



## BREAK-UP OR MAKE-UP? HELPING PEOPLE AND GROUPS RECONCILE AFTER DISPUTES

**Nurit Shnabel\***

*School of Psychological Sciences at Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv, Israel*

### YOUNG REVIEWER:



PELEG

AGE: 10

When people fight over physical things there are “hidden,” or deeper, reasons that they are fighting, as well. For example, siblings fighting over a toy might also be fighting about which child the parents love more. What do people need to make up—or reconcile—after a fight? According to one theory, people involved in a dispute need different emotional things: the victim (the one who was hurt) needs to feel empowered; that is, they need to feel that they are important, valuable, and in control; while the perpetrator (or wrongdoer) needs to feel accepted, good, and liked. If both sides can get what they need, there is a better chance that they will be willing to reconcile. These findings are significant for the field of restorative justice, which aims not only to punish the wrongdoers, but also to mend the relationship between perpetrators, victims, and their communities.

## TANGIBLE RESOURCES

Things that have value for an individual or a group, which can be perceived through the senses and measured. Money, land, property, and diamonds are examples of tangible resources.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL RESOURCES

Things that are valuable to an individual or a group that are not tangible. Respect, appreciation, recognition of injustice, and acceptance are examples of psychological resources.

## CONFLICT RESOLUTION

A way for conflicting parties to solve the dispute between them through peaceful, non-violent means (such as reaching an agreement on how to distribute the resources over which they fight).

## APOLOGY-FORGIVENESS CYCLE

A “mechanism” for restoring harmony following conflicts in which the wrongdoers acknowledge that what they did was wrong, and the victims express their readiness to let go of the grudge.

## AGENCY

The ability to determine your own outcomes. Agentic people feel competent, influential, in control, and that their voice (namely, what they have to say) is heard and respected by others.

## CONFLICT RESOLUTION: A WAY TO RESOLVE DISPUTES

Conflicts are a basic part of life. Usually people fight over **tangible resources**—that is, physical things that can be seen and measured. For example, children in a kindergarten may quarrel over a toy, a divorced couple may fight over a house, and groups of people may go to war over land. But underneath the conflict for tangible resources, people are also fighting for **psychological resources**—things that we can not see or measure, such as respect, justice, and sympathy. In other words, conflicts are not always only about what we think they are—they are also about questions like: Who is the favorite child in the family? Who are the “good guys” and who are the “bad guys”? Am I being treated fairly and with respect? In the field of **conflict resolution**, it is well-known that to fully resolve a dispute, it is not enough to divide up the tangible resources. Even if the kindergarten teacher buys more toys for the children, the divorced couple agrees to share the house, and the warring groups sign a peace treaty, the problem may return if the struggle over psychological resources is not dealt with.

One of the ways people can move forward is by using the **apology-forgiveness cycle** [1], in which one person says “sorry” and the other accepts the apology. When the wrongdoer sincerely apologizes and the victim agrees to forgive them, the relationship changes and improves dramatically, and they are much more likely to reconcile. We can see from the way people talk about the apology-forgiveness cycle (for example, “you owe me an apology”) that when we use it, we are trading something—not tangible resources like money or items, but psychological (or emotional) resources. What are these emotional resources? Keep reading to find out!

## PSYCHOLOGICAL NEEDS AND RECONCILIATION

People generally judge themselves and others based on two main attributes: **agency** and **socio-morality**. Agency has to do with how much power or control a person feels they have over their environment, and is related to traits such as ability, influence, and respect. Socio-morality has to do with whether a person is thought to be moral [a good person, whose behavior is right (rather than wrong)] or likable, and is associated with characteristics such as fairness, warmth, and affection. To feel good about themselves, people need to feel that they have a high degree of both attributes—that they are both in control and perceived as good people. According to the **needs-based model of reconciliation** [2], which is a way of thinking about conflict and resolving (or solving) conflict, when there is a conflict, these attributes are threatened. For the victims, who feel a loss of control, their agency has been endangered. For

## SOCIO-MORALITY

The extent to which one is perceived as a good person, who is accepted by others in their community. Those high on socio-morality are perceived as fair, considerate, and likable.

## THE NEEDS-BASED MODEL OF RECONCILIATION

A way of thinking about overcoming conflict. According to the model, when victims feel empowered, and perpetrators feel morally and socially accepted—their willingness to reconcile with each other increases.

the perpetrators, who fear being seen as immoral or bad, their socio-morality has been threatened. These threats lead to different emotional needs: victims, who want to restore their agency, feel a need for empowerment—they want to feel respected and valued, and have their voices heard. Perpetrators, who want to restore their socio-morality and who fear being cast out of the community, feel a need for acceptance—they want to feel liked and seen as good people again.

Sometimes victims and perpetrators try to “fix” the damage to their identities by acting in one-sided ways. For example, a victim may choose to get revenge, because revenge returns control to the victim. A perpetrator may deny or try to justify their harmful actions, to seem more moral. These types of actions make it harder to reconcile. However, if the parties use the apology-forgiveness cycle, each party can fix their identity in a way that increases the chance of reconciliation. How does this happen? When the wrongdoer apologizes for their actions, they are actually “confessing” to the victim. This confession gives power back to the victim, who can decide whether to grant forgiveness. If the victim decides to forgive, the victim is actually saying that they know the perpetrator is a good person, despite the harm the wrongdoer has caused. This makes the wrongdoer feel liked and accepted again.

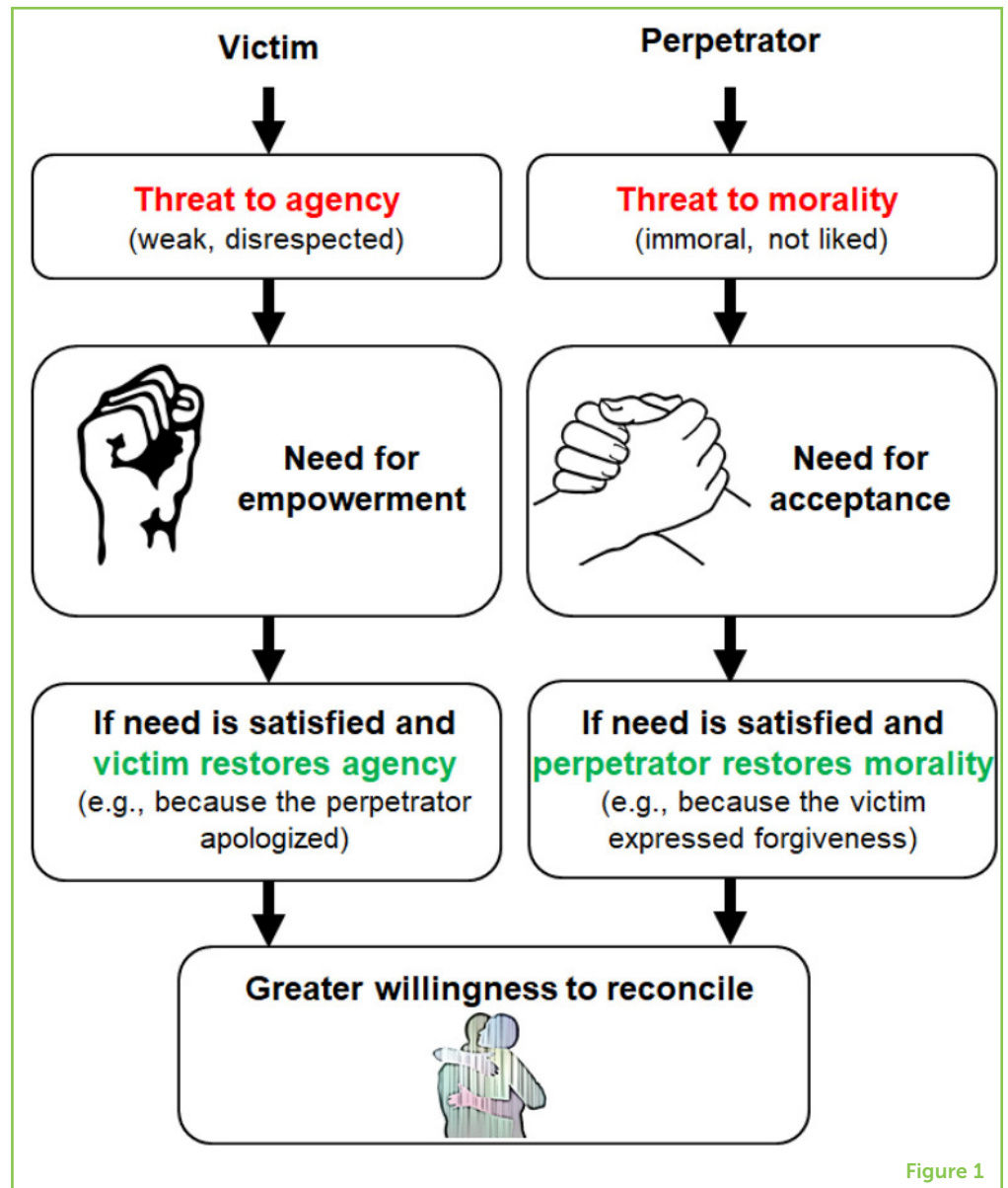
In addition to using the apology-forgiveness cycle, there are other ways perpetrators and victims can help repair each other’s wounded identity. For example, wrongdoers can give agency back to victims by showing appreciation and respect for victims’ achievements and abilities or, in the case of a group, the group’s contributions to the world. In the same way, victims can make the perpetrators feel accepted by becoming friends with them or, in the case a group, by expressing a willingness to work together. When the needs of victims and perpetrators are met, and the identity of each of the parties is repaired, their willingness to reconcile increases (Figure 1).

## TESTING THE MODEL

In one experiment to test the needs-based model of reconciliation, 2,738 participants from around the world were asked to read a short story. The story is about an unemployed university student who shares an apartment with a roommate. The student goes on vacation, and when he comes back, his roommate tells him that he found another roommate—one who could pay the rent in advance—and that he needs to find another place to live. While reading the story, half the participants (chosen randomly) read the

**Figure 1**

The needs-based model of reconciliation. Following a conflict, each person feels that a part of their identity is endangered. The victim feels weak, not-in-control, and disrespected, and therefore needs more power and agency. The perpetrator feels that their moral identity is threatened, fears social exclusion, and therefore needs to feel morally and socially accepted. When the perpetrator satisfies the victim's need for empowerment by apologizing and recognizing their value, and the victim satisfies the perpetrator's need for moral acceptance by forgiving and sympathizing with them, the identities of both parties are restored and both sides are more willing to reconcile.



story from the victim's point of view ("Your roommate tells you that he found another roommate"), while the other half read it from the perpetrator's point of view ("You tell your roommate that you have found another roommate"). After reading the story, the participants filled out questionnaires, answering questions about their need for empowerment ("I would like to be stronger in the situation"), and moral acceptance ("I would like my roommate to understand that I am a good person").

Participants were then given a message from the "other side" (the victim was given a message from the perpetrator, and vice versa). The message was either one of empowerment ("You are a talented and smart person") or acceptance ("You are a nice person and

## Figure 2

Two thousand seven hundred thirty-eight people from around the world were asked to read a short story. Half of the participants (chosen at random, symbolized by dice) read the story from the perspective of the victim, and the other half from the perspective of the perpetrator. **(A)** Victims needed empowerment more than perpetrators did, whereas perpetrators needed moral acceptance more than victims did. Next, half of the participants were given messages of empowerment, and half were given messages of acceptance. **(B)** Victims expressed a higher willingness to reconcile after reading a message of empowerment than acceptance, while for perpetrators it was the opposite.



## RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

An approach to justice that focuses on mending the relationship between the perpetrator, the victim, and the community. This is different from punitive justice, which emphasizes punishment of the perpetrator.

## HOW CAN WE USE THE FINDINGS FROM THE MODEL?

It is important to understand that the model does not offer a “recipe” for reconciliation, only general insights that may help those involved in, or helping with, conflict resolution. One area for which the model’s insights are relevant is **restorative justice** [3] (Figure 3).

Restorative justice is a method of resolving conflicts that focuses on healing the relationship between the perpetrator, the victim, and the community (unlike punitive justice, which focuses on punishing the wrongdoer). As part of the restorative justice process, meetings are held between the victim, the perpetrator, and others in the community. For example, a meeting between a girl who was bullied at school, the aggressor (the bully), and the classmates who saw the bullying. During the meeting, the perpetrator must apologize for her actions (perpetrators who are not willing to apologize are not allowed to take part). The victim is given the chance to talk about her experience and suffering. Giving the victim a voice empowers her and helps

### Figure 3

Restorative justice is an approach to justice that seeks to repair the harm caused by the transgression by providing victims and offenders an opportunity to communicate with each other. In the scale shown, instead of weighing the sides against each other to see who is on the good side and who is on the bad, justice is achieved through dialogue between the parties, during which they stand in equal positions. According to the needs-based model of reconciliation, such dialogue can erase the roles of the “evil aggressor” and the “weak victim” and restore equality and harmony to the relationship.

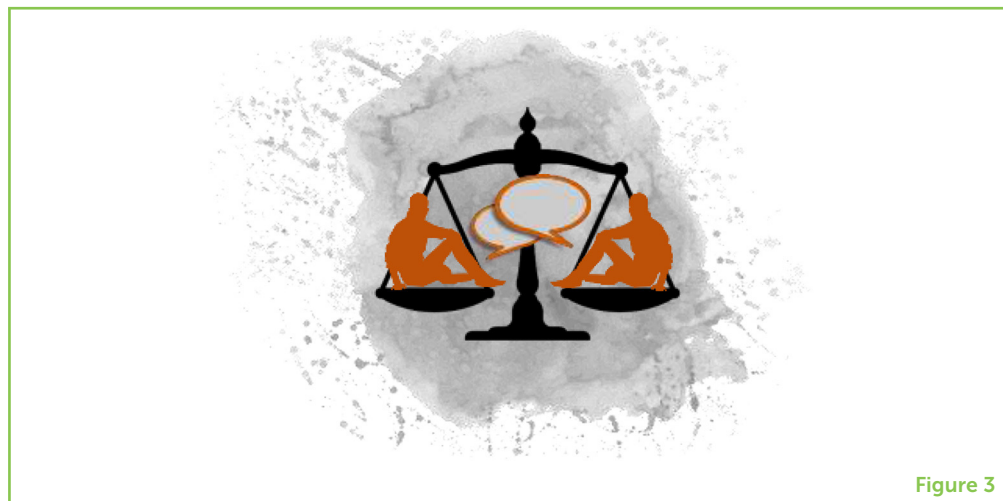


Figure 3

to restore her sense of agency. Although it is not easy for the perpetrator to hear about the suffering of the victim, especially in front of others, it is an important part of the process. Otherwise, many perpetrators will try to deny or make light of the harm they have inflicted. Without hearing from the victim face-to-face, the bullying girl could tell herself that it was just a prank, or no big deal, and she might not face up to the hurt she caused. After hearing about the consequences of her actions, the bully is then given the chance to apologize and to feel that, despite everything, she is a valued part of the class.

The needs-based model of reconciliation suggests that restorative justice programs should maximize the victim’s empowerment, possibly by giving them a say in the perpetrator’s punishment, as well as maximize the wrongdoer’s feelings of acceptance and approval. In this way, we can increase victims’ satisfaction and reduce the chances that perpetrators will repeat their actions.

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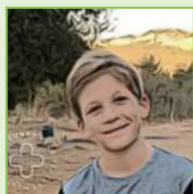
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## YOUNG REVIEWER



**PELEG, AGE: 10**

I live in Modi'in-Maccabim-Re'ut. I play tennis and basketball, play the piano, and spend a lot of time on the computer. I love swimming, playing with my family and friends, and really like watching movies.

## AUTHOR



**NURIT SHNABEL**

Sixteen years ago, I gave a ride to a 17-year-old adolescent. When he was about to get out, he tried to push me out of the car and steal it. When I resisted and screamed, a passerby came to my aid and the boy ran away. The police arrested him later that evening. Since he was a minor, he had to take part in a restorative justice program (in parallel with the criminal proceedings), during which my partner and I met with the boy, his sister, and his parents. The meeting was very emotional, and it was clear that the family was very ashamed of what the boy had done. It was only at the end of the session, after about 2 h, that the adolescent made eye contact with me, and I felt that he really saw me, as a person. Since then, I have been interested in repairing social relations between individuals and groups through my work as a social psychologist, and currently as a professor at Tel Aviv University. I am especially fascinated by the extraordinary reconciliation process between Jews and Germans. You can learn more about my research at: <https://www.nuritshnabel.sites.tau.ac.il/>. \*shnabeln@tauex.tau.ac.il