Inside the Opponent's Head: Perceived Losses in Group Position Predict Accuracy in Metaperceptions Between Groups

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What is This?
Members of groups in conflict tend to perceive the same reality in opposing ways (Demoulin, Leyens, & Dovidio, 2009). Past research has documented processes that can account for the tendency to perceive events through the lens of one’s group, such as the need to maintain a positive social identity (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002) and the need to conform to group norms (Postmes & Spears, 1998). Relatively little is known, however, about whether—and under which conditions—individuals are able to accurately perceive how out-group members think about the conflict. The ability to accurately perceive the “out-group’s mind” can have important implications for members of groups in conflict. Knowledge of what the out-group thinks about the conflict can be used to facilitate constructive initiatives (e.g., by helping to identify potential for compromise in negotiations) or antagonistic ones (e.g., by informing wartime strategy). In the research reported in this article, we focused on this understudied yet highly consequential ability.

Previous research on metaperceptions, particularly work that has considered the effects of power on the ability and motivation to detect other people’s views, provides valuable insights into processes that might drive the accuracy of metaperceptions surrounding intergroup conflict. Researchers have argued that because members of low-power groups are more dependent on high-power groups than vice versa, they have more motivation than members of high-power groups to detect what out-group members think of them (Lammers, Gordijn, & Otten, 2008; Vorauer, 2006; see also Galinsky, Magee, Inesi, & Gruenfeld, 2006). In related work, Vorauer and Sakamoto (2008) found that the more members of high-power groups perceived the power relations as illegitimate, the more they cared about how they were viewed by members of low-power groups, particularly in the domain of moral goodness. According to the authors, as the perceived legitimacy of power relations decreases, the views of low-power group members are increasingly perceived to be valid, and consequently useful for self-evaluation.

Thus, prior research suggests that the more out-group members’ views are considered relevant for understanding one’s outcomes—whether because the out-group has more control or because its views are perceived to be particularly valid—the...
more motivated one will be to “read the out-group’s mind.” Drawing on this notion, we propose that when group members perceive losses to their group position in an intergroup conflict, they will be especially motivated to accurately perceive out-group members’ views of the conflict. In the context of perceived losses, the out-group’s views become increasingly relevant to the in-group’s outcomes. The more accurately group members assess the out-group’s views (i.e., the more insight they gain into the out-group’s conflict-related motives, attitudes, and perceptions), the better placed they are to devise strategies for countering losses effectively. Conversely, because individuals perceiving group gains have no loss to contain, they can afford to be somewhat less vigilant in their group-based metaperceptions. Therefore, we propose that the ability to accurately read the out-group’s mind in situations of conflict, especially conflict that is intense and consequential, can reflect a strategic motivation to manage group position—a motivation likely to be particularly aroused when one’s group is experiencing losses.

We tested these ideas in the context of Israeli-Palestinian relations, a paradigm case of intense, zero-sum conflict (Kelman, 1987). In terms of military, economic, and political power, Israel clearly holds the upper hand relative to Palestinians, and this advantage has tended to be relatively stable. Study 1 was conducted a few days following the Gaza flotilla incident—an extreme event that, in its immediate aftermath, disturbed the stability of the power dynamics because it evoked “near-universal condemnation of Israel’s actions” (Migdalovitz, 2010, p. 6). Because both sides are heavily dependent on third parties for gaining material support and legitimacy, international isolation in this context directly translates to political losses (Tessler, 1994). Given the losses in Israel’s political standing that the event provoked, we examined the possibility that Israelis would be more accurate than Palestinians (who were expected to perceive gains) in predicting out-group members’ views in the aftermath of the incident. We expected Palestinians’ views about the incident to be relevant to Israelis because, by anticipating and convincingly countering the Palestinian perspective on the event, Israel would be better able to stem the political loss. In addition, we tested the hypothesis that Israelis’ accuracy would increase with their perception of Israel’s political losses and that Palestinians’ accuracy would decrease with their perception of Palestinians’ political gains. Moreover, we expected these effects to be most pronounced among individuals who should care most about their group’s losses or gains—those highly identified with their group (Doosje, Ellemers, & Spears, 1999). In Study 2, we aimed to demonstrate that perceptions of group losses have a unique effect on accuracy in metaperceptions, over and above any effects of other potentially relevant factors.

**Study 1**

In our first study, we surveyed Israelis, Palestinians, and members of third-party groups 2 days following the Gaza flotilla incident. On May 31, 2010, several ships embarked from Turkey with the stated aim of delivering humanitarian aid to Gaza, which has been under Israeli blockade since 2007. Israel declared that the flotilla was in violation of the blockade, and demanded access to inspect the cargo and regulate entry of items to Gaza, citing concerns that the ships contained weapons. The people on the flotilla refused this demand and sailed toward Gaza as planned. The Israeli army invaded the largest ship of the flotilla while it was in international waters. As a result of subsequent clashes, nine activists aboard the flotilla were killed by Israeli troops. Although several aspects of the event (e.g., who initiated the violence) were disputed, the incident provoked heavy international criticism directed at Israel for use of deadly force. Consistent with the criticism, polling among the Israeli public revealed that the percentage of Israeli Jews who felt Israel to be internationally isolated reached a record 54% in the month following the incident, compared with 32% in the months preceding the event (Yaar & Hermann, 2010).

**Method**

**Participants.** Respondents were 496 individuals who volunteered to complete a questionnaire online: 130 Israelis (mean age = 41.68 years, SD = 11.94; 62% female, 38% male), 91 Palestinians (mean age = 39.18 years, SD = 17.68; 54% female, 46% male), 55 non-Palestinian Arabs (mean age = 28.91 years, SD = 11.77; 51% female, 49% male), 139 Americans (mean age = 35.17 years, SD = 14.24; 50% female, 50% male), 28 Europeans (mean age = 37.72 years, SD = 14.04; 61% female, 39% male), 34 Canadians (mean age = 34.59 years, SD = 13.68; 50% female, 50% male), and 19 Australians and Asians (mean age = 32.00 years, SD = 10.66; 53% female, 47% male).

**Procedure and measures.** We distributed an e-mail 2 days following the flotilla incident, inviting acquaintances (of all nationalities) to complete an anonymous survey about the incident and asking them to forward the survey to other people. To measure perceptions of group losses and gains, we asked participants, “To what extent do you believe the recent flotilla event will help or harm Palestinians politically?” The response scale ranged from 1, harm very much, to 7, benefit very much (4 = neither harm nor benefit). Given the zero-sum nature of Israeli-Palestinian relations, in which one’s opponent’s gains are experienced as one’s own political losses (Bar-Tal, 2007), we considered perceptions of Palestinian gains resulting from a conflictual incident between the parties to entail perceptions of Israeli losses.

A second indicator of Israel’s political losses was whether members of third parties sided with Palestinians rather than Israelis when assigning responsibility for the fatal outcome of the event. All participants were asked, “Who do you think is responsible for the fact that people were killed on the flotilla?” Responses ranged from 1, solely Israel, to 7, solely people on the flotilla (4 = equal responsibility). We expected that Israelis...
and Palestinians would diverge strongly on this item and that, as a reflection of Israel’s political isolation following the incident, third-party groups would side with the Palestinians’ view.

To assess accuracy in metaperceptions surrounding the conflict, we presented Palestinians and Israelis with eight goals and asked them to rate the extent to which they thought each goal guided the Israeli operation; the rating scale ranged from 1, not at all, to 7, very much. The goals represented a broad range of perspectives on the event: (a) undermine Hamas leadership, (b) strengthen the image of the Israeli defense forces, (c) punish Gaza’s inhabitants, (d) harm civilians, (e) maintain Israeli control over entrance of supplies to Gaza, (f) protect the safety of Israeli citizens, (g) ensure that Israel keeps its stance regarding the blockade, and (h) demonstrate Israel’s indifference to the world’s opinions about its morality. After rating their own view regarding Israel’s goals, Israelis and Palestinians used the same scale to rate the extent to which they thought the other group thought each goal guided the operation. For example, Israeli participants read: “For each of the goals, we now want you to indicate whether you think Palestinians think the goal guided the operation.” In combination, these measures enabled us to compare the accuracy of the two groups in predicting out-group members’ perceptions of the event.

We measured in-group identification using the following items: “How important is it for you to be an Israeli/Palestinian?” “How close do you feel to other Israelis/Palestinians?” and “How much do you identify with other Israelis/Palestinians?” The rating scale for these items ranged from 1, not at all, to 7, very much (α = .74 for Palestinians; α = .85 for Israelis). Finally, to control for individuals’ political orientation, we asked participants to place themselves on a continuum ranging from 1, hawk (opposing political compromise), to 7, dove (favoring compromise).

Results

In-group identification did not differ between Israelis (M = 6.05, SD = 1.13) and Palestinians (M = 6.22, SD = 1.04), F < 1, and was high in both groups. Because Israelis rated themselves as more dovish (M = 4.89, SD = 1.49) than Palestinians did (M = 3.95, SD = 1.76), t(215) = 4.22, p < .001, we controlled for this measure in all cross-group comparisons.

Perceptions of group losses/gains. Both Israelis (M = 5.45, SD = 1.46) and Palestinians (M = 5.66, SD = 1.40) rated Palestinians as benefiting politically from the flotilla incident (i.e., mean scores were greater than 4, which indicated no harm or benefit), t(129) = 11.27, p < .001, for Israelis and t(91) = 11.31, p < .001, for Palestinians. We next examined whether members of third-party groups sided with Palestinians in assigning responsibility. As expected, Israelis held the people on the flotilla responsible for the deaths (M = 5.40, SD = 1.68), whereas Palestinians placed the blame on Israel (M = 1.15, SD = 0.78), β = −0.87, t(213) = −22.09, p < .001. A Tukey honestly significant difference analysis revealed that ratings of responsibility by each of the third-party groups differed significantly from Israel’s ratings (Fig. 1). Moreover, the ratings of all third-party groups, with the exception of Americans (M = 3.22, SD = 1.87), were indistinguishable from Palestinians’ ratings. These findings indicate Israel’s political isolation and are consistent with the notion that the flotilla event marked political losses for Israel.

Accuracy in metaperceptions. Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for Palestinians’ and Israelis’ ratings of each of the goals (own view and prediction of out-group’s view). To compare the accuracy of the two groups, we computed, for each goal, the difference between individuals’ prediction of how out-group members rated the goal and the out-group members’ actual rating of that goal. For example, Palestinians’ mean rating of the goal “harm civilians” was subtracted from each Israeli’s prediction of how Palestinians rated that goal. Difference scores closer to zero reflect more accurate predictions. Because we were interested in accuracy, and not in the direction of bias (i.e., overestimation or underestimation), we used absolute values of the difference scores. As indicated in the last two columns of Table 1, across all goals, Israelis demonstrated more accuracy than Palestinians. For five of the goals, the differences in accuracy were significant.

To assess overall accuracy, we computed the average of the difference scores across all goals. To test the effects of the
hypothesized predictors, we regressed this score on group membership (Israeli = 0, Palestinian = 1), perceptions of Palestinians’ loss/gain (centered), in-group identification (centered), and all interactions among these variables. This analysis revealed a main effect for group membership; Israelis displayed greater overall accuracy compared with Palestinians, $b = 0.59, t(201) = 6.45, p < .001$. In addition, there was a main effect for in-group identification, $b = 0.15, t(201) = 4.03, p < .001$, indicating that, generally, greater identification was related to less accuracy. The expected interaction between group membership and perceptions of Palestinians’ loss/gain was obtained, $b = 0.18, t(201) = 3.31, p < .001$. As hypothesized, the more Israelis perceived Palestinians as gaining from the incident, the more accurate they were in predicting Palestinians’ views, $b = -0.07, t(206) = -2.28, p = .024$. Conversely, for Palestinians, perceived gains resulted in decreased accuracy, $b = 0.14, t(206) = 3.02, p = .003$.

Finally, the analysis revealed the predicted three-way interaction among group membership, perceived Palestinian loss/gain, and in-group identification, $b = 0.10, t(201) = 1.89, p = .06$. To test our hypothesis regarding in-group identification, we analyzed the relationship between perceived Palestinian loss/gain and accuracy separately for participants scoring 1 standard deviation above and 1 standard deviation below the mean level of identification (Preacher, Curran, & Bauer, 2006). As expected, among participants who identified relatively strongly with their group, the relationship between perceptions of loss/gain and accuracy was significant for both Israelis and Palestinians (see Fig. 2b)—Israelis: $b = -0.11, t(201) = -2.37, p = .02$; Palestinians: $b = 0.19, t(201) = -2.42, p = .02$. For participants who were less identified with their group, the effects of perceptions of loss/gain on accuracy were in the same direction, but not significant (see Fig. 2a)—Israelis: $b = -0.07, t(201) = -1.42, p > .16$; Palestinians: $b = 0.03, t(201) = 0.33, p > .74$.

**Discussion**

Study 1, conducted in the immediate aftermath of a politically consequential incident, provided support for our theorizing regarding the relationship between perceived losses and accuracy in reading the out-group’s mind. Israelis, who perceived political losses to their group as a result of the flotilla incident, were more accurate in predicting the out-group’s views than were Palestinians, who perceived political gains to their group. Moreover, the more Israelis perceived losses to their group, the more accurate they were in reading Palestinians’ views of the event, and the more Palestinians perceived political gains to their group, the less accurate they were in reading Israelis’ minds. These effects were particularly pronounced among participants who were strongly identified with their group and were not accounted for by political hawkishness/dovishness. Notably, Israelis, who perceived losses to their group as a result of the incident, were more accurate than Palestinians even though they did not feel responsible for its consequences.

### Table 1. Results From Study 1: Palestinians’ and Israelis’ Own Views and Prediction of the Out-Group’s Views of Israel’s Goals and Accuracy in Predicting the Out-Group’s Views

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Israelis’ view</th>
<th>Palestinians’ view</th>
<th>Israelis’ prediction of Palestinians’ view</th>
<th>Palestinians’ prediction of Israelis’ view</th>
<th>Israelis’ accuracy</th>
<th>Palestinians’ accuracy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undermine Hamas leadership</td>
<td>4.73 (2.09)</td>
<td>6.00 (1.72)</td>
<td>6.23 (1.20)</td>
<td>2.08 (1.52)</td>
<td>0.88 (0.85)</td>
<td>1.82 (0.82)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate Israel's indifference to the world's opinion about its morality</td>
<td>2.14 (1.61)</td>
<td>4.67 (2.19)</td>
<td>4.96 (1.85)</td>
<td>4.15 (2.25)</td>
<td>1.60 (0.97)</td>
<td>2.50 (1.63)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punish Gaza’s inhabitants</td>
<td>2.98 (2.03)</td>
<td>6.15 (1.59)</td>
<td>5.86 (1.53)</td>
<td>5.13 (1.20)</td>
<td>1.10 (1.10)</td>
<td>2.61 (1.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harm civilians</td>
<td>1.46 (1.17)</td>
<td>5.39 (1.82)</td>
<td>5.09 (1.95)</td>
<td>3.79 (2.36)</td>
<td>2.09 (1.03)</td>
<td>2.61 (2.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain Israeli control over entrance of supplies to Gaza</td>
<td>6.24 (1.29)</td>
<td>6.71 (0.76)</td>
<td>6.17 (1.33)</td>
<td>6.06 (1.61)</td>
<td>0.87 (1.15)</td>
<td>1.11 (1.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protect the safety of Israeli citizens</td>
<td>4.78 (2.18)</td>
<td>1.54 (1.30)</td>
<td>3.06 (2.13)</td>
<td>4.56 (2.32)</td>
<td>1.87 (1.82)</td>
<td>2.00 (1.19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure that Israel keeps its stance regarding the blockade</td>
<td>5.26 (1.72)</td>
<td>6.31 (1.44)</td>
<td>5.47 (1.76)</td>
<td>6.28 (1.20)</td>
<td>1.41 (1.36)</td>
<td>1.44 (0.62)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthen the image of the Israeli Defense Forces</td>
<td>3.86 (2.08)</td>
<td>4.99 (1.90)</td>
<td>5.63 (1.64)</td>
<td>5.17 (2.83)</td>
<td>1.52 (0.89)</td>
<td>2.00 (1.02)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall accuracy

1.42 (0.50) 2.01 (0.72)

Note: The table presents means, with standard deviations in parentheses. Accuracy was computed as the absolute value of the difference between a participant’s rating of how he or she predicted the out-group rated the goal and the actual mean rating of that goal by the out-group. Smaller numbers indicate greater accuracy. Because absolute values were used to index accuracy, the accuracy scores do not equal the difference between the mean prediction of the out-group’s views and the out-group’s actual views.

For these goals, the difference between Palestinians’ and Israelis’ accuracy was significant ($p < .01$)

For this goal, the difference between Palestinians’ and Israelis’ accuracy was marginally significant ($p = .05$)
This finding is consistent with the notion that a strategic (and not an empathic) motivation underlies the relationship between perceived in-group losses and accuracy in reading the out-group’s mind.

Indeed, the goal of Study 2 was to demonstrate that perceptions of group losses have a unique effect on accuracy in metaperceptions, over and above the potential effects of other relevant factors. Although Study 1 showed that Israelis, who perceived losses to their group, were more accurate than Palestinians, who perceived gains to their group, and that each group’s accuracy was predicted by perceived political gains and losses, other variables may have contributed to our findings. In Studies 2a and 2b, we addressed this issue by assessing the relationship between perceived losses and accuracy controlling for several such factors. Additionally, in Study 2b, we used a more comprehensive measure of group losses, in which both out-group gains and in-group losses were considered as part of one scale.

**Study 2**

Study 2 was conducted among two separate samples of Israeli Jews. Participants were asked to assess the results of recent public opinion polls that asked random samples of Palestinians in the West Bank about their views concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We tested whether accuracy in perceiving Palestinians’ views was uniquely predicted by perceptions of Israel’s political losses, and whether other theoretically relevant factors improved the prediction of accuracy once perceptions of political losses were considered. Reasoning that perceptions of in-group losses promote attention to the out-group’s views, we expected Palestinians’ general views of the conflictual relations with Israel to be especially relevant to Israelis who perceived their group to be losing ground. The more individuals perceive in-group losses in an intergroup conflict, the more likely they are to be concerned with seeking relevant information about the conflict—and, therefore, about the views of the out-group—in an attempt to understand their counterpart and defend their group.

The first factor we considered as potentially relevant for predicting accuracy in reading the out-group’s mind was political awareness, which can generally lead to more accurate assessment of the intergroup reality (Stephan & Renfro, 2002) and thus, perhaps, of the out-group’s views. We also considered the roles of empathy, an other-focused orientation likely to increase the ability to take the out-group’s perspective (Stephan & Finlay, 1999), and of group-based guilt, which has been found to be positively related to empathic perspective.
taking (Hoffman, 2000). Finally, we considered the role of key demographic variables (age, gender, and education), as well as of left/right political orientation, a strong predictor of perceptions regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict among Israelis (Halperin, 2008). We expected that perceptions of in-group losses would uniquely predict accuracy in metaperceptions, and that this relationship would remain significant after controlling for other factors that could also potentially predict accuracy.

**Study 2a**

Respondents in Study 2a were 72 psychology students (mean age = 24.53 years, SD = 1.59; 72% female, 28% male) who completed a questionnaire, presented as dealing with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in a large classroom. They first read a paragraph in which recent failed negotiations between the parties was described. We measured perceptions of group losses by asking participants, “To what extent do you believe recent political occurrences will help or harm Palestinians politically?” The response scale ranged from 1, *harm very much*, to 7, *benefit very much* (4 = neither harm nor benefit). To assess political awareness, we asked participants, “Do you consider yourself politically knowledgeable (follow the news; know the key events)?” Empathy was assessed by asking, “Do you personally care to know how Palestinians feel about the conflict?” and group-based guilt was measured with the item, “To what extent do you, as an Israeli, feel guilt regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?” Responses to these last three questions were given on a scale from 1, *not at all*, to 7, *very much*. Participants also indicated their gender, age, and highest level of education. Finally, in addition to measuring hawk/dove orientation, we asked participants to place themselves on a continuum ranging from 1, *extreme left*, through 4, *center*, to 7, *extreme right*.

We measured accuracy in metaperceptions regarding the conflict by asking participants,

> In a recent survey among a random sample of Palestinians in the West Bank, Palestinians were asked whether they support or oppose hurting Israeli civilians inside the green line [Israel’s borders prior to the 1967 war]. What percentage (from 0% to 100%) do you think expressed support?

We computed a difference score as the absolute value between participants’ assessment and the actual percentage obtained from the poll data (41%; Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, 2010). As in Study 1, the closer the difference score is to zero, the more accurate the prediction.

We ran a hierarchical regression in which we first regressed accuracy on perceived in-group losses (Step 1) and then entered the rest of the potential predictors (Step 2). As indicated in Table 2, perceived losses was a significant predictor of accuracy in metaperceptions at Step 1. Moreover, it remained significant after controlling for the entire group of additional predictors entered at Step 2. Indeed, the cluster of predictors entered at Step 2 did not add a significant portion of explained variance in accuracy. Thus, perceptions of in-group losses uniquely explained a substantial portion of variance in accuracy, whereas a wide range of other potential predictors, including demographics, political orientations, and group-based emotions, had no added effect on accuracy.

**Study 2b**

Respondents in Study 2b were 61 passengers on a train (mean age = 33.03 years, SD = 11.93; 42% female, 58% male); thus, this study involved a more diverse, nonstudent sample. A research assistant, who explained that she was running a survey about Israeli-Palestinian relations, approached passengers and offered candy in return for participation. Participants were handed a questionnaire similar to the one in Study 2a, except for the following changes: First, the event participants read about concerned the anniversary of an incident that occurred during the Gaza war in 2008. During the war, the Israeli army bombed the home of a Palestinian doctor, killing his three daughters and his niece. This change in the materials rendered empathy and guilt potentially more relevant predictors of accuracy. Second, we used a more comprehensive measure of group losses, averaging responses to the following items: “Do you think the events described in the paragraph hurt or help Palestinians politically?” “Do you think the events hurt or help Palestinians in gaining international support for their political goals?” “Do you think the events make Israel look good or bad in the eyes of the world?” and “Do you think the events make Palestinians look good or bad in the eyes of the world?” (α = .88). These items

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### Table 2. Results From Study 2a: Unstandardized Coefficients From a Hierarchical Multiple Regression Predicting the Accuracy of Israelis’ Metaperceptions Regarding Palestinians’ Support for Hurting Israeli Citizens

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>r²</th>
<th>b</th>
<th>SE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1 (R² = .098)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Palestinian gain</td>
<td>−3.83*</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>3.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>1.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>9.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political awareness</td>
<td>−.08</td>
<td>−.72</td>
<td>1.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawk/dove rating</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>2.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left/right rating</td>
<td>−.04</td>
<td>−0.84</td>
<td>1.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>−.15</td>
<td>−2.30</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guilt</td>
<td>−.07</td>
<td>−0.76</td>
<td>1.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05.

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This column lists zero-order correlations between each predictor and accuracy.
formed a unidimensional scale (eigenvalue = 2.93, 73.24% of variance explained, all loadings above .82), which was coded such that higher scores reflect greater perceived losses to Israel. Third, to the accuracy item in Study 2a, we added the following: “In another recent survey among a random sample of Palestinians in the West Bank, Palestinians were asked whether they support or oppose signing a peace agreement with Israel. What percentage do you think expressed support?” As in Study 2a, our measure of accuracy was the absolute value of the difference between participants’ assessment and the actual percentage obtained from the poll data (60% for the new item; Near East Consulting, 2010).

We conducted the same analysis as in Study 2a for both accuracy scores. As shown in Tables 3 and 4, perceived in-group losses predicted accurate metaperception of Palestinian support for harming Israelis and for signing a peace agreement with Israel. This effect remained significant after controlling for the group of additional predictors entered at Step 2. Further, as in Study 2a, these additional variables did not significantly improve the prediction of accuracy. Thus, Study 2b replicated Study 2a and extended the conclusions to a different sample, new measures, and a novel context.

**General Discussion**

We investigated group members’ accuracy in reading their opponent’s mind during intergroup conflict. Two studies supported our expectation that perceived losses to one’s group increase accuracy in predicting how out-group members view the conflict. Study 1 was conducted in the immediate aftermath of the Gaza flotilla incident, which substantially harmed Israel’s political position. Indeed, all groups in the study (including Israelis themselves) viewed Palestinians as gaining politically from the incident. Moreover, a range of third-party groups sided with the Palestinians and against Israel in assigning Israel the responsibility for the fatal outcome. In this political climate, Israelis were more accurate in predicting Palestinians’ views of the event than Palestinians were in predicting Israelis’ views. Moreover, as we predicted, Israelis — especially those who identified strongly with their group — were more accurate the more they perceived their group to be losing politically from the event. Conversely, Palestinians — particularly those highly identified with their group — were less accurate in reading Israelis’ minds the more they perceived that their group had gained politically. In two different samples of Israelis, Study 2 further established the importance of perceived losses for predicting accuracy in metaperceptions, showing that perceived losses, but not a range of other potential factors, predicted an accurate reading of the out-group’s views.

Individuals’ ability to predict how their opponents view the conflict has been relatively understudied (but see Chambers, Baron, & Inman, 2006; Robinson, Keltner, Ward, & Ross, 1995). We theorized that individuals who perceive losses to their group position should display increased motivation to accurately read the out-group’s mind, because this ability might be invaluable in reversing the situation. Indeed, one is reminded in this sense of Sun Tzu’s famous dictum to “know thy enemy.” Thus, turning attention to how the out-group thinks might not necessarily reflect caring, in the empathic sense, about the other group, but rather may reflect strategic concern with managing the position of one’s own group — a concern likely to be heightened when one is faced with losses. This conclusion is supported by the findings of Study 2b, which demonstrated that, although empathy and accuracy in metaperceptions had a zero-order relationship (see Tables 3 and 4)
and 4), empathy did not predict accuracy once perceptions of losses were taken into account.

The current research suggests valuable directions for future research. Experimental work showing that manipulated losses yield similar effects would further support our claims, as would data collected in other intergroup contexts. At present, it remains possible that increased accuracy in reading the out-group’s mind leads individuals to perceive more losses to their own group’s position, rather than the reverse. Furthermore, studies investigating the mechanisms through which losses lead to enhanced accuracy would be extremely valuable to understanding this phenomenon more fully. Plausible mediators include emotions related to anxiety over losses in group position (Han, Lerner, & Keltner, 2007). Conversely, groups experiencing gains may become less accurate in their metaperceptions in part because positive emotions, such as happiness, may not promote attention (Tiedens & Linton, 2001). Finally, an important implication of our research is that accuracy may be influenced not only by absolute levels of power, but also by changes in power: We observed, for the first time, that accuracy was related to losses and gains among both high- and low-power groups. Future research could further investigate the dynamic nature of power and the ways in which perceived changes in power influence group-based metaperceptions and intergroup relations more broadly.

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