

# Self-censorship of Conflict-related Information in the Context of Intractable Conflict

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## Abstract

Self-censorship is of great importance in societies involved in intractable conflict. In this context, it blocks information that may contradict the dominant conflict-supporting narratives. Thus, self-censorship often serves as an effective societal mechanism that prevents free flow and transparency of information regarding the conflict and therefore can be seen as a barrier for a peacemaking process. In an attempt to understand the potential effect of different factors on participants' willingness to self-censor (WSC) conflict-related information, we conducted three experimental studies in the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Study 1 revealed that perception of distance from potential information recipients and their disseminating capabilities lead to higher WSC. Study 2 replicated these results and also showed that fulfilling different social roles has an effect on the WSC. Finally, study 3 revealed that the type of information has a major effect on WSC.

## Keywords

intractable conflict, sociopsychological barriers, freedom of expression, self-censorship

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“I, who am opposed to censorship, call on all of you to [conduct] self-censorship.”  
 Limor Livnat, as the Minister of Culture and Sport of Israel in a message to Israeli filmmakers

(Anderman 2013).

In this declaration by the former Israeli Minister of Culture, she suggests that Israeli filmmakers censor themselves, as some of the movies they have created, specifically *The Gatekeepers* and *Five Broken Cameras* (two Israeli movies that were nominated for Best Documentary Feature at the 2012 Academy Awards), can potentially harm Israel's image in the eyes of the international community. Although the former minister does not call for censorship, her statement is a prime example of the attempt to create a political climate in which the dissemination of information that contradicts or questions the dominant and formal conflict-supportive collective narratives<sup>1</sup> is beyond accepted norms.

As we will elaborate in the following sections, although self-censorship is a broad and general sociopsychological phenomenon that is manifested in different forms and contexts, it especially flourishes in the context of intractable conflicts. In this context, a large proportion of those involved believe that if harmful information that questions the dominant narrative is disclosed and disseminated, it might jeopardize the mobilization of society members to participate in the conflict and might reduce support from the international community. Hence, in order to prevent its disclosure and dissemination, societies not only resort methods of official censorship and other societal mechanisms (Bar-Tal 2013) but also propagate norms of self-censorship and use social sanctions to enforce them (Bar-Tal 2017).

The context of intractable conflicts and the political climate propagating silence is crucial factors when examining an individual's decision to whether or not to practice self-censorship. In addition, it has been suggested that the type, or content, of information, as well as other circumstantial factors (i.e., information recipients, information holder's social role), may have crucial influence on the individual's decision to disclose or withhold information (Bar-Tal 2017). The present research aims to elucidate the causal relationships between the abovementioned factors and the practice of self-censorship. To this end, we carried out three experimental studies that examined different factors and their effect on self-censorship in the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. To the best of our knowledge, as it is a challenging endeavor, this is the first attempt to study self-censorship experimentally in the context of an intractable conflict. Before further elaborating on self-censorship as a sociopsychological phenomenon, we will describe the context for our research, namely, intractable conflicts, and the powerful narratives that are constructed and maintained within them.

### *Intractable Conflicts and Conflict-supporting Narratives*

Intractable conflicts are still occurring in different parts of the world, distinguished by their violence, duration and intensity, underlying causes, and by the toll they take

on the involved societies (Bar-Tal 2013). Members of these societies not only suffer human losses but also experience long-term negative psychological effects, such as stress, anxiety, pain, sorrow, suffering, and distress, both at the individual and at the collective levels. Furthermore, intractable conflicts necessitate that the affected societies mobilize their members to support the conflict's continuation and take an active part, often to the extent of sacrificing their lives. Such experiences pose an enormous challenge to involved societies, requiring them to find ways of adapting to the existing harsh conditions (Bar-Tal 2013).

In order to meet the challenges described above, societies involved in intractable conflicts develop a set of conflict-supporting collective narratives that illuminate the reality of the conflict, including its outbreak and its course (Andrews 2007). These narratives are selective and biased and provide a simplistic, moralistic, and one-dimensional view that allows unequivocal and meaningful comprehension of the conflict (Bar-Tal, Oren, and Nets-Zehngut 2014; Paez and Liu 2011). They enable continuous mobilization of society members and help to maintain a positive collective self-image. Eventually, they become well institutionalized and serve as one of the foundations for the development of a culture of conflict, which dominates societies engaged in intractable conflicts (Bar-Tal 2013; Bar-Tal, Oren, and Nets-Zehngut 2014). Because they fulfill such important functions in times of conflicts, they are constantly imparted and disseminated by formal institutions, educational systems, the media, and other cultural channels (Bar-Tal 2013; Nets-Zehngut, Pliskin, and Bar-Tal 2015). When large segments of a society and its leaders perceive the conflict to be irresolvable, extensive efforts are made to preserve the conflict-supporting narratives and to prevent the formation and dissemination of alternative/counter-narratives (Bamberg and Andrews 2004). The latter narratives are perceived to be detrimental to the group's efforts in the struggle against the rival because they often indicate a possibility of resolving the conflict peacefully, present the in-group in negative light and the rival in more positive light and/or as a victim of the conflict (Bar-On 2006).

Even though the conflict-supporting narratives serve an important function in times of war and violence (Hammack 2011), when the possibility for a peace process appears, the same narratives begin to function as sociopsychological barriers (Bar-Tal and Halperin 2011). According to Bar-Tal and Halperin (2011), conflict-supporting narratives could potentially be changed when facing compelling arguments about the heavy costs of the conflict, the rival's humanity, the rival's willingness to negotiate a peaceful resolution, and immoral acts committed in the past by the in-group, but in reality, this change hardly ever takes place over a short period of time. Even when society members are presented with valid counter-information that contradicts or refutes their beliefs, they continue to adhere to them. This is due to the operation of the selective information processing that obstructs and inhibits the penetration of new alternative information that may facilitate a peace-making process (e.g., Ross and Ward 1995). Moreover, in societies involved in intractable conflicts, there are powerful societal mechanisms that preemptively block alternative information from entering social spheres and guarantee that even

when they do penetrate they will be rejected (Bar-Tal, Oren, and Nets-Zehngut 2014). Importantly, in some cases, society members who possess valid alternative information decide to withhold it and not disseminate it, practicing what is termed self-censorship. In the following section, we will discuss the nature of self-censorship and then describe the present research.

### *Self-censorship*

Self-censorship is a broad and general phenomenon that is manifested throughout the world in many forms and contexts. It has been addressed in the realm of media (e.g., Antilla 2010); academic work and cultural products (e.g., Maksudyan 2009); organizations, focusing on whistle-blowers (e.g., Morrison and Milliken 2000); and in families, focusing on secret keeping (e.g., Petronio 2010). But it has been relatively overlooked in the societal context (for notable exceptions, see Hayes, Glynn, and Shanahan 2005; Horton 2011).

Recently, Bar-Tal (2017) proposed that self-censorship functions as one of the mechanisms that in times of intractable conflict maintains and preserves the conflict-supporting narratives of a society involved and thus prevents free access to information, inhibits freedom of speech, and obstructs free flow of information. In a conceptual development of the concept, Bar-Tal defined self-censorship as an “act of intentionally and voluntarily withholding information from others in the absence of formal obstacles” (p. 10). In other words, the act of self-censorship refers to situations in which an individual possesses information, is aware that the information she or he holds is reliable, and believes that the information may have negative implications for the society at large, for a particular group, for specific society members, and/or for a cherished worldview. Finally, self-censorship denotes that an individual consciously and voluntarily decides to withhold valid information in spite of the fact that there is no formal obstacle, such as censorship that prevents him or her from sharing it (Bar-Tal 2017).

### *The Present Study*

In the developed conceptual framework, Bar-Tal (2017) has suggested that the actual practice of self-censorship, as a societal phenomenon, is influenced by the following contributing factors: (1) the context of the group (e.g., whether the group is engaged in an intractable conflict or in time of peace), (2) personal characteristics of the person who has the information (see Hameiri et al. 2016; Sharvit et al. 2016), (3) type (content) of information that is in question and its potential impact, and (4) circumstantial factors (e.g., the individual holding the information role or the possible information recipients). Thus, Bar-Tal’s (2017, figure 2) theory argues that when a person receives unexposed, valid, new information, the decision to whether reveal it or not is dependent upon the considerations of the implications of revealing the information to the person, to her immediate social environment (e.g., family,

colleagues, etc.), and to the broader social environment (e.g., involved groups, third parties, etc.). This process includes taking into subjective account perceived costs and rewards and is influenced by the abovementioned factors. The resolution of this process will determine whether a person will be willing to reveal the information, and to whom, or whether she will be more willing to practice self-censorship. Despite of the significance and considerable social impact of self-censorship, research on the issue in the context of an intractable conflict is scarce and focuses on the demonstration of the phenomenon rather than studying its conditions. Thus, the main objective of the present study is to empirically examine the causal effects of several abovementioned factors on individuals' willingness to practice self-censorship that are especially relevant in the context of an intractable conflict.

First of all, one important circumstantial factor that is hypothesized to have an effect on individuals' willingness to self-censor (WSC) is the characteristics of the potential audience (i.e., information recipients). Hopman and van Leeuwen (2009) stated that group members are more inclined to report in-group transgressions or become whistle-blowers (e.g., Hersh 2002), when they perceive that doing so will result in a positive outcome for the in-group (e.g., the group will be able to protect its integrity and morality and strengthen its standing in front of relevant out-groups). Moreover, reporting transgressions to in-group members can have a constructive effect because it offers the group an opportunity to correct the impairment, while preventing out-groups from achieving related gains. Furthermore, research shows that in-group criticism could be evaluated as legitimate and constructive, as long as it is perceived as a proposal for an improvement (Hornsey and Imani 2004).

Additionally, it was found that the audience, whether comprised of in-group or out-group recipients, affects the manner by which the criticism and its source are perceived (Elder, Sutton, and Douglas 2005; Hornsey et al. 2005). In general, reporting in-group transgressions to out-group members is perceived as a serious violation of the implicit rule that group members are not supposed to criticize their in-group in front of outsiders (Elder, Sutton, and Douglas 2005). By doing so, the message source is perceived as causing unnecessary damage to the in-group's image (Hopman and van Leeuwen 2009; Hornsey et al. 2005). Moreover, even in cases of an in-group audience or in-group message recipients, the message is evaluated differently, depending on the size of the in-group audience. For example, Elder, Sutton, and Douglas (2005) showed that public criticism (as opposed to criticism made in private) is perceived as less acceptable and elicits less favorable evaluations of the message source (see also Hornsey et al. 2007). Hence, we hypothesized that the characteristics of the potential information recipients would affect the participant's WSC. Specifically, participants would be more willing to self-censor potentially harmful information about the in-group when message recipients were out-group members or were able to publicly disseminate the information.

A second important circumstantial factor is the effect of the social role that a person fulfills. Individuals hold different roles within a social group and these roles prescribe different patterns of behaviors within a given social context (e.g., Van Bavel and

Cunningham 2012). For example, Van Bavel and Cunningham (2012) found that assigning participants to different social roles (a soldier or a spy) affected the way participants from the same group recognized in-group and out-group members' faces. Similarly, Bar-Tal (2017) suggested that different social roles could affect individuals' WSC information about the in-group. For example, individuals who hold social roles which embed strong adherence to conflict-related narratives (such as governmental officials or soldiers), would be more ready to protect the in-group's image and narratives (e.g., Nets-Zehngut 2015). Hence, we hypothesized that the characteristics of the social role imposed on the information holder would affect his or her WSC. Specifically, participants would be more willing to self-censor potentially harmful information about the in-group when assigned the role of a soldier, as opposed to the role of a civilian.

A third important factor is the type of information. According to Bar-Tal (2017), information can be characterized among other things by its severity, its relevance to the present, the type of act it involves, the time that it relates to, the objects of the information, and the issues raised by it. As already mentioned, self-censorship is a sociopsychological phenomenon, which functions as one of the mechanisms that maintains and preserves conflict-supporting narratives of a society involved in an intractable conflict (Bar-Tal 2017; Nets-Zehngut, Pliskin, and Bar-Tal 2015). Thus, we hypothesized that information that presents the in-group as violent, immoral or presents the rival as a victim or as more moral than the in-group (i.e., information that is incongruent with the dominant conflict-supportive narrative) will lead participants to be more willing to self-censor, as opposed to information that presents the rival as violent, immoral or presents the in-group as a victim or as the moral side (i.e., information that is congruent with the dominant narrative).

In sum, in the present research, we have intended to examine our hypotheses regarding the causal effects of the abovementioned factors on participants' WSC conflict-related information. We conducted three studies in the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, a prototypical example of an intractable conflict that has escalated and deescalated for a period of decades (Tessler 2009). In study 1, we examined the effects of information recipients by manipulating their perceived social proximity and disseminating capabilities. In study 2, we tried to further establish the effects of potential information recipients on the WSC and also to examine the effects of the social role of the information holder by requesting that participants imagine themselves as either army soldiers or civilians, and the effects of the social role of the protagonists, whether army soldiers or civilians committed the dubious act in question. Finally, in study 3, we wanted to examine the effects of potential information recipients and the type of information on the WSC, by manipulating the depiction of Israelis and Palestinians as either perpetrators or victims.

## **Study 1**

The goal of study 1 was to examine how different information recipients' characteristics affect the participants' WSC information that potentially presents the

in-group negatively. To this end, we asked Jewish–Israelis to take part in a study that ostensibly “evaluated the effectiveness of different news content,” in which the news article presented to the participants consisted of information that portrayed Israelis (i.e., the in-group) negatively. Participants were then asked to indicate how willing they would be to share the information with four different recipients. We hypothesized that participant’s WSC would be affected by their perceived closeness to the recipients (i.e., in-group or out-group members), and whether disclosure of the information was considered private or public, such that it would be the lowest when the disclosure was done in private, and the information recipient was an in-group member, and would increase the more public the disclosure was, and the information recipient was an out-group member.

## Method

### *Participants*

Participants were 71 Israeli–Jews (35 men and 36 women, ages ranging from 20 to 30,  $M = 25.06$ , standard deviation [ $SD$ ] = 2.45) who were recruited online by an Israeli surveying company. In exchange for participation, they received 15 Israeli shekel (ILS; equivalent to US\$4). The participants’ political orientations were quite diverse (45.1 percent identified themselves as rightists, 36.6 percent stated that they were centrist, and 18.3 percent indicated that they were leftists).

### *Procedure and Measures*

The participants were e-mailed a link to a questionnaire. They were told that they were taking part in a study on the effects of different forms of message broadcasting (i.e., text or text accompanied by images) and on the effectiveness and coherence of the transmitted news’ contents. In practice, all the participants were asked to read an article from the most popular and mainstream Israeli news website—ynet. The article presented a real report written by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), which estimated that since 2009 hundreds of Palestinian children have been arrested, interrogated, and sentenced by the state of Israel, using tactics of violence and degradation, in violation of the UN’s children’s rights convention and international law (ynet 2013). To the original article, we added a short segment in which we emphasized that the UNICEF report was based mostly on information that was voluntarily disclosed by Israelis who worked and served in the detention centers for the Palestinian minors (see Online Supplementary Material).

After reading the article, the participants were asked to answer a number of multiple response questions, ostensibly examining reading comprehension, thus bolstering the reliability of the cover story. Following this questionnaire, the participants were asked to imagine that they were the ones who were exposed to the illegal acts described in the UNICEF’s report. Subsequently, they were given the

second questionnaire that included the dependent variables as well as the following demographic variables: gender, age, and self-reported political orientation measured on a five-point scale ranging from 1 = *extreme right* to 5 = *extreme left*.

**Dependent measures.** We devised four questions which measured the extent to which the participants were willing to disclose the information presented in the article on a scale ranging from 1 = *definitely no* to 6 = *definitely yes*, with the reference to the following recipients: (1) closely related figures (e.g., family and close friends), (2) in-group superiors (e.g., a commanding officer or a supervisor), (3) in-group non-governmental organizations (NGOs; e.g., Israeli civil rights organizations, such as B'Tselem), and (4) out-group NGOs (e.g., international civil rights organizations, such as Amnesty International). As mentioned, this measure was reverse recoded, such that higher scores in each item indicated higher *WSC* rather than high willingness for disclosure.

## Results

A one-way repeated-measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to compare the effect of the different potential information recipients on the participants' *WSC* the information presented in the article. To eliminate a potential alternative explanation, we controlled for the participants' political orientation throughout the statistical analyses of all three studies, but the pattern of results is identical when not controlling for this background variable. First, the analysis showed that the political orientation covariate was a significant predictor of *WSC* ( $F(1,69) = 18.10, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .21$ ), such that the more the participants were rightists, they showed higher levels of *WSC*. More importantly, we found, according to our hypothesis, a significant effect for information recipients ( $F(3,69) = 7.66, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .10$ ). Post hoc analysis using Bonferroni correction indicated that all the comparisons but one (i.e., the difference between the closely related figures and in-group superiors) were significant (all  $ps < .001$ ), such that the more the participants perceived the message recipients as more distant and the act of disclosure as more public, the more they were willing to self-censor the conflict-related negative information (for means and *SDs* see Table 1).

## Discussion

In study 1, we examined how the perceived closeness to the potential information recipients, and the perceived publicity of the act of disclosure influenced the participants' *WSC* negative information about the in-group. As predicted, participants were most willing to self-censor themselves when message recipients were out-group members and when it was a public disclosure (i.e., out-group NGOs) and were least willing to do so when message recipients were close, and it was a private disclosure (i.e., family and close friends or in-group superiors). Furthermore, as



**Table 1.** Means and Standard Deviations of the Main Research Variables.

Information recipients	Mean (SD)
WSC—closely related figures	3.00 (1.57)
WSC—in-group superiors	3.01 (1.51)
WSC—in-group nongovernmental organizations	4.06 (1.54)
WSC—out-group nongovernmental organizations	4.73 (1.37)

hypothesized, participants were significantly more willing to self-censor themselves when message recipients were from the in-group, but the disclosure was perceived as public (i.e., in-group NGOs) in comparison to in-group members to which a disclosure of information would have been made privately. Finally, we did not find any differences between closely related figures and supervisors, both of which are considered to be from the in-group and with minimum probability of the disclosed information going public.

## Study 2

In study 2, we wanted to replicate and extend the findings of study 1, and thus we examined the potential differential effects of social roles on WSC. As discussed in the literature review, individuals play different roles within a social group and these roles could prescribe different patterns of behavior (e.g., Van Bavel and Cunningham 2012). Serving as a soldier, especially in the context of an intractable conflict, leads to being subjected to powerful institutional laws and norms and to practice self-censorship, in order to prevent disclosure of information that is viewed as harming the image of the army (see, e.g., Ben-Ze'ev, Ginio, and Winter 2010; Nets-Zehngut 2015). Therefore, we hypothesized that participants who were randomly assigned to the role of the soldier who observed a transgression, will generally be more willing to self-censor this information in comparison to participants who were assigned to the role of a civilian.

Furthermore, the social role of the actors committing the transgression could also have a significant effect on WSC. In the context of an intractable conflict, soldiers, who protect and fight for the in-group, are respected, revered, and glorified (Shafir and Peled 2002). Accordingly, in the context of the present study, we hypothesized that participants would be more willing to self-censor themselves when witnessing transgressions carried out by soldiers rather than by civilians in order to maintain their glorified public image.

Finally, we predicted that the results of study 1 would be replicated, and WSC would increase as a function of perceived distance from the potential recipient and the publicity of the act of disclosure. Specifically, we predicted that the WSC would be lowest when the information recipients were close family and friends and would be highest when the information recipients were international NGOs.

## Method

### *Participants*

Participants were 204 Israeli Jewish men (age ranging from 20 to 64,  $M = 28.19$ ,  $SD = 8.38$ ) who were recruited online by an Israeli surveying company. In exchange for participation, they received 15 ILS (equivalent to US\$4). It is important to note that the exclusive sample of men is due to the specific role-playing scenario we constructed for the present study. We assumed that the scenario, which involves the role of Israeli Defense Forces soldiers, is more familiar to Israeli men, who serve more in field units and carry out operational missions compared to women. Participants were quite diverse in terms of their political orientation (40 percent identified themselves as rightist, 27 percent stated that they were centrist, and 33 percent indicated that they were leftist).

### *Procedure and Measures*

The participants were e-mailed a link to the questionnaire which began with a brief explanation. Then, the participants were randomly assigned to one of the four manipulation conditions. In all of the conditions, the participants were instructed to read a short scenario of an individual who witnesses (a very realistic account of) harm done by Israeli Jews to Palestinians. The participants were then asked to try and take the perspective of that individual, try experiencing what he might have been feeling and thinking when he witnessed the described events. In each vignette, we manipulated the identity of the actors (i.e., the Israeli Jews committing harm to Palestinians) who were either civilians or army soldiers and the identity of the observer of the described events, who was also either a civilian or an army soldier. In all of the conditions, the vignette was exactly the same, except for the identity of the observer and the identity of the actors. The vignette was as follows:

Imagine you're a [soldier serving/a civilian working in a private security company] in Judea and Samaria.<sup>2</sup> As part of your duties, you're manning a position which overlooks the repair of a road that passes near Palestinian agricultural land. After a few weeks at the observation post, you see a rather frequent phenomenon: [Soldiers/civilian security guards] who are responsible for the security of the work area, leave their position, approach the Palestinians who are harvesting the nearby fields, and verbally and physically assault them, sometimes even causing severe physical injury that requires medical care.

After reading the short vignette, the participants were given the same questionnaire as in study 1, including the exact same within-subject measure assessing the participants' WSC (reverse coded) as well as the participants' age and self-reported political orientation.

**Table 2.** Means and Standard Deviations of Willingness to Self-censor the Information as a Function of Information Recipients, Role of the Observer, and Role of the Actors.

Information recipients	The observer		The actors		Total
	Soldier	Civilian	Soldiers	Civilians	
Closely related figures	1.97 (1.02)	1.91 (1.18)	1.88 (1.07)	1.99 (1.12)	1.94 (1.10)
In-group superiors	2.80 (1.71)	2.75 (1.62)	3.02 (1.77)	2.53 (1.51)	2.78 (1.66)
In-group nongovernmental organizations	5.08 (1.27)	4.25 (1.56)	4.86 (1.48)	4.44 (1.46)	4.65 (1.48)
Out-group nongovernmental organizations	5.60 (0.75)	5.14 (1.24)	5.37 (1.10)	5.36 (0.98)	5.37 (1.04)
Total	3.86 (0.86)	3.51 (1.05)	3.78 (1.01)	3.58 (0.93)	3.69 (0.97)

Note: Standard deviations are given in parentheses.

## Results

The analysis was carried out using a three-way repeated-measures ANOVA with “the actors” (soldiers vs. civilians) and “the observer” (soldier vs. civilian) as between subject factors, and information recipients’ (closely related figures, in-group superiors, in-group NGOs, out-group NGOs) as a within subject factor. Similar to study 1, political orientation was added as a covariate.

First, the analysis showed that the political orientation covariate was a significant predictor of WSC ( $F(1,199) = 93.45, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .32$ ), such that the more the participants were rightists, they showed higher levels of WSC. More importantly, and in line with our hypotheses, the analysis yielded three significant main effects. First, replicating the results from study 1, we found a significant main effect ( $F(2,470) = 73.81, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .27$ ) for information recipients. Post hoc analysis with Bonferroni correction revealed that all the comparisons were significant (all  $ps < .001$ ), such that the more the participants perceived the message recipients as more distant and the act of disclosure as more public, the more they were willing to self-censor the negative information (means and *SDs* of participants’ WSC the information as a function of the identity of the observer, identity of the actors and potential information recipients are presented in Table 2).

Second, we found a significant main effect for the identity of the observer on WSC ( $F(1,199) = 7.68, p = .006, \eta_p^2 = .04$ ), such that participants were more willing to self-censor the information when the observer was a soldier than when the observer was a civilian. Third, the analysis also revealed a significant main effect for the identity of the actors on WSC ( $F(1,199) = 4.31, p = .039, \eta_p^2 = .02$ ), such that the participants were more willing to self-censor the information when the actors were soldiers than when the actors were civilians.

In addition, we found a significant two-way interaction between the identity of the observer and information recipients on WSC ( $F(2,470) = 6.06$ ,

$p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .03$ ). Post hoc analysis with Bonferroni correction revealed that when the information recipients were closely related figures or in-group superiors, the identity of the observer did not have an effect on participants' WSC (both  $F$ s < .41), whereas when the information recipients were in-group NGOs or out-group NGOs, the participants were more willing to self-censor themselves when assigned to the soldier observer condition ( $F(1,199) = 21.32, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .10$  and  $F(1,199) = 10.62, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .05$ , respectively).

Moreover, we found a significant two-way interaction between the identity of the actors and information recipients on WSC ( $F(2,470) = 4.33, p = .009, \eta_p^2 = .02$ ). Post hoc analysis with Bonferroni correction revealed that when the information recipients were closely related figures or out-group NGOs, the identity of the actors did not have an effect on participants' WSC (both  $F$ s < .36), whereas when the information recipients were in-group superiors or in-group NGOs, the participants were more willing to self-censor themselves when the perpetrating actors were soldiers ( $F(1,199) = 5.80, p = .017, \eta_p^2 = .03$  and  $F(1,199) = 7.50, p = .007, \eta_p^2 = .04$ , respectively). Finally, the analysis did not yield a significant two-way interaction between the identity of the actors and the identity the observer ( $F(1,199) = .33, p = .565$ ), or a three-way interaction between the identity of the actors, the identity of the observer and information recipients ( $F(2,470) = .33, p = .759$ ).

## Discussion

The results of study 2 replicated the results of study 1, providing further support for our hypothesis that WSC increases as a function of perceived distance from a potential recipient and the perceived publicity of the act of disclosure. Furthermore, we found a significant main effect, suggesting that participants were more willing to self-censor the information presented in the vignette when the actors in the scene were soldiers in comparison to civilians. Thus, in order to protect the glorified public image of soldiers within the context of intractable conflict, participants were more willing to self-censor themselves, when faced with a transgression committed by soldiers. Furthermore, acts carried out by soldiers of the Israeli army, as opposed to civilians, can be framed as conducted on behalf of the entire group. Therefore, disclosing this information could damage the group's positive image, which most individuals are motivated to maintain (Tajfel and Turner 1986).

Second, as we hypothesized, participants were significantly more willing to self-censor the information presented in the vignette when they were assigned to the role of a soldier observer in comparison to when they were assigned to the role of a civilian observer. These findings empirically substantiate quantitative findings (e.g., Ben-Ze'ev, Ginio, and Winter 2010; Nets-Zehngut 2015), showing that soldiers are bound to follow specific rules of conduct intended to create a clear coherent and self-serving narrative regarding acts that are perhaps questionable, which are

implemented by the army. Although in the present study the participants were not active soldiers in the Israeli army, it is plausible to assume that an overwhelming majority of them have served in the army at some point, and many of them are still being called to army reserve duties, as it is mandatory in Israel. Thus, when assigned the role of a soldier, participants undertook well-known rules of conduct and behaved accordingly, showing more WSC information that might harm the army and/or Israel's public image.

A more in-depth look at the results shows two unexpected significant interactions between the information recipients and the identity of the observer and between the information recipients and the identity of the actors. First, we found that higher WSC the information when the observer was a soldier (in comparison to a civilian), occurred only when the information recipients were in-group and out-group NGOs. No differences were found when the information recipients were closely related figures or in-group superiors. This means that the participants, on the one hand, did not differentiate between the close circle of family and friends, and superiors, and on the other hand, did not differentiate between the two levels of NGOs. The latter finding indicates that from the point of view of the "soldier" the two types of human rights NGOs (Israeli and foreign) do not differ, as they both carry out a similar mission of collecting information about Israel's violations of human rights and both disseminate it. Indeed, Israeli Jews in general strongly reject this mission and are deeply critical of it (Ilany 2008). This collective perception is even more amplified when assuming the role of a soldier. Soldiers are in many cases perceived by the Israeli public as victims, who are wrongly accused of violations of international human rights and international humanitarian law in the Palestinian territories. (A famous example is the "Report of the United Nations Fact-finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict" often referred to as "The Goldstone Report.")

With regard to the first finding, although there is no statistical difference between the two types of information recipients, we can assume that they differ in their motivational basis. In the case of the close circle, the disclosure of information probably comes mainly in order to relieve the feelings of distress that were created by the observation of the violent acts (Harber and Pennebaker 1992). But in the case of superiors, we can assume that the main motive was to try to change the situation, by asking for intervention to stop the wrongdoing (Hersh 2002). In any case, individuals perceive the act of disclosure both to closely related figures and to superiors as private, without the danger that the information will somehow be disseminated to the public, and as a consequence, they are generally more willing to disclose it (see Elder, Sutton, and Douglas 2005).

Second, we found that higher WSC the information when the actors were soldiers (in comparison to civilians), occurred only when the information recipients were in-group superiors and in-group NGOs. No differences were found when the information recipients were closely related figures or out-group NGOs. These two significant differences show that when the respondents saw soldiers as performers of the wrongdoing, they were less reluctant to tell superiors about it because they knew

that in the Israeli army, as a military organization, breaking the rules might result in more severe punishment than in the civilian world; thus, they wanted to protect the soldiers. We can assume that the same motivation led them to practice more self-censorship in the case of the Israeli human rights NGOs. Regarding the foreign NGOs, the willingness to practice self-censorship in both cases almost reached its peak.

The first two studies supported our hypotheses and presented significant evidence for the important role that the characteristics of information recipients and different social roles play in participants' WSC. So far, our participants had to decide hypothetically whether or not to expose information that could possibly harm their in-group's image, by deciding to self-censor (or disclose) information that depicted Israelis as the perpetrators and the Palestinians as victims. Therefore, in the next study, we aimed to examine the possible differential effect of the type of information (i.e., whether it depicted Israelis in a positive or negative light) on participants' WSC. Furthermore, as opposed to the hypothetical nature of the first two studies, in study 3, participants were led to believe that their decisions would have real-world consequences.

### **Study 3**

The main goal of study 3 was to examine the possible differential effect that the type of information (Israelis as perpetrators vs. Israelis as victims) may have on participants' WSC. In societies engaged in intractable conflict as in Israel, the conflict supporting narrative is hegemonic, being institutionalized by the official organs of the society. The counter-narrative is viewed by the authorities and by significant segments of the society as being harmful to the societal goals and causes, and therefore when society members encounter information that negates the official narrative they may try to withhold it. This practice is not surprising because the carriers of information that negates the official narrative are also often delegitimized by this narrative (Bar-Tal, Oren, and Nets-Zehngut 2014).

Thus, we hypothesized that a significant difference in WSC would be found between information that corresponds with the dominant narrative and information that counters this narrative. Specifically, participants' WSC would be significantly higher when the information in question presents Israelis in a positive light than when the information presents Israelis in a negative light. Moreover, based on the findings of Studies 1 and 2, we hypothesized that an interaction would be found between the information recipients and type of information on WSC. Specifically, we hypothesized that when the information included depicts Israelis as the perpetrators, participants would be more willing to self-censor in front of out-group information recipients than in front of in-group information recipients, whereas when the information included depicts Israelis as the victims, we predicted that the type of information recipients would not affect participants' WSC.

## Method

### Participants

Participants were 123 Israeli Jews (64 men, ages ranging from 19 to 59,  $M = 28.28$ ,  $SD = 6.59$ ) who were recruited online by an Israeli surveying company. In exchange for participation, they received 15 ILS (equivalent to US\$4). Participants were quite diverse in terms of their political orientation (42.3 percent identified themselves as rightist, 22 percent stated they were centrist, and 35.7 percent indicated they were leftist).

### Procedure and Measures

The participants were e-mailed a link to the questionnaire which started with a brief explanation that provided the framework for the study, which was as follows:

“We are a group of researchers from the School of Education at Tel Aviv University, which develops educational curricula on various issues (such as social, educational, economic, and political issues). In the last few weeks, we have been developing a curriculum that deals with the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. In order to validate our work, we have decided to consult with a wide sample of people and get their opinions regarding the suitability of different materials (such as texts, images, and videos) for the curriculum about the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.”

Following the introduction, all the participants were told that they were about to view a slideshow of twelve images that presented different aspects of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Their task was ostensibly to indicate to what extent each photo should appear in the slideshow that ostensibly would be presented to high school students. In other words, participants were made to believe that their choices would have an actual effect on the curriculum regarding the Israel–Palestinian conflict.

In order to manipulate the independent variable “information recipients,” the participants were randomly assigned to one of the three audience conditions. One-third of the participants were told that the curriculum about the Israeli–Palestinian conflict would be presented to Jewish high school students in Israel (i.e., in-group members). Another third were told that it would be presented to Arab high school students in Israel (i.e., out-group members that are directly related to the conflict). Finally, third of the participants were told that the curriculum was designed to be presented to European high school students who come to visit Israel (i.e., unrelated out-group members).

The images, which were selected based on a pilot study (see elaboration on the pilot study in Online Supplementary Material), consisted of two different types of conflict-related information and were presented in random order: (1) *Israelis as victims*: A total of six images, three images that presented “*Israeli suffering*” (e.g., the wreckage of a bus after a terror attack) and three images that presented “*Palestinians as aggressors*” (e.g., Hamas militants preparing to fire a rocket), and (2) *Israelis as perpetrators*: A total of six images, three images that presented

“*Palestinian suffering*” (e.g., Palestinian’s looking for their belongings after their house was bombed) and three images that presented “*Israelis as aggressors*” (e.g., young Jewish settlers attacking a Palestinian woman).

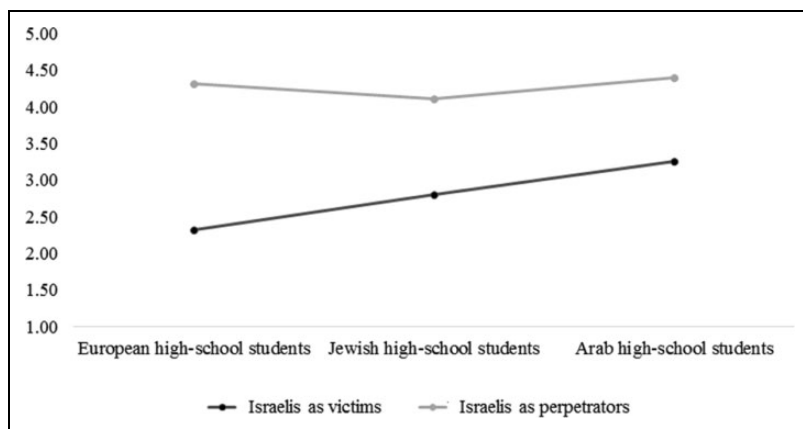
**Dependent variables.** After each image the participants were asked to indicate on a scale ranging from 1 = *definitely no* to 7 = *definitely yes*, to what extent they thought that the image was suitable to appear in the curriculum (i.e., their willingness to disclose this information). Similar to Studies 1 and 2, the dependent variable was reverse coded, such that a high score in each one of the items indicated a high WSC. In order to examine whether the twelve images did indeed create two distinct measures, we ran principle component analysis with varimax rotation on the responses to the twelve images, which indeed yielded two distinct factors: the first factor (Israelis as victims) accounted for 32.4 percent of the variance ( $\alpha = .87$ ) and the second factor (Israelis as perpetrators) accounted for 31.5 percent of the variance ( $\alpha = .87$ ). Finally, we measured the participants’ age, gender, and political orientation.

## Results

The analysis was carried out using a two-way repeated-measures ANOVA with information recipients (i.e., Jewish high school, Arab–Israeli high school, and European high school) as a between subject variable, and the “type of information” (i.e., Israelis as victims vs. Israelis as perpetrators) as a within subject variable. As in the previous studies, political orientation was added as a covariate.

First, the analysis showed that the political orientation covariate was a significant predictor of WSC ( $F(1,119) = 6.03, p = .016, \eta_p^2 = .05$ ), such that the more the participants were rightists, they showed higher levels of WSC. More importantly, and as we hypothesized, the analysis (see Figure 1) revealed a significant main effect for type of information on WSC, such that participants were more willing to self-censor information that depicted Israelis as the perpetrators than information that depicted Israelis as the victims ( $M = 4.28, SD = 1.60$  vs.  $M = 2.78, SD = 1.42$ , respectively;  $F(1,119) = 75.05, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .39$ ). There was no main effect for the information recipients manipulation ( $F(2,119) = 2.03, p = .136$ ). Furthermore, according to our hypothesis, we found a significant two-way interaction between the information recipients and the type of information on participants’ WSC ( $F(2,119) = 3.45, p = .035, \eta_p^2 = .05$ ). However, probing into the significant interaction revealed an unexpected pattern of results, inconsistent with what we had hypothesized. Specifically, simple effects analyses revealed that when the information depicted Israelis as the perpetrators, there was no difference across the information recipients conditions in the participant’s WSC ( $F(2,119) = .06, p = .942$ ). Conversely, when the information depicted Israelis as the victims, there was a significant difference between the conditions ( $F(2,119) = 5.51, p = .005, \eta_p^2 = .08$ ). Post hoc





**Figure 1.** Means of willingness to self-censor images that depict Israelis as either the victims or the perpetrators as a function of information recipients.

analysis with Bonferroni correction indicated that participants showed significantly lower levels of WSC when the message recipients were the European high school students in comparison to the Arab high school message recipients ( $M = 2.32$ ,  $SD = .96$  vs.  $M = 3.26$ ,  $SD = 1.42$ , respectively;  $p = .004$ ). No significant differences were found between the Jewish–Israeli high school condition ( $M = 2.81$ ,  $SD = 1.72$ ) and the two other information recipients conditions (both  $ps > .27$ ).

## Discussion

In study 3, we extended the findings of Studies 1 and 2 (that used only information that depicts Israelis as the perpetrators) by examining the possible differential effect of type of information on the participants' WSC and the interaction between type of information and the characteristics of the potential information recipients. Moreover, in study 3, participants were led to believe that the choices they made had real-world consequences, to bolster the external validity of the present research. As predicted, a significant main effect for type of information was found, indicating that participants were generally more willing to self-censor information that depicts Israelis as perpetrators (i.e., inconsistent with the dominant conflict supporting narrative) than information that depicts Israelis as victims (i.e., consistent with the dominant conflict supporting narrative) across all conditions.

Additionally, a significant two-way interaction between type of information and the characteristics of the information recipients on participants' WSC was obtained. Simple effects analyses revealed that unlike studies 1 and 2, when the information depicted Israelis as perpetrators, there was no difference across the information recipient's conditions—participants were generally quite willing to self-censor the information for all the potential recipients. However, when the information depicted

Israelis as victims, there was a significant difference between the information recipients' conditions. Thus, participants showed significant higher levels of self-censorship in the Arab high school condition in comparison to the European high school condition. No significant differences were found between the Jewish–Israeli high school condition and the two other information recipients conditions. We will discuss this unexpected pattern of results in the general discussion.

## **General Discussion**

The current research, carried out in the context of an intractable conflict, focused on a specific sociopsychological mechanism—self-censorship. This mechanism, which according to Bar-Tal (2017) is activated on the individual level, indicates that individuals intentionally and voluntarily withhold information from other society members, while no formal obstacle prevents them from sharing it (e.g., official censorship). In a more specific context, individuals often self-censor in societies involved in violent conflicts because they assume that the withheld information may have negative implications for the society as a whole. In the context of intractable conflict, self-censorship is perceived as a necessary mechanism that protects the in-group from the dissemination of information that contradicts the group's interests, and therefore as a consequence it maintains and preserves the collective conflict-supporting narratives (Bar-Tal 2013; Bar-Tal, Oren, and Nets-Zehngut 2014).

The main goal of the present study was to conduct a preliminary experimental examination of Bar-Tal's (2017) theoretical conception of self-censorship, in order to extend the qualitative research on this societal phenomenon (e.g., Ben-Ze'ev, Ginio, and Winter 2010; Nets-Zehngut 2015; Nets-Zehngut, Pliskin, and Bar-Tal 2015). First of all, the results of studies 1 and 2 show that the identity of the potential information recipients (i.e., closely related figures, in-group superiors, in-group NGOs, or out-group NGOs) can have a major effect on participants' WSC information that may harm the in-group's image. Indeed, we found that the WSC changes as a function of perceived social distance from the potential recipient. This means that when information recipients are perceived as socially distant (e.g., out-group NGOs), participants are significantly more willing to self-censor in comparison to when the information recipients are perceived as close (e.g., family and close friends). This effect corresponds with the literature of in-group criticism which asserts that when the audience is comprised of out-group recipients, the criticism and its source are generally perceived more negatively, as causing more damage, and as less appropriate (Elder, Sutton, and Douglas 2005; Hopman and van Leeuwen 2009; Hornsey et al. 2005). Accordingly, reporting in-group transgressions or misconducts to out-group members is viewed as a violation of an implicit norm that group members shouldn't air the group's "dirty laundry" out in the open (Elder, Sutton, and Douglas 2005).

Moreover, we also found variance in WSC between in-group potential recipients, when participants in study 2 were significantly more inclined to self-censor to the

in-group NGOs in comparison to closely related figures. This effect could be explained by another important characteristic of the potential information recipients, namely, the attributed dissemination channel of the information—public or private (Elder, Sutton, and Douglas 2005). Thus, in-group members could be perceived as a private channel (e.g., friends and family) or as a public channel of information (e.g., media, in-groups NGOs, etc.). As mentioned, Elder, Sutton, and Douglas (2005) demonstrated that participants perceived public in-group criticism as less moral in comparison to the same criticism that was made privately (in a private conversation). This indicates that in-group members are perceived as less entitled to criticize their group in public than in private spheres. Therefore, it is plausible to assume that in the present study, when the recipients were perceived as holding public dissemination capabilities, participants were significantly more willing to self-censor the information in comparison to recipients who were perceived as private figures.

In addition, it is possible that individuals practice less self-censorship with their close circle because the collected information related to political or military events often negates their values and thus causes distress. A person is aware of possessing new unexposed information that is relevant to the society and should be revealed, but at the same time, a person is aware that revealing the information violates another principle, norm, dogma, ideology, or value and may cause harm. Thus, revealing the information to family members or to close friends serves a kind of therapeutic function (Harber and Cohen 2005). Finally, individuals have an evolutionary tendency to share, communicate, and disclose information and knowledge that they form, observe, and/or collect (Brewer and Caporael 2006). Thus, by sharing information with close persons, individuals satisfy this need.

Another important finding was the effect of social roles on the participants' WSC. The results of study 2 supported our hypothesis and provided evidence that different social roles can have a major influence on individuals' WSC information. Thus, (1) participants were significantly more inclined to self-censor negative information about the in-group when they were assigned the role of a soldier observing the events in comparison to when they were assigned the role of a civilian observer; (2) participants were significantly more inclined to self-censor the information presented in the vignette when the perpetrators of the described immoral acts were soldiers in comparison to civilians. These findings validate the general assumption that in a given context, different social roles can prescribe different standards, goals, norms, patterns of conduct, and behavioral repertoires among individuals (Van Bavel and Cunningham 2012). They also empirically support the assumption that social roles (such as soldiers) that increase the saliency of conflict-related ideology, make individuals more willing to self-censor information that may harm the in-group's image. Moreover, they support the notion that security forces have a unique and meaningful status in societies involved in enduring conflicts and as mission carriers of a society they have the role of defending it, even with violence (Shafir and Peled 2002). Thus, on the one hand, soldiers as observers are used to violence and see it as part of the conflict, and on the other hand, as those that carry out the

violence, they are perceived as performing their role. In both cases, therefore the respondents in the role of soldiers were more ready to self-censor than respondents in the role of civilians.

Study 3, which focused only on public disclosure (Jewish Israeli high school students, Arab high school student, and European high school students) in comparison to the previous studies, showed that participants are generally more willing to self-censor information that presents Israeli-Jews as carrying out immoral acts and the Palestinians as being the victims, in comparison to information that presents Israeli-Jews as moral and victims and the Palestinians as immoral perpetrators. These results are not surprising, given the nature of self-censorship as a sociopsychological phenomenon that functions as one of the mechanisms which maintains and preserves conflict-supporting narratives and blocks the dissemination of alternative/counter-narratives (Bar-Tal 2017; Nets-Zehngut, Pliskin, and Bar-Tal 2015).

Furthermore, a significant interaction between information recipients and type of information was obtained, such that when the information included images of Israelis as the perpetrators, there was no difference between the information recipients conditions—participants displayed the same high levels of self-censorship towards the in-group (Jewish-Israeli high school students), the conflict-related out-group (Arab high school students) and the uninvolved out-group (European high school students); on the other hand, when the information included images of Israelis as the victims, participants showed significantly higher levels of self-censorship in the Arab-Israeli high school condition in comparison to the European high school condition. Put differently, participants showed more willingness to display the Palestinians as the aggressors and the Israelis as victims in front of the European audience, compared to the other experimental conditions. One possible explanation is that in study 3, as opposed to the first two studies, the dilemma the participants faced (i.e., whether to self-censor or disclose the information) did not involve any hypothetical costs to the participant himself or herself or to another person, and as such, the main considerations favoring self-censorship were almost exclusively related to the possible costs the in-group might suffer (Afifi and Seuber 2009; Bar-Tal 2017). This finding, together with the high WSC narrative-incongruent information to Israeli-Jewish high schools, also corresponds with what Bar-Tal, Oren, and Nets-Zehngut (2014) describe as the struggle over the dominance of the conflict-supportive narrative. According Bar-Tal, Oren, and Nets-Zehngut, narratives are of great importance for a society involved in a conflict. Thus, they engage in vigorous struggle in order to maintain the dominance of their conflict-supportive narrative vis-à-vis the in-group and the international community.

At the same time, a relatively high level of readiness to self-censor this information from Arab students may indicate that the participants know that this information will not be easily accepted, and might even lead to anger, by this group which has long-term negative experiences with the state, the Jewish public, and especially the Israeli security forces. In other words, in many respects images that would be perceived as being consistent with the dominant narrative for Jewish-Israelis, would

be, at the same time, perceived by Jewish–Israelis to be inconsistent with the dominant narrative of most Palestinians citizens of Israel (see Biton and Salomon 2006). This is because most Jewish Israelis consider the Palestinian minority in Israel, which is largely uninvolved in violent actions, as a hostile minority, loyal to Israel's enemies (Smootha 2002). These initial findings should be investigated in future research. Not surprisingly, the respondents felt the responsibility to present the images depicting Jewish–Israelis as the victims to the European audience in order to create moral support for the Israeli–Jewish cause.

### *Implications of the Current Findings*

The findings of the present study have two major implications. First, the present study was a first experimental research aimed to examine Bar-Tal's (2017) theoretical conception of the self-censorship phenomenon. Our findings indicated that self-censorship could be influenced by the social role, characteristics of the recipients, and by the type of information presented. It is important to note that, due to the complex nature of self-censorship, the present findings represent only a small fraction of its potential antecedents. Many more potential research questions may be raised that call for a thorough examination of the conditions that affect the practice of self-censorship. Second, the findings also hold interesting implications for the study of sociopsychological barriers in the context of intractable conflicts that inhibit peacemaking processes (e.g., Bar-Tal and Halperin 2011). We argue that self-censorship functions as one of the sociopsychological barriers that prevent free flow of information. Thus, it helps to maintain and preserve the society's conflict-supporting narratives by preventing the dissemination of alternative information that may shed new light on the conflict, the rival and the in-group, which might facilitate unfreezing of the held beliefs (Bar-Tal 2017).

The notion that self-censorship should be viewed as a sociopsychological barrier is further reinforced by a longitudinal study that was conducted by Hameiri et al. (2016). The study which involved a large sample of Jews in Israel showed that support for self-censorship mediated the relationships between personal characteristics (e.g., authoritarianism, ethnocentrism, siege mentality) and support for negotiations and providing humanitarian aid to Palestinians in the Gaze Strip. In another words, it demonstrated the relationship between support for self-censorship and support for behaviors that reflect a rightist political orientation. Self-censorship thus functions as one of the mechanisms of closure. Importantly, we do not argue that only rightists practice self-censorship, but that they are more prone to do so in the context of intractable conflicts in order to protect their in-group.

### *Limitations and Future Directions*

A few limitations of the current study should be noted. One of the biggest challenges of the experimental research on self-censorship is to design experiments that contain

the complexity of the phenomenon and succeed in simulating real life situations, that is, a situation in which the participant (1) believes the information presented in the experiment is reliable; (2) he or she is aware that the information is relevant to the group/society and should or shouldn't be revealed; (3) he or she is aware that revealing the information violates another principle, norm, ideology, or value and can cause harm; and (4) he or she believes that the decision to self-censor can have an actual effect in reality (i.e., a potential recipient/s will or will not receive the information according the decision). In the three studies we designed, the first presented a hypothetical situation and the second used a role-playing paradigm in order to examine the participants' WSC. Both of them satisfied conditions 1 to 3 but did not satisfy condition 4. Only in study 3 did we design an experiment that satisfied conditions 1 to 4, leading participants to believe that their actions would be implemented in reality and the participants were asked to rate photos depicting events and situations they perceived as valid or truthful.

It should also be noted that WSC was operationalized in all three studies by measuring participants' willingness to disclose. Although similar in meaning, it can be argued that even if participants show very low levels of willingness to disclose information, it does not necessarily mean that participants are practicing self-censorship, as it was conceptualized. Nevertheless, we believe that it is reasonable to assume that in the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, the information we provided in all three studies was perceived as having negative implications for the society at large and relevant to the potential recipients. Furthermore, in the first two studies, participants were asked to believe that the potentially negative information is reliable, while in study 3 we provided images that were presented by presumably a reliable source, that is, The School of Education at Tel Aviv University. Finally, the significantly higher levels of WSC (or lower levels of willingness to disclose) when the potential recipients are local and international NGOs, compared to closely related figures and superiors, suggests that participants did not think that the information is unimportant or uninteresting to these recipients, but rather that they may break a societal norm or may even cause harm if they decide to disclose the information. Thus, it seems reasonable to assume that the dependent measures did assess participants' WSC because it is improbable to think about another motivation to avoid disclosure of information.

Still, future research on self-censorship as a societal phenomenon should attempt to design experiments that address all of the potential limitations described above. Furthermore, future research should examine experimentally the possible motivations that come into play when individuals face the dilemma of whether to practice self-censorship or not. On the one hand, manipulating the possible causal effect of the price, whether personal or collective, that the individuals (or their in-group) may endure; and on the other hand, manipulating the effect on the society's well-being and greater good may further enhance our knowledge of self-censorship and its psychological mechanisms. Finally, as the research of self-censorship begins its move, there are numerous personal, societal, and other conditions suggested by the

conceptual framework that may facilitate or inhibit self-censorship and they should be investigated. In sum, the present study has attempted to experimentally investigate one of the important societal phenomenon that has been relatively neglected by researchers in social psychology—namely, self-censorship. Social and political psychologists, thus, ought to widen the understanding of this social behavior that has important implications for society's life.

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### Supplemental Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online.

### Notes

1. Conflict-supportive collective narratives focus on a number of themes: they justify goals of the conflict, stress the importance of personal safety and national survival and outline the conditions for their achievement, present and maintain positive collective self-image and a collective sense of being the victim in the conflict, delegitimize the rival, and propagate patriotism and unity (Bar-Tal 2013; Bar-Tal, Oren, and Nets-Zehngut 2014).
2. Judea and Samaria are the historical and biblical names for an area usually referred to as the West Bank.

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