The Distinctive Effects of Empathy and Hope in Intractable Conflicts

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Abstract

The goal of the current research was to examine how discrete positive intergroup emotional phenomena affect conflict-related attitudes in different contexts of intractable conflict. We hypothesized that empathy, but not hope would be negatively associated with aggressive attitudes during escalation, while hope, but not empathy would be associated with conciliatory attitudes during de-escalation. In study 1, we examined our hypotheses within a correlational design in an emotion-inducing context, while in study 2 a two-wave survey was conducted during real-life events within the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict; a peace summit as well as a war. Both studies supported our hypotheses, thus indicating the unique, yet complimentary, contribution of each of the two emotional phenomena to the advancement of peace.

Keywords

conflict resolution, emotions, Israeli–Palestinian conflict, empathy, hope, escalation, de-escalation

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Members of societies involved in deep-rooted, long-term, and violent conflicts find themselves emotionally drawn in. The grief over the loss of young combatants or civilian casualties, fear from having a close friend or relative hurt in the conflict, despair over failed attempts to achieve peace, and hope for a brighter future for the next generations are just a few of these intense emotions, present within the context of intractable conflict. Intractable conflicts are violent, revolve around goals viewed as existential, perceived as having a zero-sum nature and being irresolvable, occupy a central position in involved societies, require immense material and psychological investment, and last for at least twenty-five years (Bar-Tal 2013; Kriesberg 1993).

Although these conflicts revolve around real issues such as territory and natural resources, it is difficult to explain their intractability and resistance to change over the course of years without addressing their emotional underpinnings (Halperin, Sharvit, and Gross 2011b; Horowitz 1985; Staub 2005). Yet, it is only in the last two decades or so, that the role of emotions has begun to be empirically examined within processes of conflict management, conflict resolution, and reconciliation (e.g., Halperin 2011; Halperin et al. 2013; Kamans et al. 2014; Reifen-Tagar, Halperin, and Federico 2011; Sabucedo, Alzate, and Rodríguez 2011; Spanovic et al. 2010). Accumulated evidence shows that emotions affect public opinion on conflict-relevant issues, such as support for militant actions, risk-taking, negotiation, and compromise (e.g., Halperin 2011; Maoz and McCauley 2005, 2008; Sabucedo, Alzate, and Rodríguez 2011) and that these effects hold even when controlling for some prominent predictors of support for policies, such as ideology, socioeconomic status, and others.

Contemporary scholars see emotion as a multidimensional process that involves conscious or subconscious cognitive appraisals, affect, and behavioral aspects (Frijda 2004). The motivational or behavioral aspect of emotion creates the basis for its potential influence on conflict-related attitudes, as it gives expression to individuals' adapted reaction to the stimulus underlying the emotion (see Frijda 2004; Frijda, Kuipers, and ter Schure 1989). Highly relevant to the current discussion is the concept of group-based emotions, which refers to emotions that are felt by individuals as a result of their membership in a certain group (Mackie, Devos, and Smith 2000). More specifically for this research, intergroup emotions are group-based emotions targeted at another group as a homogeneous entity. Intergroup emotions theory suggests that group-based emotions are an integration of unique appraisals and specific identification with a certain group, namely, group-based emotional experience is driven by a combination of identification with the group and appraisal of a certain event in light of that very identification (Smith, Seger, and Mackie 2007). Therefore, our approach to the study of emotions is based on *Appraisal Theories* of emotions (Roseman 1984; Scherer 2004; Smith and Ellsworth 1985) in the context of intergroup relations.

Most research examining the influence of intergroup emotions on the dynamics of conflicts divides them into negative and positive ones. Negative emotions (such as anger, fear, and hatred) were traditionally considered as promoting the continuation

and even escalation of the conflict (Bar-Tal 2013; Lindner 2006; Petersen 2002), while positive emotions (such as hope and empathy) were usually considered to be contributors of de-escalation and reconciliation processes (Kelman 1998; Tam et al. 2008). However, research in the domain of negative emotions has already shown that this approach is at best inaccurate and that discrete emotions from the same valence should be considered separately regarding their effects on conflict-related attitudes. Recent studies regarding interpersonal conflicts (e.g., Cesario, Plaks, Hagiwara, Navarrete and Higgins 2010; Fischer and Roseman 2007) as well as intergroup conflicts (e.g., Gayer et al. 2009; Halperin 2011; Reifen-Tagar, Halperin, and Federico 2011; Spanovic et al. 2010) have demonstrated the pluripotentiality of some emotions. For example, Halperin et al. (2011a) demonstrated that anger can lead to higher support for compromises in the absence of hatred within the context of an upcoming opportunity for peace. This is mainly due to the fact that anger can lead to risk-seeking behavior, optimistic forecasting, and a belief in one's own capability, or that of the in-group, to correct the negative situation (Halperin 2011; Halperin et al. 2011a; Reifen-Tagar, Halperin, and Federico 2011).

Following this approach, scholars have pointed out several influential emotions, each of which has been found to have a discrete influence on attitudes and behavioral tendencies related to maintaining or resolving the conflict. As noted previously, most of these studies have concentrated on negative emotions, such as fear (Huddy et al. 2002; Lerner and Keltner 2001; Maoz and McCauley 2005; Rosler 2013; Wohl, Branscombe, and Reysen 2010), anger (Cheung-Blunden and Blunden 2008; Halperin and Gross 2011; Reifen-Teger et al. 2011; Spanovic et al. 2010; Tam et al. 2007), and/or hatred (Halperin 2008, 2011; Staub 2005) on conflict dynamics.

Among the positive emotions, empathy (Kelman 1998; Kriesberg and Dayton 2012; Tam et al. 2008) and hope (Halperin et al. 2008; Jarymowicz and Bar-Tal 2006; Moeschberger et al. 2005; Staub et al. 2005) are the most widely discussed in this context, since they provide the motivations for two of the most important processes in the dynamic of conflict resolution. As will be elaborated subsequently, empathy is related to relieving the suffering of the other group caused by the conflict (Pagano and Huo 2007), while hope is associated with searching for new and creative solutions to the conflict (Cohen-Chen, Halperin, Porat, et al. 2014). However, only a handful of recent empirical studies explore the ways in which positive emotions can promote conflict resolution processes (Sabucedo, Alzate, and Rodríguez 2011; Cohen-Chen, Halperin, Crisp, et al. 2014). Therefore, there is a need to empirically examine the distinct effects of different positive emotional phenomena[1] on conflict processes, expanding our understanding of each emotion's (i.e., hope and empathy) unique influence on support for conflict-related policies in different stages of the conflict.

The stage of de-escalation ranges from reducing the level of violence and other destructive conflict-related behaviors, to achieving a mutually consented settlement. In cases of long-lasting struggles, de-escalation is a nonlinear, long, and difficult process. It involves changes in all parties involved, both in the relations and

dynamics between them and in their social environment (Bar-Tal 2013; Kriesberg and Dayton 2012). On the other hand, escalation processes in conflicts may take the form of either spontaneous outbursts of violence or a calculated step-by-step policy. Escalation in intractable conflicts takes place when the severity of means used to wage the conflict intensifies but also requires large social mobilization for the struggle (Bar-Tal 2013; Kriesberg and Dayton 2012). Hence, reducing levels of violence by decreasing support for aggressive policies against the rival is a key factor in moving from escalation to de-escalation processes. Subsequently, public support for conciliatory policies is required in order to achieve conflict resolution as a result of the de-escalation process.

Interestingly, societies involved in intractable conflicts often find themselves trapped in a vicious cycle of repeated stages of escalation and de-escalation, with every round of escalation building further animosity, and every failed attempt of resolution reducing trust and hope. This was the case in Sri Lanka during the 1990s and 2000s (Podder 2006; Samarasinghe 2009), in the conflict between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland during the 1990s (Dixon 2008; Todd 2009) and in the Middle-Eastern conflict between Israelis and Palestinians since 1987 (Bar-Siman-Tov 2007; Tessler 2009). In these troubled conflict zones, as well as in other cases, studying the distinct effect of empathy and hope can provide a better understanding of the psychological underpinnings of conflict resolution processes. But furthermore, it can contribute to promoting the actual realization of conflict resolution efforts, by indicating which emotions should be addressed in different phases of the long and rocky road toward peace. The growing field of emotion regulation in conflicts (e.g., Halperin 2014; Halperin, Sharvit, and Gross 2011b) offers knowledge and pathways for those who seek to mobilize public opinion toward conciliatory attitudes and policies in the context of intractable conflicts.

In what follows, we present a short overview of the characteristics of empathy and hope, laying the foundation for our hypotheses regarding their distinct potential effects on escalation and de-escalation in intractable conflicts. Next, we briefly present the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, which we used as our case for this study. Then, we describe the method and results of the empirical investigations we carried out in order to examine the attitudinal associations of each emotional phenomenon. Finally, we propose a discussion on the article's contribution to the fields of emotions in conflict and conflict resolution, as well as directions for future studies.

Empathy and Hope in Escalation and De-escalation

Empathy is an other-oriented emotional state comprised of cognitive and affective components. The cognitive component includes knowing another person's thoughts and feelings as well as possibly taking their perspective (Ickes 1993; Stotland 1969). Understanding others' internal state is based on how one thinks events affect their experiences (Frith and Frith 2012; Zaki 2014). Some scholars regard empathy as the observer's emotional phenomenon, reflecting affective sharing or "feeling with" the

other person or group (Singer and Lamm 2009). In this sense, it involves taking on the perceived emotional state that observers encounter in targets (Stotland 1969). However, others assert that empathy relates to concern about the other or "feeling for" her or him or them, hence evoking such affective responses as sympathy, compassion, and tenderness in response to another person's appraised distress (Eisenberg 2000; see Batson [2009] for elaboration).

Both cognitive and affective components relate to a third empathic subcomponent referred to as empathic concern (termed also prosocial concern): the motivation to alleviate the suffering of another (Batson 2011; de Waal 2008; Harbaugh, Mayr, and Burghart 2007; Waytz, Zaki, and Mitchell 2012; Zaki and Mitchell 2013). Empathic concern frequently results in helping behaviors, as indicated by the vast research showing a significant positive association between empathy and altruistic motivation and behavior (e.g., Batson and Coke 1981; Eisenberg and Miller 1987; Knight et al. 1994; Waytz, Zaki, and Mitchell 2012). Furthermore, empirical studies show that empathy is strongly (and negatively) related to any kind of aggression (Kaukiainen et al. 1999; Mehrabian 1997; Richardson et al. 1994), even in the context of intractable conflict (Shechtman and Basheer 2005).

Although some research carried out in intergroup contexts supports the idea that empathy can result in a motivation to advance the out-group's welfare (Batson, Chang, Orr, and Rowland 2002; Iyer, Leach, and Crosby 2003; Pagano and Huo 2007), a growing body of literature indicates that empathic responses are biased or absent when dealing with members of an out-group, leading to reduced prosocial behaviors (e.g., Avenanti, Sirigu, and Aglioti 2010; Chiao 2011; Cikara, Bruneau, and Saxe 2011; Tarrant, Dazeley, and Cottom 2009; Xu et al. 2009). However, the question concerning the effect of empathy in intergroup contexts remains unanswered by these studies.

During times of escalation in intractable conflict, the need to achieve society's goals and protect it from the rival intensifies. Coupled with deep animosity toward the other side and past grievances, this intensification in this context almost inevitably deteriorates to outbursts of violence (Bar-Tal 2013; Pruitt and Kim 2004). Since empathy involves engaging affectively and cognitively with the internal state of others who are hurt due to the conflict's escalation, it may create personal distress among empathic individuals. When empathy is aroused in this context, the main emotional goal will be to halt or relieve the others' suffering caused by the violence, hence alleviating the observer's personal distress. This emotional goal may lead to action tendencies based on empathic concern, such as objecting to aggressive behaviors, as well supporting helping behaviors. In this context, relevant political actions that can be associated with this motivation may include opposition to potential or existing militant steps taken against the out-group, and support for providing humanitarian aid. Therefore, although experiencing empathic concern toward the rival during escalation of an intractable conflict could be less common, we suggest that empathy will have an important role in decreasing aggressive attitudes leading to support for militant actions during escalation.

The potential positive relation between conciliatory attitudes during de-escalation processes and empathy was suggested in the literature (e.g., Kelman 1998; Kriesberg and Dayton 2012) but has less empirical support. Maoz and McCauley (2005) found that sympathy of Jewish Israelis toward Palestinians predicted support for compromises. Unfortunately, items mentioning liking and empathy were combined together in that study in order to measure sympathy, hence weakening their distinction between specific positive emotional phenomena. Yet, it stands to reason that similar to other positive emotional phenomena toward the other side, empathy could be associated with conciliatory attitudes.

However, we believe that empathy is less related to higher support for compromises compared to other emotions, such as hope, for two main reasons—its basic motivation, namely, the emotional stake it offers the self in other's welfare (de Waal 2008), and its temporal orientation, which is focused on the present, rather than on the future. Regarding the first reason, the emotional goal of empathy is focused on the internal state of another, which includes suffering from aggressive measures in the context of violent escalation. No less important is the temporal orientation that stands at the core motivation of empathy as it relates to the present situation of the out-group. However, supporting political compromises is related to future-oriented attitudes that will presumably become relevant once negotiations are conducted. In addition, such compromises are not mainly focused on the other side's existing condition but rather are based on the expectation for positive reciprocal relations that will improve the conflict situation and equally benefit both sides. These attitudes and expectations seem less related to empathy's emotional goal and temporal orientation.

Furthermore, the high costs associated with political compromises in intractable conflict, and the interference empathizing with the out-group might create in the context of future negotiations may reduce the motivation to engage with the other sides' emotions (Cameron and Payne 2011; Shaw, Batson, and Todd 1994; Zaki 2014). Since intractable conflicts revolve around existential goals, compromises aimed at resolving them are associated with elevated political costs. Individuals anticipating this costly outcome of conciliatory attitudes might be motivated to avoid it by reducing empathy-induced action tendencies. In addition, anticipation of the highly competitive negotiation process and its perceived zero-sum nature might weaken the association between empathy and conciliatory attitudes due to its potential interference with the negotiation's outcomes. Therefore, we suggest that when controlling for other engines of positive affect within the stage of de-escalation, empathy will not be associated with conciliatory attitudes. We further propose that in this context, empathy's role will be underplayed by the effect of hope.

Hope is a highly cognitive-based emotion that involves expectation and aspiration for a positive goal in the future, as well as positive feelings about the anticipated outcome (Snyder 1994, 2000; Staats and Stassen 1985). Hope facilitates goal setting, planning, use of imagery, creativity, and cognitive flexibility (Breznitz 1986; Snyder 1994, 2000). Unlike empathy that relates to engaging affectively and cognitively

with the suffering of another, hope has been pointed to as enabling those involved in violent conflicts to imagine a future that is different and better than the past, as well as the negative present. Furthermore, hope can elicit thinking and planning creative solutions to the disputes at the core of the conflict (Jarymowicz and Bar-Tal 2006).

Hope has been found to play a constructive role in reducing hostility and increasing problem solving in negotiation contexts and willingness to forgive the adversary in post-conflict settings (Baron et al. 1990; Čehajić, Brown, and Castano 2008; Halperin et al. 2008; Moeschberger et al. 2005; Tam et al. 2008). Recently, experimentally induced hope predicted support for concession making within the Israeli–Palestinian context (Cohen-Chen, Halperin, Crisp, et al. 2014).

During the de-escalation process, which consists of changes within the context of the conflict and within the different parties engaged, the main emotional goal of hope is imagining a positive and different future, as well as various paths toward achieving it. The belief that a peaceful resolution is possible is an essential step toward taking risks and compromising in an intractable conflict that had created stress and cognitive freezing (Bar-Tal 2013). Furthermore, the essential component of pathway thoughts (Snyder 2000), which involves directed thinking and imagining of potential yet concrete routes to achieve the desired target, can lead people to accept the compromises needed to achieve a peaceful solution to deep-rooted conflicts.

The emotional goals of hope in the context of de-escalation might lead to action tendencies that can facilitate achieving a peaceful future, such as being open to new information about the conflict and the other side, as well as supporting concrete political concessions. Accordingly, hope has been found to allow adversaries to mentally explore a future that is different from the past and present reality of violent conflict (Halperin et al. 2008; Jarymowicz and Bar-Tal 2006). Therefore, and in accordance with recent findings (Cohen-Chen, Halperin, Crisp, et al. 2014), we suggest that within the stage of de-escalation hope will be associated with conciliatory attitudes.

On the other hand, the association between hope and support for aggression or militant actions has not been empirically investigated in the past, as far as we know. Hope, similarly to other positive intergroup emotions, may be associated with lower levels of support for militant actions against the other side. But we believe that hope has less to do with these attitudes, both because of its future time orientation and its core motivation, which is focused on oneself or one's group. The main emotional goal of hope is directed toward setting a better vision in the future, while planning forthcoming steps to achieve it. Furthermore, in the context of escalation in conflicts, the expectation for positive goals revolves around one's own group's future, which seems to be less related to political attitudes on aggressive actions toward the rival group. Therefore, when violence in the conflict intensifies and the wish for vengeance increases, opposing present-time militant actions against the other side does not appear to be a potentially relevant pathway in order to get to an aspired positive future for one's own group.

Hence, while supporting compromises that can secure self-goals seems highly related to hope, objecting to aggressive policies that affect mostly the current conditions of the rival group may be much less relevant to that emotion. Therefore, when controlling for other positive emotional motivations we presume that within the stage of conflict escalation, hope would not be associated with support for aggressive policies. Moreover, we propose that empathy will be the more proximal predictor than will hope in terms of aggressive attitudes.

The Present Study

In this study, we aimed to differentiate between the potentially distinct roles of empathy and hope in two different stages of intractable conflict—escalation and de-escalation. Such an empirical examination can promote a better understanding of the role played by each of these emotional phenomena in the reality of intractable conflicts. In addition, it may contribute to the attempts to restrain violence and promote peace, by addressing specific and relevant emotions in different stages of the conflict. We examined our projections in the context of the intractable conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. In the first study, our hypotheses were initially tested within the context of the conflict, but with no specific setting of escalation or de-escalation taking place in the background. This general conflict context enabled us to examine the effect of empathy and hope on both aggressive attitudes and conciliatory attitudes, both potentially relevant in these circumstances. Two events that took place in the conflict in the course of approximately one year enabled us to examine the hypotheses in a second study that took place within uniquely real contexts of conflict escalation and de-escalation processes. In each of the two events, we examined how the two emotional phenomena are associated with attitudes on relevant conflict-related actions, that is, conciliatory acts during de-escalation, and militant acts during escalation.

Escalation and De-escalation in the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict

The Israeli–Palestinian intractable conflict has continuously fluctuated between de-escalation and escalation phases over the last two decades (Bar-Siman-Tov 2007; Tessler 2009). The conflict entered an escalation phase with the outburst of the First Intifada on December 1987, followed by de-escalation that took the form of almost a decade of peace talks and interim agreements between the parties during the 1990s, mostly known as "the Oslo Accords." After the collapse of the peace process and the escalation of violence in the conflict in September 2000, the parties moved once again to conflict management strategies, including unilateral steps and low intensity confrontation measures (Bar-Siman-Tov 2007). Although violence continued around the Gaza strip, Israel, and the Palestinian Authority renewed their dialogue and negotiations in the Annapolis peace summit, sponsored by the American government in November 2007.

Only thirteen months after the Annapolis Summit, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict escalated once again, as violence erupted after a six-month ceasefire. This ceasefire between Israel and the Hamas movement, ruling the Gaza Strip, collapsed in December 2008; missile attacks against Israel intensified and the latter launched a wide-scale offensive campaign in the Gaza strip leaving approximately 1,300 Palestinian and thirteen Israeli casualties and mass destruction on the Palestinian side. The two events—the Annapolis Summit and the Gaza War—provide an outstanding setting for examining the questions asked within this study. Unfortunately, the vicious cycle still continued with Israeli and Palestinian societies fluctuating between anger, fear, and hope, following another war in Gaza in November 2012, the renewal of the peace talks between the two parties in July 2013, its collapse in April 2014, and the third war in Gaza that started in July 2014. In the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and the two opposing events that took place in the conflict in 2007 and 2008, we conducted our research regarding the effect of hope and empathy on conflict-related attitudes.

Study 1

Study 1 provided an initial examination of our hypotheses regarding the relations between levels of empathy and hope and support for conflict-related attitudes (conciliatory vs. aggressive attitudes). For this purpose, we conducted a correlational study in an emotion-inducing context. Here, we measured the extent to which Jewish-Israeli participants experienced hope regarding the resolution of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, and empathy toward Palestinians. We also measured participants' levels of support for compromises on core issues of the conflict, their support for militant policies against the other side, and other relevant control variables. We hypothesized that levels of hope would be associated with support for conciliatory attitudes, whereas levels of empathy would be negatively associated with support for aggressive attitudes.

Method

Participants. Two hundred twenty-six participants (50 percent men; mean age 44.37, $SD = 15.30$) were contacted and recruited in August 2012, using an online survey platform that offers monetary compensation in return for participation in surveys. They were paid approximately US$3 for their participation. Participants were all Jewish Israelis from the general population, and the survey was conducted in Hebrew. Regarding political orientation, 50 percent of the respondents defined themselves as Rightists, 29 percent as Centrists, and 21 percent as Leftists. Of the respondents, 46 percent estimated their family income as below the average in Israel, 25 percent indicated average income, and 24 percent stated their family as above the average (5 percent did not answer that question).

Procedure. Participants were presented with a link to a mock news website, assembling articles regarding Israel's situation as relatively calm, while considering launching an attack in Gaza. The articles' order was counterbalanced in order to overcome any effect of order. This scenario was both realistic in the current context of the conflict and held high potential for inducing emotions related to the conflict. After reading the articles, participants were transferred to an online questionnaire in which we assessed their empathy toward Palestinians and hope regarding the future of the conflict, as well as support in conciliatory and aggressive policies toward the other side. Additionally, we measured other variables—fear, anger, and sociodemographic variables—that might influence conflict-related attitudes. We hypothesized that empathy would be negatively associated with aggressive attitudes, but not conciliatory attitudes, while hope would be positively associated with conciliatory attitudes but not aggressive ones.

Measures

Emotional phenomena and sociodemographic variables. Self-reported hope and empathy toward the Palestinians were assessed using two items. These items were as follows: "empathy towards the Palestinians" and "Hope regarding the future of Israeli-Palestinian relations." Answers ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 6 (*to a very large extent*) indicating to what extent participants experienced each of the emotional phenomena. The same range of answers was applied to all other items in the questionnaire unless stated otherwise.

Next, in order to control for the effect of negative emotions, we measured two additional emotions that play an important role in the context of conflict: anger and fear. These items were as follows: "Anger towards the Palestinians" and "Fear from the Palestinians and their actions in the future."

Then, we measured four sociodemographic variables. Level of religiosity ranged from 1 (*secular*) to 4 (*ultra-Orthodox*). Level of education ranged from 1 (*up to 8 years*) to 13 (*PhD*). Self-reported political orientation ranged from 1 (*extreme right*) to 7 (*extreme left*). Finally, income ranged from 0 (*no income*) to 5 (*well above average*).

Conflict-related attitudes. To assess *conciliatory attitudes*, we used a 4-item scale based upon the work of Halperin et al. (Halperin et al. 2012) in which items reflected participants' conciliatory attitudes, such as openness to listen to the Palestinian narrative and support for relevant concessions (e.g., "To what extent would you be willing to watch films and read books that present the Palestinian narrative about the conflict" and "Israel must freeze the building in the settlements since the building is isolating Israel internationally"; $\alpha = .80$; See online Appendix 1 for all items).

To assess *aggressive attitudes*, we used a six-item scale based on the work of Halperin and Gross (2011) in which items reflected participants' support for aggressive policies (e.g., As long as rockets continue to be launched, it is Israel's right not

to provide electricity to Gaza" and "Only an attack in Gaza will restore Israel's deterrence capabilities"; $\alpha = .85$; See online Appendix 1 for all items). For both conflict-related attitudes' scales, answers ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 6 (*to a very large extent*).

Results and Discussion

Although levels of conciliatory attitudes were below the midpoint of the scale ($M = 3.01$, $SD = 1.24$), levels of support for aggressive policies were above that point ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 1.09$). On the other hand, levels of both empathy toward the Palestinians ($M = 2.64$, $SD = 1.25$) and hope for future relations between the parties ($M = 2.94$, $SD = 1.35$) were relatively low (see Online Appendix 2). In terms of the relationship between hope and empathy, a strong association was found between the two emotional phenomena ($r = .41$, $p < .001$).[2] In addition, conciliatory and aggressive attitudes were strongly and negatively associated ($r = -.58$, $p < .001$). Conciliatory attitudes were significantly associated with both hope ($r = .39$, $p < .001$) and empathy ($r = .37$, $p < .001$). Additionally, aggressive attitudes were strongly negatively correlated with hope ($r = -.39$, $p < .001$) and empathy ($r = -.49$, $p < .001$). Thus, people who tended to feel more hope about the possibility of peace and empathy toward the Palestinians also tended to hold more conciliatory attitudes and less aggressive attitudes. Both emotional phenomena were highly correlated with political orientation, as well as religiosity, although they were not associated with either income or level of education. For all means and zero-order correlations between all the variables assessed, see Online Appendix 2.

To examine our main research hypotheses, we next regressed the dependent variables on hope and empathy while controlling for the effect of fear and anger, level of religiosity, education, income, and political orientation (Table 1). As hypothesized, results showed that while empathy ($\beta = -.20$, $p < .001$, $SE = .05$) was a significant predictor of aggressive attitudes, hope ($\beta = -.04$, $p = .42$, $SE = .04$) was no longer a predictor. On the other hand, when regressing the same variables on conciliatory attitudes, hope ($\beta = .13$, $p = .03$, $SE = .06$) became the stronger and more proximal predictor, while the effect of empathy ($\beta = .09$, $p = .14$, $SE = .06$) became nonsignificant. A stepwise regression analysis, in which all emotional and control variables were included, revealed that for aggressive attitudes, 40 percent of the variance is explained by political orientation, 46 percent can be explained by political orientation and anger, and when empathy is added to the model, the model explains 50 percent of the variance, indicating that 4 percent of the variance is explained by empathy. However, hope did not predict aggressive attitudes. A similar procedure was used for conciliatory attitudes. Political orientation explained 32 percent of the variance, and when hope was added to the model, the model explained 35 percent of the variance, indicating hope explains 3 percent of the variance. Here, empathy did not predict support for conciliatory attitudes.

Table 1. Associations of Empathy and Hope with Conciliatory Attitudes and Aggressive Attitudes in Study 1.

	Conciliatory attitudes	Aggressive attitudes
Empathy	.09 (.06)	−.20** (.05)
Hope	.13* (.06)	−.04 (.04)
Anger	−.06 (.07)	.25** (.05)
Fear	−.008 (.05)	−.04 (.04)
Education level	.04 (.01)	−.10 (.01)
Religiosity	−.09 (.09)	−.005 (.07)
Political orientation (Left+)	.39** (.07)	−.40** (.05)
Income	−.03 (.01)	.05 (.01)
R^2 (Adjusted)	.34 (1.00)	.50 (.78)

Note: Entries are standardized regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

As predicted, participants who felt empathy toward Palestinians objected to aggressive policies toward them, even when controlling for the effect of variables traditionally associated with aggressive attitudes, such as anger and political orientation. At the same time, feeling empathy toward Palestinians was not associated with supporting conciliatory policies with regard to the conflict. On the other hand, hope had a different and unique effect on conflict-related attitudes when controlling for sociodemographic variables and negative emotions. Although participants who felt hopeful with regard to the future of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict supported conciliatory policies, their experience of hope did not significantly predict attitudes concerning aggressive policies in the conflict. These findings are consistent with our broader theoretical claim that each of the two emotional phenomena—empathy and hope—has a distinct role in promoting peace. While empathy is necessary to prevent potential further escalation of the conflict, hope is needed to accomplish conflict resolution.

While the findings grant preliminary support to our hypotheses, the first study was conducted in a context that is highly plausible in the context of conflict, yet still based on an invented scenario. In addition, participants did not constitute a representative sample of the Jewish population in Israel. Finally, the general conflict context allowed us to examine support for aggressive and conciliatory attitudes that are both potentially relevant but did not permit us to examine the specific associations in de-escalation and escalation stages. In order to address the limitations, this may pose on our research's external validity and in order to more fully address our hypotheses, we conducted study 2 in two waves, while using random sampling within stratified subgroups: during the Annapolis peace summit in November 2007 and during the Gaza War in December 2008 to January 2009. These unique settings enabled us to assess the proposed effects on relevant attitudes during real-time events in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict of either violent escalation or a conflict resolution process.

Study 2

To test our hypotheses in real-life contexts, we conducted another study utilizing a two-wave panel design that took place among Jews in Israel.[3] The first assessment wave was conducted one week prior to the Annapolis peace summit (i.e., de-escalation process), and the second wave—during the Gaza War between Israelis and Palestinians (i.e., escalation stage). In the first wave, we aimed to assess the potential association between hope, empathy, and political support in making compromises needed in order to resolve the conflict between Israelis and the Palestinians. In the second wave, we examined the potential effects of the two emotional phenomena on political support for militant actions against the other side during war.

Method

Procedure. The procedure for both the assessment waves was similar but took place at different times. Phone interviews were conducted by an experienced and computerized survey institute in Israel (the Machshov Institute) during one week in November 2007 for the first wave and during one week in January 2009 for the second wave. Interviewers were trained in telephone survey methodology and conducted interviews in the interviewee's native language of Hebrew or Russian. 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. Questionnaires were translated into Russian and carefully back-translated.[4] Interviews were conducted by fluent Hebrew or Russian speakers. The order of the questions throughout the entire questionnaire was counterbalanced, and there was no effect of order.

Participants. The first assessment wave included 501 individuals (50 percent women) who were contacted by phone and who agreed to participate, yielding a final response rate of 50 percent. Participants' mean age was 45.5 ($SD = 16.49$), 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 orientation, 46.3 percent of respondents defined themselves as Rightists, 23.2 percent as Centrist, and 18.4 percent as Leftists (12.2 percent refused to answer that question). Of the respondents, 23.6 percent estimated their family income as below the average in Israel, 22.2 percent earned the average income, and 37.8 percent earned above the average (16.6 percent refused to answer that question).

The second assessment wave consisted of 201 Jewish-Israeli citizens who participated in the first wave of the study (40.11 percent) and were contacted by phone and reinterviewed a week after the outbreak of war. It should be noted that during the war, some Israelis were called in for reserve army duty, while many others came under missile attacks or left their homes for other reasons, and therefore reinterviewing a higher portion of the wave 1 sample was difficult. Having said that, it has been

suggested that participation rates between 30 percent and 70 percent are, at most, weakly associated with sampling bias (Galea and Tracy 2007).

Wave 2 included 101 men and 100 women from which 45.3 percent defined themselves as Rightists, 22.9 percent as Centrists, and 21.4 percent as Leftists (10.4 percent refused to answer that question). Of the respondents, 24.4 percent estimated their family income as below the average in Israel; 20.4 percent earned the average income; and 39.3 percent earned above the average (16.9 percent refused to answer that question). To make sure that no dropout bias occurred in the second wave, we used both ordinary least square and logistic regression to predict dropout and did not find any significant effects of neither of the sociopolitical variables on dropout between waves.

Measures

Emotional phenomena and sociodemographic variables. In the first wave, participants were asked to indicate, with regard to the upcoming peace summit, the level to which they feel hope about the future of the Israeli–Palestinian relations, and empathy toward the condition of the Palestinian people. As control variables, participants were asked to indicate, with regard to the upcoming peace summit, the level to which they feel anger toward the Palestinians and fear from them, using one-item measure for each emotion. Participants in the second wave were asked to indicate their emotions and feelings in response to the war events they experienced (directly or indirectly) in the last days. The measures for the four emotional phenomena were the same as those used in wave 1. In both waves, answers ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 6 (*to a very large extent*) indicating to what extent participants experienced each of these emotional phenomena. Sociodemographic information was obtained regarding participants' income (1 = *highly below average, 5 = highly above average*), level of education (1 = *elementary, 6 = university/college degree*), religiosity (1 = *very religious, 5 = secular*), and political orientation (1 = *extreme right/hawkish, 7 = extreme left/dovish*).

Conciliatory attitudes (wave 1). To account for conciliatory attitudes manifesting willingness to make compromises which were relevant in the context of the Annapolis Summit, after hearing a very short reminder of the forthcoming summit participants were asked to indicate to what extent they support three core components of a settlement proposal ($\alpha = .54$).[5] The three components of a potential comprehensive settlement were widely discussed in the Israeli political discourse at the time and were therefore chosen for the questionnaire: Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 borders while keeping the settlement blocks in place; a division of Jerusalem, by which areas with an Arab majority will be under Palestinian sovereignty and areas with a Jewish majority will be under Israeli sovereignty; partial Israeli responsibility for the Palestinian refugee problem and financial compensation to the Palestinians, with no refugee entrance to Israeli territories.

Aggressive attitudes (wave 2). Since the context of war with Hamas primed aggressive political attitudes toward the Palestinians, we strived to assess these relevant attitudes in the second wave. Therefore, participants in wave 2 were asked to indicate to what extent (1 = *not at all*; 6 = *very much*) they support implementing each of the three following militant actions ($\alpha = .68$) during the war in Gaza: continuation of the operation until complete surrender of the Hamas; immediate shelling of every neighborhood from which rockets are fired to Israel, even if widely hurting innocent civilians; "erasure" of neighborhoods in Gaza by Israeli aircrafts. The three items expressing aggressive attitudes were chosen according to the possible militant options that were mentioned in the Israeli media during the war and were therefore familiar to the Israeli public.

Results and Discussion

In the first wave, even though a peace summit was just about to take place, levels of support for compromises among Jewish Israeli participants were relatively low ($M = 2.77$, $SD = 1.29$; see Online Appendix 3). Levels of hope were below the midpoint of the scale as well ($M = 2.79$, $SD = 1.53$), while levels of empathy were even lower ($M = 2.33$, $SD = 1.56$). The correlation between hope and empathy was moderate and positive ($r = .27$, $p < .001$).[6] As we hypothesized, the correlation between hope and conciliatory attitudes ($r = .24$, $p < .001$) was higher than the one between empathy and conciliatory attitudes ($r = .14$, $p < .01$). Although hope and empathy were not very common among Israelis, people who tended to experience each of these emotional phenomena also tended to hold more compromising views. Both emotional phenomena were correlated with political orientation, but not with any of the other socioeconomic variables assessed.

In the next stage, conciliatory attitudes were regressed on hope and empathy as measured in the first wave while controlling for the effects of fear, anger, and all relevant sociodemographic variables—that is, political stand, religiosity, education level, and income (Table 2). Results showed that while hope ($\beta = .21$, $p < .001$, $SE = .04$) was a powerful predictor of conciliatory attitudes above and beyond the influence of negative emotions and sociopolitical variables, empathy ($\beta = .06$, $p =$ n.s., $SE = .04$) was no longer associated with our dependent variable. In other words, the more participants felt hope, the more they were also willing to support proposals for peaceful settlement with the Palestinians, regardless of their negative feelings toward Palestinians or their sociopolitical background. A stepwise regression analysis, in which all emotional and control variables were included, revealed that for conciliatory attitudes, 9 percent of the variance is explained by religiosity, 13 percent can be explained by religiosity and hope, 16 percent by religiosity, hope, and anger, and when political orientation is added to the model, the model explains 18 percent of the variance. The analysis therefore indicates that 4 percent of the variance is explained by hope. However, empathy did not predict support for conciliatory attitudes.

In the second assessment wave, levels of support for aggressive policies toward the Palestinians were well above the midpoint of the scale ($M = 4.50$, $SD = 1.35$), suggesting that many Israelis were in favor of the military operation that was taking place at that time in the Gaza Strip. Furthermore, levels of empathy toward the Palestinians were considerably lower ($M = 2.51$, $SD = 1.57$), whereas levels of hope were closer to the midpoint of the scale ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 1.73$). Interestingly, in this wave, the correlation between hope and empathy did not reach the significance level ($r = .09$, $p =$ n.s.), suggesting that during war many people separate their empathy toward their rival's current situation from their experience of hope regarding future relations.[7]

Next, we analyzed the association between the two emotional phenomena as measured in the second wave and aggressive attitudes during the Israeli military operation in Gaza. The negative correlation between empathy and aggressive attitudes ($r = -.31$, $p < .001$) was higher than the one between hope and support of such actions ($r = -.14$, $p < .05$). Thus, people who felt empathy toward the Palestinians during the military operation in Gaza tended to object to taking aggressive measures against them. People who felt more hope about future relations with the Palestinians also tended to reject aggressive attitudes, but to a lesser degree. Although empathy was weakly correlated with level of education, religiosity, and income in the second wave, hope was not correlated with any socioeconomic variable. For all means and zero-order correlations between all the variables assessed in both waves of study 2, see Online Appendix 3.

We next regressed aggressive attitudes on hope and empathy measured in the second wave, while controlling for fear, anger, and all other relevant sociodemographic variables (see Table 2). As predicted, results showed that while hope ($\beta = -.04$, $p =$ n.s., $SE = .05$) did not predict aggressive attitudes, empathy toward the Palestinians ($\beta = -.20$, $p < .01$, $SE = .06$) was negatively associated with such attitudes above and beyond control variables. That is to say, when participants felt higher levels of empathy toward the Palestinians in the context of the War in Gaza, they also expressed lower willingness to support implementing various militant actions against the other side. A stepwise regression analysis, in which all emotional and control variables were included, revealed that for aggressive attitudes, 9 percent of the variance is explained by anger, 16 percent can be explained by anger and empathy, and 21 percent by anger, empathy, and religiosity, and when political orientation is added to the model, the model explains 23 percent of the variance. The analysis therefore indicates that 7 percent of the variance is explained by empathy. Here, hope did not predict aggressive attitudes.

Study 2 enabled us to examine our hypotheses regarding the distinctive effects of hope and empathy on a relevant set of attitudes—either conciliatory or aggressive—in an optimal setting of real-life situations in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. The Annapolis summit in 2007, taking place after over six years of widespread mutual violence, provided a context of de-escalation that allowed us to examine the potential effect of hope (vs. empathy) on conflict resolution. Findings indicate that, of the

Table 2. Effects of Empathy and Hope on Conciliatory Attitudes and on Aggressive Attitudes in Study 2.

	Conciliatory attitudes (wave 1)	Aggressive attitudes (wave 2)
Empathy (wave 1)	.06 (.04)	
Hope (wave 1)	.21** (.04)	
Empathy (wave 2)		−.20** (.06)
Hope (wave 2)		−.04 (.05)
Anger (wave 1)	−.15** (.03)	
Fear (wave 1)	.00 (.03)	
Anger (wave 2)		.24** (.05)
Fear (wave 2)		−.07 (.05)
Education level	−.03 (.04)	−.07 (.06)
Religiosity	.22** (.04)	−.16* (.07)
Political orientation (Right−)	.13** (.03)	−.16* (.05)
Income	−.04 (.03)	−.04 (.05)
R^2 (Adjusted)	.17 (1.17)	.21 (1.21)

Note: Entries are standardized regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

two positive emotional phenomena examined, only hope predicted conciliatory attitudes that are crucial for fragile peace processes to succeed. On the other hand, the Gaza War that took place during the end of 2008 and beginning of 2009 created a "natural lab" to examine our hypothesis regarding the effect of empathy on escalation processes in a conflict. This highlighted the discrete role of empathy in impeding real conflict escalation. As predicted, results indicate that people experiencing empathy (vs. hope) toward the Palestinians do not support the escalation of the conflict through aggressive militant policies. The important potential implications of these studies for promoting the resolution of intractable conflicts while major conflict-related events are taking place is discussed next.

General Discussion

Societies involved in intractable conflicts find themselves entrapped in a vicious and bloody cycle of escalation and de-escalation which deepens mutual animosity, nurtures despair, and strengthens the perception that the conflict is irresolvable (Bar-Tal 2013; Kriesberg 1993). Intergroup emotions have been found to be a major engine fueling the underlying psychological mechanism in both of these reoccurring stages of conflict (Halperin 2008; Cheung-Blunden and Blunden 2008; Spanovic et al. 2010). While most research has been dedicated to the destructive impact of negative emotions on conflicts, an important question regarding the potential role of discrete positive emotions in promoting peace in different stages of conflict resolution processes has remained unanswered.

In order to address this question, we carried out two studies in the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, which is regarded as a prototypical example for a protracted violent conflict (Bar-Tal 2001). Moreover, we tested our hypotheses utilizing two dramatic events that took place in the conflict within a relatively short period of time. One of them constituted a context of de-escalation, while the next one reflected violent escalation.

Results of these two studies substantiated our research hypotheses regarding the distinct effects of empathy and hope on conflict-related attitudes. While empathy was the most (emotional) proximal predictor of support for militant policies against the other side during escalation in the conflict, hope was the strongest predictor of support for compromises in the context of a de-escalation process. Taken together, our findings indicate the unique and distinct role that each emotional phenomenon plays in advancing resolution in long-standing intractable conflicts at their different stages.

Theoretical and Applied Implications

Our findings hold theoretical significance for the growing research field of intergroup emotions in conflicts. Previous research has focused mostly on either valence-based approaches of intergroup emotions or the role of discrete negative emotions in conflicts. The first approach advocated a differentiation between the negative effects of negative emotions in intergroup conflicts and the positive effect of positive emotions in such settings (e.g., Kelman 1998). The latter line of research adopted the discrete emotions approach (see, e.g., Smith and Ellsworth 1985) and revealed the unique implications of discrete *negative* emotions on intergroup conflicts (Halperin 2011; Reifen-Tagar, Halperin, and Federico 2011; Spanovic et al. 2010). The framework presented in this research offers an application of the discrete emotion approach to the realm of positive emotions in intergroup conflict. It emphasizes the distinct effects of hope and empathy on political attitudes pertaining to an ongoing protracted conflict. In addition, it utilizes a powerful real-world setting to examine these effects, by testing the hypotheses in the contexts of two different major events in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. More generally, our research further consolidates the importance of examining discrete emotions, while emphasizing the unique role that each emotion holds in social life.

The research framework also carries significance in the realm of conflict resolution. Resolving intractable conflicts requires tremendous and continuous multilevel efforts, including massive public mobilization for the process (Bar-Tal 2013; Kriesberg and Dayton 2012). Achieving peace requires stopping and rejecting the natural continuation of violence, while developing new alternatives leading to peaceful political settlements. These results point to the unique, yet complementary, contribution of each of the two emotional phenomena to the advancement of peace. Feeling empathy toward the other side is associated with the rejection of militant policies' continuation, even when violent confrontation is taking place in the

background. When the next phase in the process of peacemaking arrives, hope contributes to de-escalation and negotiation by promoting willingness to support concrete political settlements and accept their price. Since peace processes are fragile and carried out in a dual context that includes elements of both conflict and change (Rosler 2015), sustaining hope is required to bring it to a successful ending.

In addition to their theoretical implications, our findings suggest practical application in the context of *emotion regulation* in conflicts (Halperin 2014). At the individual level, emotion regulation refers to processes that take place when individuals try to influence the type or amount of emotion they (or others) experience, when they (or others) have them, and how they (or others) experience and express these emotions (Gross 1998). Recent studies have shown that regulation of intergroup emotions in conflicts can promote conciliatory attitudes (e.g., Cohen-Chen, Halperin, Crisp, et al. 2014; Halperin et al. 2013) and expend empathic efforts (Schumann, Zaki, and Dweck 2014). The question remaining is which emotions should be regulated to promote peace in the long process of conflict resolution. While most interventions in the field, such as intergroup contact and perspective taking (e.g., Bilali and Vollhardt 2013; Maoz 2011), are aimed at amplifying empathy toward the outgroup, the current research suggests that inducing empathy is mostly relevant for specific goals and at a specific stage of the conflict. On the other hand, our findings indicate that regulating hope (see Cohen-Chen, Halperin, Crisp, et al. 2014) could be applied more frequently during de-escalation processes in order to promote support for conciliatory policies.

Limitations and Future Directions

In this research, we focused on the Israeli–Palestinian case in order to test our hypotheses regarding the effect of hope and empathy on attitudinal aspects of conflict resolution processes. One important limitation is that it is unknown whether these findings will generalize to other conflicts. Therefore, an interesting direction for future research is to examine the role of hope and empathy in other ongoing conflicts, using real events in the conflict as much as possible.

Another important limitation derives from the study's correlational design. In order to draw causal inferences, future research should use experimental methods that will enable the examination of the effect's direction. In addition, our study focused only on two positive emotional phenomena that arise during conflicts. Future studies can continue this line of research and examine further discrete positive emotions and their impact on conflict-related attitudes and behavioral tendencies. In addition, the constructs used to examine each emotional phenomenon were based on only one item, similarly to previous studies (e.g., Halperin and Gross 2011). Yet these constructs can be widened in future endeavors, in order to include more specific aspects of each emotional phenomenon examined.

Peacefully resolving intractable conflicts that cause death, destruction, and great suffering in different parts of the world should be considered as an important goal for

scholars and practitioners alike. This research offers insights into the emotional path which can contribute to this end. Although inducing positive emotions in this context is a challenging task, our findings indicate that regulating empathy and hope, each in the appropriate phase of conflict resolution, has significant potential of promoting peace.

Authors' Note

The data files containing all findings from both studies presented in this research are available alongside the electronic version of the article, on the *Journal of Conflict Resolution* website.

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Supplementary Material

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Notes

1. The discussion that exists in the literature regarding whether empathy should be considered an emotion is beyond the scope of the current article. Therefore, the term *emotional phenomenon* is used instead throughout the article.
2. A variance inflation factor (VIF) test on the emotional variables revealed that all VIFs < 1. 30, indicating no multicollinearity between these variables.
3. Data collected in the two assessment waves had been used in previously published articles (Halperin 2011—wave 1; Halperin and Gross 2011—wave 2) and included further items that were assessed but are not mentioned here.
4. There are currently 1.2 million (16 percent) new immigrants from the former Soviet Union who speak Russian in Israel.
5. The three components of a potential settlement relate to distinct issues in the conflict, therefore yielding relatively low internal reliability.
6. A VIF test on the emotional variables revealed that all VIFs < 1.08, indicating no multi-collinearity between the variables.
7. A VIF test on the emotional variables revealed that all VIFs < 1.01, indicating no multi-collinearity between the variables.

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