



Community Post-traumatic Growth: Israeli Ultra-Orthodox Coping with Coronavirus

Shlomo Black¹ · Itschak Trachtengot¹ · Gabriel Horenczyk¹

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Abstract

The present study sheds light on the phenomenon whereby groups experience adversity, following which they show signs of growth. We propose the conceptualization of post-traumatic growth as a phenomenon that also exists at the group level, “community post-traumatic growth” (CPTG). The concept of CPTG is explained using a case study on the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community in Israel following the first wave of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. The study describes shared characteristics of Israeli ultra-Orthodox society and the crisis it experienced during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, both in terms of physiological features such as the relatively high proportion of affected people and in terms of psychological characteristics such as the shut-down of synagogues and *yeshivas*, and the perceived discrimination they experienced from the general population in Israel. The present study views the sense of discrimination as a traumatic factor at the group level. In total, 256 participants completed online questionnaires examining three hypotheses: (1) sense of discrimination (trauma) will be correlated with level of CPTG; (2) the level of identification with the ultra-Orthodox culture will be positively related to CPTG, while the level of identification with Israeli culture will be negatively correlated with CPTG; (3) the level of life satisfaction of the individual will be predicted by CPTG. The results supported the hypotheses and are discussed at length in the discussion section.

Keywords Post-traumatic growth · Trauma · Perceived discrimination · Ultra-Orthodox · Life satisfaction

✉ Shlomo Black
Shlomo.black@mail.huji.ac.il

¹ Seymour Fox School of Education, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Mt. Scopus, 9190501 Jerusalem, Israel

Crisis Leading to Growth

The Israeli ultra-Orthodox community chooses to live according to a specific lifestyle that places its members among the lower socioeconomic strata in society (Kasir and Tsachor-Shai 2017), and despite the fact that they live in an independent Jewish state, some of them insist on continuing to adhere to an “expatriate lifestyle” (Brown, 2017). They still report relatively high levels of discrimination from the majority society (Bergman et al. 2017).

Although one might expect that these factors may predict low levels of happiness and life satisfaction, recent studies show a different picture. Not only do these factors not reduce the sense of well-being and level of happiness of the Israeli ultra-Orthodox population (Chernihovsky and Sharoni 2015), it seems that the Israeli ultra-Orthodox population tend to believe that they belong to a group superior to the rest of the Jewish people, and we find that this group is growing rapidly (Malach and Cahaner 2020), and unlike the intuitive prediction, the ultra-Orthodox community reports the highest level of psychological well-being in Israeli society (Chernihovsky and Sharoni 2015). The present study seeks to examine this picture of growth in the face of difficulties, and to suggest that “the more they will experience pain, they will grow and prosper” (Exodus, 1:12). This narrative seems to consist of two components: the first relates to pain, and the second refers to growth and prosperity. It seems that, for the ultra-Orthodox as well as other minorities under stress, these two are intertwined. In the introduction, we will first elaborate on the first component, that of pain in different shapes and forms, and then we will discuss the second component, namely growth, and examine how that pain can yield a sense of growth in [the ultra-Orthodox society](#).

What is Trauma?

Trauma is a mental or physical condition in which the individual is threatened by an external threat that creates a crisis. According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th edition (DSM-5), trauma is defined by a series of conditions. The first condition requires the individual to face exposure to a life-threatening situation, significant physical harm, or violence in one or more of the following ways: direct experience of the event, firsthand evidence of another’s event exposed to a similar situation, exposure of a person close to such an event (violent or surprising), or exposure to difficult details regarding the event in a powerful or repetitive manner (DSM-5).

Researchers suggest that people will likely be exposed to a traumatic event at least once in their lifetime (Wu et al. 2019). Approximately 5–30% of those who experience a traumatic event may develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in addition to any physical injury sustained as a result of the traumatic event (Bonanno, 2004; Bonanno and Mancini, 2008; Shigemoto et al. 2017). PTSD is

characterized by intrusive thoughts, negative mood, dissociation, avoidance, or overarousal (Shigemoto et al. 2017).

In 1995, Tedeschi and Calhoun defined the concept of “post-traumatic growth” (PTG). According to this concept, a percentage of those who experience a trauma will report that the trauma led them to experience growth in various areas of their lives. Tedeschi and Calhoun found that, following trauma, an individual may report growth in five dimensions: appreciation for life; relationships with others; mental resilience; identification of new opportunities; and spiritual development (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 1995). They explain that such “growth” is born out of the crisis and the state of trauma, allowing the individuals to reexamine their values and way of life (Aflakseir et al. 2016). A reconstruction of values may also lead to changes in behavior that are appropriate to the individual’s new reality post-trauma (Coroiu et al. 2016; Harding et al. 2014).

It is important to emphasize that, despite positive outcomes of PTG, it is widely accepted that it is still far preferable to avoid trauma completely, as it causes a harmful disturbance in the physical or psychological well-being of an individual.

It is important to mention that some scholars have suggested adding to the DSM-5 definition of trauma as it relates to PTG to include any kind of a stressful event that has the power to direct the individual to consider adjustments in identity and/or major life routines as traumatic experience (Jayawickreme et al., 2021). To undergo PTG, the individual need not experience life-threatening events; stressful events that are not life-threatening are now included under the definition of trauma (in the context of PTG). Examples of such traumas include events such as unemployment or marital separation. In short, in terms of PTG, trauma is in the eye of the beholder (Tedeschi et al., 2018).

Most empirical studies have found that growth is not a direct consequence of the trauma but is a result of the way a person *cope*s with it. Active and positive coping, in which individuals reexamine the conventions they have promoted all their lives, is what allows individuals who have experienced a trauma to adapt their behavior and lifestyle to the new situation and to experience growth following the crisis (Maitlis 2020).

The focus on the possible positive outcomes of trauma (Teixeira and Pereira, 2013) stems in part from the understanding that traumatic events can make a person have difficulty seeing the complexity of things. The individuals may experience a kind of “tunnel vision,” in which they tend to see the world narrowly and notice mainly the negative characteristics they experience (Pat-Horenczyk et al. 2016). The therapeutic approach to post-trauma suggests that, when individuals are presented with the positive aspects that result from the trauma, they may pay attention to the forces that exist in them and develop personal resilience as a result. In doing so, individuals manage to transcend the harm caused by the trauma, and they try to make use of the situation created for personal growth and growth in general (Meyerson et al. 2011). Although a person who experiences PTG may still suffer from adverse post-traumatic symptoms, developing PTG has been shown to sometimes help that person overcome these symptoms and use them for further personal development (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004).

Community Post-traumatic Growth (CPTG)

In his book *Escape from Freedom*, Erich Fromm wrote that, to understand the individual, one must first understand the environment in which he or she lives (Fromm 1941). Context affects numerous aspects of our lives at different levels—self, society, family, community, etc.—meaning that traumatic situations can befall us as a group, not just as individuals. In the present study, we examine whether it is possible to identify the PTG phenomenon in group consciousness. That is, can a group that has experienced trauma as a collective also show signs of growth and prosperity as a result of how it copes with that trauma?

Previous studies have indeed found that large groups of people reported growth and development following an experience of group trauma. Such phenomena, for example, were reported in El Salvador (Vasquez 2000), New York (Peterson and Seligman 2003), and Madrid (Conejero et al. 2004).

Despite these studies, there is no clear conceptualization examining PTG in the group context, and no parallel has been drawn between the phenomena that characterize PTG of the individual and a group's perception of its own growth following a group trauma. In the present study, we examine whether a “community post-traumatic growth” (CPTG) can be defined as a phenomenon that can be found in a population that has been exposed to a situation threatening to its continued existence, as in community values, in a manner experienced as group trauma (Farkash 2020).

Just as PTG for the individual need not follow a life-threatening incident, a trauma for a group does not need to present an existential threat in order to induce growth. In the context of CPTG, different events that are experienced as stressful can be considered as trauma (Tedeschi et al., 2018). As indicated by Stephan and Stephan (2017), when an individual feels that his or her group is facing a threat of alienation, even if that threat is only symbolic and not a physical threat (Hirschberger et al. 2016), the individual tends to act and believe as though the individual and its group are facing an actual physical threat (Stephan and Stephan, 2017).

Our study focuses on the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community in Israel following the first wave of COVID-19 in Israel, which took place from early March 2020 until the end of April 2020. Although currently the COVID-19 pandemic is not over yet, we found many studies that refer to the experience of people during the pandemic as *post-traumatic* (e.g., Laslo-Roth et al., 2020; Vazquez et al. 2021).

The ultra-Orthodox Jews are a minority group within the Israeli population, which experienced a significant group trauma during the first wave of the COVID-19 in Israel. Although the pandemic affected the entire Israeli population, the ultra-Orthodox in Israel experienced this traumatic situation in certain ways that differed from the rest of Israeli society (Hendrix 2020).

The Ultra-Orthodox Society

We will now briefly describe the main characteristics of the Israeli ultra-Orthodox community and the extent of the perceived adversity they experienced during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Israeli ultra-Orthodox community is a Jewish religious minority group (Cahaner 2009) composed of many distinct subgroups. For the current study, we considered the ultra-Orthodox society to be composed of three main groups: the Lithuanians, Hasidim, and Sephardim. Those in the “Lithuanian” group are followers of a religious leadership whose religious practice stems from prewar Lithuania and Russia. This group’s leaders in Israel are Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky and Rabbi Gershon Edelstein. The second group, the Hasidim, are followers of the Hasidic movement, which originally developed in the eighteenth century in Eastern Europe. The Hasidim are made up of several subgroups, with each group guided by its head rabbi (*admor* or *rebbe*). Most Hasidic *rebbe*s guide their communities in similar ways, although each *rebbe* may differ slightly in the guidelines they instructs to their community. The third group is that of the Sephardim, who in Israel come primarily from Arab countries. In the context of the current study, the Sephardic ultra-Orthodox can be divided into two political groups: those who follow Israel’s chief Sephardic rabbi, Rabbi Yitzhak Yosef, and those who follow the rabbinical rulings and guidance of the Lithuanian religious leadership.

The ultra-Orthodox community, or *haredim* as they are known in Hebrew, makes up approximately 12% of the Israeli population (Cahaner and Malach 2019). Scholars point to a number of principles that characterize the ideology of most of the ultra-Orthodox community members: the absolute commitment to and observance of the Jewish law and tradition, the absolute sanctification of the value of Torah study (Caplan, 2003; Elor 1992; Friedman 1991), and the importance of family and accepted (traditional) family structure, such as early marriage, large families, patriarchy, and gendered division of roles (Friedman 1991). The ultra-Orthodox are also characterized by accepting the authority of the rabbis who lead the community unconditionally and without reservation. In this way, rabbis are the arbitrators in all areas of life, discourse, and daily practices customary in ultra-Orthodox society (Friedman 1991). In addition, as mentioned above, the ultra-Orthodox are characterized by separation and isolation from general society and an uncompromising departure from the modern trends in Israeli society (Russo-Netzer and Bergman, 2020). These ideals are agreed upon by all the subgroups of the ultra-Orthodox society, while these different subgroups differ in their levels of devotion to those values in their daily life.

The ultra-Orthodox prefer to live in separate residential areas (Cahaner 2009; Flint 2014), send their children to study in a separate education system (Shiffer 1998; Spiegel 2011, 2013), and most do not serve in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) (Spiegel 2013). Because a large number of adult men study in *yeshivas* full time, the ultra-Orthodox participation in the labor market is only partial (Malach et al. 2015).

Many ultra-Orthodox even refuse to recognize many of the symbols of the State of Israel and do not celebrate Israeli Independence Day (Alperson, 2012).

On the fringes of society, there are conservative extremist groups that refuse to recognize the existence of the State of Israel, even though they live and work in it (Inbari 2016).

After the Holocaust that devastated the Ashkenazi Torah world, the ultra-Orthodox Torah learning institutions were established to raise and educate their students to engage in Torah study all their lives, in a way that would cultivate another generation of scholars.

The great value that the members of the community give to study means that even ultra-Orthodox men who are not able to study Torah full time still view *yeshiva* teachers and their students as exemplary symbols who lead the ideal Torah way of life (Aran 2003; Soloveichik, 1994).

The Conflict between the Ultra-Orthodox and General Israeli Society

The relationship between the ultra-Orthodox society and the general society in Israel has been contentious for many years. These relations are the product of a clash between the ultra-Orthodox society, which perceives itself as keeping the authentic Jewish way of life, and the rest of Jewish Israeli society, which, for the most part, is more modern in outlook and less stringent in religious observance (Elimelech 2012). Thus, segregation from modern society is not just a lifestyle choice for ultra-Orthodox society but part of its very self-definition (Buchbinder et al. 2015). Over the years, this separateness has manifested itself on various levels: geographical, social, cultural, educational, and religious (Caplan 2003; Offner and Tennenbaum 2012). However, with the significant growth of the ultra-Orthodox population, the friction has been augmented between the ultra-Orthodox society and the general society, thus exacerbating the prevailing conflict (Brown 2017).

Following the economic recession of 2001, the Israeli government developed an emergency plan to stabilize the Israeli market. As part of that plan, in the years 2003–2005, the Israeli Minister of Finance at that time, Benjamin Netanyahu, reduced the financial child allocation in an attempt to encourage the Haredi and Arab sectors to join the labor market (Malach and Cahaner 2020). Simultaneously, since those years, the government focused on encouraging *haredim* to acquire secular academic education and work in profitable fields (Black et al. 2021; Malach and Cahaner 2020). Although the number of the ultra-Orthodox individuals who work (as opposed to study in the *yeshiva*) is rising, recent research finds that the ultra-Orthodox who work tend to adopt some aspects of the Israeli culture but still sees themselves as ultra-Orthodox and are not interested in undergoing an integration process (Kalagy and Braun-Lewensohn 2017). Notably, studies have shown that even ultra-Orthodox individuals who adopt certain aspects of Israeli culture feel that doing so is wrong and do not want the rest of their community (family, fellow ultra-Orthodox members, and especially the Torah learners) to go through a similar process (Black 2020).

The literature shows that each individual who deals with bicultural identities (as ultra-Orthodox in Israel) identifies on different levels with each identity; hence,

each individual holds an Israeli identity on some level parallel to his Haredi identity (Black 2020; Jubran et al. 2020).

It can be said that today there are two distinct groups within the Israeli ultra-Orthodox society that advocate different outlooks toward interaction with the wider Israeli society. The traditional ultra-Orthodox group advocates the old and conventional ways of life (as they perceive them), while the modern ultra-Orthodox group advocates more integration (Freund and Band-Winterstein 2017; Stadler, 2009; Zicherman 2014). In the present study, we classified each subject as either “non-integrated” or “integrated.” Those who held a conservative and exclusive ultra-Orthodox identity (hence, high levels of identification with the ultra-Orthodox culture and low levels of identification with the Israeli culture) were classified as “non-integrated,” and those who were integrated in one way or another with Israeli culture alongside their ultra-Orthodox identity (hence, high levels of identification with the Israeli culture), were classified as “integrated.” Through this classification, we were able to examine the relationship between the two aspects of individual identity with the ultra-Orthodox group and how they relate to CPTG.

In the following paragraphs, we will review a number of examples that explain how a few scholars put forward the terminology of CPTG regarding the development of the ultra-Orthodox community, albeit without using a specific conceptualization to explain the process of growth out of distress.

The ultra-Orthodox ideology stems from the ultra-Orthodox Jewish approach that developed in Europe in the nineteenth century. During the Enlightenment, when trends of liberalism and secularism began to develop among Jews, many rabbinical leaders viewed these trends as an existential threat toward traditional Judaism, which they considered the “true Judaism” (Friedman 1987). In response, they began to differentiate themselves from the rest of Judaism by more stringently adhering to religious observances (Blutinger 2007). At the beginning of the nineteenth century, as the trends of education and secularization intensified, the ultra-Orthodox ideology started to develop. The ultra-Orthodox rabbis strengthened their values and strictness, while uncompromisingly struggling with innovative trends prevalent in Judaism, such as the Enlightenment movement, Reform, Socialism, Communism, and Zionism (Caplan and Stadler 2012).

More than a century later, the establishment of the State of Israel marked a milestone in the development of ultra-Orthodox society, due to the fact that its establishment by the Zionist-secular movement explicitly expressed a threat to the ultra-Orthodox community and even strengthened it (Friedman 1987). The establishment of the state of Israel found the ultra-Orthodox under a governmental institution that declares itself as Jewish, but at the same time did not advocate a traditional way of life that adheres to religious precepts and even declares that they are not committed to the Jewish Torah tradition (Brown 2017). The ultra-Orthodox saw this as an existential danger and in response reinforced their segregationist tendencies (Ravitzky 1997). This shows how in different occasions the feeling of threat strengthened the community’s stands and ideology, which eventually contributed to the group’s defining ideology and identity.

We chose to examine the CPTG phenomenon among the ultra-Orthodox society during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the next paragraphs, the

adversity that they experienced will be briefly described, with respect to psychological, physical, spiritual, and social levels of adversity.

The Ultra-Orthodox Society during the COVID-19 Crisis

Unfortunately, the academic research on the ultra-Orthodox community coping with the COVID-19 pandemic is not yet rich enough. Moreover, as is well known in the field of social science, it is not simple to categorize groups and sectors in a dichotomic way, since the reality is fluid and complex. For those reasons, we need to rely on local Israeli press and on the authors that have personal experience as individuals who define themselves as part of the ultra-Orthodox community.

The COVID-19 crisis posed a significant challenge to ultra-Orthodox society. Although the ultra-Orthodox in Israel make up only about 12% of the population, during the first wave in the pandemic, more than 50% of COVID-19 patients in Israel (March–April 2020) belonged to this population (Ministry of Health 2020). Moreover, the leaders of the ultra-Orthodox society were accused of demanding noncompliance with government directives at the beginning of the crisis (Arlozorov 2020). After an increasing number of patients from the ultra-Orthodox areas were reported, the authorities defined the ultra-Orthodox residential areas as dangerous “red zone” areas. While synagogues and *yeshivot* were closed in all religious communities, the closures were particularly traumatic for the ultra-Orthodox population because of the highly regimented nature of their religious observance.

We believe that the prohibition of performing rituals that define the community’s core beliefs and social identity can alone be considered as a trauma in the collective experience. Adding to the trauma, however, was a situation where the local municipalities and social management encountered difficulties functioning as leaders and decision-makers in the public arena (Caspit 2020).

It is important to mention that there is a disagreement in the ultra-Orthodox research field regarding the ways the different communities reacted to the developments (Caplan 2020). In the next paragraphs, we will report briefly the events as the first and second authors experienced them as part of the ultra-Orthodox community in Bnei-Brak and Jerusalem. We will also make use of some news articles that were published in the press. At the beginning of the crisis, many in ultra-Orthodox society saw its leadership as responsible for the local situation that had arisen. In the midst of the chaos in the ultra-Orthodox cities and neighborhoods, the municipalities’ organizations did not function, and were replaced by former army commanders, to manage the crisis. As time passed and the situation stabilized, the management of the crisis passed from the army commanders back to the local ultra-Orthodox leadership, and the anger over the restrictions and the marking of the ultra-Orthodox society as the one spreading the disease was increasingly directed at the state authorities (Hacohen 2020).

The period in which army commanders supported the ultra-Orthodox cities and helped them deal with the crisis raised significant emotional conflict among many in ultra-Orthodox society. Because of the well-ingrained adversarial attitude of ultra-Orthodox leadership and educational institutions toward the army, which is

portrayed as a religiously dangerous, secularizing institution, the situation in which army commanders and soldiers became their rescuers from the difficult crisis raised many questions, especially among ultra-Orthodox youth, who were left asking, "How is it that the very people who we've been taught are our enemies, dangerous threats to our spirituality, now appear to be our saviors and supporters in times of crisis?" On this issue as well, as the first wave of the COVID-19 progressed and the ultra-Orthodox cities returned to normal activity, it became clear that the positive attitude toward the army was temporary, and looking at it as a negative thing returned as before. It is important to note that the ultra-Orthodox were accused of spreading the disease (Cohen 2020; Palvinsky 2020), and closures were imposed on their neighborhoods and cities far more than on other areas in Israel (Twersky 2020). In addition, the ultra-Orthodox were restricted in their movement through law enforcement far beyond what was experienced by the rest of the population (Mizrahi and Nachsoni 2020).

As mentioned earlier, the ultra-Orthodox society in Israel is composed of a variety of different groups, who basically hold similar lifestyles and ideologies, but there are some differences between them. During the pandemic, the various ultra-Orthodox subgroups reacted differently to the government regulations. In a rough generalization, the Lithuanian subgroup reacted in two ways, depending on which rabbi the members followed. Rabbi Kanievsky, who is considered the primary leader of the group, instructed that educational institutions should be left open. Rabbi Edelstein, on the other hand, pursued a stricter policy, instructing that religious studies for men should be significantly reduced and that all the guidelines of the Ministry of Health should be strictly observed (Kalman and Weisberg 2020). In reality, although boys' schools and *yeshivas* remained open for most of the period (whereas girls' schools and seminaries were closed), most members of the Lithuanian group adhered to the guidelines strictly: people prayed outside; wore masks; were careful not to leave the house unnecessarily during the closure period; and made sure to get tested for any possible COVID-19 infection (Lafayer 2020).

Hasidim, on the other hand, took a completely different approach. The Hasidic rabbis, for the most part, ordered that life continue as usual. The Hasidim held multiparticipant events, continued studies and prayers as usual, and did not wear masks. It is important to emphasize, however, that the Hasidic community is made up of a variety of subgroups, and that while most of them did not encourage obeying the restrictions, some *rebbe*s instructed their followers to carefully observe the regulations (Shlezinger 2020).

The Sephardim strictly followed the guidelines of the Ministry of Health, and the group's rabbinical leaders even demanded that their followers observe regulations that were even stricter than those set by the government. The Sephardi *yeshivas* and synagogues were closed across the board (Even-Tzur and Friedman, 2020).

In the next paragraphs, we will elaborate on the sense of discrimination that accompanies the Ultra-Orthodox society; the literature shows that a feeling of group discrimination is a factor that enhances the ultra-Orthodox unity and cohesion (Trachtengot 2021) and thereby may contribute to developing the notion of CPTG.

Discrimination, Adversity, and Growth

A feeling of discrimination in general is likely to create a feeling of rejection and adversely affect psychological health (Bowlby 1982; Tice and Baumeister 1990). It has been argued that feelings of discrimination can be divided into two components: feelings of *personal* discrimination, in which an individual experiences discrimination directed at him or her directly, and group discrimination, in which individuals experience discrimination directed at their group (Verkuyten 1998).

A study comparing personal and group discrimination found that while personal discrimination was found to have a clear, significant negative effect on individual well-being and self-esteem, the effects of group discrimination were more complex. On the one hand, it reduced the group members' sense of well-being but at the same time strengthened the group members' identification with the group, thereby positively affecting well-being (Taylor et al. 1990).

Other studies found that the individual's perception of group discrimination may give a sense that many people are facing the same challenges together, thus reducing the discrimination's negative impact. The fact that discrimination has been directed not only toward the individual but against the whole group may cause the individual to feel belongingness and closeness to the group, increase the individual's identification with the group, and thus positively affect his or her well-being (Bourguignon et al. 2006; Schmitt et al. 2003). This explanation is consistent with social identity theory (SIT), which states that a person's identity is derived from his or her social identity and that threats to group status can increase group cohesion (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). This finding can also be explained according to the theory proposed by Breakwell (1986), which claims that imbalance between the personal identity and the social identity creates an internal or external threat to the individual. In this situation, individuals choose different strategies aimed at returning themselves to a state of desirable balance and therefore tend to adhere to their group identity (Breakwell 1986). In a study conducted among Israeli ultra-Orthodox, it was found that a sense of group discrimination strengthens the well-being of the ultra-Orthodox, with the ultra-Orthodox identity serving as a mediator (Bergman et al. 2017). A study that elaborated on these findings claims that, in some way, the ultra-Orthodox community has learned how to benefit from the situation of feeling discriminated, and they seek to preserve and maintain the situation of discrimination and benefit from it (Trachtengot 2021).

Nevertheless, during the pandemic, the Israeli ultra-Orthodox community felt it was under attack more than usual: the synagogues were shut down; curfews were imposed selectively (to their belief), mainly in ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods; and the proportion of sick people in the ultra-Orthodox community was high. All this, together with unclear instructions coming from most of the community leaders, left the ultra-Orthodox community dealing with a highly stressful situation, on the individual level and, obviously, on the community level depending on the coherence they experienced coming from their leaders regarding the way to cope with the pandemic.

The Current Study

The present study seeks to examine the group's perception of dealing with situations of difficulty and crisis. To this end, we chose to examine the sense of group discrimination as a threatening source that the individual experiences for his or her group. We examined the beliefs of individuals about the development of their community in the face of the threat (CPTG). The ultra-Orthodox community in Israel suffered also from the physical aspect (high numbers of casualties), and also from the psychological aspect (hostility, closure of the religious institutions, and perceived discrimination); the present study included the following variables:

- The sense of discrimination that individuals experience, as directed both toward themselves and toward their group as a source of threat that can be perceived as trauma.
- The level of satisfaction of the individual with their life in general (measured by the life satisfaction index, LSI);
- The level of growth that the individual believes the ultra-Orthodox community showed following the COVID-19 crisis (CPTG);
- The level of the individual's identification with ultra-Orthodox culture and the level of identification with Israeli culture.

For the purpose of the present study, a CPTG questionnaire was developed consisting of 15 items (for more detail, see the method section).

We have therefore raised the following hypotheses:

1. A positive correlation will be found between feelings of discrimination and CPTG.
2. A positive correlation will be found between the level of identification with ultra-Orthodox culture and CPTG, and a negative correlation with the level of identification with Israeli culture.
3. A positive correlation will be found between CPTG and the level of satisfaction with life.

Method

Participants

The study involved 256 respondents from the ultra-Orthodox sector in Israel. The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 71 years. Among the participants, 126 were women (49.2%) and 127 men (49.6%), and three did not report gender (1.2%). Most of the respondents were married (83.2%), 17 single (6.6%), 17 divorced (6.6%), and 5 widows (2%). Three participants did not report their marital status. Most participants reported that they had children (88.7%), with the average number of children standing at 6.8 (exactly as noted by Malach and Cahaner 2019 as the average number of children per family in the Haredi population in Israel). Out of the participants in the study, 34% defined themselves as members of the Lithuanian

Table 1 List of items in the CPTG questionnaire adapted for the ultra-Orthodox community

1	The ultra-Orthodox society has strengthened its values following the coronavirus crisis
2	During the coronavirus crisis, the ultra-Orthodox society learned that it could not trust others
3	The ultra-Orthodox society values even more its existence as a group after the coronavirus crisis
4	In the coronavirus crisis, ultra-Orthodox society has learned to find its way in a changing world
5	In the coronavirus crisis, ultra-Orthodox society missed new opportunities to develop
6	Following the coronavirus crisis, ultra-Orthodox society has learned that as a community it is capable of more
7	In the coronavirus crisis, the ultra-Orthodox society has learned that it has no more “divine intervention” than other groups
8	Following the coronavirus crisis, the ultra-Orthodox society has acquired a better ability to cope with difficulties
9	In the coronavirus crisis, it became clear that ultra-Orthodox society is stronger than it thought
10	People in ultra-Orthodox society have a greater sense of closeness to each other following the coronavirus crisis
11	The ultra-Orthodox society has become more sensitive following the coronavirus crisis
12	During the coronavirus crisis, ultra-Orthodox society did not show more than their usual kindness
13	The ultra-Orthodox society has come to know that it has wonderful people in it
14	The ultra-Orthodox society strengthened its religious beliefs following the coronavirus crisis
15	The ultra-Orthodox society now understands spiritual matters more than before

sector, 28% defined themselves as Hasidim, 23% defined themselves as Sephardi, 4% as not having been raised as religiously observant, 4% as ultra-Orthodox from abroad, and 2% as belonging to the “Jerusalem faction,” while 4% did not belong to any subsector (the questionnaire allowed multichoice answers). In total, 57.4% of participants reported that they, or one of their family members, had been in COVID-19 quarantine over the previous month.

Questionnaire

A questionnaire comprising 15 items was developed for measuring CPTG. Ten items were taken from the abbreviated questionnaire of Cann, Calhoun, Tedeschi, Taku, Vishnevsky, Triplett, and Danhauer (2010), to which five more items were added from the extended questionnaire of Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996). The items were translated from English to Hebrew using back-translation. After the translation, the items were culturally adapted from the level of the individual to that of the ultra-Orthodox society. For example, instead of referring to the growth of the individual following the trauma, the item referred to the growth of the ultra-Orthodox community following the trauma. In the original questionnaire by Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996), all items were positively worded so that a high score always indicated growth and a low score indicated a lack of growth. In the present study, some of the items were worded in a negative way, so that a high score in those items indicated a lack of growth. This is done to prevent a possible bias (see the list of items in Table 1). Subjects were asked to rate on a Likert scale the extent to which they agreed with the statement presented, with values ranging from 1 (do not agree at all)

to 6 (strongly agree). Cronbach's alpha reliability for this questionnaire was 0.93. An exploratory factor analysis with Varimax rotation was conducted on the 15 items listed in the questionnaire.

To examine the level of identification with the ultra-Orthodox culture and with Israeli culture, the respondents were presented with two single items (Postmes et al. 2013), in which they rated how much they identify with the ultra-Orthodox culture from 1 (does not identify at all) to 6 (identifies very much) and with Israeli culture from 1 (does not identify at all) to 6 (identifies very much).

To measure the level of life satisfaction, subjects completed a life satisfaction index (LSI) questionnaire (Diener, Emmons, Larsen and Griffin, 1985), in which they were asked to rate their views on a Likert scale from 1 (do not agree at all) to 6 (fully agree). The questionnaire included five items that assessed the subject's perceived level of satisfaction with their life (for example, "My living conditions are excellent," or "I am satisfied with my life"). High scores indicated high levels of life satisfaction. The questionnaire showed high validity in previous studies (Anaby, Jarus, and Zumbo, 2010), and Cronbach's alpha reliability in this study was 0.85.

To assess the sense of personal discrimination (PPD), four items were adapted from a perceived discrimination questionnaire (Bergman et. al., 2017; Horenczyk 2008). (For example, "I feel that people in secular society do not accept me because I am ultra-Orthodox," or "I was ridiculed or insulted because I am ultra-Orthodox"). To assess the feeling of group discrimination (PGD), four items were adapted from a perceived group discrimination questionnaire (Bergman et. al. 2017), (for example, "I feel that people in secular society do not accept people from ultra-Orthodox society," or "Others mocked or insulted people from my society because they are ultra-Orthodox"). The answers to the items ranged on a Likert scale from 1 (very opposed) to 6 (strongly agree). The scale of perceived personal discrimination (PPD) showed a Cronbach's alpha reliability of 0.89, and items reflecting perceived group discrimination (PGD) showed a Cronbach's alpha reliability of 0.86. As indicated above, to assess the closeness of the subject to COVID-19, respondents were also asked whether they or members of their close family had been in quarantine during the previous month because of COVID-19.

Procedure

The questionnaires were distributed during the week between 13 July 2020 and 17 July 2020. That week, the Israeli government imposed a roadblock on some of ultra-Orthodox cities and neighborhoods owing to high morbidity rates, and many ultra-Orthodox perceived this as discrimination and collective punishment distinctively directed at the ultra-Orthodox sector. This was reflected in many protests, some of which became violent.

Subjects volunteered to participate in this study, and the online questionnaire was distributed on various ultra-Orthodox forums. Participants were assured that responses stayed anonymous, and they were not asked to provide any identifying information about themselves. It is important to mention a current study claiming that, when the research focuses on Israeli-ultra-Orthodox issues, there is no

Table 2 Means, standard deviations, and correlations of the major variables

		Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	CPTG	4.41	1.30	–					
2	Haredi identity	4.98	1.40	0.69**	–				
3	Israeli identity	2.73	1.48	–0.48**	–0.36**	–			
4	PGD	4.81	1.26	0.54**	0.47**	–0.28**	–		
5	PPD	3.90	1.62	0.63**	0.42**	–0.45**	0.75**	–	
6	LSI	4.87	1.00	0.51**	0.46**	–0.23**	0.21**	0.27**	–
7	Quarantine	0.57	0.49	0.32**	0.11	–0.25**	0.20**	0.23**	0.16*

* $p < 0.5$; ** $p < 0.1$

difference between online forms and manually filled out forms, and that the data collected are highly reliable (Barak-Koren 2019). Data were analyzed using SPSS software, and the study was approved by the ethics committee of the Hebrew University School of Education.

Results

In the following paragraphs, we will describe briefly the statistical findings, and in the discussion chapter we will analyze the findings in depth. All 15 items of the CPTG questionnaire were found loaded on one key factor. An exploratory factor analysis with Varimax rotation was performed showing a single factor with an eigenvalue of 7.996 explaining 53% of the variance, while the next factor had only an eigenvalue of 1.20 and explained only 8% of the variance.

Table 2 shows that participants reported a high level of community growth following the crisis. As revealed in the correlation table, all three hypotheses were confirmed, and the correlations were statistically significant in the predicted directions.

As a preliminary analysis, we conducted between-subjects analysis of variance (ANOVA) to examine differences in the level of CPTG among participants from the different subgroups in the ultra-Orthodox community. Results were statistically significant ($F = 37.01$, $df = 2, 215$, $p < 0.001$). Follow-up analyses using Scheffe's test showed that the level of the CPTG was the lowest among the Lithuanian participants, followed by the Hasidic participants, and the highest level of CPTG was found among the Sephardi participants. The comparisons will be analyzed in the discussion section.

In addition to the predicted correlations, it is interesting to see that there is a negative correlation between identification as an Israeli and identification as an ultra-Orthodox. We also found a negative correlation between identification as an Israeli and satisfaction with life. These results will also be explained later in the discussion section.

In addition, there was a positive significant relationship between perceived discrimination and life satisfaction. This pattern is similar to the one reported among a similar population by Bergman et al. (2017).

To test the predictive power of the various variables on CPTG, a hierarchical regression was conducted. In the first block we included gender, marital status, and number of children. To distinguish between individual characteristics and group characteristics, the feeling of group discrimination was introduced in the second block, and the third step included the feeling of personal discrimination and stay in quarantine. The fourth block included the ultra-Orthodox identity and the Israeli identity, while the fifth, and final, block included the level of satisfaction with life. A test was performed to verify that there was no multicollinearity between the predictors, and indeed the values of VIF and tolerance for the variables of the present study ranged from 1.026 to 1.579, and from 0.633 to 0.974, respectively; thus, multicollinearity was ruled out.

As can be seen in Table 3, all the variables together predicted about 73% of the predicted CPTG variance. The analysis of the data shows that, beyond the demographic variables, the main contribution to CPTG prediction was the individual's level of identification with the ultra-Orthodox culture (15%), such that low identification with the ultra-Orthodox culture predicted low CPTG levels, while high identification with the ultra-Orthodox culture predicted high CPTG levels. The feeling of group discrimination also contributed to the CPTG prediction positively; it seems that as individuals feel that their group is being discriminated against, they also believe that their group thrives and grows. Interestingly, individual difficulties and the level of life satisfaction were not found to be significant predictors of CPTG. Moreover, the amount of exposure to the virus (as measured using the quarantine item) did not emerge as a strong predictor of CPTG.

Discussion

The present study seeks to contribute to the understanding of an unexpected phenomenon: that minority groups facing difficulties and adversity can manage not only to overcome the adversity, but also to grow and be strengthened from the experience. Examples of this phenomenon certainly can be observed throughout Jewish history, following numerous persecutions and expulsions.

To help us understand the permanence and enduringness of those minorities, we developed a concept called community post-traumatic growth (CPTG). We hypothesized that various traumas may increase the resilience of a group facing adversity; it may make it stronger, and the group may come out of the crisis strengthened by what it has endured because of the traumatic event. We noticed that many scholars referred to this idea, but we did not find a clear conceptualization that describes it specifically. To investigate this, we examined the attitude of the ultra-Orthodox population in Israel during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Because the Israeli authorities imposed closures of areas with high morbidity rates, and morbidity levels among ultra-Orthodox society were much higher than those of the general population, the Israeli ultra-Orthodox population experienced a wave of frustration and feelings of perceived discrimination. For the purpose of the present study, we characterized the feeling of group discrimination as stress

Table 3 Hierarchical regression of the different variables as predictors of CPTG (Community Post-Traumatic Growth)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Gender ^a	0.89 (0.34)*** (SD = 0.15)	0.68 (0.26)*** (SD = 0.14)	0.62 (0.24)*** (SD = 0.13)	0.56 (0.21)*** (SD = 0.11)	0.51 (0.20)*** (SD = 0.11)
Marital status ^b	0.29 (0.08) (SD = 0.18)	0.20 (0.06) (SD = 0.17)	0.15 (0.04) (SD = 0.16)	0.04 (0.01) (SD = 0.13)	0.06 (0.02) (SD = 0.13)
Number of children	0.49 (0.07)*** (SD = 0.41)	0.36 (0.31)*** (SD = 0.06)	0.27 (0.23)*** (SD = 0.06)	0.15 (0.13)*** (SD = 0.05)	0.13 (0.11) (SD = 0.5)
Perceived group discrimination		0.39 (0.37)*** (SD = 0.06)	0.11 (0.10)	-0.00 (0.00) (SD = 0.07)	0.03 (0.03) (SD = 0.06)
Perceived personal discrimination			0.29 (0.36)*** (SD = 0.06)	0.23 (0.29)*** (SD = 0.05)	0.21 (0.27)*** (SD = 0.05)
Quarantine			0.27 (0.10)* (SD = 0.13)	0.25 (0.9)* (SD = 0.11)	0.21 (0.08)* (SD = 0.10)
Haredi identity				0.43 (0.44)*** (SD = 0.04)	0.37 (0.38)*** (SD = 0.04)
Israeli identity				-0.05 (-0.06) (SD = 0.04)	-0.05 (-0.06) (SD = 0.04)
Life satisfaction					0.21 (0.16)*** (SD = 0.05)
R ²	0.389	0.503	0.561	0.561	0.731
Δ R ² , ^c	0.389***	0.114***	0.058***	0.151***	0.019***

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$ ^a male = 1, female = 2^b single = 1, married = 2, divorced = 3, widowed = 4^c model accuracy

inducing, and we measured this by means of self-report questionnaires to assess the degree of growth that the individual believes the ultra-Orthodox community demonstrated in the face of the group's feelings of adversity.

The study seeks to take the concept of PTG from the world of clinical psychology and expand it to allow for the concept of PTG of the community, namely the CPTG. The research hypotheses were confirmed, and indeed it was found that a sense of group discrimination, the experience of involuntary quarantine, and identification with the community predicts the belief in the individual that his or her community is showing resilience and strength in the face of situations of stress and crisis. We discuss the findings and their theoretical and practical implications later in this section.

Studies have shown that a person's group affiliation plays an important function in his or her self-definition (Tajfel and Turner 1986). Beyond the material resources that the group provides for the benefit of its members, there are also psychological gains it offers, such as a sense of acceptance, a feeling of belonging, and a set of rules, values, and beliefs that guide individual behavior. As a result, the group has the power to influence the feeling of self-worth of its members (Crocker et al. 2003). The group also helps to define the social position of its members and helps its members to distinguish between themselves and those belonging to other groups, while maintaining a sense of their own uniqueness (Turner et al. 1987).

In the current study, the level of identification as ultra-Orthodox was found to be highly correlated with CPTG, that is, the more a person identified as ultra-Orthodox, the more he or she believed that the ultra-Orthodox group had experienced growth in the face of the crisis. Our findings confirmed the important role that the group plays in the life of individuals and showed how group members see belonging to the group as something of value and meaning, almost as they see their own lives. Thus, at times when individuals feel the danger lurking for the group's existence, they become anxious and behave and react similarly to a situation where their own lives are in danger (Branscombe et al. 1999).

Some researchers argue that the concept of PTG does not reflect actual behavior (Pat-Horenczyk et al. 2016) but rather assesses the level of growth as *perceived* and reported by the individual after trauma. In light of this, it is possible to understand the finding that strong identification with the ultra-Orthodox culture is positively correlated with CPTG. On the other hand, the study also found that the level of identification with Israeli culture was negatively correlated with CPTG. Evidently, the participants who expressed a strong identification with Israeli culture do not feel the need to believe that the ultra-Orthodox group is strong and prosperous, because they are less sympathetic to this group. Hence, the two identities—Israeli and ultra-Orthodox—were negatively correlated, which may suggest low bicultural identity integration (Jubran et al. 2020).

Considering this, it can be mistakenly explained that people with high levels of life satisfaction will report high levels of CPTG, a claim that sounds logical and intuitive. Yet the hierarchical regression analysis conducted in the present study suggests a slightly different pattern. The level of life satisfaction predicted very little of CPTG after the predictive contribution of the factors of group identification,

perceived discrimination, and experience of quarantine. It should be noted, however, that the demographic variables contributed the highest level of prediction (approximately 39%). This finding is reasonable and predictable, as previous studies have found that the gender variable predicts PTG significantly (Vishnevsky et al. 2010). However, the variables in our study that predicted CPTG at the highest level after the demographic variables were the perception of group discrimination and the level of identification with the ultra-Orthodox population.

As to the distinction between personal trauma and group trauma, the variables characterized in [the current study](#) as stressors at the individual level (staying in quarantine and a sense of personal discrimination) were introduced in the predictive model in a separate block, after the one that included the group discrimination variable, which is perceived as a group stressor. Indeed, a significant gap was found between the predictive levels of group variables versus individual variables, such that perceived group discrimination predicted about 11% of CPTG while a sense of individual discrimination and quarantine together predicted only an additional 0.6% of CPTG. In summary, the findings of the present study indicate that when individuals identify with a particular group and perceive that their group has experienced collective trauma, they may tend to believe that the group has grown through facing the crisis it has experienced. The current study indeed found that the concept of post-traumatic growth can be expanded to include a group as well.

The findings of the present study also revealed that different subgroups within ultra-Orthodox society responded differently to the CPTG questionnaire. The Sephardim responded with the highest level of CPTG, followed by Hasidim. The response of the Lithuanian group demonstrated a certain level of CPTG, but they showed the lowest level among the groups. This seems to be due to the nature of the instructions given by the different community rabbis during the COVID-19 period. To understand the difference of CPTG between the different subgroups, we need first to elaborate on the differences between the different groups, which were described briefly in the introduction.

As discussed earlier, the ultra-Orthodox society can be divided into three main subgroups: Sephardim, Hasidim, and Lithuanians:

The first subgroup, the Sephardim, were first perceived as an independent group within the ultra-Orthodox sector in the early 1980s (in parallel with the establishment of the Shas movement) (Leon 2012). The group is characterized by certain levels of flexibility in relation to Torah laws and relative openness to the outside world (Leon 2012). Many Sephardim live in heterogeneous residential areas, and many of them have non-Haredi relatives, so they are closer to the general population than the others (Black 2020). The former Sephardic chief rabbi, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, had a relative pragmatic approach to secular studies and going to work, and this is reflected in the higher level of general education in Sephardic schools and the high percentage of men who go to work (Leon 2010). The ultra-Orthodox Sephardim are relatively more open to a different way of life, which makes it easier for them to integrate into general society and into non-Haredi workplaces (Lupo 2003, 2007).

The second subgroup, the Hasidim, are members of a movement that advocates religious work done out of inner emotion and not just out of a rational approach. There are dozens of small Hasidic sects, each headed by a *rebbe*, who is the spiritual

leader (Ashery, 2020). They show complete obedience to the spiritual guide (Lupo 2007; Stadler, 2009).

The third group, the Lithuanians, have different characteristics from the Hasidim: in their view, the most important occupation is Torah study. They even have social sanctions on those men who go to work, compared with the other groups for whom this is acceptable on a certain level (Aran 2003; Caplan and Stedler 2012). Therefore, the number of men engaged in full-time Torah study is the highest among the Lithuanian ultra-Orthodox, and at the same time, the participation of men in the labor market is extremely low (Trachtengot 2014).

The response of the leaders of each group to COVID-19 was different. In the Sephardi community, the rabbis clearly stated unequivocally that the health guidelines given by the Israeli government should be strictly adhered to. The Sephardi synagogues were closed without exception (Cohen 2020); there were no group events at all; schools for both boys and girls, as well as *yeshivas*, remained closed until the government explicitly allowed it; and the rabbis even spoke harshly against those who did not follow the guidelines (Even-Tzur and Friedman, 2020).

Similarly, in the Hasidic community, most rabbinical leaders gave clear instructions, and in contrast to the Sephardic rabbinical leaders, they opposed the government guidelines. Most rabbis instructed their followers to observe government guidelines only in public spaces, so as not to provoke anger among the government and Israeli society, but told their followers that in private spaces they can continue to behave normally (Shamir 2020). Prayers continued in synagogues, *yeshivas* and schools remained open, and there were even quite a few large gatherings, especially for religious events and weddings (Schlesinger 2020). With the exception of a few communities, such as *Gur* and *Karlin-Stolin* (Even-Tzur and Friedman 2020), the rest of the Hasidic groups mostly did not follow government guidelines at all and did not even make sure to wear a mask when meeting people (Schlesinger 2020).

The Hasidic community faced two sources of confusion: first, complying with their leaders made them behave one way in public space and another way in private; in addition, the rabbis publicly denied that they had made statements supporting noncompliance with the government's instructions (Even-Tzur and Friedman 2020).

While in the Hasidic group the leaders' instructions were mostly clear but still emotionally confusing for its members, in the Lithuanian group there was confusion about the rabbis' instructions themselves. Already at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, when Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky instructed that the synagogues and schools not be closed, Rabbi Gershon Edelstein advised that the government guidelines should be strictly observed. The *yeshivas* and schools that followed Rabbi Edelstein's instructions remained closed for a long time, while in the rest of the Lithuanian community, institutions remained open. In May 2020, joint public letters were published by the two leaders instructing their followers to observe the government regulations, but throughout the time period of the study, the disagreement between the two leaders was clear (Bitan 2020).

Confusion in the Lithuanian community grew, when in the autumn of 2020 the "outline of educational institutions" that agreed with the military failed, and thousands of Lithuanian students fell ill with COVID-19 within the *yeshivas* (Nachshoni 2020). Despite the great price these people paid, when they were forced to stay

within the *yeshiva* for many months and not meet with their families, the fact that they became ill with COVID-19 undermined confidence in the leadership instructions, leading to high peaks of confusion and chaos in this community.

In light of the differences between the three subgroups, one can explain the present study's findings that that CPTG was the lowest in the Lithuanian community, followed by higher levels in the Hasidic community, and the highest among the Sephardim.

Studies show that people in ultra-Orthodox society report more optimistic attitudes than members of other societies (Bergman et al. 2017), and ultra-Orthodox society reports the highest level of happiness in Israeli society (Chernihovsky and Sharoni 2015). This can explain the high level of CPTG found in ultra-Orthodox society. But the differences between the subgroups may show that the stronger the leadership and the clearer its instructions, the higher the CPTG.

In this context, it is important to emphasize that COVID-19 caused rifts between different factions within the ultra-Orthodox community, especially between different parts of the Lithuanian community. This rift is an expression of a perceptual change in the power relations between the rabbis and the state and the secular public. Future research is required to examine the impact of social coherence and adherence to the respective leader on the CPTG levels. Similarly, further research is needed to determine the contribution of different variables to the prediction of CPTG. Among such variables are the belief that *hakol-letova* (whatever God does is for the better), the level of belief in God, etc. In addition, a longitudinal study is required to evaluate the length and consistency of the CPTG phenomenon.

The study directs the spotlight for further examination and for examining how the individual perceives the whole group, the changes it undergoes, and how the individuals see themselves in relation to that process.

Another theoretical contribution of the present study is related to the way the CPTG questionnaire was developed. The standard PTG questionnaire consists only of positively worded items, which may lead to possible bias in the answers. In the present study, some of the items were worded negatively to strengthen the validity of the structure of the questionnaire. In general, there seems to be room for further research concerning adjustments to the original PTG questionnaire.

The findings of the present study make a contribution on a practical level. Over the years, different groups grow and expand, and over time, subgroups are formed within the broader group. The Jewish community in Israel and around the world is currently made up of several subgroups. The ultra-Orthodox tend to feel discriminated against by the majority society and distinguish themselves from the other Jewish groups (Bergman et al. 2017). The present study directs our attention to the importance of maintaining contact between individuals and their group. We believe that one should try to look more into similarities than differences. Thus, in times of crisis, individuals can find a way to believe that their group is growing and strengthening together.

The study suffers from a number of possible limitations. First, the data from the current study were collected in the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, and it is possible that, with the increase in the rate of infection during later stages of the pandemic, the wider picture has changed. We thus propose conducting a follow-up

study on a larger sample to examine patterns of commonalities and differences between the waves of the COVID-19 crisis.

Another limitation of the current study can be seen at the methodological level. The ultra-Orthodox community was chosen as the case study to show the phenomenon of CPTG, and the authors wished to show how the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences caused growth. Indeed, the current paper shows this phenomenon. We are aware that the ultra-Orthodox community in Israel considers itself a superior group among the other Jewish groups in Israel, a fact that can be an intervening factor that may or may not add an alternative explanation to the findings. Further research is needed on other groups facing challenging situations to examine this subject more deeply.

There is debate as to whether the percentage of internet users among the ultra-Orthodox community is high and whether those who answered via the internet can be relied upon to reflect all parts of ultra-Orthodox society. Although years ago studies showed that there was a difference between the results obtained electronically from the ultra-Orthodox community and those that were filled out by hand (Trachtengot 2014), recent studies show that about 85% of ultra-Orthodox society are exposed to the internet and use it daily. Other studies show that, in many cases, those in the ultra-Orthodox sector use a filtered internet that is approved for use by the rabbis (Drillman 2020; Galperin 2020). In addition, many studies conducted in recent years among the ultra-Orthodox have used the internet as a tool for administering questionnaires (for example, Braun-Lewensohn et al. 2021; Drillman 2020; Malchi, et al., 2020). Therefore, it can be assumed that the answers obtained from questionnaires filled out online reflect the position of the majority of the ultra-Orthodox public and are credible (Barak-Koren 2019). To verify this claim, we recommend replicating this study among the 15% of ultra-Orthodox members that do not use the internet web. Regarding concerns of response bias that could affect the quality of the data, we can say that social desirability in research does exist in the general population, but various studies have argued that the ultra-Orthodox population is more prone to this than the rest of the population (Horowitz 2016; Weinreb and Blass 2018). Recent studies, however, have found no evidence of this, and it has been found that the ultra-Orthodox do not tend to be influenced by social desirability more than the rest of the population (Benbenisti and Friedman 2020; Trachtengot 2021). Therefore, it can be argued that the present study is likely not to be affected by social desirability bias.

Finally, the research team included researchers who belong to the ultra-Orthodox community. This was helpful, on the one hand, as the researchers were familiar with the cultural language and found it easier to recruit the subjects; yet, on the other hand, careful awareness was needed to avoid possible biases.

Conclusions

The current study shows that the concept of PTG can be expanded from the clinical psychology area to the social psychology field. Hence, CPTG was found among those that strongly identify with their community, and especially when the

community leaders demonstrate a clear and directive way to their followers. These conditions can help the group and its members stay/become stronger given the challenges that they are facing.

Moreover, it is recommended to adopt the PTG questionnaire modification that we suggest, as adding items that are worded negatively can strengthen the construct validity of the of the questionnaire. The findings of the current study confirm that identification with the ultra-Orthodox community is positively correlated with higher levels of life satisfaction, and similarly, perceived group discrimination is positively correlated with higher levels of life satisfaction. It is important that the decision-makers take these findings into consideration when planning social policies, as trying to force a group to cooperate may cause them to unite and fortify within themselves, hence reinforcing in-group favoritism.

The growth that a group may experience as a result of a shared trauma can contribute to the continued preservation of the group's members in the face of different types of adversity. We hope that the current research will help to explain how various minority groups can thrive within general society and identify the factors that affect their trauma-related patterns.

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Declarations

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Shlomo Black Shlomo Black, a psychologist, earned his PhD at the Seymour Fox School of Education, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. His major areas of research are: acculturation and adaptation; psychological aspects of cultural, ethnic, and national, religious and psychological identities; identity transitions. His studies examine the ability to combine identities and the different aspects of multicultural life that may affect life satisfaction, existential threats, and adaptation. Dr. Black's work has a special focus on the Ultra-Orthodox community in Israel.

Itschak Trachtengot Itschak Trachtengot earned his PhD at the Seymour Fox School of Education, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. His major areas of research are: acculturation; psychological aspects of cultural, ethnic, and national identities. His dissertation focused on minority groups that wish to keep their uniqueness, and put forward the notion of minority awareness. His studies examine aspects of behavior change among minorities, the ability to combine identities, and the different aspects of multicultural life. Dr. Trachtengot is a lecturer in psychology and special education at Herzog College and at Jerusalem College in Israel, and is a facilitator of students at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

Gabriel Horenczyk Gabriel Horenczyk is J. Robert Fisher Professor at the Seymour Fox School of Education, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. His major areas of research and teaching are: psychological aspects of cultural, ethnic, and national identity; identity and adaptation of immigrants; immigrants in schools; the school acculturative context; identity transitions. Professor Horenczyk integrates cross-cultural, sociopsychological, and educational theory and research for the study of biculturalism, acculturation, and ethnic identities of minorities, and their effects on psychological and school adaptation.