgression. These findings shed light on the complexities that emerge from dyadic social relationships wherein both parties have played the role of ‘victim’ and ‘offender’.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

All authors contributed to every aspect of this research, including conception, study design, data collection and analysis, and manuscript preparation.

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The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the authorship and/or publication of this article.

ETHICS STATEMENT

This research had human subjects ethical approval from the University of Queensland Ethics Committee.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data and materials for these studies are openly available on the Open Science Framework at <https://osf.io/juydw/>

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