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Increasing Support for Concession-Making in Intractable Conflicts: The Role of Conflict Uniqueness

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Intractable conflicts are a severe type of intergroup conflict. When people who perceive themselves as involved in such conflicts learn of other conflicts being resolved around the world, they often explain this by contending that *their* conflict is unique, and thus justify their perception of its irresolvability. Accordingly, across 3 studies, we examined the hypothesis that the perception of conflict uniqueness is negatively associated with support for concession-making and that when the conflict is perceived as unique, it is also perceived as irresolvable. Study 1 established the perception of the conflict as unique as a new variable, which is distinct from other and more specific unique aspects of conflicts. Additionally, it revealed a negative association between this perception and support for concession-making. In Studies 2 and 3, we demonstrated that the effect of a perception of conflict uniqueness on support for concession-making is moderated by malleability beliefs regarding conflicts in general. Results have both theoretical and practical implications regarding the ability to increase support for concession-making in intractable conflicts.

Keywords: intractable conflicts, uniqueness, implicit beliefs, concession-making

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Conflicts perceived as intractable are one of the most severe issues that the modern world is forced to deal with. Achieving resolution and reconciliation within such contexts requires difficult decisions and major concessions from all parties involved in the conflict (Bar-Tal, 2000, 2007a; Coleman, 2003; Deutsch, 1973; Fisher, 1997; Kriesberg, 1998, 2005; Putnam & Peterson, 2003). According to the bottom-up perspective, which accentuates the significance of people and societies in the promotion of political and social processes, to promote the resolution of such conflicts, monumental public support is needed (Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2013; Kelman, 1998; Pettigrew, 1998).

Accumulated work involving these conflicts has pointed toward seven unique elements, which distinguish them from other forms of conflict. First, they are protracted and last for long periods of time. They involve high levels

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of violence and demand extensive investment (Kriesberg, 1998). Additionally, intractable conflicts are total and central in societal life, and are perceived as zero-sum in nature (Bar-Tal, 1998). Lastly, one of the main challenges embedded within these situations is that both individuals and societies involved in these conflicts tend to perceive them as irresolvable (Bar-Tal, 2007b; Kriesberg, 1998). For this reason, among other things, it is extremely hard to convince parties to such conflicts to support concession-making, especially because they do not believe that it can possibly lead to conflict resolution (Coleman, 2003). Previous research (e.g., Cohen-Chen, Halperin, Crisp, & Gross, 2014; Jarymowicz & Bar-Tal, 2006) has revealed that intractable conflicts are largely characterized by despair, which is manifested by indifference and general loss of belief in the ability of concessions to achieve peace. This experience of despair is the extreme opposite of hope (Sällfors, Fasth, & Hallberg, 2002; Stotland, 1969), which has been found to induce flexibility, creativity, and planning alternatives to achieve peace (Jarymowicz & Bar-Tal, 2006). Within the context of conflict, hope has been found to be associated with conciliatory attitudes (Cohen-Chen, Halperin, Crisp, et al., 2014; Cohen-Chen, Halperin, Porat, & Bar-Tal, 2014; Halperin & Gross, 2011; Moeschberger, Dixon, Niens, & Cairns, 2005; Saguy & Halperin, 2014).

Given this, how can people who live in the context of intractable conflicts (or conflicts perceived as intractable) be convinced that concession-making can actually lead to the resolution of the conflict? One potential method is exposing people to information about other conflicts throughout history and in different parts of the world that were resolved in the past and are being solved in the present. In a real-world setting, programs such as Beyond Conflict (http://www.beyondconflictint.org) use this tool of consuming information from other conflict-zones and sharing experiences to help promote the peace process in one's own conflict. Beyond Conflict creates direct contact between leaders of societies involved in conflict, and leaders who managed to tackle similar contexts in their conflict and respective society.

This perspective has been utilized within research as well. In a study conducted by Lustig (2002), Israeli 12th-graders learned about the Northern Irish conflict, without mentioning the Israeli–Palestinian context. Here, it was expected to trigger an optimistic expectation regarding the possible resolution of their own conflict, based on information demonstrating that even violent, long-term conflicts can in fact be resolved (Lustig, 2002; Salomon, 2004). However, in this case, no significant differences were found in terms of attitudes toward Palestinians (measured quantitatively using pre and post questionnaires) between those who participated in the program and those who did not. Despite that, a qualitative analysis conducted on essays collected after the study showed that students who participated in the program were capable of writing a full essay about the Palestinian perspective (compared to those who did not participate in the program).

These mixed results, we argue, are driven by the fact that people who are involved in conflicts perceived as intractable tend to see their own conflict as unique, and differentiate it from other conflicts. For instance, a survey we conducted that included 203 Israeli participants (63% female, 37% male; mean age 33.83, SD = 15.27; 34% right-wing, 48% centrists; 18% left-wing) including psychology students and the general population showed that, when asking people about the uniqueness of their conflict on a scale of 1 (*not unique*) to 6 (*highly unique*), half of the participants rated it above 3.5 and 25% of them rated their conflict between 5 and 6, indicating their belief that the conflict is extremely unique. On an anecdotal level, people involved in conflict resolution efforts often find that while people demonstrate a belief that other conflicts are simple to resolve, they perceive their own conflicts as unique and much harder to tackle.

Why do people tend to perceive their conflict as unique? One possible explanation is that when people learn that intractable conflicts around the world are constantly being resolved (following long and demanding social and political processes), they question why other conflicts are "reconcilable" while their conflict cannot seem to come to a peaceful end. We believe that for psychomotivational reasons, it stands to reason that people's most intuitive answer is that "it seems to happen in other places and not here because *this* conflict is unique." The categorization of the conflict as unique is made in comparison to other conflicts, and the separa-

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tion that people create between their conflict and others prevents them from learning from similar situations that may force them to change their behavior or criticize their ingroup.

If that is the case, the next question should address what people mean when they talk about the "conflict's uniqueness." We contend that people perceive their conflict as a whole as unique, above and beyond their perceptions of uniqueness regarding more specific aspects of the conflict. This includes the outgroup, the ingroup, and the relations between them. In the case of ingroup uniqueness, for instance, this perception of uniqueness can be expressed in several ways. One more general example for this is ingroup superiority (Mummendey & Shreiber, 1983; Mummendey & Simon, 1989), according to which the ingroup tends to constantly seek its positive distinctiveness in comparison to the outgroup. Even when looking at more specific aspects of ingroup uniqueness within conflict contexts, ample research has focused on aspects of victimhood, which expresses uniqueness of the ingroup's historical narrative in its own eyes. These can be found in work on siege mentality (Bar-Tal & Antebi, 1992), competitive victimhood (Noor, Shnabel, Halabi, & Nadler, 2012; Shnabel, Halabi, & Noor, 2013), inclusive versus exclusive victim beliefs (Vollhardt, 2009, 2012, 2013), and the pervasiveness of ingroup victimization (Warner, Wohl, & Branscombe, 2014; Wohl & Branscombe, 2008). Although the perception of the conflict as unique is related and quite probably associated with some of the abovementioned psychological phenomena, we contend that conflicts can be seen as separate entities. Therefore, their perceived uniqueness does not fully overlap with beliefs regarding unique victimhood, glorification and so on. If the conflict is perceived as unique, its level of perceived resolvability cannot be refuted either by a change in one of its specific aspects (e.g., attitudes and motivations of the ingroup or the outgroup), or by examples of other resolved conflicts.

Accordingly, it stands to reason that if the influence of perceptions regarding the conflict's uniqueness were neutralized, it would be possible for people to more openly learn from other conflict resolution processes. Furthermore, this would demonstrate that conflicts indeed can be resolved, helping people to see "the light at the end of the tunnel." Thus, we believe that particularly within conflicts perceived as intractable, the perception of conflict uniqueness is associated with the belief in the conflict's inability to end, and therefore plays a role in inducing support for policies promoting peacemaking.

From what we know today, support for concession-making and willingness for compromise can be induced in several ways. One such avenue focuses on emotions, including hope (Cohen-Chen, Halperin, Crisp, et al., 2014), collective angst (Halperin, Porat, & Wohl, 2013), guilt (Van Kleef, De Dreu, & Manstead, 2006), and surprisingly, even anger (Reifen Tagar, Federico, & Halperin, 2011). In addition, other variables that were found to predict support for compromises (both positively and negatively) were trust (Maoz & Ellis, 2008), low zero-sum perspective of the conflict (Maoz & McCauley, 2005), malleability beliefs about groups (Halperin, Russell, Trzesniewski, Gross, & Dweck, 2011), and openness to new information (Halperin & Bar-Tal, 2011).

In our attempt to find new elements that influence support for concession-making and conciliatory steps, the main hypothesis put forth in this article is that the perception of the conflict as unique is an important barrier to peacemaking and that changing it can lead people to support peace-making steps. We contend that uniqueness perception influences people's ability to learn from other resolved conflicts, a framework that enables application of various solutions and methods that have proven successful in the past. To examine this hypothesis, the present research includes three studies that examine the relationship between a perception of the conflict as unique and support for concession-making. All three studies were conducted among Israelis within the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, which has been described as an intractable conflict (Cohen-Chen, Halperin, Porat, et al., 2014; Halperin et al., 2011).

In Study 1, we utilized a correlational design and examined the relationships between the perception of the conflict's uniqueness and support for concession-making. This also enabled us to establish the perception of conflict uniqueness as a new variable, and to distinguish it from existing variables encompassing unique and more specific aspects of intergroup conflicts.

Study 2 further elaborated and examined the relationship between the perception of the conflict's uniqueness, support for concession-making, and the belief in conflicts' malleability. Study 3 examined this relationship in an experimental framework by investigating whether the belief in general conflict malleability moderates the relationship between perception of the conflict's uniqueness and support for concession-making.

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Study 1

The goal of the first study was to examine the association between the perception of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict as unique on the one hand, and support for concessions on the other. We hypothesized that a higher perception of the conflict's uniqueness would be associated with lower levels of support for concessions. To achieve this goal, we used a correlational design in which self-reported perceptions of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict as unique and support for concessions were measured, while controlling for other relevant variables.

Participants and Procedure

Ninety-eight participants (41% men, 59% women; mean age 20.88 years, $SD = 5.01$) were asked to fill in a questionnaire regarding current social and political issues, in exchange for modest monetary compensation. Participants were recruited during a leadership workshop that was open to the general public, and they filled in the questionnaires prior to the beginning of the workshop. In terms of political orientation, 57% of the participants indicated they were rightists, 18% as centrists and 25% as leftists, providing a relatively representative distribution of the Jewish public in Israel nowadays.

Measures

To assess participants' *perception of the conflict's uniqueness*, we formulated a two-item scale, which included the following items: "The Israeli–Palestinian conflict is incomparable and unique" and "The Israeli–Palestinian conflict does not have special characteristics which make it unique" (R), ($r = .63$). Answers ranged from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 6 (*completely agree*), and Question 2 was reverse coded, such that higher answers imply a higher perception of conflict uniqueness.

Support for concession-making was assessed using a three-item scale, which dealt with the most critical issues in the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. These items were "In exchange for a full peace agreement with the Palestinians, to what extent would you support return to the 1967 borders with territory exchanges?"; "In exchange for a full peace agreement with the Palestinians, to what extent would you support concession-making on the issue of Jerusalem?"; and "In exchange for a full peace agreement with the Palestinians, to what extent would you support compensating Palestinian refugees?"($\alpha = .67$). All questions were coded so that higher means imply higher support for concession-making.

To ensure that the associations between the perception of the conflict as unique and support for concession-making are not confounded with the relationship between more specific perceptions regarding the conflict (e.g., the nature of the outgroup, the nature of the ingroup, and the nature of the relations between them), *delegitimization of the outgroup*, *dehumaniztion of the outgroup*, *attachment-glorification to the ingroup*, and *ingroup victimhood (siege mentality)* were also assessed and used in the analysis as control variables. Outgroup uniqueness was examined using two measures. Delegitimization was measured using a seven-item scale based on the Negative Attitudes Toward Palestinians scale used in the work of Halperin and colleagues (Halperin et al., 2011). For example, we asked participants, "To what extent would you say that the Palestinians have negative, permanent, and stable characteristics?" and "To what extent would you say that Palestinians are 'evil' by nature?" ($\alpha = .80$). The scale was coded such that higher means imply greater delegitimization of the outgroup. We also assessed dehumanization, which addresses perceptions of the outgroup as a unique group in its low humanity (Haslam, 2006; Opotow, 1990; Schwartz & Struch, 1989). We used one item based on the "feeling thermometer," in which participants were asked to rate the outgroup's humanity from 0 (*not human*) to 100 (*very much human*).

Regarding the perception of the ingroup as unique, we first measured Ingroup Glorification,

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which captures a sense of superiority that people hold regarding their national ingroup, as well as respect for national symbols such as the anthem, the flag, and the leadership. Attachment to the ingroup reflects commitment to the ingroup and the incorporation of the group in one's identity. We measured both as different aspects of identification and connection to the group, based on scales developed by Roccas, Klar, and Liviatan (2006). The glorification scale included items such as "Israel is better than other states in every aspect" and yielded acceptable internal reliability ($\alpha = .65$), while the attachment scale focused on items like "I love Israel" ($\alpha = .90$). Additionally, we measured ingroup victimhood, (Bar-Tal, Chernyak-Hai, Schori, & Gundar, 2009; Noor et al., 2012) which is, according to Bar-Tal and colleagues (2009),

> 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 . . .. The perceived harm can be done in the present or fairly recent past . . .. It can be real or partly imagined, but usually is based on experienced events. It can be large-scale, as a result of a one-time event . . . or of long-term harmful treatment of the group . . .. (p. 238)

In the case of Israeli-Jews, this perception is based on past experiences of anti-Semitism (Poliakov, 1974) in a way that lasts until today and carries to different (and unrelated) contexts, such as the Israeli–Palestinian conflict (Halperin & Bar-Tal, 2011). Importantly, this perception symbolizes ingroup uniqueness as the only group to have suffered from this international harm. Ingroup victimhood was measured using a six-item scale (e.g., "To say that the whole world is against us reflects the Jewish reality," "The Jews suffered from unceasing anti-Semitism"; $\alpha = .74$) based on the work of Halperin and Bar-Tal (2011). Lastly, participants' reported their age and gender as potential control variables.

Results

Means, standard deviations, and correlations among research variables are presented in Table 1. In terms of the perception of the conflict's uniqueness, 75% of the participants reported a sense of uniqueness of 3–6, which is above the midpoint of the scale. Most importantly for our purposes, results revealed an association between support for concession-making and a perception of the conflict as unique, such that the more participants perceived their conflict to be unique, the less they were willing to make concessions to resolve it ($r = -.37$, $p < .01$).

Results also demonstrated that the perception of the conflict's uniqueness was indeed viewed by participants as a separate type of psychological phenomenon, one that refers to the conflict as a whole, and not to the groups involved in it. This can be drawn based on the low to moderate correlations between the conflict uniqueness measure and the specific ingroup and outgroup perceptions (i.e., delegitimization, $r = .40$, $p < .01$; dehumanization, $r = -.31$, $p < .01$, ingroup attachment, $r = .01$, *ns*; ingroup glorification, $r = .12$, *ns*; and ingroup victimhood, $r = .43$, $p < .01$). These trends did not change when

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations Between Research Variables (Study 1)

Means (*SD*)		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Perception of the conflict's uniqueness	3.87 (1.16)	—								
2. Support for concession-making	3.08 (1.19)	−.37**								
3. Delegitimization of the outgroup	2.46 (.79)	.40**	−.29**							
4. Dehumanization of the outgroup	71.64 (24.19)	−.38**	.14	−.56**						
5. Attachment to the ingroup	5.88 (1.09)	.02	.00	−.10	.22*					
6. Glorification of the ingroup	4.08 (0.78)	.12	−.08	.22*	.08	.58**				
7. Ingroup victimhood	3.91 (0.90)	.44**	−.31**	.46**	−.12	.20*	.42**			
8. Gender	1.59 (0.49)	−.23*	.05	−.01	.02	.03	.01	.05		
9. Age	20.88 (5.02)	−.25*	.09	.00	−.08	−.23*	−.83	−.20	−.12	—

* $p < 0.05$ (2-tailed). ** $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed).

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controlling for both participants' gender and age.

Moreover, to ensure that the significant correlations did not indicate multicollinearity, and that these variables are indeed distinct from one another, we conducted a series of exploratory factor analyses. We used principal component extraction with direct oblimin rotation and entered items comprising the perception of the conflict's uniqueness as well as delegitimization, dehumanization, and ingroup victimhood. The analyses showed that the uniqueness items consistently loaded onto their corresponding factor over .76 and had cross-loading less than .27. Consistently, the other items' loading to the uniqueness factor was significantly lower.

Next, we wanted to examine whether the association between the perception of the conflict's uniqueness and support for concessions was significant above and beyond other relevant variables. When regressing support for concessions on the perception of the conflict's uniqueness, the association was found to be significant above and beyond all other variables (see Table 2 for regression coefficients).

Discussion

Study 1 revealed the hypothesized relationship between the perception of conflict uniqueness and support for concession-making. Importantly, Study 1 showed that these associations remained significant even when controlling for more specific views regarding the ingroup and the outgroup. This provided indications for a new avenue to inducing attitudes crucial for promoting conflict resolution. Considering perceptions of conflict uniqueness enables further understanding of predictors of peacemaking attitudes. This is important because it does not directly reference the outgroup and attitudes toward it. Importantly, the perception of the conflict as unique and irresolvable can lead to the perception of concession-making as futile.

Table 2
Linear Regression of Associations Between Perception of Conflict Uniqueness and Support for Concessions (Controlling for Relevant Background Factors; Study 1)

	B	*SE* (B)	β
(Constant)	5.40	1.16	
Perception of the conflict's uniqueness	−.26	.13	−.25*
Delegitimization of the outgroup	−.32	.23	−.21
Dehumanization of the outgroup	.00	.00	−.08
Attachment to the ingroup	−.02	.15	−.01
Glorification of the ingroup	.02	.21	.01
Ingroup victimhood	−.05	.18	−.03

Note. *SE* = standard error. Dependent variable: Support for concession-making. $R^2 = .14$, $F(6, 77) = 2.08$, $p = .06$.
* $p < .05$.

Although interesting, these results still hold a number of limitations. Most important in our view is the lack of consideration of boundary conditions of the revealed associations. Do all people who perceive the conflict as nonunique also support more concession-making? The next study further expands upon the relationship found in Study 1 by trying to explore potential moderating factors and particularly the general belief conflict malleability (Cohen-Chen, Halperin, Crisp, et al., 2014).

Study 2

In Study 2, we wanted to better understand the underlying process, explaining the relationship found in Study 1. One of the main questions that remained unresolved following Study 1 is what is it about the sense of nonuniqueness that underlies the association with support for concession-making. As mentioned before, support for concession-making is a way to state a belief in the conflict's ability to end. Therefore, we hypothesized that in order for the perception of the conflict as nonunique to be associated with greater support for concession-making, one must first believe that conflicts in general can change their nature. If one believes that conflicts *in general* are malleable, then similarity to other conflicts may suggest that this conflict too can be resolved, just like other conflicts. If the conflict can change and thus be resolved, this may lead people to believe there is a practical reason for supporting concession-making.

To examine this hypothesis, we turned to the well-established theory of implicit beliefs (Chiu, Hong, & Dweck, 1997; Dweck, Chiu, & Hong, 1995), which has recently been applied to intergroup settings (Cohen-Chen, Halperin, Saguy, & van Zomeren, 2014; Halperin et al., 2011, 2012) and more specifically to conflict situations (Cohen-Chen, Halperin, Crisp, et al., 2014). On the intergroup level, the belief in the outgroup's ability to change (a malleable per-

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ception referred to as an "incremental belief") has been found to induce conciliatory attitudes in the context of intractable conflict, by decreasing the perception of the outgroup as inherently evil. On the other hand, a fixed perception (defined as an "entity belief") was found to decrease such attitudes (Halperin et al., 2011). In another study that was conducted in the context of the conflict in Cyprus, Greece (between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots), it was found that malleable perceptions of groups in general led to decreased intergroup anxiety, which further led to greater motivation for contact and interactions with the outgroup (Halperin et al., 2012). Group malleability was also examined in the context of collective action—in the work of Cohen-Chen, Halperin, Saguy, et al. (2014) it was found that inducing malleable perceptions of immoral groups in general (again, with no mention of the outgroup) led to increased group efficacy that induced collective action tendencies. Malleability beliefs about conflict situations were shown to influence levels of experienced hope, further increasing support for concession-making (Cohen-Chen, Halperin, Crisp, et al., 2014). In this study, we hypothesized that perceiving the conflict as nonunique may increase support for concession-making, but only for participants who perceive conflicts in general as malleable and able to change. On the other hand, those who believe that intractable conflicts cannot change their nature would not become more supportive of concession-making when learning that their conflict is not unique.

Participants and Procedure

Ninety Israeli participants (47% men, 53% women; mean age 29.79 years, $SD = 12.19$) were recruited on a train from Tel-Aviv to Be'er Sheva. Because the study focused on Israeli-Jewish society, two Muslim participants were removed from this analysis. Participants were asked to answer a questionnaire regarding current social and political issues. In terms of political orientation, 55% of the participants consider themselves rightists, 23% as centrists, and 22% as leftists.

Measures

Independent and moderating variables. To assess *perception of the conflict's uniqueness*, we used the two items of Study 1 and added two additional items to improve the scale's reliability ($\alpha = .77$). The two new items were, "It is wrong to think that Israel and the Palestinians can learn from other conflicts throughout history because they are less complicated than the Israeli–Palestinian context," and "When I hear about other conflicts, I cannot see any connection between them and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict."

Implicit beliefs about conflicts were measured using a four-item scale adapted from the work of Cohen-Chen, Halperin, Crisp, et al. (2014). Items were worded in terms of participants' belief regarding the malleability of conflict situations in general: "The inherent characteristics of conflicts cannot be changed because their nature is fixed and unchanging," "Conflicts may seem at times like they are being resolved, but their true underlying nature will never change," "Under certain circumstances and if all core issues are addressed, the nature of conflicts can be changed" (R), and "At the end of an enduring process, which deals with all of the core issues of the conflict, the conflict can be ended and resolved" (R); ($\alpha = .76$).

Dependent variable. To increase its reliability, *support for concession-making* was assessed using the same three-item scale as in Study 1, to which we added another item: "In exchange for a full peace agreement with the Palestinians, to what extent do you support Israel giving up her dominance in the Arab neighborhoods in Eastern Jerusalem?" ($\alpha = .81$). In addition, participants' age and gender were measured as potential control variables.

Results

Means, standard deviations, and zero-sum correlations are presented in Table 3. Seventy-five percent of participants reported a sense of uniqueness higher than 3, placing them on the unique side of the spectrum. Once again, the perception of the conflict as unique was negatively associated with support for concession-making, $r = -.45$, $p < .01$. This indicated that people who perceived the conflict as unique were also less willing to make concessions. Perception of the conflict as unique was also found to have a positive association with entity beliefs about conflicts, $r = .34$, $p < .01$, such that people who perceived the conflict as unique

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations Between Research Variables (Study 2)

	Means (*SD*)	1	2	3	4	5
1. Perception of the conflict's uniqueness	3.29 (1.09)	—				
2. Implicit beliefs about conflicts	2.76 (.99)	.34**				
3. Support for concession-making	2.92 (1.26)	−.45**	−.23*			
4. Gender	1.53 (.50)	.04	.11	−.11		
5. Age	29.79 (12.19)	.06	−.03	.26*	.20	—

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .0001$ (two-tailed significance).

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also believed that conflicts in general are fixed by nature and cannot change.

Belief in conflict malleability moderates the relationship between perception of conflict uniqueness and concession-making. To examine whether implicit beliefs about conflicts moderates the relationship between uniqueness of the conflict and support for concession-making, we used Hayes' (2013) bootstrapping Process for SPSS (Model 1) to test the conditional effect, $R^2 = .24$, $F(3, 86) = 9.18$, $p < .001$. The analysis revealed a significant simple effect for uniqueness ($B = -.42$, $SE = .12$, $t = -3.52$, $p < .01$) on support for concession-making, while no simple effect of implicit beliefs about conflicts on support for concession-making ($B = -.13$, $SE = .12$, $t = -1.05$, *ns*) was found. Most importantly for the purposes of the current study, the effect of the interaction term of Uniqueness × Implicit Beliefs About Conflicts on support for concession-making was marginally significant ($B = .19$, $SE = .10$, $t = -1.84$, $p = .06$; see Table 4 for regression coefficients). An analysis of the conditional effects of perception of the conflict's uniqueness on support for concession-making at two different levels of implicit beliefs about conflicts (one standard deviation above the mean: "entity theorists," and one standard deviation below the mean: "incremental theorists") allowed us to shed light on the nature of this interaction (see Figure 1). The analysis revealed that, as hypothesized, among incremental theorists there was a significant relationship between perception of uniqueness of the conflict and support for concession-making (effect = −.62, $SE = .13$, $t = -4.54$, $p < .01$). However, among entity theorists this relationship was not significant (effect = −.23, $SE = .18$, $t = -1.27$, *ns*). Thus, while a perception of conflict uniqueness was not associated with support for concessions among participants who believed that conflicts are fixed by nature, for those who believe that conflicts are malleable, belief in the conflict as nonunique was associated with more support for concessions.

Discussion

Study 2 revealed that the relationship between a perception of conflict uniqueness and support for concession-making was moderated by beliefs regarding the malleability of conflicts. Perceiving the conflict as nonunique increased support for concession-making, but only for those who believed that conflicts have the ability to change. Thus, the relationship between the perception of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict as nonunique and support for concession-making applies only for those who believe that conflicts are malleable. This somewhat clar-

Table 4
Linear Regression of Associations Between Perception of Conflict Uniqueness and Support for Concessions (Study 2)

	B	*SE* (B)	β
(Constant)	6.44	.95	
Perception of the Conflict's Uniqueness × Implicit Beliefs About Conflicts	.19	.10	−.78***
Perception of the conflict's uniqueness	−.97	.28	−.83**
Implicit beliefs about conflicts	−.78	.37	−.61*

Note. *SE* = standard error. Dependent variable: Support for concession-making. $R^2 = .24$, $F(3, 86) = 9.018$, $p < .01$.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .001$. *** $p < 1.0$.

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ifies the trend found in the previous study and sheds light on who is affected and influenced by conflict uniqueness perceptions. In conflicts people often espouse an entity belief, applying their understanding about conflicts from their own personal experiences. If a person believes that their conflict cannot change, they may assume that all similar conflicts are stable as well. Therefore, it is important to better understand the way in which implicit beliefs and perceptions of uniqueness interact. Having said that, the main limitation of this study was its correlational nature, which cannot indicate causality. This led us to conduct the third study, in which we aimed to examine the moderated relationship once again, this time using an experimental design.

Study 3

The main goal of Study 3 was to replicate the findings revealed in Study 2 and establish causality using an experimental design. To do so, the perception of uniqueness was manipulated, while implicit beliefs about conflicts and support for concession-making were measured. We expected to find the same trend found in Study 2, such that the belief that the conflict is nonunique leads to higher support for concessions among participants who believe that conflicts are malleable by nature.

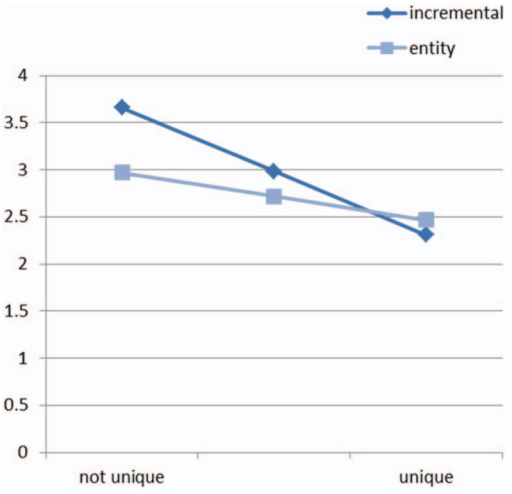

Figure 1. Interactive effect of Perception of Conflict Uniqueness × Conflict Implicit Beliefs on concession-making (Study 2). See the online article for the color version of this figure.

Participants

Seventy-one Jewish-Israeli participants (32 men; mean age 27.75 years, $SD = 9.16$) were recruited on a train from Tel-Aviv to Be'er Sheva. Participants were asked to answer a questionnaire regarding current social and political issues. In terms of political orientation, 34% of the participants consider themselves right-wing, 50% as centrists, and 16% as left-wing, making this sample slightly less "right-wing" than the ones utilized in the first two studies.

Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions—uniqueness and nonuniqueness group. Participants in both conditions read a seemingly reliable article from a well-known Israeli online news source discussing a new line of research. According to the article, this research demonstrated the following findings: Findings in one condition demonstrated that conflicts (including the Israeli–Palestinian conflict) are similar to one another, hence *not unique*. Participants in the second condition were told that according to findings, conflicts (including the Israeli–Palestinian conflict) have nothing in common, hence each conflict is *unique*. The articles were followed by a graphic depiction illustrating conflicts' uniqueness/non uniqueness.

More specifically, according to the article, 30 conflicts from around the world were compared according to the main features of intractable conflicts. The examples presented to participants were, "... among others, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, the Sri-Lanka conflict, the resolved conflict in South Africa, the partially resolved conflict in Northern Ireland, the conflict in Cyprus and the conflicts in Rwanda and Kashmir—conflicts of which some are still ongoing, while some were resolved and have even reached advanced stages of reconciliation." Participants were informed that

> people tend to think that the conflict they are involved in is unique and different from other intractable conflicts. As a result, they believe that it is impossible to learn from the course of history and from other conflicts (whether resolved or still ongoing) and apply

> lessons to their own conflict. Our data shows the opposite/the same—the examined conflicts are not unique/are unique and not fundamentally/and fundamentally different from one another. *If people only understood that the level of resemblance/difference between conflicts outweighs the level of difference/resemblance, it would be possible to learn a lot about the method for resolving contemporary conflicts based on past experience/not based on past experience.* (emphasis in the original)

In addition, participants were presented with a figure showing the level of similarity/difference between the examined conflicts (according to the given manipulation). At the end of the study, participants were debriefed and told that the article they had read was fabricated.

Measures

The manipulation's effect was examined using the four-item scale measuring the perception of *uniqueness* regarding the Israeli–Palestinian conflict that was used in Study 2 ($\alpha = .82$). *Malleable beliefs about conflicts* were assessed using the four-item scale from Study 2 ($\alpha = .79$). The scale was coded so that higher means imply a more fixed perception. *Support for concession-making* was assessed using the same scale used in Study 2, only without the item regarding the refugees issue, due to the decrease of the issue's relevance in Israeli public discourse at that time ($\alpha = .74$).

Results

Means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations are presented in Table 5. Perception of the conflict's uniqueness (above and beyond the experimental conditions) was once again positively associated with implicit beliefs about conflicts ($r = .41$, $p < .01$), such that the higher the perception of uniqueness, the higher the belief that conflicts are fixed and cannot change. On the other hand, the more people believed that conflicts are similar to one another and are nonunique, the more they held a malleable belief about conflicts in general. Support for concession-making was negatively associated with entity beliefs about conflicts ($r = -.38$, $p < .01$), such that the higher participants' perception of conflicts in general as fixed by nature, the lower their support for concession-making.

Main manipulation effects on perception of conflict uniqueness. Results showed that those in the uniqueness condition reported a higher perception of uniqueness ($M = 3.46$, $SD = .92$) compared to those in the nonunique condition ($M = 2.78$, $SD = 1.10$), $t(68) = -2.79$, $p < .01$. This indicates that the manipulation indeed led participants in the uniqueness condition to believe that the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is unique compared with the nonuniqueness condition. However, no additional main effects of the manipulation were found on the dependent variables, including support for concession-making, $F(1, 64) = .43$, *ns*, leading us to examine the hypothesized interaction once again.

Does the belief in conflict's malleability moderates the relationship between the perception of the conflict's uniqueness and concession-making? In an attempt to replicate the Study 2 results and show, once again, that implicit beliefs about conflicts moderate the relationship between perception of conflict uniqueness and support for concession-making, we employed Hayes' (2013) PROCESS bootstrapping command with 5,000 iterations (Model 1) to test the conditional effect, $R^2 = .25$, $F(3, 59) = 6.71$, $p < .01$. As mentioned before, we did not find a main effect of the

Table 5
Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations Between Research Variables (Study 3)

	Means (*SD*)	1	2	3	4	5
1. Perception of the conflict's uniqueness	3.12 (1.06)	—				
2. Implicit beliefs about conflicts	3.05 (1.00)	.41**				
3. Support for concession-making	3.01 (1.25)	−.15	−.38**			
4. Gender	1.49 (.50)	−.01	−.28*	.07		
5. Age	27.80 (9.22)	.12	−.15	.23	.29*	—

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

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manipulation on support for concession-making ($B = -.01$, $SE = .27$, $t = -.05$, *ns*), yet we found a significant main effect of implicit beliefs about conflicts (using one standard deviation above the mean and one standard deviation below the mean; $B = -.48$, $SE = .13$, $t = -3.46$, $p < .01$) on support for concession-making, such that participants who held an entity belief regarding conflicts reported higher levels of support for concession-making compared with those who believed in the fixedness of conflicts. Most importantly, the interaction term of Uniqueness × Implicit Beliefs About Conflicts on support for concession-making was significant ($B = .82$, $SE = .27$, $t = 2.95$, $p < .01$), indicating that the relationship between uniqueness and support for concession-making was moderated by implicit beliefs about conflicts.

An analysis of the conditional effects of uniqueness on support for concession-making at two different values of implicit beliefs about conflicts (one standard deviation above the mean, and one standard deviation below the mean) allowed us to shed light on the nature of this interaction (see Figure 2). This analysis revealed that among incremental theorists (one standard deviation below the mean) the uniqueness of the conflict manipulation reduced support for concession-making (effect = −.84, $SE = .39$, $t = -2.13$, $p = .03$.), replicating the patterns revealed in the Study 2. Rather surprisingly, and in contradiction to the findings of Study 2, at the other side of the measure's mean (one standard deviation above the mean: "entity theorists") the effect was also significant, but in the opposite direction (effect = .81, $SE = .39$, $t = 2.05$, $p = .04$). Here, those who were led to believe that the conflict is not unique, expressed less support for concessions.

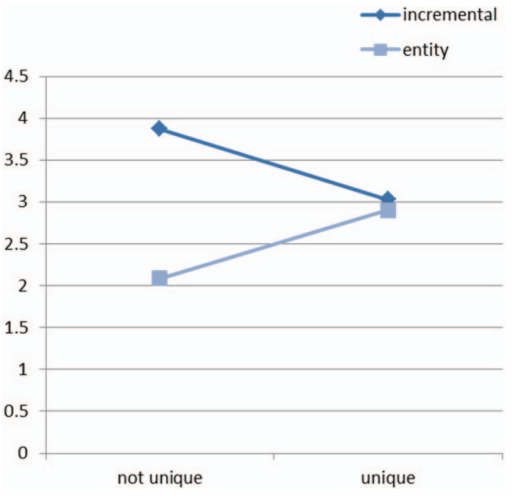

Figure 2. Interactive effect of Perception of Conflict Uniqueness × Conflict Implicit Beliefs on concession-making (Study 3). See the online article for the color version of this figure.

Discussion

Study 3 further explored the relationship described in Studies 1 and 2. First, this study established a causal (moderated) effect of the perception of the conflict as unique on support for concession-making. Second, this effect was moderated by beliefs regarding the malleability of conflicts in general, such that the perception of conflict uniqueness manipulation led participants to be more willing to make concessions, but only for those who believe that conflicts in general can change. Additionally, further to the findings of Study 2, Study 3 demonstrated that there is also an opposite effect, in which perceiving the conflict as nonunique decreases support for concession-making for those who believe that conflicts' nature is fixed and cannot change.

Although the last part of these findings is not in line with those of Studies 1 and 2, and should therefore be further explored, it can be explained quite intuitively. If people believe that conflicts in general cannot change and be resolved, and they are led to believe that their *own* conflict is similar to all others, then it would stand to reason for them to assume that their own conflict cannot be resolved, and therefore, concession-making would not be useful.

General Discussion

This article's main hypothesis was that the perception of the conflict as unique constitutes a barrier to conciliatory attitudes needed for conflict resolution. We contended that instilling a perception of the conflict as nonunique would influence participants' ability to learn from other resolved conflicts, leading them to support concession-making. However, we further expected this relationship to be moderated by the perception that conflicts are malleable in gen-

eral. Results from Study 1 showed that the perception of the conflict's uniqueness is associated with participants' support for concession-making, such that participants who perceive the conflict as nonunique and similar to other conflicts were also more willing to make concessions for peace. This study also showed that the perception of the conflict as unique is distinct and separate from perceiving the ingroup, or the outgroup, as unique. By that, we established a new variable in the field of conflict resolution. In Study 2, a correlational study, as well as in Study 3, which was an experimental design, we found that the relationship between the perception of the conflict's uniqueness and the participants' support for concession-making is moderated by the belief in the malleability or fixedness of conflicts in general. Perceiving the conflict as not unique was associated with increased support for concession-making only when participants held a malleable belief of the nature of conflicts. Study 3 also showed that when people believe that conflicts are fixed by nature, instilling a low sense of uniqueness (vs. high) decreased their support for concession-making.

In terms of our study's theoretical contribution, our article sheds light on a new variable, focusing on the perception of conflict uniqueness as a distinct and important perception within conflicts perceived as intractable. Existing literature focuses mainly on the uniqueness of the ingroup in the form of victimhood (Bar-Tal & Antebi, 1992; Bar-Tal et al., 2009; Noor et al., 2012; Shnabel et al., 2013; Vollhardt, 2009, 2012, 2013; Warner et al., 2014; Wohl & Branscombe, 2008) and attachment and glorification (Roccas et al., 2006), or the uniqueness of the outgroup, like delegitimization (Halperin et al., 2011) and dehumanization (Haslam, 2006). However, we offer a new perspective to thinking of ways in which people perceive their environment in the context of conflicts perceived as intractable.

Future research should further study additional aspects of conflict uniqueness that were not mentioned in this article. These include both underlying causes for the formation of perceptions regarding uniqueness, and the need to find a unique and new strategy for its resolution. In addition, future studies should more directly test some of the mediating mechanisms that explain the effectiveness of the uniqueness intervention. For example, future research might wish to explore the role of hope and despair in the suggested model. Moreover, further work is required to reveal the complex relationships between perceived conflict uniqueness and the perceived uniqueness of more concrete aspects like the ingroup and outgroup. The current research demonstrated that conflict uniqueness is distinct from some of these aspects., Nonetheless, future research should empirically test whether some of these variable—like siege mentality (Bar-Tal & Antebi, 1992), competitive victimhood (Noor et al., 2012; Shnabel et al., 2013), and inclusive versus exclusive victim beliefs (Vollhardt, 2009, 2012, 2013)—can be seen as predictors or as outcomes of the more general conflict uniqueness view.

Finally, it might be interesting to examine this new conflict resolution intervention in light of the existing theories of social identity and more specifically theories of group distinctiveness (Brown, 1984; Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, 1978), as well as the role of distinctiveness threat in the formation and influence of perceived conflict uniqueness. In addition, the interaction with implicit beliefs about conflicts offers a new understanding that the perception of the conflict as nonunique leads to greater support for concession-making for people who believe that conflicts can change. This understanding also calls for further research in other contexts, and probably in other kinds of conflicts as well.

On a more general note, these findings imply that people's attitudes are an integration of their general worldviews, together with their specific perception of the situation in which they are involved. This finding's significance not only applies to the research of uniqueness of conflicts, but also to the field of implicit beliefs about conflicts (Cohen-Chen, Halperin, Crisp, et al., 2014). Moreover, this finding can potentially expand our understanding regarding the entire realm of implicit beliefs (Chiu et al., 1997; Dweck et al., 1995). We contend that implicit beliefs may be applied to more concrete entities only to the extent that they are not seen as unique and fundamentally different from others. This idea should be further investigated in future studies. For instance, Cohen-Chen, Halperin, Saguy, and colleagues (2014) showed that malleable beliefs about immoral groups in gen-

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eral increased group-based efficacy in contexts of social protest, which further increased motivation to partake in collective action. If we apply what we now know about the effects of perceived conflict uniqueness, the model suggested by Cohen-Chen, Halperin, Saguy, et al. (2014), might be applicable only if the intergroup context is not perceived to be unique. If, for example, people are convinced that immoral groups (including the outgroup) can change, but that the situation is highly unique, then it is possible that the potential of outgroup change may not be enough to resolve the conflict. In this case, the power lies in the context and not in the hands of the people. This might decrease the sense of group efficacy and engagement in collective action. This, of course, requires further research and may be an interesting future endeavor.

Our research holds applied significance as well: Disseminating this relatively simple intervention using platforms such as publicity, governmental reforms, and the education system may go a long way to convince people that their conflict is not unique. One way is to use the education system or create workshops open to the general public, in which the content would compare conflicts and demonstrate that conflicts are not unique. Additionally, this variable can serve to inform decision makers as well as practitioners in the field of conflict resolution and peacemaking. This can deepen our understanding of how comparisons, not only between groups, but between contexts, can shape attitudes in protracted conflicts.

Moreover, the concept of conflict uniqueness can be used for purposes of peace promotion even if the concept of nonuniqueness fails to be assimilated. When both sides involved in a conflict perceive the specific conflict as unique, they inevitably become members of a shared ingroup. Similar to the idea of cross-categorization (Crisp & Hewstone, 1999), recategorization (Gaertner, Dovidio, Anastasio, Bachman, & Rust, 1993) and decategorization (Bettencourt, Brewer, Rogers-Croak, & Miller, 1992) members of outgroups involved in a conflict become members in a new group that is (in their perception) unique. This way, by promoting the notion that the outgroup also perceives the conflict as unique, a common identity may begin to develop.

Despite these implications, the present research has a number of limitations: First of all, these studies were conducted among members of the strong side of an asymmetrical conflict perceived as intractable, which is often affected differently than the weak or disadvantaged side of the conflict (Rouhana & Bar-Tal, 1998; Rouhana & Fiske, 1995). The suggested theory is novel in in this field, and this research should be only the first of many examining perceptions of conflict uniqueness. Future research should address this issue by examining the aforementioned hypotheses on the low status group and by taking into consideration issues of power. This will provide a full picture of this process, as well as expanding its scope in terms of applicability. Another limitation involves the context of the studies discussed. This research was conducted within a specific context, which is pivotal to the concept itself. It stands to reason that in less extreme circumstances, people may not hold perceptions of uniqueness regarding an intergroup conflict in which they are involved, especially if it is not salient or central in their identity. Relatedly, future work should compare the effect of uniqueness perceptions within other stages of conflict such as reconciliation or escalation versus de-escalation processes.

In addition, it is important to note that although the robustness of these effects was demonstrated throughout three studies, our studies have small sample sizes and were conducted in a relatively convenient and controlled setting. A similar limitation applies to our effect sizes: Although effect sizes were consistent, they were not very strong, probably as a result of the brief and to some extent subtle intervention. Furthermore, our experimental study (Study 3) did not have a baseline control group, making it difficult to determine whether the difference between the two conditions derives from the inducement of perceptions of uniqueness or nonuniqueness. All these methodological concerns should be dealt with in future work.

In summary, this research constitutes a novel path for future studies, theories, and applications in the field of conflict resolution. Integrating this new variable of conflict uniqueness with the existing theory of implicit beliefs about conflicts points to the combination of malleable beliefs about conflicts and the perception of the conflict as not unique as an important predictor of increased support for concession-making in

conflicts perceived as intractable. Such findings hold implications both in theoretical and practical terms, by uncovering new directions for research in conflict resolution, as well as a new possible tool for promoting peace and intergroup harmony.

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