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Protected by the Emotions of the Group: Perceived Emotional Fit and Disadvantaged Group Members' Activist Burnout

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Abstract

Psychological processes that hamper activism, such as activist burnout, threaten social change. We suggest that perceived emotional fit (i.e., perceiving to experience similar emotions as other disadvantaged group members) may buffer activist burnout by mitigating the deleterious effects of stressors that are associated with partaking in collective action. We investigated the relation between perceived emotional fit and activist burnout using three-wave longitudinal survey data of Palestinians in the context of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict. We hypothesized that both higher general tendencies to fit emotionally with the ingroup (general perceived emotional fit) and increases over time in perceived emotional fit (change perceived emotional fit) would relate negatively to activist burnout. Supporting our hypotheses, both aspects of emotional fit were associated with lower activist burnout, even when controlling for classical predictors of collective action. This research highlights perceived emotional fit as an additional dimension to the role of emotions for sustainable collective action.

Keywords

activist burnout, perceived emotional fit, collective action, intergroup conflict, emotions

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The last decade has seen a surge in the number of social movements, challenging the status quo in various domains, including racism, dictatorships, militarized occupation, sexism, and other forms of inequality (Berberoglu, 2019; Taylor, 2017). While extensive social change has been accomplished through these means, it often requires long and strenuous efforts, particularly from members of the disadvantaged group. When such efforts do not yield fruitful and tangible outcomes, activism may lead to burnout, a psychological process that wears away one's emotional well-being, resulting in emotional exhaustion and abated motivation to partake in activism (Gorski & Chen, 2015). Considering activism as the backbone of social change, what psychological factors might buffer activist burnout, ultimately safeguarding activist resilience?

As extensive emotional labor is at the core of activist burnout (Gorski & Chen, 2015; Hochschild, 1983), we suggest that perceived emotional fit, that is the extent to which individuals believe their emotions are in line with the emotions of other ingroup members, can play a role in mitigating burnout. To persevere in action, disadvantaged group members must receive social information that supports their perceptions about their environment (Mackie et al., 2000).

Perceiving other disadvantaged group members to share one's emotions validates one's appraisals of one's shared environment (Locke & Horowitz, 1990; Van Zomeren et al., 2004). As a result, emotional fit creates a perceived social support that can redefine hardships as collectively borne challenges (Walker & Smith, 2001), facilitating coping with group-based challenges and promoting collective action (see Van Zomeren et al., 2004). In bringing out these outcomes, perceived emotional fit may address the two main components of activist burnout, that is a reduced efficiency in coping with stressors and an abated motivation to partake in collective action (Chen & Gorski, 2015). Thus, perceived emotional fit with other disadvantaged group members, who share their fate on an emotional level, may be particularly

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sued for reducing burnout for those involved in a long journey of collective action with numerous setbacks.

The Nature of Perceived Emotional Fit

Perceived emotional fit refers to perceiving overlap in one's emotional experiences with other individuals or group members (Delvaux et al., 2015). While group unity (i.e., sharing attributes, goals, or behavior with a group; McLaughlin & Pearlman, 2012) is a broader concept in research on collective action (Drury et al., 2005; Vestergren et al., 2019), emotional fit is unique in the content of what is shared. As perceived emotional fit is subjective, it is possible to perceive high emotional fit even if one's emotions do not align with the actual emotions of one's group (i.e., collective emotions; Goldenberg et al., 2020). In addition, perceived emotional fit is inherently affective, referring to a perceived common emotional interpretation of a common experience (Parkinson, 2011). Therefore, social identification (i.e., the extent to which a certain group is included in one's self-representation; Tropp & Wright, 2001) is not necessary to have emotional fit with a target. For example, Jewish Israelis would be able to perceive that they are experiencing similar emotions to Palestinians in response to a certain event, even though their identities do not overlap (McDonald et al., 2017). Thus, perceived emotional fit is orthogonal to group-based emotions (i.e., emotions as a result of one's identification with a group; Smith & Mackie, 2015) as one can perceive emotional fit with those with whom one does not relate, and group-based emotions may occur without perceptions of sharedness with other group members (Smith & Mackie, 2015). The current study, however, is centered around perceived emotional fit with the group-based emotions of the disadvantaged group with which one is likely to identify.

Predicting Activist Burnout

Although a rich psychological literature has detailed the predictors of collective action tendencies—actions aimed to improve the condition of one's group (Wright et al., 1990), it remains largely unknown whether these same predictors apply to sustainability of collective action. The Social Identity Model of Collective Action (SIMCA) has established three key motivations for momentary engagement in collective action: (a) emotions related to injustice perceptions (i.e., anger), (b) perceptions of efficacy to achieve ingroup goals, and (c) identification with one's ingroup (van Zomeren et al., 2008). Just recently, the focus of research in this area has been shifting from temporary tendencies to engage in collective action to predicting its long-term sustainability (e.g., Louis et al., 2016; Vestergren et al., 2019). In this realm, it may be more important to understand how group members deal with the prolonged emotional labor they are confronted with in their participation in collective action (Hochschild, 1983).

In the current work, we suggest that perceived emotional fit can contribute to sustainability of collective action by mitigating activist burnout, due to its individual and group benefits. Multiple individual benefits are associated with higher perceived emotional fit. Group members who perceive high fit with ingroup emotions share concerns, appraisals about the situation, and action tendencies with other group members (De Leersnyder, 2017). Thus, perceived emotional fit validates group members' perceptions and enhances certainty and control over the intergroup environment (Locke & Horowitz, 1990; Van Zomeren et al., 2004). Congruent with this line of thought, perceived emotional fit has been linked to higher physical (Consedine et al., 2014) and psychological well-being (De Leersnyder et al., 2015), as well as lower stress levels in the presence of stressors (Townsend et al., 2014). However, while management of the emotional effect of stressors is crucial to prevent burnout from activism (Gorski & Chen, 2015), no literature has yet studied how emotional fit aids management of group-related stressors.

On the group level, an emergent literature suggests that perceived emotional fit may function as a form of social support (Van Zomeren et al., 2004), thereby boosting the collective action. Drury and Reicher (2009) performed interviews with activists from a host of activist movements. Perceived unity in experiences in response to shared stimuli (i.e., facing "the same struggle") was a key explanation for activists' experiences of empowerment (i.e., the ability to challenge existing conditions for the disadvantaged group in the face of chronic domination by the advantaged group). Further research has identified perceived unity of emotions as the driver of this effect, promoting group empowerment as well as offering social support for collective action (Van Zomeren et al., 2004) and its long-term sustainability (Thomas et al., 2009). Thus, this line of research suggests that the perception that one shares emotions with one's group in response to shared events may strengthen a group, facilitating sustained action.

Our research bridges literature on the individual and the group outcomes of perceived emotional fit to predict a severe impediment to sustainable collective action, that is activist burnout (Gorski & Chen, 2015). Most previous research has looked at benefits of emotional fit for the individual or the group separately (Barsade, 2002; Gump & Kulik, 1997; Páez et al., 2015). The current study focuses on its influence on activist burnout, located on the intersection between the individual level and the group level as it refers to individual emotional exhaustion as well as an abated motivation for collective action (Gorski & Chen, 2015). As the effects of perceived emotional fit have been demonstrated both on the individual level (i.e., coping with stress; Townsend et al., 2014) and the group level (i.e., promoting collective action; Van Zomeren et al., 2004), we propose that perceived emotional fit of disadvantaged group members with one's disadvantaged group may relate negatively to activist burnout.

Expanding on literature showing the importance of the fit of one's total pattern of emotions (De Leersnyder, 2017), we focused on emotional fit with the totality of the emotions of the group rather than with one emotion in particular. There is research showing that perceived emotional fit with ingroup anger particularly (i.e., experiencing anger to a similar extent as other group members) increases tendencies toward collective action (Livingstone et al., 2011). However, while emotional fit with anger may spark initial intentions for collective action, due to its fleeting and short-term nature, it may be less effective for its long-term sustainability (Thomas et al., 2009). Furthermore, validation of reality perception is a key mechanism of perceived emotional fit (De Leersnyder, 2017; Echterhoff & Higgins, 2017; Van Zomeren et al., 2004). This reality perception is built by a myriad of emotions, implying that, for example, Palestinians high on perceived emotional fit perceive that others not only share their anger in response to conflict-related events, but also their fear, (lack of) guilt toward the occupier and their hope to end occupation. Therefore, the more emotions they perceive to share with others, the more they sense that their emotional interpretations are supported (Van Zomeren et al., 2004). As a result, we focused in our main analyses on perceived emotional fit with the overall emotions expressed by the group (see Supplementary materials for robustness analyses testing the effect of emotional fit with anger, omitting emotions from the perceived emotional fit measure or testing fit with approach vs. avoidance-oriented emotions).

The Present Research

To test our main hypotheses, Palestinians from the West Bank participated in a three-wave survey, of which the second was conducted during an escalation phase and the other waves during relatively quiet periods. As the Palestinian endeavor for ending the Israeli occupation has required long-term, even intergenerational efforts of collective action under harsh conditions, it can be viewed as the epitome of contexts in which activist burnout should be addressed. Capturing activism during the natural course of the conflict allowed us to detect the evolution of activist burnout over time during fluctuations of intergroup stressors and adversities. As our research relates to the longevity of activism, a subsample of the participants who reported some level of past activism was the focus of the current research. We chose to focus on perceived emotional fit with Palestinians because the Palestinian identity (rather than the activist identity) has been the strongest and most salient identity mobilizing Palestinians for collective action (Gawerc, 2016). Not only does the national identity lie at the heart of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict (Kriesberg, 1993), but the fragile political landscape in Palestine has made mobilization of organized movements a difficult task, rendering Palestinian activism of spontaneous and fragmented nature (Khoury-Machool, 2007). As a result, while burnout may ensue from certain

activism-related experiences (i.e., lack of progress in social change, violent repression), it is likely that these events will coincide with high salience of their Palestinian identity rather than their activist identity.

As both perceived emotional fit and activist burnout were measured and varied over time, we were able to test two distinct effects of perceived emotional fit: (a) general perceived emotional fit, that is the between-subjects effect of a person's general tendency to experience the same emotions as their group, and (b) change in perceived emotional fit, that is the within-subject effect of increasing in perceived emotional fit over time, on activist burnout among disadvantaged group members.

If perceived emotional fit does in fact buffer burnout, then Palestinians who have a stronger overall tendency to fit emotionally with those who share their concerns and goals in their intergroup context (i.e., Palestinians) should be protected more from the influence of prolonged adversities than individuals lacking this tendency. As a result, we hypothesized that there will be a negative relationship between general perceived emotional fit and Palestinian activist burnout (H1).

Furthermore, individuals' perceived emotional fit varies throughout time in response to environmental factors (Gump & Kulik, 1997). Temporal increases in perceived emotional fit have been linked to enhanced coping with adversities (Pelletier, 2018) and increased group cohesion (De Leersnyder, 2017). Therefore, Palestinians who, at a particular time point, increase in their perceived emotional fit (i.e., change perceived emotional fit) with other Palestinian ingroup members might be buffered more from the detrimental influences of adversity during that time. Considering increased perceived emotional fit as an adaptive response to disadvantaged group members' adversities, we hypothesized that above and beyond the effect of general perceived emotional fit, individual temporal increases in perceived emotional fit will be negatively related to Palestinians' activist burnout (H2).

Methods

Participants and Procedure

After coordinating the data collection with a local survey company (Near East Consulting), Palestinians from the city of Ramallah and its surrounding were contacted by the survey company to partake in face-to-face interviews. Due to the sensitive sociopolitical topic of the study and in the absence of online polling companies in the region, recruiting participants and maintaining their engagement for an extended period bear significant challenges. Past research projects in the West Bank which we conducted were met with high levels of distrust and lack of willingness for cooperation by many Palestinians, as they conveyed concerns and fear of political repercussions by the Israeli army or the Palestinian authority.

The snowball convenience sampling method the survey company employed could mitigate some of these concerns. Generally, entrusting the data collection to a local organization dramatically reduces risks as they have expertise in discerning the advantages and drawbacks of different approaches in their context (Leshem et al., 2020; Paluck, 2009; Staub, 2014). More specifically, the survey company personnel recruited people in their social network, increasing trust between interviewer and interviewee, yet maintaining representation consistent with statistics from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. The final sample was generally similar in demographics to the overall population, with similar gender and age distributions (see Annex 5 in Supplementary materials). Due to the nature of activism in Palestine (Khoury-Machool, 2007) and our sampling method, we were unable to target activist groups and thus gauged participants' prior collective action through self-report.

In addition, we undertook several measures to protect the identity of participants and to maximize their benefits. First, the second author of this article has a Palestinian background. This increased our knowledge as researchers on how to deal with participants residing in this intergroup environment. In addition, it could facilitate participants to feel more secure about their participation and to contact us for questions or feedback on the survey (her telephone number and email were made available to all participants). This was highlighted in the "Introduction to research and researchers" document all participants received before starting the interviews (see Annex 5 in Supplementary materials). In addition, three authors of this article do not have a Jewish Israeli background, contributing to interpretational triangulation. While the actual informed consent was taken by the survey company, the company committed to follow the ethical standards of the researchers' research institution as was approved by its institutional review board (see Annex 6 in Supplementary materials). These requirements are also reflected in the ethical guidelines of the survey company (see Annex 7 in Supplementary materials). Our questionnaire items were adapted as to avoid threatening or violent terms to make the threshold lower for participants to respond and to ensure their security. Identifiable information was kept separate from the questionnaires. Finally, the questionnaires were locked in secure cabinets and destroyed after data collection ceased.

As intergroup conflicts are typically characterized by periods of escalation and de-escalation (Kriesberg, 1993), we reasoned that to properly measure emotional fit and activist burnout, our data should be reflective of both those two types of periods. We conducted the first wave of the study in May 2018 during a period of relative calm for baseline measurements. The second wave took place 7 months later, during a period of escalation following two drive-by shootings carried out by Palestinians targeting Israeli soldiers and settlers near illegal Israeli settlements. These events led the Israeli army to impose a military closure on Ramallah,

raiding neighborhoods, and closing major checkpoints in the area (Kubovich et al., 2018). The third wave was conducted in October 2019, during a period of relative de-escalation.

A generic power analysis in G*Power suggested a sample of 449 participants to detect small changes across waves ($d = .2$), while ensuring a 95% power at $p = .01$ level. Four hundred and fifty participants (51% women, $M_{\text{age}} = 33.9$) completed the first wave (T1), and 420 of them completed all waves (50% women, $M_{\text{age}} = 33.70$). As Palestinian activism is mostly of spontaneous and non-organized nature (Khoury-Machool, 2007), we employed a broad inclusion criterion for our sample, that is those participants who completed all three waves and confirmed they had participated in activism at least to a small extent in the last 5 years prior to the time of measurement (see "Measures" section). As activist burnout ultimately leads to a decrease in and cessation of activism (Chen & Gorski, 2015), this inclusion criterion prevents potential restriction of the range of the "activist burnout" variable. Two hundred and fifty-four participants¹ (46% women, $M_{\text{age}} = 32.7$) fulfilled this criterion at the first wave (T1), 248 in the second wave (T2; 47% women, $M_{\text{age}} = 32.5$), and 231 in the third wave (T3; 55% women, $M_{\text{age}} = 31.70$).

Our sampling methodology appeared to be fruitful, with most participants (those with or without history of activism) completing all three waves ($n = 420$, 50% women, $M_{\text{age}} = 33.7$). In all waves, after obtaining their informed consent, the interviewer read the questions to the participants and recorded their answers. Each interview lasted around 40 to 60 minutes, and each participant was assigned an anonymized identification code, allowing us to match responses across the waves.

Measures

Although perceived emotional fit was the core of this investigation, as activist burnout leads to cessation of collective action tendencies (Rettig, 2006), we investigated whether general perceived emotional fit and change perceived emotional fit might be predictive of activist burnout, above and beyond the SIMCA predictors (i.e., established predictors of collective action tendencies; van Zomeren et al., 2008). Perceived emotional fit, activist burnout, past activism, collective action, and the SIMCA predictors were measured in all three waves. Demographic variables were measured only at T1. The survey included other measures that are not analyzed in the current report, yet are part of other publications (Hasan-Aslih, Shuman, Goldenberg, et al. 2020; Hasan-Aslih, Shuman, Pliskin, et al., 2020) and included in the Supplementary materials. All items reported below were measured on a 1 = *Not at all* to 6 = *To a very large extent* Likert-type scale, unless indicated otherwise.

Past activism. To measure past activism, we asked participants: "To what degree were you involved in political activism during the past 5 years?" on a 1 = *I never participated to*

6 = *I participated all the time* Likert-type scale. Participants that answered “2” or more on this question during any of the waves were included in our sample.

Perceived emotional fit. In the interviews, participants rated to what extent they experienced 10 conflict-related group-based emotions during each of the three waves and the extent to which they perceived other group members experience the same emotions. In T1 and T3, participants were asked: “In the context of the Israeli occupation and the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, to what extent do you feel/ do you think the Palestinian people feel each of the following emotions?” In T2, they were asked: “In light of the recent escalation in the West Bank, to what extent do you feel/do you think the Palestinian people feel each of the following emotions?” In each wave, participants responded “Anger toward Israeli Jews,” “Hatred toward Israeli Jews,” “Anger toward the Israeli occupation,” “Contempt toward Israeli Jews,” “Anger toward the Palestinian authority,” “Despair about ending the occupation,” “Hope for ending the occupation,” “Fear of political persecution,” and “Humiliation as a result of the Israeli occupation practices.” “Some people feel guilty about some of the violent resistance actions carried out by Palestinians. To what extent do you personally feel guilt/do you think they feel guilt about such actions?”

To capture participants’ perceived emotional fit with their group, we computed profile correlations (see De Leersnyder, 2017). They measured the co-occurrence of participants’ experienced emotions and what they perceived the group experienced. Importantly, they do not require averaging across emotions, and take into account interindividual differences in scale use, making them preferable over other similarity indices (Delvaux et al., 2015; Rogers et al., 2018). Hence, we correlated each participant’s emotional pattern with their perceived emotional pattern of the group. The profile correlations resulted in a unique perceived emotional fit value per participant per wave.

We followed the procedure of between-subjects centering and within-subject centering, the most common procedure when dealing with longitudinal designs (Bolger & Laurenceau, 2013; Jebb et al., 2015; Wang & Maxwell, 2015). Between-subjects centering creates a participant-level variable, which is computed as individuals’ mean across all time points. This variable captures the variance that exists between participants, for example a participant who was generally low on all perceived emotional fit measurements would receive a low value whereas someone who was relatively high on all measurements would receive a high value. Thus, this variable captures the differences that exist between people, hence the term “general emotional fit.” Then, our within-subject variable was created by subtracting this participant-level mean (i.e., general perceived emotional fit) from each time measurement (i.e., the raw emotional fit value), hence creating the change perceived emotional fit variable yielding a unique value per wave. Thus, this

variable represents changes or fluctuations around the general tendency, which is the within-subject variance.

If we were to place the uncentered variable into the model, we would not know whether any effect was due to the between-subjects variance or the within-subjects variance (or some combination of the two). Thus, the method we have used allows us to have those two sources of variance as separate variables in the model, so that it is clear what the effect of each is. Since the linear combination of both perceived emotional fit variables results into the raw perceived emotional values, no information is omitted or added. The information is merely separated to distinguish two effects. As these operations separated both effects, they are statistically independent from one another, as suggested by the lack of correlation between both perceived emotional fit variables, $r = 0.00$, 95% confidence interval [CI: $-0.08, 0.08$], $t(6,620) = 0.00$, $p = 1.00$ (see Wang & Maxwell, 2015 for more information on centering approaches and see Hasan-Aslih et al. (2020a) for a similar approach for longitudinal data).

While we could also have baseline centered our predictors (i.e., separating perceived emotional fit into participants perceived emotional fit at T1 and their changes over time), this causes *all* participants to have a change perceived emotional fit score of 0 at T1 (i.e., the baseline). This then introduces new statistical issues, as there is no variance in the change variable at T1, creating asymmetry in the variances across time points (Bates, 2010). Therefore, we relied on mean-centering to create the general perceived emotional fit and the change perceived emotional fit variable.

SIMCA predictors. Anger toward the Israeli occupation was measured similarly as the other emotions (see “perceived emotional fit”). Two items measured group efficacy (adapted from Van Zomeren, Saguy, & Schelhaas, 2013): “I believe that we Palestinians, as a group, can achieve our goals,” and “I believe that we Palestinians, together, can end the occupation” (T1: $\alpha = .91$, T2: $\alpha = .87$, T3: $\alpha = .84$). Ingroup identification was measured as the agreement on two items (adapted from Roccas et al., 2008): “Being Palestinian is an important part of my identity,” and “I identify with other Palestinians” (T1: $\alpha = .90$, T2: $\alpha = .89$, T3: $\alpha = .74$). All three variables underwent the same centering procedure as the emotional fit variable before entering them into the regression model, yielding a “general” and “change” variable for each of them.

Activist burnout. We adapted two items from the Maslach Burnout Inventory, a validated measure of vocational burnout (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Worley et al., 2008) to measure activist burnout. These items were: “I feel drained as part of being politically active,” and “I feel mentally stressed as part of being politically active” (T1: $\alpha = .90$, T2: $\alpha = .89$, T3: $\alpha = .74$).

Collective action tendencies. In T1, participants were asked: “In the context of the ongoing struggle against the Israeli

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for the Variables and Changes Across Time.

Variable	Statistic	T1 M (SD)	T2 M (SD)	T3 M (SD)
Perceived emotional fit	$F(2, 661) = 19.32, p < .001$.31 (0.42) ^a	.50 (0.41) ^b	.26 (0.39) ^a
Activist burnout	$F(2, 719) = 3.63, p = .027$	2.70 (1.12) ^a	2.45 (1.14) ^b	2.62 (.91) ^{ab}
Anger toward the occupation	$F(2, 728) = 11.17, p < .001$	4.79 (1.35) ^a	4.99 (1.21) ^a	4.43 (1.31) ^b
Ingroup efficacy	$F(2, 729) = 8.69, p < .001$	4.26 (1.28) ^a	4.62 (1.35) ^b	4.15 (1.19) ^a
Ingroup identification	$F(2, 730) = 15.17, p < .001$	4.71 (1.32) ^a	5.18 (1.08) ^b	4.64 (1.11) ^a
Collective action tendencies	$F(2, 730) = 3.72, p = .025$	3.39 (1.43) ^{ab}	3.68 (1.70) ^b	3.31 (1.54) ^a

Note. M = mean; SD = standard deviation; T1 = measured variables in wave 1; T2 = measured variables in wave 2; T3 = measured variables in wave 3. Means with different superscripts denote significant Tukey post hoc contrasts at $p < .05$ level.

^asignifies a significant difference from times indicated with "b".

^bsignifies a significant difference from times indicated with "a".

^{ab}signifies a lack of difference from either "a" or "b" indicated times.

occupation, to what degree are YOU personally willing to engage in the following actions?" In T2, participants were asked: "In the context of the recent protests against the Israeli occupation, to what degree are YOU personally willing to engage in the following actions?" In T3, participants were asked: "In the context of the ongoing struggle against the Israeli occupation, to what degree are YOU personally willing to engage in the following actions?" They then responded to the following items: "Participating in peaceful demonstrations against the occupation," "Participating in peaceful sit-ins against the occupation," and "Acting within peaceful social political movements against occupation."

Demographics. Participants completed a brief demographic questionnaire in T1 in which their gender, age, education, income, religion, religiosity, and profession were assessed.

Results

The code and data used for the present analyses are available on https://osf.io/yhqnu/?view_only=0c761adc9f19497b9fca4dfe8236b110.² We report all measures and exclusions in our study. Given the small number of missing data points (no variable contained more than 10% missing values), we used a pairwise deletion technique to handle missing data in our analyses (Newman, 2014). For descriptive statistics across waves, see Table 1. Anger toward the occupation and activist burnout were significantly lower during T3, compared with T1 and T2, while not differing significantly between T1 and T2. Ingroup efficacy and ingroup identification increased from T1 toward T2 and decreased toward T3, although T1 and T3 did not differ significantly from one another. Collective action tendencies were significantly lower at T3 relative to T2, but did not differ between the other time points. As we looked at perceived emotional fit per time point, we could not distinguish between a general and a change effect. Thus, the changes in the aggregate perceived emotional fit over time were analyzed. Perceived emotional fit increased significantly between T1 and T2 and decreased

significantly from T2 to T3. In addition, perceived emotional fit at T3 was significantly lower than during T1.

To test H1 and H2, we constructed a mixed linear regression model using the lmerTest package in R (Kuznetsova et al., 2017). General perceived emotional fit was entered as a continuous between-subjects variable and change perceived emotional fit (participant mean-centered) was entered as a continuous within-subjects variable. To facilitate interpretation of the main effects and the intercept, general perceived emotional fit was grand-mean centered. According to H1, we would expect a significant negative effect of general perceived emotional fit on burnout, suggesting that individuals with generally high perceived emotional fit are overall buffered from burnout. H2 would be supported if we find a significant negative effect of change perceived emotional fit, indicating that increases in perceived emotional fit across time are associated with decreases in burnout.

In this model (see Table 2), both general perceived emotional fit ($b = -0.43, p = .006$) and change perceived emotional fit ($b = -.78, p < .001$) had significant negative effects on activist burnout, supporting H1 and H2. Of the SIMCA predictors, only increases in identification and general levels of anger predicted burnout. Interestingly, higher general tendencies of anger toward the conflict related to higher experiences of burnout, indicating a role of this emotion for burnout that differs from when predicting temporary engagements in collective action (van Zomeren et al., 2008).

While this report focuses on the relationship between emotional fit and activist burnout, we wanted to test an underlying assumption of our research, that is treating activist burnout is important because of its downstream effect on decrease in collective action tendencies. To examine that assumption, we started by testing an additional mixed model using the same centering approach as the main analysis. Collective action tendencies were predicted by general activist burnout (a between-subject variable indicating differences between participants in their general tendencies to experience burnout) and change activist burnout (a within-person variable indicating changes from participants' general tendencies to experience burnout).

Table 2. Output of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Activist Burnout From General Perceived Emotional Fit and Change Perceived Emotional Fit.

Predictors	Burnout					
	Estimates	SE	CI	Statistic	<i>p</i>	<i>df</i>
(Intercept)	2.55	0.04	[2.47, 2.64]	60.75	<.001	284.46
General perceived emotional fit	-0.43	0.16	[-0.74, -0.12]	-2.75	.006	400.02
Change perceived emotional fit	-0.78	0.16	[-1.11, -0.46]	-4.78	<.001	362.45
General identification	0.03	0.06	[-0.08, 0.14]	0.52	.605	375.19
Change identification	-0.18	0.06	[-0.30, -0.06]	-2.86	.004	385.55
General efficacy	-0.07	0.05	[-0.16, 0.03]	-1.36	.174	322.83
Change efficacy	0.00	0.06	[-0.12, 0.12]	0.03	.97	384.37
General anger	0.14	0.05	[0.03, 0.24]	2.62	.009	339.31
Change anger	0.05	0.06	[-0.07, 0.17]	0.80	.423	384.19
Random effects						
σ^2			1.06			
τ_{00id}			0.04			
ICC			0.03			
N_{id}			333			
Observations			651			
Marginal R^2 /conditional R^2			.077/.113			

Note. CI = confidence interval; SE = standard error; ICC = Intra class correlation.

Interestingly, while change activist burnout negatively predicted willingness for collective action, $b = -.17$, 95% CI = $[-.27, -.06]$, $SE = .05$, $t(380.22) = -3.13$, $p = .002$, general activist burnout did so positively, $b = .29$, 95% CI = $[.12, .47]$, $SE = .08$, $t(409.82) = 3.133$, $p < .001$. Although the relationship between general activist burnout and willingness for collective action may seem counterintuitive, this can be explained by the fact that those who are overall more willing to pursue collective action are the ones who are most prone to partake in sustained action and therefore suffer more burnout. As a result, the change burnout effect is more interesting, showing that individual increases from one's general tendency to experience burnout relates to decreased willingness to participate in collective action. These findings highlight the importance of our analysis method, as lumping together both effects would misleadingly suggest that activist burnout does not relate to willingness for collective action.

Finally, we wanted to test the ultimate merit of emotional fit for predicting sustained collective action, examining whether increases in perceived emotional fit predict support for collective action *through* individual decreases in activist burnout. We tested all three paths and the indirect effect of this mediation model statistically utilizing a multivariate multilevel model (see Bolger & Laurenceau, 2013), including both variables as outcome variables in one model. First, we reorganized the data into double-record data. All the variables of our main analysis were placed in one dataset. Each row of predictor variables and the participant indicator

variable was doubled, one per response on the mediator (i.e., change activist burnout, general activist burnout was included as a control variable) and one per response on the outcome (i.e., collective action). Then, we combined the dependent variable and the mediator into a single-stacked response "z." A row of "z" contained either a response on the mediator or a response on the outcome. Finally, dummy variables indicated whether, per row, variable "z" indicated the mediator or the outcome response. The interaction between change emotional fit and the mediator dummy variable indicated the a-path of the mediation. The interaction between change activist burnout and the mediator dummy variable indicated the b-path of the mediation. Finally, the interaction between change emotional fit and the outcome dummy variable indicated the c-path of the mediation. For a lengthier discussion, please see Bolger and Laurenceau (2013).

Running this model, both the negative effect of change perceived emotional fit on change activist burnout, $b = -.89$, 95% CI = $[-1.09, -.68]$, $SE = .10$, $t(1,281.64) = -8.51$, $p < .001$, and the negative effect of change activist burnout on change willingness for collective action, $b = -.08$, 95% CI = $[-.16, -.00]$, $SE = .04$, $t(1,298.00) = -2.03$, $p = .04$, were significant. In addition, there remained a significant positive direct effect of change perceived emotional fit on change willingness for collective action, $b = .80$, 95% CI = $[.59, 1.02]$, $SE = .11$, $t(1,286.46) = 7.36$, $p < .001$. Then, we performed a bootstrap procedure on the indirect effect generated by the mixed model, using 10,000 bootstrapped samples

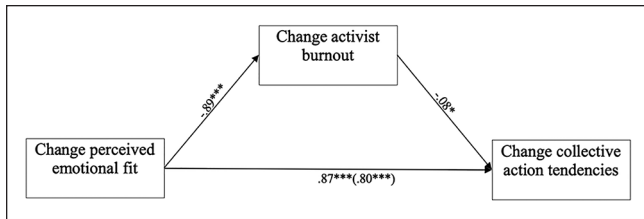


Figure 1. Mediation model of change perceived emotional fit on change collective action tendencies through change activist burnout.

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

and with the 95% CI being computed by determining the indirect effects at the 2.5th and 97.5th percentiles. The bootstrapped indirect effect was significant ($b = .07$, 95% CI = [.003, .14], $SE = .03$, $p = .019$), indicating that the positive effect of change perceived emotional fit on change willingness for collective action was partially mediated by lower change activist burnout (see Figure 1).

Discussion

This research investigated what bolsters sustainability of long-term activism in the face of hardship. Prolonged hardship can lead to experiences of activist burnout, which is detrimental to the well-being of those that partake in activism, as well as to the sustainability of the activist movement. Previous work has suggested the importance of group unity and group-level emotions for collective action tendencies (Drury et al., 2005; Gorski & Chen, 2015; Thomas et al., 2009). In line with research on individual coping with stress (Townsend et al., 2014) and research on sustainable activism (Thomas et al., 2009), we aimed to bridge these strands of literature and study the implications of perceived emotional fit for an individual process hampering the sustainability of collective action. Drawing on this literature and data from a three-wave longitudinal study with a Palestinian sample, we tested whether and which aspects of perceived emotional fit with other disadvantaged group members may buffer activist burnout.

First, the data provided evidence for our first hypothesis, that general perceived emotional fit relates to lower activist burnout. The relationship held while controlling for change perceived emotional fit as well as classical predictors of collective action and suggests that those who have a higher general tendency to perceive to experience emotions similarly as other group members are less likely to experience activist burnout. This is in line with theories viewing shared emotions as a form of support for group members (Van Zomeren et al., 2004) and resonates with research on emotional fit and its relationship with stress (Páez et al., 2007; Townsend et al., 2014), group cohesion (Páez et al., 2015), and group action (e.g., Barsade, 2002; Totterdell, 2000). Therefore, this finding illuminates the function of emotional fit for processes that are on the intersection of individual and collective

processes, such as activist burnout, that influence the sustainability of activism.

Second, we received support for our second hypothesis, that greater increases in perceived emotional fit will be linked to decreases in activist burnout over time. This relationship held even when controlling for classical predictors of engagement in collective action as well as the effect of general perceived emotional fit. Worded differently, increases over time in similarity to the emotions of the group carry additional explanatory power of activist burnout above and beyond having an overall high perceived emotional fit with the group. This extends prior work on the importance of emotional synchrony (temporary increases of perceived emotional fit during collective emotional events) for group outcomes (e.g., coping with adversities; Pelletier, 2018) and may further explain why moments of increased shared emotional experience bear such importance to the long-term resilience of groups (Páez et al., 2015).

This research bears important implications for further research on long-lasting efforts of collective action, such as in the Palestinian context. First, this study shows that activist burnout as an aspect of activist sustainability is a unique phenomenon in the realm of collective action and that evidence from other branches of collective action research may not all translate to the topic of activist burnout. In our research, the classical predictors of intentions to engage in collective action (i.e., SIMCA, van Zomeren et al., 2008) were only partially able to explain experiences of activist burnout. Support for the effect of perceived emotional fit provides a first step into what does predict this debilitating emotional state. Yet, more research is crucial to build a comprehensive model to predict and to address activist burnout.

Second, our research suggests that emotional fit may dampen the negative effect of the host of conflict-related events individuals experience. While disadvantaged group members generally may suffer the consequences of prolonged violent repression (Leonard et al., 2011), the negative emotions that are paired with these experiences magnify for those who challenge the status quo like activists (Hochschild, 1983). Our research suggests that these emotions may relate to higher well-being of these individuals, given that they perceive to share them with other disadvantaged group members. Further research may look at how emotional fit transforms the meaning of emotions and how it relates to other debilitating mental states such as post-traumatic stress disorder and depression in the presence of chronic activist stressors.

Third, since the journey toward social change requires extended efforts of activism, treating activist burnout is essential to accomplish goals of the disadvantaged group. This is one of the first empirical examinations of activist burnout and increases knowledge about a significant impediment to resilience of those that partake in activism. Social interaction is crucial to induce perceived emotional fit among group members (De Leersnyder, 2017). As collective action

brings group members together and allows for emotional sharing, perceived emotional fit could at least partially explain under which conditions participation in collective action is able to strengthen individual coping abilities and sustain activist movements (Vestergren et al., 2019).

Finally, this work has demonstrated the complex and multilevel role of emotions in intergroup contexts. Prior work on collective action has acknowledged that individuals' emotions are informed by their group membership (i.e., in the form of group-based emotions; Mackie et al., 2009) and that, in turn, experience of these emotions drives intergroup behavior (Goldenberg et al., 2016). However, the role of these collective emotional experiences has largely been viewed from the individual perspective, independently from the extent to which they are in tune with the emotions of other group members. Crucially, the current investigation shows that the extent to which individuals' overall emotional experience fits with their group is an additional complexity bearing explanatory power for intergroup behavior.

There are a few important limitations to this research. The current research focused on the Palestinian cause in the context of the intractable Palestinian–Israeli conflict. As the role of perceived emotional fit has been demonstrated to promote a range of group outcomes outside of the realm of such conflicts (e.g., De Leersnyder, 2017), the effect of perceived emotional fit on activist burnout is likely to generalize to other contexts as well. Still, it is possible that the predictors of sustained activism of oppressed individuals in intractable conflicts might differ from those in less extreme environments. Further research is thus needed to generalize our findings to other intergroup contexts.

Asides from emotional fit with the disadvantaged group, we argue that future research could focus on other target identities and content of emotional fit. Due to the sensitivity and nature of the research context, it was not possible to sample from professional activists or activist groups in Palestine. While we obtained information on prior collective action activities and activist identity through self-report, more research that deals directly with group dynamics within activist groups is needed. In that case, research may verify whether the reference group of emotional fit may moderate the strength of its effect. If a strong activist identity is present and is formed around an organized group, the shared perception of reality is even larger among its members (i.e., related to the conflict and the activism). As such, emotional fit with this group may bear even more benefits for activist outcomes. In addition, although we have included a comprehensive list of relevant intergroup emotions in the emotions used to compute emotional fit, the effect of perceived emotional fit may differ when additional emotions are added. Further research is necessary to determine whether our findings remain intact when a more inclusive set of emotions is used.

Finally, the correlational nature of our study hinders us to infer the direction of the emotional fit effect. While it could

be that, as suggested in previous research (Thomas et al., 2009) the effect is driven by individuals conforming with ingroup emotions, it may as well be that perceiving that the group is converging to one's emotion is what predicts activist burnout or that another intervening factor is at play. While our correlational design does not afford causal claims, causal effects of perceived emotional fit have been shown in collective action research (Livingstone et al., 2011), and future experimental research that manipulates experiences of perceived emotional fit can test whether perceived emotional fit causes lower activist burnout.

In sum, this article offers a new perspective on the role of emotions for the longevity of disadvantaged group members battling their adversity, taking Palestinian activism as the running example. Although emotions are experienced individually, they do not arise in vacuum, but in interaction with those that share the same fate in society. When perceiving to share these emotions with other group members, they play an adaptive role to grapple with the daily challenges coupled to their group membership. For this reason, the implications of disadvantaged group members' emotions are not merely a summation of the influence of each emotion. Rather, emotional fit represents an additional dimension to group-based emotion needed to be reckoned with to fully understand the role of group-based emotions for disadvantaged group members' long-term struggle for justice.



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Supplemental Material

Supplemental material is available online with this article.

Notes

1. For our narrower sample, a generic sensitivity analysis in G*Power suggested a sample of 230 participants to detect small changes across waves ($d = .2$), while ensuring an 85% power at $p = .05$ level.
2. The design and the analyses for this study were not preregistered.

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