

Three layers of collective victimhood: effects of multileveled victimhood on intergroup conflicts in the Israeli–Arab context

Noa Schori-Eyal¹, Eran Halperin², Daniel Bar-Tal³

¹University of Maryland

²The Interdisciplinary Center

³Tel-Aviv University

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Noa Schori-Eyal, University of Maryland, Department of Psychology, College Park, College Park, MD, 20742 USA.
E-mail: noa.schori@gmail.com

doi: 10.1111/jasp.12268

Abstract

Perceived collective victimhood plays a significant role in conflictual intergroup relations. We suggest a conceptualization of three different layers of collective victimhood: historical victimhood, general conflict victimhood, and conflict event victimhood. Three studies explore the interrelationship between the layers and their effects in the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. In Study 1, general conflict victimhood mediates the relationship between historical victimhood and willingness for compromise. In Study 2, conducted in two waves, changes in general conflict victimhood predict support for military actions against the out-group. The relationship between general conflict victimhood and support for military actions was mediated by conflict event victimhood. In Study 3, three new scales were developed, and their relations with different outcomes examined. Findings were nearly identical to the models tested in Studies 1–2.

Collective victimhood is a prevalent theme among societies embroiled in intergroup conflicts. In every severe and violent intergroup conflict, typically, both sides believe that they are the victim in that conflict (Bar-Tal, Chernyak-Chai, Schori, & Gundar, 2009; Noor, Shnabel, Halabi, & Nadler, 2012; Vollhardt, 2012a, 2012b). In intractable conflicts¹, which are prolonged and brutal, a sense of collective victimhood is an inseparable part of the shared narrative among society members as constructed in their collective memory of the conflict and ethos of conflict (Bar-Tal, 2007a, 2013). In the present paper we suggest a new framework of collective victimhood based on multilayered perspective. Three layers of collective victimhood are identified: historical victimhood, based on accumulated in-group experiences of persecution and suffering not unrelated to a specific conflict; general conflict victimhood, which pertains to a particular ongoing conflict; and conflict event victimhood, related to a distinct event within a given conflict. The present paper describes three

studies that come to solidify the above noted distinction by studying the relations among the three layers of collective victimhood and by pointing to their differential outcomes. First, however, we will elaborate on their nature and their effects.

Three layers of collective victimhood

Collective victimhood denotes “a mindset shared by group members that results from a perceived intentional harm with severe and lasting consequences inflicted on a collective by another group or groups, a harm that is viewed as undeserved, unjust, and immoral and one that the group was not able to prevent” (Bar-Tal et al., 2009, p. 238).

We suggest three possible layers of collective victimhood. The three layers do not necessarily exist within the same group or at the same time, as the context, power relations, and group history may affect the manifestation of collective victimhood in its various forms. Nevertheless, when the three layers exist, the interaction between them can have a meaningful impact on the course of intergroup conflicts. While previous works used different types of victimhood without making formal differentiation (e.g., Bilewicz & Stefaniak, in press; Vollhardt, 2012b), the present research not only tries to

¹Intractable conflicts are violent, fought over goals viewed as existential, perceived as being of zero sum nature and unsolvable, preoccupy a central position in the lives of the involved societies, require immense investments of material and psychological resources and last for at least 25 years (Bar-Tal, 2007a, 2007b, 2013; Kriesberg, 1993).

make conceptual distinction and plot three discrete layers of victimhood, but also empirically tests the interactions between them in the context of a real-life conflict.

The first and most fundamental layer of collective victimhood is historical collective victimhood. Different groups exhibit a sense of historical collective victimhood as part of their shared identity, either as a muted note or a more fundamental tone. Examples of historical collective victimhood can be found among Poles (e.g., Jasińska-Kania, 2007), Serbs (Volkan, 1997), and Jews (e.g., Bar-Tal & Antebi, 1992; Schori-Eyal, Klar, Roccas, & McNeill, 2014; Wohl & Branscombe, 2008), to name just a few. Based on an experience of considerable harm embedded in a society's collective memory as severe and unjust (Paez & Liu, 2011; Wertsch, 2002), it is a sense of unforgettably shared trauma and unjustified wrongdoing by others done (e.g., Armenians carry in their collective memory the traumatic event of the genocide performed during World War I; see Wertsch, 2002). But it can also be based on accumulated experiences of harm carried out by different out-groups through the history of the in-group (e.g., Serbs carry in their collective memory a series of experiences that begin with the Turkish invasion and conquest during the 14th century, invasion by the Austro-Hungarian empire in the beginning of the 20th century with the German help, and the invasion by the Axis forces during World War II; see Bieber, 2002). All these cases involve blaming either one out-group or a number of them for the unjust harm done in the past.

A related concept is perpetual in-group victimhood orientation (PIVO), defined as the belief that one's group is a constant victim persecuted by different enemies (Schori-Eyal et al., 2014). PIVO may be considered a specific case of historical group victimhood, as it is based in part on past experiences, but it is different from our broader construct in that it also encompasses elements of present victimhood. It also places emphasis on the uniqueness of the victimhood status and on the interchangeability of adversaries through the history of the group, elements that are not part of our concept of historical group victimhood.

Historical collective victimhood is reminiscent of the conceptualization of victimhood as group-centric, with drawn defense-focused lessons and sociopsychological implications that eventually lead to the construction of perpetual in-group victimhood orientation (Klar, Schori-Eyal, & Klar, 2013).

Historical collective victimhood is also related to the construct of "siege mentality" (Bar-Tal & Antebi, 1992), defined as the mental state in which members of a group hold a central belief that the rest of the world has highly negative behavioral intentions toward them. But siege mentality is an outcome of a shared perception of the history of the group or present events it experiences, a perception that is generalized to encompass the international community at large; as such,

it is a worldview not necessarily anchored in the perception of past trauma, but rather in the negative intentions attributed universally to out-groups.

The second layer of collective victimhood, general conflict victimhood, is more concrete. In contrast to the first layer, general conflict victimhood is related to a specific conflict with a particular rival out-group that is carried in the present. While under some circumstances, it can draw on the first layer of historical victimhood, general conflict victimhood can also appear in societies with little historical background of suffering and harm (e.g., United States in the World War II with Japan). But since our interest focuses on intractable conflicts, it is suggested that in these cases, both sides in conflict view themselves as being the victims in the conflict (Bar-Tal, 2007a, 2013; Frank, 1967). This societal belief, together with other societal beliefs of ethos of conflict², enables the involved societies to meet the challenges of the conflict on the individual and collective levels (Bar-Tal, 2013; Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2013). This construal of the group's situation does not necessitate a background of historical suffering but can be limited to the contemporary conflict alone. General conflict victimhood in situations of intractable conflict is always reflected in competitive victimhood: the efforts of members of groups involved in violent conflicts to establish that their group has suffered more than their enemy (Bar-Tal, Oren, & Nets-Zehngut, 2013; Noor et al., 2012). However, in other cases, general conflict victimhood does not necessarily include the sense of competitiveness, and can be experienced regardless of the element of comparison between in-group and adversarial out-group's suffering. For example, the perception of the in-group as suffering great pain and harm in the course of the conflict is not inevitably tied to comparing it with the out-group's suffering (see, e.g., the case of Russia-Georgia war in 2008—Georgian feeling of general conflict

²Ethos of conflict is defined as the configuration of shared central societal beliefs that provide a particular dominant orientation to a society at present and for the future in the conditions of intractable conflict (Bar-Tal, 2007a, 2007b, 2013). It is composed of eight major themes about issues related to the conflict, the in-group, and its adversary: (1) *societal beliefs about the justness of one's own goals*, which outline the contested goals, indicate their crucial importance, and provide their explanations and rationales; (2) *societal beliefs about security* stress the importance of personal safety and national survival, and outline the conditions for their achievement; (3) *societal beliefs of positive collective self-image* concern the ethnocentric tendency to attribute positive traits, values, and behavior to one's own society; (4) *societal beliefs of victimization* concern the self-presentation of the in-group as the victim of the conflict; (5) *societal beliefs of delegitimizing the opponent* concern beliefs that deny the adversary's humanity; (6) *societal beliefs of patriotism* generate attachment to the country and society, by propagating loyalty, love, care, and sacrifice; (7) *societal beliefs of unity* refer to the importance of ignoring internal conflicts and disagreements during intractable conflicts to unite the society's forces in the face of an external threat; and finally, (8) *societal beliefs of peace* refer to peace as the ultimate desire of the society.

collative victimhood was not related to competition of victimhood with Russia—see Heinrich & Tanaev, 2009). General conflict victimhood is based on the prevailing societal beliefs within the ethos of the specific conflict (e.g., in-group morality, justness of goals). These provide the logical inference on which general conflict victimhood is based—If our goals are just, we are moral and the rival is ruthless aggressor, then we are the victims in this conflict. Nevertheless, in all the cases, general conflict victimhood is related by its nature to blaming the rival for the unjust intentional severe harm.

The third proposed layer, conflict event victimhood, refers to a particular event within a given conflict. Escalations, violent clashes, terror attack(s), and full-blown wars are perceived through the lens of victimhood. The specific event is perceived as one which the in-group suffered severely and unjustly during a distinct act of violence carried out by the enemy out-group. One example is the American perception of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. The attack was described as “premeditated murder masked by a toothy smile . . . The Nation had taken a heavy blow” (*Time Magazine*, December 15, 1941); U.S. President Roosevelt described the attack in his address to the nation on December 8, 1941 as treacherous, “unprovoked and dastardly.” The third layer of victimhood differs from the second in its degree of specificity and in the concreteness of the interpretation of events. Whereas the second layer is a general perception of the conflict and the role of each party in it, the specific perceptions within the third level are associated with specific indications for aggressive actions against the out-group that may lead to retaliation and further escalation. In some cases this level may also to competition over the victimhood, and would always assigning blame of the other side.

Our proposed model of three layers encompasses some elements described in previous works mentioned earlier (Noor, Brown, Gonzalez, Manzi, & Lewis, 2008a; Noor, Brown, & Prentice, 2008b; Noor et al., 2012; Schori-Eyal et al., 2013; Vollhardt, 2012a, 2012b; Wohl & Branscombe, 2008). A central contribution of the present conceptual framework is the clear organizing hierarchical structure of the three layers that allows viewing its mutual interactive influence. In a sense, the proposed framework operates at a meta-theoretical level, with components similar to previous conceptualizations of victimhood as specific mechanisms within each level. This differentiation is necessary to understand better the way collectives think about their histories and present situations in the context of intergroup hurt and trauma, augment their feeling of victimhood, and then form their attitudes and patterns of behavior toward the rival and *vis-à-vis* the international community. This differentiation also bears implications for the in-group processes of socialization through which a sense of collective victimhood is formed (Bar-Tal, 2007b).

As mentioned before, it is possible to a group to experience different combinations of the three layers of victimhood. A group may be imbued with a strong sense of historical wrongdoing that occurred once but was not repeated (such as the Armenian genocide; Hovannisian, 2011), or historical victimhood that is restricted to the past but is not reflected in contemporary intergroup conflicts (as is the case with Poles; e.g., Confino, 2005; Jasińska-Kania, 2007), or experience historical victimhood that still plays a part in the group’s internal and international politics, but not as part of an active, violent conflict (e.g., China; Callahan, 2004; Renwick & Cao, 1999). It is also possible for a group to experience victimhood only in the context of a specific conflict (e.g., American perception of victimhood in the wake of the 9/11/2001 attack on the World Trade Center and the following wars); or to experience both layers simultaneously (e.g., Jewish Israelis’ interlocking layers of historical victimhood, particularly the Holocaust, and the general conflict layer of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict). The third layer is likely to be active during a very limited time frame close to its occurrence, and possibly, but not necessarily, it will be accompanied at least by the second layer of victimhood. In fact, it may reinforce this perception.

The three layers of collective victimhood differ in their level of construal (Lieberman & Trope, 1998). The “lower” tier, the more psychologically distant it is from the group’s current reality, and thus, the more abstract it is. The first layer of victimhood is an amorphous feeling, based on an aggregation of long-term experiences, and conceptualizations of those experiences, which have blended into each other. The second layer is also based on diverse shared events, but those are centered around a particular ongoing, often prolonged conflict. The third layer is the most specific one, and is focused on a single event within the conflict.

We suggest that when more than one layer is present, the more concrete layers are based on the abstract, nonspecific ones. The most general layer would tend to flare and induce more concrete perceptions of victimhood when intergroup conflicts erupt. While the second layer of general conflict victimhood can appear without a foundation of historical enduring victimhood, it is unlikely that the most specific layer would occur without the second layer, more general conflict victimhood. If the group does not perceive itself as the victim in a given conflict, an event within this conflict would need to be of large magnitude (e.g., large number of in-group casualties) to induce a sense of victimhood without the basis or mind-frame of general conflict victimhood. Hence, we expect the three layers to be positively associated but distinct.

The influence the layers exert on one another can potentially be bidirectional; each concrete transgression against the in-group reaffirms and enhances the general perception of the in-group as a victim. Thus, a specific clash between in-group members and rival out-group members not only

triggers the abstract layers of victimhood, but is seen as evidence for the more general, perpetual victim status of victimhood. The three layers feed each other, magnifying and perpetuating the experience of collective victimhood in a vicious cycle. In the present research, we focus on a scenario in which all three layers are present and active, while acknowledging that different circumstances and context can yield a different constellation of victimhood forms. Special focus is given to the possible consequences of collective victimhood at its different interlocking layers.

Effects of collective victimhood

Collective victimhood has been associated with numerous consequences, both on the dynamics within the group and on intergroup interactions (e.g., Noor et al., 2008a, 2008b; Schori-Eyal et al., 2014; Wohl & Branscombe, 2008). Though under some limited conditions, victim beliefs have been suggested to induce caring, empathy and prosocial behavior toward others (Staub & Vollhardt, 2008; Vollhardt, 2009), collective victimhood is more often connected with detrimental effects on intergroup relations. It has been associated with reduced empathy toward other groups (Cehajic, Brown, & Castano, 2008; Chaitin & Steinberg, 2008; Mack, 1990); less willingness to acknowledge the in-group's responsibility for atrocities committed during conflict (Cehajic & Brown, 2009); decreased willingness for intergroup forgiveness and reconciliation (Noor et al., 2008a, 2008b); moral license—the belief that the group is allowed to use whatever means to ensure its safety, with little regard to moral norms (Schori-Eyal et al., 2014); enhancement of societal beliefs in justness of one's own goals in conflict and in delegitimization of the rival (Halperin & Bar-Tal, 2011); and with low group-based guilt (Schori-Eyal et al., 2014; Wohl & Branscombe, 2008). Related in-group perceptions of vulnerability, injustice and distrust are associated with extreme policy preferences, including morally problematic actions (Maoz & Eidelson, 2007).

The work by Wohl and Branscombe (2008) exemplifies current directions and possible limitations in the study of collective victimhood. They examined how reminders of historical victimhood (the Holocaust for Jewish Canadian participants, the Pearl Harbor and 9/11 attacks for American participants) affect group-based guilt for harmful actions done by the in-group (directed against Palestinians and Iraqis, respectively), and found that reminding members of various groups of historical victimization led to decreased group-based guilt. While this research sheds light on the effects of trauma on the dynamic of intergroup conflict, it focuses exclusively on one level of collective victimhood. This pattern characterizes most of the existing studies on collective victimhood, which have not examined the immediate effects of conflict event on collective victimhood and did not

investigate its relations to other described layers of sense of collective victimhood.

Examining the impact of collective victimhood on intergroup conflict, we propose that the different layers can lead to reduced willingness for compromise and to increases support for the use of aggressive military measures. Perceiving the in-group as the unjustly wronged party and the out-group as a savage aggressor combines with belief in the in-group's justness of cause to decrease the willingness for compromise. The idea of making concessions to appease the enemy out-group may seem insufferable to individuals who strongly believe in their group's victimhood.

Collective victimhood can also contribute to the continuation of conflict by promoting conflict escalation (see Bar-Tal, 2013). By weakening the safeguards that ensure proper conduct even during wartime—feelings of guilt and shame (Schori-Eyal et al., 2014; Wohl & Branscombe, 2008), acknowledgment of the in-group's part in the violence and even possible breaches of human rights (Cehajic & Brown, 2009), and empathy toward out-group members (Chaitin & Steinberg, 2008; Shechter & Salomon, 2005; Volkan, 2001)—collective victimhood contributes to greater support in extreme military actions against the out-group. Shifts between layers of collective victimhood can also play a role in increasing aggressiveness against the rival out-group. Two mechanisms can account for this. First, the effects of the different victimhood layers may be additive. When event-related or conflict-related victimhood is aroused, it tends to trigger the more abstract-general layers. The combination of the two layers increases the force of response to the triggering occurrence; the more immediate layer is predominant, with the abstract layer active in the background and adding to the overall sense of collective victimhood.

A second route of influence is related to the level of abstraction. A more concrete sense of collective victimhood, connected to specific circumstances, is likely to lead to more concrete responses. Whereas historical collective victimhood reflects an abstract sense of wrongdoing and injustice, general conflict and conflict event collective victimhood pertain to specific enemies and circumstances. The concreteness of the rival out-group and the threat it poses would lead to similarly concrete retributive actions. The theoretical model is illustrated in Figure 1.

The current studies

The first two studies presented were conducted under unique circumstances, providing an opportunity to empirically examine key phases of an active intractable conflict. The Israeli–Palestinian conflict is particularly suitable for exploring the three layers of collective victimhood, as the Jewish Israeli society is suffused with a strong sense of historical victimhood, perceives itself as a victim in the context of the

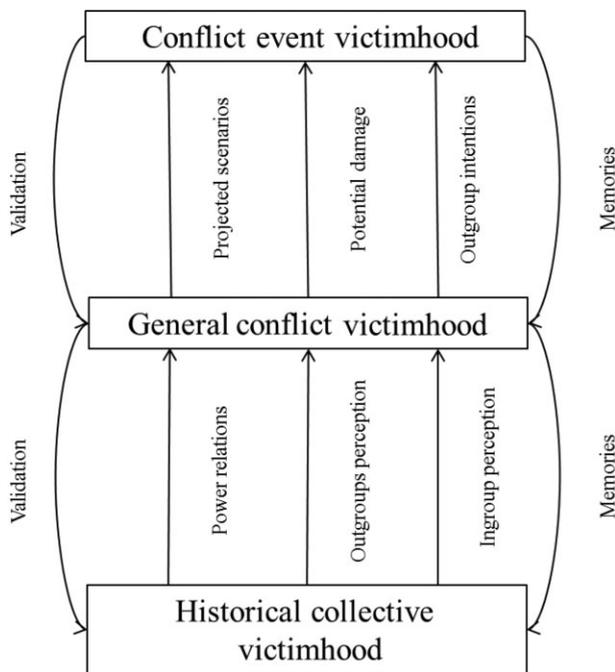


Figure 1 Relations and directions of influence between layers of collective victimhood.

intractable conflict with the Palestinians, and frequently experiences violent encounters which are a fertile ground for conflict event victimhood (see Bar-Tal, 2007b). With regard to the historical level, the transmitted Jewish history shows that from the destruction of the Second Temple and the beginning of the forced exile in the Roman era, through the Middle Ages, the Reformation, and the Industrial Revolution until the present, Jews have consistently and continuously been victims (Liebman, 1978). Throughout this long history, they have experienced unjust persecution, libel, social taxation, restriction, forced conversion, expulsion, and pogroms (e.g., Grosser & Halperin, 1979; Poliakov, 1974). At the second layer of general conflict victimhood, Israeli Jews view themselves as being the victims of the conflict because in their view, Arabs initiated the violent conflict in the beginning of the 20th century, launched indiscriminate attacks on the civilian Jewish population, started the wars, and carried terror attacks throughout the years the conflict (Bar-Tal, 2007b). Dozens of specific conflictive events are also presented this way in history books describing the conflict (Podeh, 2002).

In the first study, we explored the relationship between historical collective victimhood and general conflict victimhood, and their effect on willingness for compromise. In the second study, we investigated the effect of general conflict and conflict event collective victimhood on attitudes of Jewish Israelis toward the wide-scale harm inflicted upon the

Palestinians in Gaza during a large-scale military operation that took place in late 2008. In Study 3, we designed and tested new scales for the three layers, and then examined their interrelations and tested models similar to the ones in the first two studies.

Study 1

Sense of collective victimhood can affect conflict resolution. One source of deleterious influence arises from the fact that collective victimhood is negatively associated with out-group trust, and thus decreases the chances of intergroup forgiveness (Noor et al., 2008b). Whereas Noor and his colleagues explored forgiveness in the context of the Northern Ireland conflict, as an aspect of reconciliation in a relatively resolved conflict, we investigate the impact of collective victimhood on willingness for compromise in the pre-resolution phase of the peace making process. We argue that collective victimhood, often accompanied by feelings of threat and mistrust (Chaitin & Steinberg, 2008; Montville, 1991; Rotella, Richeson, Chiao, & Bean, 2013; Wohl, Branscombe, & Reysen, 2010; Volkan, 2001), decreases individuals' willingness for compromise. Compromise may seem as risking the in-group's safety through giving ground to an untrustworthy opponent; at a more basic level, it may seem unfair for a society that already views itself as the unjustly harmed party to make further concessions that would benefit its enemy.

In terms of the interplay between the different layers, we suggest that the relationship between historical collective victimhood and (un)willingness to make compromises is mediated by a particular perception of collective victimhood, specific to the context of a current ongoing conflict. While historical victimhood lays the ground for a sense of having been wronged, thus entitled to favorable treatment, general conflict victimhood directly relates to the enemy in question. As the particular enemy is perceived as the aggressor who is currently harming the in-group, individuals characterized by high levels of general conflict victimhood are expected to be less willing to accommodate that enemy. Making concessions is viewed as unbearable not only because of the ongoing sense of historical victimhood, but because the specific rival/negotiation partner is perceived as responsible for the unjustified suffering and pain within the current conflict.

Method

Sampling and sample characteristics

A nationwide representative survey was conducted among Jews in Israel during the ongoing negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, in a period of relative calm with few acts of hostilities. Phone interviews were conducted by an experienced and computerized survey

Table 1 Zero-Order Correlations Between Two Types of Collective Victimhood, Willingness for Compromise, and Background Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Historical collective victimhood ($M = 4.30, SD = 1.57$)						
2. General conflict collective victimhood ($M = 4.03, SD = 1.57$)	.49**					
3. Willingness for compromise ($M = 2.55, SD = 1.69$)	-.35**	-.51**				
4. Sex	.05	.00	.00			
5. Income	-.20**	-.26**	.22**	.08		
6. Level of education	-.12**	-.17**	.15**	.00	.10	
7. Political orientation	-.35**	-.46**	.61**	.06	.13**	.06

** $p < .01$.

institute in Israel (the Dialogue Institute) hired by the researchers to carry out the survey. At the onset of the interview, oral informed consent was obtained. A random sampling within stratified subgroups was used to obtain a representative sample of Jews living in Israel at the time of the survey. Interviews were conducted by fluent speakers of Hebrew or Russian. The order of the questions throughout the entire questionnaire was counterbalanced, and there was no effect of order.

Participants

The final interviewed sample included 500 individuals (246 men, 254 women) who could be reached and who agreed to participate, yielding a final cooperation rate of 50%. The mean age of the participants was 45.5 years ($SD = 16.49$), and the distribution of main sociodemographic variables represented that of the Israeli Jewish adult population at the time of the survey (Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, 2008). Respondents were from all geographic regions of Israel. Regarding political orientations, 41% of the respondents defined themselves as rightists, 29.2% as centrist, and 18% as dovish (11.8% refused to answer that question). Participants responded to multiple questions touching on several subjects. The relevant measures are described in the following section.

Measures

Due to the limitations on the nationwide phone survey, one or two items were used to measure the different variables.

Historical collective victimhood

Historical collective victimhood was assessed by asking participants to use a 1 (*not at all*) to 6 (*very much*) Likert scale to rate how much they agreed with the following general statement: "The history of the Jewish people is characterized by consistent threat to its existence." As Jews in Israel very often present themselves as having been victimized throughout their history, this item is understood to reflect unjust threat by non-Jews to their existence; in other words, as being unjustly harmed through the centuries.

General conflict collective victimhood

Collective victimhood related to the current (Israeli–Arab) conflict was assessed by asking participants to respond on the same scale to the statement "Throughout the years of the conflict, Israel is the victim and the Arabs and Palestinians are the perpetrators."

Willingness for compromise

Willingness for compromise was assessed using two items, each representing a unique aspect of potential Israeli compromise within the upcoming negotiations about key issues. Participants were asked to indicate to what extent (1—*not at all*, 6—*very much*) they support each of two compromises: territorial compromise and symbolic compromise about the status of Jerusalem. The internal reliability of the scale was $\alpha = .82$ and greater scores indicated higher willingness for compromise.

Sociopolitical information was obtained regarding participants' sex, income, level of education, and political orientation.

Results

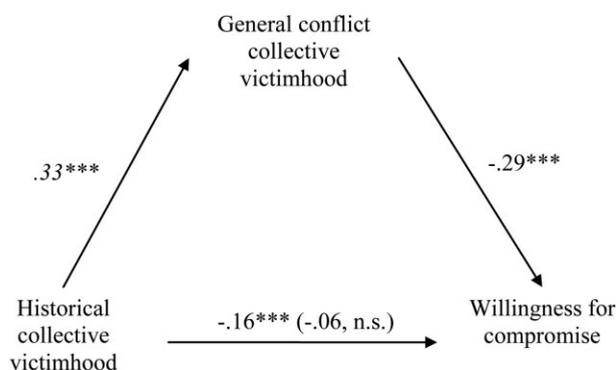
First, we note that the historical collective victimhood ($M = 4.30, SD = 1.57$) and general conflict victimhood ($M = 4.03, SD = 1.57$) were both on the higher end of the scale. Zero-order correlations between study variables were analyzed (Table 1). The two layers of collective victimhood were moderately correlated ($r = .49, p < .01$), but did not exceed critical value of .7, which is the accepted level for multicollinearity (Bagozzi, Yi, & Phillips, 1991). Willingness for compromise was quite low ($M = 2.55, SD = 1.69$). Results supported our hypotheses: the higher participants' sense of collective victimhood, both historical and general conflict related, the less they supported compromise with the Palestinians.

We then conducted a hierarchical regression analysis to examine the contribution of the two layers of collective victimhood to predicting willingness for compromise. In the first step, we entered historical collective victimhood,

Table 2 Two Layers of Collective Victimhood as Predictors of Support for Compromise

	B	SE	β	r^2	F change
Step 1				.40	90.59***
Historical collective victimhood	-.16	.05	-.14**		
Religiosity	.15	.05	.11**		
Political orientation	.65	.06	.52***		
Step 2				.45	33.55***
Historical collective victimhood	-.06	.05	-.06		
General conflict collective victimhood	.12	.05	-.09*		
Religiosity	.54	.06	.42***		
Political orientation	-.29	.05	-.26***		

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

**Figure 2** Direct and indirect effects of collective victimhood on willingness for compromise in Study 1. *** $p < .001$.

religiosity, and political orientation (Table 2, left column). Historical collective victimhood predicted willingness for compromise above and beyond background variables. In the second step, we added general conflict collective victimhood (Table 2, right column). The addition of the difference between measurements increased the explanatory power of the model (delta $r^2 = .05$, $p < .01$). A sense of collective victimhood related to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict predicted willingness for compromise. More importantly, when general conflict victimhood was added to the model, historical victimhood ceased to be a significant predictor.

Finally, we used the Preacher and Hayes's (2008) bootstrapping technique with 5,000 iterations to determine whether the indirect effect of historical collective victimhood on compromises via general conflict victimhood, was significantly different than zero (see Figure 2). We controlled for religiosity and political orientation in the analysis. The indirect effect was estimated to lie between $-.14$ and $-.06$ with 95% confidence. Because zero is not in the 95% confidence interval, the indirect effect is indeed significantly different

from zero at $p < .05$ (two tailed). Thus, general conflict victimhood mediates the effect of historical collective victimhood on compromise.

Discussion

Results of Study 1 supported our hypotheses. We found that the more group members experience a historical sense of collective victimhood, the less they were willing for compromises to end a current conflict. The effect was mediated by collective victimhood related to the ongoing conflict with the Palestinians, which unlike the historical sense of having been continuously victimized relates directly to the perception of the out-group embroiled in the conflict as the unjust perpetrator.

The data collected in a nationwide representative survey provides support for the difference and relationship, hitherto little discussed, between historical collective victimhood and general conflict collective victimhood. Historical collective victimhood is associated with decreased group members' willingness to make compromises that allow peaceful resolution of the ongoing conflict. The effect is mediated by translating the broad historical sense of victimhood, not anchored in any particular conflict or enemy, into a sense of collective victimhood related to a rival out-group in a current conflict. The latter sense of collective victimhood is fueled by the historical sense of victimhood that is carried through generations, and the effect of historical victimhood on compromise is mediated by collective victimhood pertaining to the current conflict. The bidirectionality of the two layers is evinced by the fact that the reverse mediation model (historical victimhood mediates the effect between general conflict victimhood and willingness for compromise) is also significant. This implies that while general conflict victimhood draws on the historical sense of unjust persecution for its association to a decreased willingness for compromise, so does a contemporary conflict and its experiences of unfair suffering feed into historical victimhood and expands it.

Another important aspect of the findings is that the predictive power of collective victimhood on compromise is above and beyond political attitudes. The association between political attitudes and willingness to compromise is very strong in Israel, with "leftists" leaning toward compromise and "rightists" opposing it (Arian, 1995). Furthermore, one's attitude about compromises is what defines political ideology in Israel. The fact that collective victimhood predicts readiness to compromise beyond political attitudes makes it an even more intriguing factor in intergroup conflicts.

The nature of the study design used posed some limitations on the items employed. The use of single-item measure for historical group victimhood, while enabling us to tap a valuable sample, affected the degree of accuracy that could be achieved. Though the single item used may be seen to reflect

ongoing threat, which could induce different emotional responses, albeit a similar desire to strengthen the in-group (Wohl et al., 2010). We believe that as in the course of Jewish history, most such threats came to be realized, the item is interpreted not as threat but rather as its culmination. But in light of this possible alternative interpretation of the item, in the following studies, we attempted a cleared distinction between threat and its realization.

Study 2

While Study 1 focused on the effects of historical collective victimhood and general conflict victimhood on willingness for compromise, this study focuses on a different political action tendency: the use of aggressive military measures against an enemy out-group, including means verging on violation of human rights. We were able not only to examine the impact of general conflict collective victimhood on people's support for the employment of such means during a real-time large military operation, but also to study how changes in the perception of collective victimhood affected the level of this support. Previous studies conducted in the Israeli–Palestinian context have shown that the effect of terror on attitudes regarding peace varies according to ideological orientations and the transitional context in which terror occurs (Sharvit, Bar-Tal, Raviv, Raviv, & Gurevich, 2010). We similarly investigated the effects of context, but focusing on the different layers of collective victimhood.

General conflict collective victimhood measured in this study reflects both the perception of the in-group as a victim within the conflict and the competition over the victim status, which often develops between the rival groups (Noor et al., 2008b, 2012). The party that wins this status is assured international support and often financial aid, as the international community tends to assist groups that are perceived as victims. It also mobilizes internal support and can increase group cohesion.

We suggest that when collective victimhood is flavored with competitiveness (as in the case of the competitive victimhood construct; Noor et al., 2008a, 2008b), the struggle over the status of sole victim can enhance aggressiveness and lead to the employment of harsher means against the rival out-group. When the in-group is viewed as the exclusive victim and the out-group is perceived only as a dangerous, aggressive adversary, the felt need for self-defense increases and extreme means are deemed justified to protect the in-group (Bar-Tal & Hammack, 2012). It is suggested that conflict escalation would lead to an increase in the perception of the group as a victim within the conflict (second-layer collective victimhood), which would predict support in aggressive military actions against the rival out-group. Conflict escalation would also lead to a

sense of collective victimhood in the context of the specific violent event (third-layer collective victimhood), resulting greater support for aggressive military actions (Bar-Tal et al., 2009).

We investigated how general conflict collective victimhood affected the attitudes of Jewish Israelis toward the extensive damage incurred by the Palestinians in Gaza during a large military operation (December 2008–January 2009). Participants responded to a survey 1 year prior to the operation, in which they were asked about their sense of collective victimhood related to the ongoing conflict, and again at the height of the military action. Two measures of collective victimhood were tested as predictors of support for extreme military acts, each tapping into a different layer of the general construct: general conflict victimhood, measured during the military operation and one year prior to it; and conflict event victimhood pertaining to the specific escalation.

We expect differences in levels of general conflict victimhood before and during the escalation to predict support for extremely aggressive military actions. We also suggest that the effect of general conflict victimhood on support for military actions would be mediated through conflict event victimhood. The perception of the in-group as the inculpable victim of the specific attack by a brutal and unjust opponent would mediate support for extreme military actions in response to the escalation.

Method

General overview

We conducted a two-wave panel study in which the same participants were contacted (via phone) at two points of time. Phone interviews were conducted by an experienced and computerized survey institute in Israel, hired by the researchers to carry out the study. Participants were first contacted in November 2007, and again in January 2009. The first wave took place during a relatively calm period in which Israel and the Palestinians were involved in continuous negotiations. The second wave took place during an upsurge of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict at the end of 2008, which included a large Israeli military “Cast Lead” operation in Gaza and heavy missile attacks on Southern Israel by the Palestinians. The confrontation began after a 6 month ceasefire between Israel and the Hamas movement ruling the Gaza Strip disintegrated in December 2008 and missile attacks against civilian areas inside Israel intensified. Israel then launched a wide-scale offensive in the Gaza strip that led to about 1,300 Palestinian casualties, 13 Israeli casualties, and mass destruction on the Palestinian properties. The second wave of the panel study was conducted during the period of violent confrontation.

Participants

Wave I

501 Jewish Israelis (248 men, 253 women) who could be reached and who agreed to participate on a voluntary basis took part in the first wave. The mean age of the participants was 45.5 years ($SD = 16.49$), and the distribution of main sociodemographic variables represented that of the Israeli–Jewish adult population at the time of the survey (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2008). Regarding political orientations, 46.3% of the respondents defined themselves as rightists, 23.2% as centrist, and 18.4% as leftists (12.2% refused to answer that question). Respondents were from all geographic regions of Israel, including the south of Israel and the area surrounding the Gaza strip.

Wave II

The second wave included 201 respondents from Wave I (101 men and 100 women; 40.1% of the first assessment). Participants were contacted and reinterviewed a week after the military operation was commenced. It should be noted that during the large-scale operation, some Israeli men and women were recruited to reserve army service, while many others came under missile attacks or left their homes for other reasons, thus making the task of reinterviewing the Wave I sample very difficult. Previous research suggests that participation rates between 30% and 70% are, at most, weakly associated with sampling bias (Galea & Tracy, 2007). Regarding political orientation, 45.3% of respondents defined themselves as rightists, 22.9% as centrist, and 21.4% as leftists (10.4% refused to answer that question). More details on the survey can be found in Halperin and Gross (2011). Participants responded to multiple questions touching on several subjects. The relevant measures are described in the following section.

Measures

Wave I

General conflict collective victimhood was assessed by asking participants to use a 1 (*not at all*) to 6 (*very much*) Likert-type scale to rate how much they agreed with the following statement: “the Palestinians have been victims of the conflict just as much as the Jews”, unrelated to any specific event. The item was reversed. The reversed item reflects both the participants’ perception of the in-group as a victim and a degree of competitiveness in belittling out-group suffering.

We also obtained data on relevant sociopolitical information: educational attainment (1 = *elementary*, 5 = *BA or higher*); gender (1 = *men*, 2 = *women*); religious definition (1 = *secular*, 5 = *ultra orthodox*); and self-definition of political orientation (1 = *extreme dovish*, to 5 = *extreme hawkish*).

Wave II

The general conflict collective victimhood item in Wave I was presented again and was still phrased nonspecifically, without referring to the military operation going on at the time. In addition to general conflict collective victimhood, we also measured conflict event collective victimhood reflected in perceptions of Palestinian intentions with regard to the ongoing escalation: “The Palestinians’ true intention is to inflict as much harm and damage as possible on Israel” and “Israel did all it could to maintain the ceasefire, but Hamas chose to violate it” ($\alpha = .64$). Participants were asked to respond to these statements explicitly in relation to the then-ongoing fighting. The two statements reflect different nuances of the victimhood perception—the evil intentions of the out-group, and the peaceful intentions of the in-group. These items were measured on a Likert-type scale of 1 (*not at all*) to 6 (*very much*). It is important to note that while the general conflict victimhood item was introduced prior to a reminder of the war events, the two items of Palestinian intentions were presented after asking participants to think about recent events.

Support for aggressive military actions against the Palestinians was assessed by asking participants to use a 1 (*not at all*) to 6 (*very much*) Likert-type scale to rate the degree to which they supported the following actions: “cut off power, food and water supply for inhabitants of the Gaza strip”; and “‘wipe out’ entire neighborhoods in Gaza using the Israeli air force” ($r = .44, p < .01$).

Results

Preliminary analysis

To make sure that no dropout bias occurred in the second wave, a logistic regression was used to predict attrition by sex, level of education, political orientation, religiosity and level of family income. None of these possible predictors had significant effects (all $ps > .45$). Preliminary analyses also showed that the level of general conflict victimhood was significantly higher during the military operation than 13 months before the operation. The general conflict victimhood item increased from 3.71 (1.78) to 4.09 (1.73); $t(187) = 2.32, p = .021$. During the operation in the Gaza strip, respondents exhibited high levels of collective victimhood related to the specific escalation ($M = 5.36, SD = 1.04$) and were fairly supportive of aggressive military actions against the Palestinians ($M = 3.92, SD = 1.58$).

We examined the correlations between the variables (Table 3). General conflict collective victimhood (T1 and T2) was positively correlated with support of aggressive military actions in the Gaza strip during the “Cast Lead” operation, including actions targeting civilians. Participants who viewed

Table 3 Zero-Order Correlations General Conflict Collective Victimhood in T1 and T2, Support for Military Actions, and Background Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. T1 general conflict victimhood ($M = 3.26, SD = 1.76$)								
2. T2 general conflict victimhood ($M = 2.92, SD = 1.73$)	.21**							
3. Change in general conflict victimhood ($M = .37, SD = 2.20$)	.64 **	-.61 **						
4. Conflict event collective victimhood ($M = 5.36, SD = 1.04$)	-.20**	-.23**	.03					
5. Support for military actions ($M = 3.92, SD = 1.58$)	-.26**	-.28**	.03	.38**				
6. Sex	.05	-.01	.01	-.03	.02			
7. Level of education	.02	.09	-.12	.00	-.07	.00		
8. Religiosity	.27**	.27**	.03	-.12	-.29**	-.13**	.12**	
9. Political orientation	.23**	.21**	.11	-.19**	-.29**	.00	.10*	.34**

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 4 Change in General Conflict Collective Victimhood as a Predictor of Support for Military Actions

	B	SE	β	r^2	F change
Step 1				.12	7.40***
General conflict collective victimhood (T1)	.13	.07	.15*		
Religiosity	-.16	.08	-.15*		
Political orientation	-.14	.06	-.18*		
Education level	-.12	.07	-.13†		
Step 2				.15	7.07**
General conflict collective victimhood (T1)	.29	.09	.33***		
Difference in collective victimhood between T1 and T2	-.17	.06	-.24**		
Religiosity	-.12	.08	-.11		
Political orientation	-.12	.06	-.15*		
Education level	-.11	.07	.11		

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$. † $p < .1$.

their in-group as the greater victim within the current escalation were more supportive of aggressive military actions against the enemy out-group. General conflict victimhood was positively associated with religiosity and right-wing political orientation. The more religious and right-wing the participants, the more they supported aggressive military actions.

How do changes in general conflict collective victimhood affect support for extreme military actions?

We then conducted a two-step analysis of the data to test whether the increase in general conflict collective victimhood contributed to predicting support for extreme military actions. In the first step of the regression presented in Table 4, support of aggressive military actions during the operation (Wave 2) was regressed on general conflict collective victimhood and background variables measured during Wave 1 (13 months before). As shown in Table 4 (left column), general conflict collective victimhood (T1) was a

significant predictor of support of extreme military actions. The more people perceived their group as a victim and denied the out-group's victimhood, the more they supported extreme military actions. Political orientation was also a significant predictor on the expected direction.

In the second step of the regression (Table 4, right column), the difference between general conflict collective victimhood during T1 and T2 was entered into the equation together with the measures assessed in Wave 1. The addition of the difference between measurements increased the explanatory power of the model (delta $r^2 = .03, p < .01$). Results imply that the increase in general conflict collective victimhood during the military operation predicted support for extreme military actions against rival out-group members above and beyond the baseline general conflict collective victimhood and background variables such as political orientation.

Conflict event collective victimhood as a mediator of support for extreme military actions

Finally, we examined whether conflict event collective victimhood, reflected by a perception of the enemy out-group as belligerent and intent upon harming the in-group within a current clash, affects the relationship between general conflict collective victimhood and support for extreme military actions. We used the Preacher and Hayes's (2008) bootstrapping technique with 5,000 iterations to determine whether the indirect effect of changes in general conflict victimhood on support for military actions via conflict event victimhood, was significantly different than zero, while controlling for conflict-related victimhood in T1. The indirect effect was estimated to lie between .05 and .17 with 95% confidence. Because zero is not in the 95% confidence interval, the indirect effect is indeed significantly different from zero at $p < .05$ (two tailed). The relationship is illustrated in Figure 3.

We also tested for bidirectionality of the proposed mediation. Using the same methodology, we tested the indirect effect of conflict event victimhood on support for military

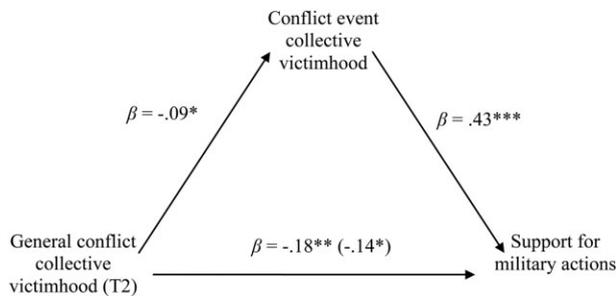


Figure 3 Direct and indirect effects of collective victimhood support for military actions in Study 2. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

actions via changes in general conflict victimhood, controlling for conflict-related victimhood in T1. The indirect effect was estimated to lie between .01 and .14 with 95% confidence. This indicates that the mediation is bidirectional.

Discussion

Results of Study 2 support our hypotheses. We found that general conflict collective victimhood increases during time of conflict escalation, and the changes predict support for aggressive military acts. The relationship between general conflict collective victimhood and support for military acts is significantly affected by conflict event collective victimhood directly related to the current escalation in conflict.

The longitudinal design of the study had important methodological advantages, mainly the ability to examine patterns of continuity and change over time. It also allowed us to examine the relation between a proposed antecedent (general conflict victimhood) and an outcome (specific response to a subsequent escalation). The increase in general conflict collective victimhood during a violent escalation is not surprising. More interesting is the predictive power of the increase in support of the extreme military actions. The results imply that during a violent upsurge of conflict, people are less willing, or even unable to perceive the rival out-group as a victim, regardless of damage it incurs. This reduced capacity of acknowledging the other's pain and suffering contributes to the unidimensional perception of a rival out-group as an aggressive enemy, hell-bent on harming the in-group. When people are unable to perceive the out-group as a potential victim of the conflict, it is much easier to endorse militant acts against all members of the group, including civilians, as all are seen as responsible for the in-group's own suffering. The role the changes in perceived victimhood illustrate the dynamic nature of collective victimhood, and how escalations and rising hostilities affect its contribution to the continuation of conflict. An increased sense of general collective victimhood may feed conflict event victimhood, thus inflating the overall

sense of wrongdoing and leading to more extreme responses. The specific events can also be assimilated into the sense of general conflict victimhood and increase it, another route in which the interplay of the different layers can increase support for aggressive military actions. By examining how conflict dynamics affect collective victimhood and its outcomes, this study provides a better understanding of the changing impact of the victimhood construct.

The two studies provided preliminary support for the three-layer notion of victimhood. While the samples were representative, the nature of large-scale phone surveys limited the number of questions and thus the conclusions that can be drawn from the results. In both studies, we relied on single-item measures on some of the main variables; in the second study, we also used a reverse-scored item, which may raise concern regarding how participants responded to such a statement. We therefore proceeded to compose three scales for the three layers, which were tested in Study 3. We also examined the relations between the three new scales and their association with several conflict-related outcomes.

Study 3

The goal of Study 3 was to develop and test new scales to measure the three layers of victimhood. We examined the interrelations between the three scales and their distinctive contribution to predicting conflict-related outcomes similar to those used in the previous two studies. We also tested mediation models in an attempt to replicate the findings of Studies 1 and 2.

Method

Participants and procedure

213 Jewish Israeli participants responded to an Internet questionnaire in exchange for approximately \$2 (Midgam Project web site: <http://www.midgampanel.com/research/en/index.asp>). We defined *a priori* a sample of 200 Jewish Israeli participants between the ages 18 and 65. Invitations were sent to 900 respondents who met these criteria out of approximately 25,000 users registered to this Midgam project. When the quota was filled, the survey was closed to additional respondents. The sample included 107 men and 106 women, age range: 18–64, $M = 39.32$, $SD = 13.44$. Regarding political orientations, 52.5% of the respondents defined themselves as rightists, 29.4% as centrist, and 18.1% as dovish (4.2% refused to answer that question).

Measures

Based on the theoretical conceptualization of the three layers of collective victimhood, new scales were developed. Seven items tapping into the theoretical construct were composed

Table 5 Principal Components Analysis, with Varimax Rotation, for Collective Victimhood Items

Collective victimhood item	Factor loading Factor 1 historical victimhood	Factor loading Factor 2 general conflict victimhood	Factor loading Factor 3 conflict event victimhood
1. Throughout our history as a people, we have been harmed many times without provocation.	.76	.15	.09
2. Many enemies persecuted us throughout the years.	.72	.31	.23
3. We have often been at a disadvantage in our relations with other groups.	.76	-.01	.05
4. The history of our people is characterized by ongoing existential threat.	.21	.46	.44
5. The Israelis have been harmed much more than the Palestinians during the conflict.	.12	.81	.22
6. The long-standing conflict with the Palestinians is not our fault.	.15	.77	.14
7. No matter what Israel does, the Palestinians will always want to harm and hurt us.	.06	.83	.29
8. The Palestinians have been victims of the conflict as much as the Israelis. (reverse score)	-.12	-.55	.04
9. Despite Israel's desire for peace, the Palestinians forced it to go to war again and again.	.10	.74	.35
10. Throughout the years of the conflict, the Palestinians wanted to annihilate us.	.09	.79	.34
11. Jews suffered unjustified Palestinian violence throughout the conflict	.10	.80	.36
12. Israel did not initiate the event but only responded to Palestinian aggression.	.04	.42	.63
13. Israel's actions in the event were aimed only at self-defense.	.09	.54	.56
14. Israel did all it could to maintain calm at the border with the Gaza strip, but the Palestinians chose escalation.	.05	.59	.62
15. The Palestinians harmed innocent civilians in the towns around Gaza.	.11	.09	.82
16. Citizens' lives became hell because of rockets launching from Gaza.	.20	.05	.83
17. Even after the operation, the Palestinians in Gaza will continue to attack us unjustifiably.	.07	.38	.63

Notes. Values in bold denote criteria that correspond to each factor. Factor 1 eigenvalue = 1.41, percent of variance = 8.30%. Factor 2 eigenvalue = 7.87, percent of variance = 46.26%. Factor 3 eigenvalue = 1.57, percent of variance = 9.23%.

for each layer. The themes represented in the scales reflect the theoretical constructs we presented in the beginning of the paper, as well as core aspects of existing victimhood measures. Some themes were represented by items at all layers: the in-group is blameless; the in-group acts in self-defense; the suffering of in-group is greater than that of the out-group; the out-group has malign intentions and wishes to harm the in-group. The recurrence of victimhood in the layer of historical victimhood was a concept that was represented only in the historical victimhood layer. All response items ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Items that did not load correctly on the layer they represented were later excluded. In the case of cross-loadings, we either excluded the item or assigned it to the appropriate layer. The full final scale is presented in Table 5.

Historical collective victimhood

Four items were used to assess participants' perception of the in-group's historical victimhood ($\alpha = .63$).

General conflict victimhood

Seven items were used to assess participants' perception of collective victimhood in the current conflict ($\alpha = .80$).

Conflict event victimhood

Participants read the following description: "During November 2012 Palestinians fired over 1,500 rockets at Southern Israel. At the same time Israel initiated 'Cloud Pillar' operation in the Gaza Strip, during which it heavily bombarded the Strip, including inhabited regions." They were then asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement with six items related to the event. $\alpha = .86$.

Event aggression justification

Five items were used to assess participants' aggression justification in the context of the November 2012 events ($\alpha = .82$). This outcome variable was designed to be similar to the one used in Study 2 for the purpose of testing a similar model to the one used in the previous study.

Willingness for compromise

Six items were used to assess participants' willingness to reach compromise with the Palestinians ($\alpha = .86$). This outcome variable was designed to be similar to the one used in Study 1 for the purpose of replication.

Results

We submitted all collective victimhood items to a principal component factor analysis with varimax (orthogonal) rotation. Three factors had eigenvalues of one or greater, and this three-factor solution accounted for 63.79% of the overall variance. All loadings were higher than .5, with the exception of one item. Cross-loadings were lower than .4 with the exception of four items³. The correlation between historical victimhood and general conflict victimhood was $r = .47$. The correlation between historical victimhood and conflict event victimhood was $r = .47$. The correlation between general conflict victimhood and conflict event victimhood was $r = .70$.

Next, we proceeded to test a model similar to the model presented in Study 1. We used the Preacher and Hayes's (2008) bootstrapping technique with 5,000 iterations to determine whether the indirect effect of historical collective victimhood on compromises via general conflict victimhood, controlling for political orientation, was significantly different than zero (Figure 4). The indirect effect was estimated to lie between $-.19$ and $-.01$ with 95% confidence. Because zero is not in the 95% confidence interval, the indirect effect is indeed significantly different from zero at $p < .05$ (two tailed). Thus, general conflict victimhood mediates the effect of historical collective victimhood on compromise. We also tested for the reverse direction of mediation (the indirect effect of general conflict victimhood on willingness for compromise via historical victimhood). The indirect effect was estimated to lie between $-.02$ and $.12$ with 95% confidence. Because zero is included in the confidence interval, the indirect effect was insignificant. Bidirectional mediation was not found.

We then tested a model similar to the one presented in Study 2. We examined whether conflict event collective victimhood mediates the relationship between general conflict collective victimhood and aggression justification (a

³One item in the historical victimhood layer (the history of our people is characterized by ongoing existential threat) had a loading of .21 on the historical victimhood layer and a loading of .44 on general conflict layer. It was included in the first layer because it conceptually represents historical victimhood, and because it was used in Study 1. Three items in the conflict event victimhood layer (Israel did not initiate the event but only responded to Palestinian aggression; Israel's actions in the event were aimed only at self-defense; Israel did all it could to maintain calm at the border with the Gaza strip, but the Palestinians chose escalation) had cross-loadings over .4 on the general conflict victimhood layer. Because these items explicitly refer to a specific event and because they had stronger loadings on conflict event victimhood they were used in the conflict event layer.

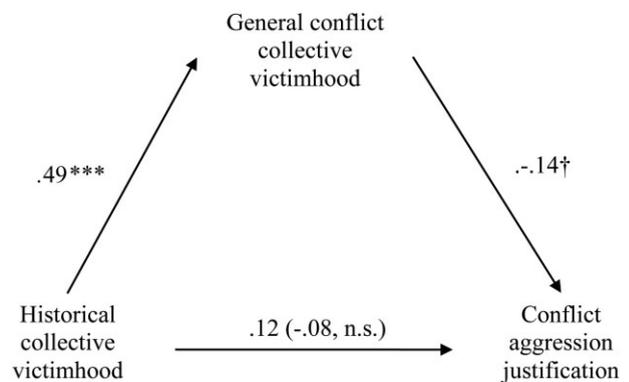


Figure 4 Direct and indirect effects of collective victimhood on conflict aggression justification in Study 3. † $p < .1$. *** $p < .001$.

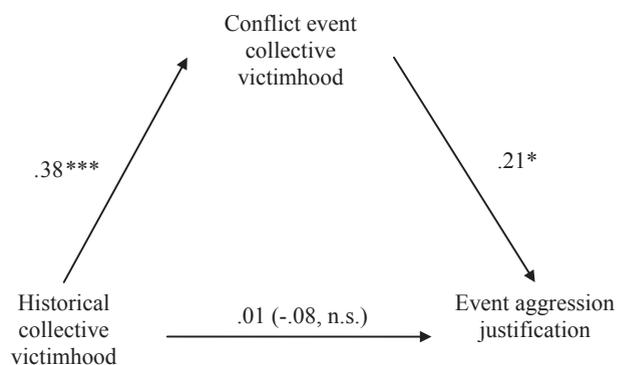


Figure 5 Direct and indirect effects of collective victimhood on event aggression justification in Study 3. * $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

measure similar to the measure of support for extreme military actions used in Study 2). We used the Preacher and Hayes's (2008) bootstrapping technique with 5,000 iterations to determine whether the indirect effect of general conflict victimhood on aggression justification via conflict event victimhood, controlling for political orientation, was significantly different than zero. The indirect effect was estimated to lie between $.02$ and $.18$ with 95% confidence. Because zero is not in the 95% confidence interval, the indirect effect is significantly different from zero at $p < .05$ (two tailed). The relationship is illustrated in Figure 5. We also tested for the reverse mediation model, for the indirect effect of conflict event victimhood on aggression justification via historical victimhood. The indirect effect was estimated to lie between $-.07$ and $.07$ with 95% confidence, indicating that the reverse indirect effect is nonsignificant.

Discussion

In this study, we created and tested new scales for the three layers of collective victimhood. Factor analysis revealed three

distinct constructs, despite some cross-loadings. A possible explanation for the cross-loadings is that participants did not pay sufficient attention to the fact that the items referred to a specific event, and answered items like “Israel did not initiate the event but only responded to Palestinian aggression” as though they were a general statement pertaining to the entire Israeli–Palestinian conflict. In future application of the scale, the name of the event should be used whenever possible to emphasize that the item pertains to a specific occurrence.

While the new scales may not be flawless, the results still provide support for our theoretical model. The cross-loadings occur in very few items, and the fit with the conceptual layers is altogether a very good one. In the future, testing the scales in additional contexts and populations would enable us to get a more accurate sense of whether certain items may be removed while maintaining the theoretical integrity of the construct.

We found that more concrete layers of victimhood mediated the relationships between historical victimhood and the corresponding level of outcome. General conflict victimhood mediated the relationship between historical victimhood and willingness for compromise in the context of the conflict. Conflict event victimhood mediated the relationship between historical victimhood and aggression justification in response to the specific event.

The bidirectionality of the influence between the layers, found in Study 1, was not replicated. Although bidirectionality is possible within the theoretical model, the empirical findings do not offer strong support for it. The conditions for the bidirectionality of influence should be explored in future research.

General discussion

Sociopsychological research has elucidated the importance of the sense of collective victimhood, which is a dominant self-perception in violent intergroup conflicts (Bar-Tal, 2007a, 2013; Bar-Tal et al., 2009; Eidelson & Eidelson, 2003; Noor et al., 2008b; Schori-Eyal et al., 2014). We introduced an expanded framework of three layers of collective victimhood, and demonstrated their effects on views of the conflict and the violent confrontations it entails. In Study 1, historical collective victimhood predicted willingness for compromise. The higher participants' sense of historical collective victimhood, the less willing they were to accept possible compromise by their group in order to resolve a current intergroup conflict. The relationship was mediated by general conflict victimhood. In Study 2, the sense of general conflict collective victimhood was higher during violent escalation compared with a calmer period, and change in the level of victimhood predicted support for aggressive military actions during the operation. The relationship was mediated by conflict event victimhood. In Study 3, new scales were developed

to measure the three layers. The relationships between the new scales and their associations with outcome variables were very similar to the findings of the two previous studies.

A central contribution of the present research is the conceptualization of collective victimhood as a multilayered construct. A few previous studies examined different levels of collective victimhood: for example, how group-based guilt is affected by event-related collective victimhood (Wohl & Branscombe, 2008) or by constructing a concept similar to historical general collective victimhood (PIVO; Schori-Eyal et al., 2014); others distinguished between conflict-specific and global victim beliefs (Vollhardt, 2012b) or focused on the comparison between in-group and out-group victimhood (Noor et al., 2008b; Shnabel, Halabi, & Noor, 2013). However, the explicit distinction between all three layers, the conceptual difference, the mutual interactive relationship and the examination of how the different layers affect various aspects of conflict have not been made before. In our view, it is essential to distinguish among the three layers because of their different nature and their effects on collective views and behaviors.

Several aspects of the present set of studies are worth noting.

The studies were conducted in the context of an active conflict, seizing the ebb and flow of intractable conflict and its influence on perceptions of victimhood. Conducting studies both immediately before advanced negotiations and during violent escalation enabled us to capture changes in collective victimhood and its effects during critical stages of the conflict. The representative nature of the sample adds to the strength of our findings. Finally, the predictive value of collective victimhood at its different layers was such that it contributed above and beyond political orientation, the foremost predictor of attitudes regarding compromise and an important factor in support for military actions.

The results of the studies provide information about some effects of multilayered collective victimhood on conflict resolution and conflict escalation. The perception of the in-group as a righteous victim, related to the view of the rival as a brutal aggressor and of the in-group's construal as moral and imbued with just goals, leads to various effects such as moral disengagement and moral entitlement (e.g., Branscombe, 2004; Cehajic et al., 2008; Chaitin & Steinberg, 2008; Mack, 1990; Schori-Eyal et al., 2014; Wohl & Branscombe, 2008). The present studies offer additional demonstration of the effects of collective victimhood, ameliorating the conceptualization of collective victimhood as predictor and the range of its effects on responses in conflict. Collective victimhood reduces the willingness for compromise and leads to support of employing very aggressive means against the rival out-group, thus refining and adding to previous findings about the effects of perceived helplessness and vulnerability on attitudes regarding compromise and violence

(Maoz & Eidelson, 2007). The layers of collective victimhood make the thought of accommodating an already supposedly strong and truculent rival very hard to bear, and contribute to the continuation of the conflict. Moreover, collective victimhood not only impedes conflict resolution; it contributes to its escalation by increasing group members' willingness to cross moral and ethical lines in their efforts to defend the in-group and punish the aggressor out-group. It would be of interest to examine what other aspects of conflict and conflict resolution—emotions, attitudes and behavioral tendencies—are affected by the different layers of collective victimhood and the interplay between them.

The studies presented were conducted in the context of the Jewish Israeli context. It is a striking example of a society embroiled in intractable conflict in which all three layers are active, sometimes glaringly so. However, the question of generalization arises. Does our model pertain to other societies as well? This is particularly relevant when considering that not all layers need manifest in a given society, and a sense of event-related victimhood can have a strong impact on a group's response without being embedded in a perception of more general victimhood, either within a conflict or throughout the group's history. The present evidence is indeed drawn from a single society, but the Jewish Israeli people are not unique in having a layered sense of collective victimhood. It would be important to empirically test the existence and impact of the three layers in other groups—for example, among Palestinians, who preliminary evidence suggests are characterized by at least the layer of historical collective victimhood (Dugan et al., 2013).

The construal aspect of the multilayered conceptualization of collective victimhood should be further explored. The different construal level of collective victimhood layers may be associated with different levels of responses to events. The more abstract layers of victimhood would yield more general responses—emotionally, cognitively, and behaviorally. More specific layers would produce responses that are directly linked to the triggering event, and may be retaliatory in nature. This is also because the specific layers may be closer in time, calling for an immediate response. In the abstract layer of collective victimhood, specific events have long blended into the general sense of unjust suffering; responses to these events are no longer possible. The abstract layers serve as a base for the concrete ones, providing a framework through which to interpret current events and an amplifier of

responses to them; in turn, they feed on more concrete occurrences and assimilate them to create an expanding, denser sense of victimhood. While current findings hint at some of these suppositions, further studies should explore them methodically.

The three studies, particularly the last one, support the distinct nature and effects of the three victimhood layers. But what of the relation of the new measures to other victimhood constructs and to related concepts, such as collective angst (Wohl et al., 2010)? Future research should include such measures to test the contribution of the three layers in relation to other victimhood constructs already in use, and to tease apart their effects and those of other relevant factors.

While the present studies support our concept of multilayered victimhood and its diverse effects and lay the fundamental framework, their correlative nature should be addressed. Future studies should include manipulating the different layers of victimhood and investigating their effects on relevant aspects of intergroup relations and intergroup conflict.

Investigating collective victimhood as a multilayered construct in diverse national-ethnic groups can clarify the roles each layer plays in different phases of conflict, from its eruption to its resolution. How does historical collective victimhood contribute to an initial outbreak of hostilities? In what ways do the more concrete layers of victimhood affect the continuation of conflict and impede its resolution? What processes are affected by each layer? And what is the impact of the interaction between the layers of victimhood on these processes?

Once a clearer understanding of the interplay between the various layers and its effects on conflict is gained, strategies for minimizing the detrimental effects of collective victimhood may be devised. While a sense of collective victimhood is functional during conflicts, particularly intractable ones, the results of the present studies indicate that it has a significant contribution to exacerbating conflicts and can act as a barrier to their successful resolution. A better understanding of the processes involved will help counteract the harmful consequences of collective victimhood.

Acknowledgment

This research was supported by a grant from the Israel Science Foundation to Eran Halperin and Daniel Bar-Tal.

References

- Arian, A. (1995). *Security threatened: Surveying Israeli opinion on peace and war*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Bagozzi, R. P., Yi, Y., & Phillips, L. W. (1991). Assessing construct validity in organizational research. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 36, 421–458.
- Bar-Tal, D. (2000). *Shared beliefs in a society: Social psychological analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Bar-Tal, D. (2007a). Sociopsychological foundations of intractable conflicts. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 50, 1430–1453.
- Bar-Tal, D. (2007b). *Living with the conflict: Socio-psychological analysis of the Israeli-Jewish society*. Jerusalem: Carmel. (in Hebrew)

- Bar-Tal, D. (2013). *Intractable conflicts: Socio-psychological foundations and dynamics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bar-Tal, D., & Antebi, D. (1992). Siege mentality in Israel. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 16, 251–275.
- Bar-Tal, D., Chernyak-Chai, L., Schori, N., & Gundar, A. (2009). A sense of self-perceived collective victimhood in intractable conflicts. *International Review of the Red Cross*, 91, 229–258.
- Bar-Tal, D., & Halperin, E. (2013). The nature of social-psychological barriers to peaceful conflict resolution and ways to overcome them. *Conflict and Communication Online*, 12.
- Bar-Tal, D., & Hammack, P. L. (2012). Conflict, delegitimization and violence. In L. R. Tropp (Ed.), *Oxford handbook of intergroup conflict* (pp. 29–52). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bar-Tal, D., Oren, N., & Nets-Zehngut, R. (2013). *Socio-psychological analysis of conflict-supporting narratives: A general framework*. Manuscript in preparation.
- Bieber, F. (2002). Nationalist mobilization and stories of Serb suffering. *Rethinking History*, 1, 95–110.
- Bilewicz, M., & Stefaniak, A. (in press). Can a victim be responsible? Antisemitic consequences of victimhood-based identity and competitive victimhood in Poland. In B. Bokus (Ed.), *Responsibility: An interdisciplinary perspective*. Warsaw: Matrix.
- Branscombe, N. R. (2004). A social psychological process perspective on collective guilt. In N. R. Branscombe & B. Doosje (Eds.), *Collective guilt: International perspectives* (pp. 320–334). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Callahan, W. A. (2004). Nationalising international theory: race, class and the English school. *Global Society*, 18, 305–323.
- Cehajic, S., & Brown, R. (2009). Silencing the past: Effects of intergroup contact on acknowledgment of in-group responsibility. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 1, 190–196.
- Cehajic, S., Brown, R., & Castano, E. (2008). Forgive and forget? Antecedents and consequences of intergroup forgiveness in Bosnia and Herzegovina. *Political Psychology*, 29, 351–367.
- Central Bureau of Statistics (2008). Israel in Figures, 2008. Retrieved from: http://www.cbs.gov.il/publications/isr_in_n08e.pdf.
- Chaitin, J., & Steinberg, S. (2008). You should know better: Expressions of empathy and disregard among victims of massive social trauma. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*, 17, 197–226.
- Confino, A. (2005). Remembering the second world war, 1945–1965: narratives of victimhood and genocide. *Cultural Analysis*, 4, 46–75.
- Dugas, M., Schori-Eyal, N., McNeill, A., Kruglanski, A. W., Gelfand, M., Klar, Y., et al. (2013). *The hurt justifies the means: Need for cognitive closure, group glorification, perceived victimhood and moral license*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Eidelson, R. J., & Eidelson, J. I. (2003). Dangerous ideas: Five beliefs that propel groups toward conflict. *American Psychologist*, 58, 182–192.
- Frank, J. D. (1967). *Sanity & survival: Psychological aspects of war and peace*. New York: Vintage.
- Galea, S., & Tracy, M. (2007). Participation rates in epidemiologic studies. *Annals of Epidemiology*, 17, 643–653.
- Grosser, P. E., & Halperin, E. G. (1979). *Anti-semitism. The causes and effect of a prejudice*. Secaucus, NY: Citadel Press.
- Halperin, E., & Bar-Tal, D. (2011). Socio-psychological barriers to peace making: An empirical examination within the Israeli Jewish society. *Journal of Peace Research*, 48, 637–657.
- Halperin, E., & Gross, J. (2011). Intergroup anger in intractable conflict: Long-term sentiments predict anger responses during the Gaza war. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 14, 477–488.
- Heinrich, H. G., & Tanaev, K. (2009). Georgia & Russia: Contradictory media coverage of the August war. *Caucasian Review of International Affairs*, 3, 244–259.
- Hovannisian, R. G. (Ed.). (2011). *The Armenian Genocide: cultural and ethical legacies (Vol. 1)*. New Jersey: Transaction Publishers.
- Israel Central Bureau of Statistics (2008). Israel in Numbers, 2008. Retrieved from: http://www.cbs.gov.il/publications/isr_in_n08e.pdf.
- Jasińska-Kania, A. (2007). Bloody revenge in “God’s Playground”: Poles’ collective memory of relations with Germans, Russians, and Jews. *International Journal of Sociology*, 37, 30–42.
- Klar, Y., Schori-Eyal, N., & Klar, Y. (2013). The “never again” state of Israel: The emergence of the holocaust as a core feature of Israeli identity and its four incongruent voices. *Journal of Social Issues*, 69, 125–143.
- Kriesberg, L. (1993). Intractable conflicts. *Peace Review*, 5, 417–421.
- Lieberman, N., & Trope, Y. (1998). The role of feasibility and desirability considerations in near and distant future decisions: A test of temporal construal theory. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 75, 5–18.
- Liebman, C. (1978). Myth, tradition and values in Israeli society. *Midstream*, 24, 44–53.
- Mack, J. E. (1990). The psychodynamics of victimization among national groups in conflict. In V. D. Volkan, D. A. Julius, & J. V. Montville (Eds.), *The Psychodynamics of International Relationships* (pp. 119–129). Lexington, MA: Lexington.
- Maoz, I., & Eidelson, R. J. (2007). Psychological bases of extreme policy preferences: How the personal beliefs of Israeli-Jews predict their support for population transfer in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 50, 1476–1497.
- Montville, J. V. (1991). *Conflict and peace-making in multiethnic societies*. New York: Lexington Books.
- Noor, M., Brown, R. J., Gonzalez, R., Manzi, J., & Lewis, C. A. (2008a). On positive psychological outcomes: What helps groups with a history of conflict to forgive and reconcile with each other? *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 34, 819–832.
- Noor, M., Brown, R. J., & Prentice, G. (2008b). Precursors and mediators of intergroup reconciliation in Northern Ireland: A new model. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 47, 481–495.

- Noor, M., Shnabel, N., Halabi, S., & Nadler, A. (2012). The psychology of competitive victimhood between adversaries in violent conflicts. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 16*, 351–374.
- Paez, D., & Liu, J. H. (2011). Collective memory of conflicts. In D. Bar-Tal (Ed.), *Intergroup conflicts and their resolution: A social psychological perspective* (pp. 105–124). New York: Psychology Press.
- Podeh, E. (2002). *The Arab-Israeli conflict in Israeli history textbooks* (pp. 1948–2000). Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.
- Poliakov, L. (1974). *The history of anti-semitism*. (Vol. 1 and 2). London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Preacher, K. J., & Hayes, A. F. (2008). Asymptotic and resampling strategies for assessing and comparing indirect effects in multiple mediator models. *Behavior Research Methods, 40*, 879–891.
- Renwick, N., & Cao, Q. (1999). Chinese political discourse towards the 21st century: Victimhood, identity, and political power. *East Asia, 111*–143.
- Rotella, K. N., Richeson, J. A., Chiao, J. Y., & Bean, M. G. (2013). Blinding trust: The effect of perceived group victimhood on intergroup trust. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 39*, 115–127.
- Schori-Eyal, N., Klar, Y., Roccas, S., & McNeill, N. (2014). *The shadows of the past: Effects of historical group trauma on current intergroup conflicts*. Manuscript in preparation.
- Sharvit, K., Bar-Tal, D., Raviv, A., Raviv, A., & Gurevich, R. (2010). Ideological orientation and social context as moderators of the effect of terrorism: The case of Israeli-Jewish public opinion regarding peace. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 40*, 105–121.
- Shechter, H., & Salomon, G. (2005). Does vicarious experience of suffering affect empathy for an adversary? The effects of Israelis' visits to Auschwitz on their empathy for Palestinians. *Journal of Peace Education, 2*, 125–138.
- Shnabel, N., Halabi, S., & Noor, M. (2013). Overcoming competitive victimhood and facilitating forgiveness through re-categorization into a common victim or perpetrator identity. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 49*, 867–877.
- Staub, E., & Vollhardt, J. (2008). Altruism born of suffering: The roots of caring and helping after victimization and other trauma. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 78*, 267–280.
- Volkan, V. (1997). *Blood lines: From ethnic pride to ethnic terrorism*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.
- Volkan, V. (2001). Transgenerational transmission and chosen traumas: An aspect of large-group identity. *Group Analysis, 34*, 79–97.
- Vollhardt, J. R. (2009). The role of victim beliefs in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: Risk or potential for peace? *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology, 15*, 135–159.
- Vollhardt, J. R. (2012a). Collective victimization. In L. R. Tropp (Ed.), *Oxford handbook of intergroup conflict* (pp. 136–157). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Vollhardt, J. R. (2012b). Interpreting rights and duties after mass violence. *Culture and Psychology, 18*, 133–145.
- Wertsch, J. (2002). *Voices of collective remembering*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wohl, M. J., Branscombe, N. R., & Reysen, S. (2010). Perceiving your group's future to be in jeopardy: Extinction threat induces collective angst and the desire to strengthen the ingroup. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 36*, 898–910.
- Wohl, M. J. A., & Branscombe, N. R. (2008). Remembering historical victimization: Collective guilt for current ingroup transgressions. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 94*, 988–1006.