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“The War on Ageism” or How Ageism is Reduced during Wartime

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: The study evaluated the perceptions of lay people in Israel concerning the presence of ageism during the Swords of Iron War. **Design, Setting, Participants, and Measurements:** Two open-ended online questions about general views of ageism during the war as well as personal experiences with ageism during the war were answered by a convenience sample of 902 Israelis (average age 47.13 years [$SD = 18.41$], 502 [55.7%] women) during the month of April 2024. **Results:** In total, 42.4% of the responses described nonexistence of or decline in ageism during the war in general, whereas 79.1% of the responses described nonexistence of or decline in ageism based on their own personal experience during the war. This was attributed to: 1) increased collaboration between the generations, 2) younger people's willingness to sacrifice their lives, and 3) older persons' contribution during the war. A fourth theme involved responses indicating no or declining ageism without detailed explanation. **Conclusions:** The findings are discussed in the context of contact and threat theories. It is noteworthy that a horrific situation like war, combined with neo-liberal values that idolize activity and contribution, may have unexpectedly positive consequences, such as reduced ageism. (Am J Geriatr Psychiatry 2025; ■■■:■■■-■■■)

Highlights

- **What is the primary question addressed by this study?**
The question addressed by the study concerns the reasons behind perceived nonexistence or reduction of ageism during the Swords of Iron War.
- **What is the main finding of this study?**
Three main reasons are provided to explain the nonexistence or reduction of ageism: 1) increased collaboration between generations, 2) the sacrifices of younger people, and 3) the contributions of older persons to societal efforts.

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- **What is the meaning of the finding?**

The findings suggest that increased contact between generations, brought about by the impending threat of outside forces, can result in a reduced sense of ageism.

INTRODUCTION

Ageism is manifested in the way we think (e.g., stereotypes), feel (e.g., prejudice), and behave (e.g., discrimination) toward people because of their chronological age.^{1,2} It can be directed toward people of all ages but has received the most attention in relation to older people.³ Ageism is more prevalent than sexism or racism, reported by one in three Europeans.⁴ These estimates are comparable to an Israeli study in which about 28% of the sample reported perceived age discrimination.⁵ Moreover, one in two people worldwide report holding ageist attitudes, clearly attesting to the prevalence of age bias worldwide.⁶

Ageism either directed by society in the form of discriminatory practices which compromise one's human rights and access to goods and services or in the form of negative messages directed toward one's own age and aging has been documented in a variety of contexts including the healthcare system, the workforce, the media, digital technology, and legal policies.⁷ Ageism has debilitating effects on society at large and on older persons specifically. Financially, the cost of ageism in the US healthcare system is estimated at 63 billion USD, broadly attributed to its impact on the prevalence of eight major health conditions.⁸ In the workforce, the cost of ageism is estimated at 850 billion USD largely due to barriers to extended employment of older persons.⁹ No comparable studies assessing the costs of ageism were conducted elsewhere. However, worldwide, ageism has been associated with reduced health and wellbeing, including a higher risk for mortality.¹⁰

In recognition of the substantial impact of ageism on the life of all members of society, the World Health Organization (WHO) launched a global campaign to combat ageism.² The campaign aims to change the way we think, feel, and act toward people because of their age and aging to reach a world for all ages. The campaign identified four mechanisms to reduce

ageism,¹ two of which are supported by scientific evidence including a systematic review on the topic.¹¹ Specifically, educational interventions which provide a more balanced view of age and aging and intergenerational contact under conditions of collaboration and solidarity between the generations have resulted in reduced ageism. Although the WHO report suggests that policy and legislations to reduce ageism are also effective, evidence concerning the impact of policy is still equivocal.¹² Likewise, the WHO found only limited evidence to support the use of social campaigns to eradicate ageism.¹³

The Impact of War and Terror on People of Different Age Groups

The Swords of Iron War started following the Hamas massacre, in which 1,182 people were murdered, more than 2,000 people were injured, and 251 were kidnapped to Gaza. Most of these people were civilians. During the first 4 hours of the attack, more than 3,000 rockets were fired into Israel. The war soon escalated to involve not only the Gaza strip, but additional fronts, including neighboring and non-neighboring territories and countries. The massacre and the war that followed have had an immense impact on Israeli society. At the time of data collection (April 2024), there were 1,497 casualties (893 civilians and 600 soldiers), 133 hostages still held in Gaza (36 of whom were identified as dead) and 15,269 people injured.¹⁴ The estimated percentage of Israelis diagnosed with probable post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) increased from 16.2% in August 2023 to 29.8% in November 2023. Likewise, the prevalence of general anxiety disorder and depression also increased from 24.9% to 42.7% following the attack and the war that followed, with direct exposure to the attack being associated with worse mental health outcomes.¹⁵

Emotionally, research has shown that younger people, especially children, are most vulnerable to the effects of war and terror. For instance, a study conducted in Nepal with 10,623 people found that exposure to violence during childhood, but not in older

age, was associated with a risk for major depressive disorder.¹⁶ Likewise, a study conducted among 428 online participants during the Swords of Iron War has found that acute stress symptoms and probable PTSD were significantly higher in younger age groups, compared with older persons, thus attesting to the resilience of older persons during wartime.¹⁷ Similar conclusions were corroborated by a review of the literature which found that the prevalence rate of PTSD is substantially lower in older persons compared with younger people.¹⁸ Although older people might be more resilient to the emotional effects of war and trauma than younger people, given their physiological and psychosocial susceptibility, older persons might be particularly challenged at times of war and conflict.^{19–22}

Ageism During Wartime

Ageism has received only minimal attention in the context of war and terror. Nonetheless, a recent study has argued that older persons are systematically excluded from preparedness, response, and recovery phases of humanitarian emergencies, including war and terror related emergencies, possibly due to ageism.²³ In support of this argument, a study conducted in Jordan has stressed that even though older refugees represent a vulnerable group, just like women and children, they are deprioritized compared with the latter two groups. This has been attributed to the perception of older persons as having a reduced life expectancy, a high disease burden, and limited contribution to the economy. The author explained this by a neoliberal value of deservedness, which is largely based on one's financial contribution to the economy.²⁴ In support of this, a study of service providers in Lebanon has concluded that older Syrian refugees face marginalization and neglect which can be attributed to ageism at the macro, meso, and micro levels.²⁵ In support of these findings, a recent study conducted in Israel (whose data forms the basis of the present study) found that 357 participants (39.6% of the entire sample) reported witnessing ageism in the current war situation, and 156 (17.3% of the entire sample) reported that they personally experienced ageism.²⁶

Although research has noted an increase in the incidence of ageism during turbulent times,^{23,27} there is some theoretical and initial empirical evidence supporting a reduction in ageism at times of external

threats, such as during wartime. Specifically, a recent study has distinguished between two types of threats. Accordingly, threats associated with scarce resources are likely to instigate intergroup conflicts, whereas threats that represent safety concerns by outgroup members toward the ingroup are more likely to instigate within group collaboration and solidarity.²⁸

The Present Study

The present study is based on the same sample and the same two open-ended questions analyzed and reported elsewhere.²⁶ However, the study is focused on those responses which described no ageism or a decline in ageism during wartime, rather than an increase in ageism as reported elsewhere.²⁶ Responses either addressed one's perceptions of the general war situation or one's personal experiences during the war. The present study aims to identify possible explanations for perceived nonexistence of or reduction in ageism.

Contact theory could possibly account for a reduction in ageism during wartime given its prediction that under conditions of shared goals, equal status, cooperation, increased interaction, and institutional support, ageism might decline.²⁹ Moreover, as predicted by current research and theory,²⁸ threats imposed by external group members are likely to bring people together in cooperation and solidarity by fostering a shared superordinate identity and diminishing within group differences.²⁸ Intergroup threat theory suggests that having a common external threat may help the different parties to set aside internal conflicts, such as ageism and to focus on commonalities within the "inner group." A common external threat may increase interdependence among parties and result in shared objectives and sacrifices, including greater solidarity between the different parties that compose the within group.³⁰ In support of contact theory, there is plenty of evidence to show the effectiveness of intergenerational contact interventions to reduce ageism toward older persons.³¹

The present study is important given its ability to provide further support to theories concerning intergenerational contact and intergroup threats by focusing on real life events and their potential impact on intergenerational relations. Threats brought by war, terror, the changing climate or the COVID-19 pandemic are common worldwide. In contrast with past

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research which has mainly emphasized an increase in ageism brought by such extreme situations,^{27,32, 33} the present findings can possibly provide more nuanced and valuable lessons about ways to reduce ageism at times of threat. By better understanding the rationale for reduced ageism, findings may provide support to contact and inter-group threat theories and may even guide the development of effective interventions to reduce ageism.

METHODS

The study was approved by the ethics committee of the School of Social Work at Bar Ilan University (12212/2; 11.12.23). The survey was administered in April 2024 by a polling company, called Panel4All. We collected a convenience sample, stratified based on sex. Inclusion criteria were Jewish Israeli Hebrew speakers over the age of 18 who have online access. We oversampled individuals aged 65 and older, who make up 26.8% of our sample, compared to their proportion in the general population, which stands at 12%. Participants were financially reimbursed for their time and effort. Overall, 911 Israeli Jews completed the overall survey and 902 of them responded to at least one of the two open-ended questions and thus, were included in the study. This sample size was deemed adequate for quantitative purposes as the survey also had a quantitative component. For the purpose of this study, the sample size substantially exceeded the estimated sample size needed to reach saturation.³⁴ All respondents provided written informed consent. The average age of the sample was 47.13 years (SD = 18.41), 502 (55.7%) were women, and about 50.3% had academic education (see Table 1 for a detailed description of the sample). We relied on two-open-ended questions presented as part of the survey: “Discrimination based on age? Such a phenomenon exists and is called ageism. Ageism represents discrimination, stereotypes, and prejudices toward people of different age groups. Both older and younger people face ageism. Israel is currently at war. Please indicate in your opinion, how is the phenomenon of ageism manifested during the war?” and “Describe any experiences of ageism you personally experienced during the war.”

TABLE 1. Sociodemographic Characteristics N = 902

Characteristic	n	%
Age group		
18–40	362	40.1
41–64	298	33.0
65–89	242	26.8
Gender		
Woman	502	55.7
Man	400	44.3
Marital status		
Single	203	22.5
Married/partnered	593	65.9
Divorced/widowed	106	11.8
Educational level		
Elementary	10	1.1
High school	234	25.9
Vocation training	204	22.6
Academic	454	50.3
Self-reported health		
Very poor	11	1.2
Poor	28	3.1
Fair	150	16.6
Good	419	46.5
Very good	294	32.6
Economic status		
Very poor	28	3.1
Poor	85	9.4
Fair	310	34.4
Good	393	43.6
Very good	86	9.5

Analysis

Relying on thematic analysis,³⁵ all responses were uploaded to ATLAS.ti-8.³⁶ After thoroughly reading the responses, two researchers (SO, AS) assigned recurring categories specific colors, with each color representing a particular code. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion among all three researchers until an agreement was reached. The final analysis focused on the main codes that were most frequent and relevant to the research question as well as codes that were conceptually relevant. These codes highlight perceived nonexistence of or a reduction in ageism as well as possible explanations offered by respondents to these changes. We present direct quotes relevant to respondents' perceptions and experiences of a reduction in ageism during wartime. Descriptive statistics and chi-square analysis to determine differences in themes by age group (18–40, 41–64, 65+) were conducted using SPSS 29.³⁷

Findings

In total, 902 individuals completed at least one of the two survey questions. In this paper, we focused

on those who reported nonexistence of or decline in ageism: 382 (42.4%) out of 901 individuals described nonexistence of or decline in ageism during the war. In addition, 712 (79.1%) out of 900 individuals reported nonexistence of or decline in ageism in their own personal life during the war. Reports of an increase in ageism are discussed elsewhere (39.6% of the entire sample reported witnessing ageism in the current war situation, and 17.3% of the entire sample reported that they personally experienced ageism).²⁶ Remaining responses were excluded due to their irrelevance to the topic of ageism during wartime.

We identified four main themes related to nonexistence of or decline in ageism. The first concerned the view of the war as instigating collaboration and solidarity between the generations. This theme was composed of responses which referred simultaneously to both younger and older persons. A second theme concerned a reduction in ageism toward younger people because of their sacrifices during the war. A third theme concerned older persons' contribution during the war. The fourth theme consisted of nondetailed responses which stated that ageism is nonexistent or declines during wartime, without much discussion or elaboration. Although the latter theme does not provide a clear explanation, it was included as a theme given its support of the overall argument of this paper of no ageism or reduction in ageism during wartime. It is important to note that 297 respondents stated that there is ageism in society and/or that it has increased during the war, while reporting that they themselves did not experience ageism during the war. In other words, if a person witnessed ageism in Israeli society during the war, this did not necessarily mean that he or she also experienced ageism personally. Table 2 illustrates the relationship between the different codes and the themes identified, while providing direct quotes from the interviews.

Increased Collaboration Between the Generations

The first theme was endorsed by 85 respondents in relation to ageism in society and by 11 respondents in relation to their own personal experiences. In response to the question about general perceptions of ageism during the war, a woman (76 years-old) stated: "I am in the group of elders. I see how people in their 70's participate in the war and contribute and on the other hand, I see the loyalty and the sacrifices

of the younger generation. It brings me to tears." A man (40 years-old) said: "You should remember that both older adults and younger ones are sacrificing their lives during the war. The sword does not distinguish between people of different ages." Likewise, a woman (41 years-old) stated, "I do not think that there is discrimination during the war. People of all ages were drafted, volunteering, and contributing. . ." A man (75 years-old) stated: "In the war, the cooperation between the older and younger generations is appreciated and valued." A man, 22 years-old: "I don't feel that ageism is evident during the war; on the contrary, many new intergenerational connections are formed that wouldn't have occurred otherwise. For example, in donation centers, reserve duty services, and stories and sharing from all age groups."

The Sacrifice of Younger People

Respondents also explained a general reduction in ageism by pointing to changes in attitudes toward younger people. This theme was endorsed by 105 respondents in relation to ageism in society and by 20 respondents in relation to their own personal experiences. "People say, we didn't think that the younger generation is so responsible and caring" (woman, 68 years-old). "If anything, the war changed the attitudes toward the younger generations. Toward the older generations- I do not think there is a change" (man, 67 years-old). A similar perspective was reported also by younger persons who responded to the query by discussing ageism toward themselves: "There is a change for the better toward me and an appreciation that I went on reserve duty" (woman, 22 years-old). Likewise, a man (33 years-old) stated, "Before the war, people talked about the younger generation, how they were not good, how they were on screens and spoiled. In reality, they are our heroes... they are fighting for us, they are saving lives." These quotes highlight the fact that prior to the war, ageism directed toward younger persons was quite notable and a shift in attitudes occurred based on the sacrifices made by the younger generation.

The Contribution of Older Persons

The contribution of older persons during the war emerged as a reason for a decline in ageism. This theme was endorsed by 26 respondents in relation to

*“The War on Ageism” or How Ageism is Reduced during***TABLE 2. A Detailed Description of the Four Themes and Related Codes**

Name of the Theme	Definition of the Theme	Codes	Examples From Participants' Responses
1- Increased collaboration between the generations	This theme reflects a decline or even the absence of ageism attributed to the collaboration and solidarity among people of different ages during the war	1-Sense of unity	During the war, everyone identified with feelings of fear, anxiety, stress, pain, sadness, and crying-unpleasant emotions about people who were suffering, taken captive, and the many who were killed. (woman, 18–40)
		2-Shared contribution	On the contrary, during the war people volunteered to cook, do laundry, and offer comfort-people care more about one another. (man, 41–64)
		3-Intergenerational connections	I don't feel that ageism was present during the war. . . many new intergenerational connections were formed that wouldn't have happened otherwise. For example, at donation centers, during reserve duty, and through stories and shared experiences across all age groups. (man, 65–90)
2- The sacrifice of younger people	This theme reflects a decline or even the absence of ageism toward younger people attributed to their sacrifices and contributions during the war	1-Young people's sacrifice in combat	What ageism? On the contrary, everyone praised the young for their military service (man, 18–40)
		2-Mature behavior among young people	During the war, many things suddenly seemed insignificant, and it felt like all the young people matured overnight. (woman, 41–64)
		3-Civic volunteering by young people	During the war young people independently initiated charitable organizations in an inspiring way that uplifted morale (woman, 65–89).
3-The contribution of older persons	This theme reflects a decline or even the absence of ageism toward older persons because of their contribution during the war	1-Older persons in formal/military roles	I actually feel that during the war it wasn't noticeable-very old people were called up for reserve duty, helped, and contributed (woman, 18–40)
		2-Recognition of older persons' contribution	There's absolutely no ageism. Older persons are enlisting and contributing in every possible war (man, 64–41)
		3-Civic volunteering by older persons	Everyone contributes what they can during the war. I can't fight physically, but I was able to contribute by knitting hats for soldiers my age-and I did. (woman, 65–89)
4-No details provided	This theme reflects a decline or even the absence of ageism, as reported by respondents without offering a clear explanation for why they perceived or experienced it that way	1-Complete denial of ageism	There's no such thing as ageism. (man, 18–40)
		2-No personal experience of ageism	I wasn't exposed to ageism-neither toward myself nor toward others. (man, 41–64)
		3-Ageism may exist, but not during the war	I do sometimes feel ageism, but definitely not during the war. (woman, 18–40)

ageism in society and by 17 respondents in relation to their own personal experiences. “I couldn't believe that people in their 50s can be soldiers. From the

beginning of the war, my father proved me wrong” (man, 18 years-old). A woman (40 years-old): “My partner is 63 and still serves on reserve duty. I can't

TABLE 3. The Distribution of Four Themes by Age Group (referred to Ageism in Society)

Age Group	Increased Collaboration Between the Generations	The Sacrifice of Younger People	The Contribution of Older Persons	No Details Provided	Total
18–40	22 (17.3%)	45 (35.4%)	3 (2.4%)	57 (44.9%)	127
41–64	23 (17.3%)	43 (32.3%)	9 (6.8%)	58 (43.6%)	133
65–89	40 (32.8%)	17 (13.9%)	14 (11.5%)	51 (41.8%)	122
Total	85 (22.3%)	105 (27.5%)	26 (6.8%)	166 (43.5%)	382

Note: Values represent frequency counts with percentages in parentheses.

see where the problem of ageism is in the context of war." "Older people were drafted, and their opinion is noted" (man, 41 years-old). Older persons also stated that they did not experience ageism personally, given their contribution to war efforts: "everyone is contributing what they can. I couldn't fight during the war, but I could contribute by knitting hats" (woman, 65 years-old). A man (65 years-old): "I didn't experience ageism. To the contrary- my experience was that I am still fit and can contribute." Likewise, middle-aged people also emphasized their contribution: A man (40 years-old): "I didn't experience ageism. I wasn't drafted. I completed my reserve duty a long time ago. I donated my time to soldiers and displaced people together with people of all ages and I didn't sense ageism." These various quotes highlight the fact that by continued contribution to society either as soldiers or as community volunteers, older persons maintain or even enhance their status.

No Details Provided

The fourth theme reflected a general belief that ageism is either nonexistent or has declined during the war, with little discussion or elaboration. This view was endorsed by 166 respondents regarding ageism in society and by 664 respondents concerning their own personal experiences. Their responses were

noninformative, simply indicating nonexistence of or decline in ageism: "I didn't experience ageism" (man, 32 years-old). "I don't think that ageism exists during the war" (man, 57 years-old). "In my opinion, there is less ageism during the war" (woman, 71 years-old). "Specifically, during the war, I think the phenomenon of ageism is not present" (woman, 43 years-old).

The Distribution of the Four Themes by Age Group

Tables 3 and 4 present the distribution of the four themes by age group (20–40, 41–64, 65+) in relation to one's general perspective on ageism in society and first-hand experiences, respectively. A chi-square test revealed a significant association between age group and the four themes related to a general perception of nonexistence of or decline in ageism during wartime, $\chi^2(6) = 28.88$, $p < 0.001$. Compared with the other age groups, older persons were significantly more likely to acknowledge collaboration between the generations $\chi^2(2) = 7.22$, $p = 0.03$. Older persons were significantly less likely to acknowledge the contribution of younger people $\chi^2(2) = 13.94$, $p < 0.001$ and more likely to acknowledge their own contribution $\chi^2(2) = 7.00$, $p = 0.03$.

A chi-square test comparing the four themes regarding one's own experiences with ageism also

TABLE 4. The Distribution of Four Themes by Age Group (referred to Personal Ageist Experience)

Age Group	Increased Collaboration Between the Generations	The Sacrifice of Younger People	The Contribution of Older Persons	No Indication of Ageism, but no Details Provided	Total
18–40	3 (1.1%)	9 (3.3%)	0 (0.0%)	261 (95.6%)	273
41–64	5 (2.0%)	5 (2.0%)	2 (0.8%)	233 (95.1%)	245
65–89	3 (1.5%)	6 (3.1%)	15 (7.7%)	170 (87.6%)	194
Total	11 (1.5%)	20 (2.8%)	17 (2.4%)	664 (93.3%)	712

Note: Values represent frequency counts with percentages in parentheses.

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revealed a significant association between age group and nonexistence of or decline in ageism, $\chi^2(6) = 34.71$, $p < 0.001$. Older persons were significantly more likely to acknowledge their own contribution as a reason for reduced ageism $\chi^2(2) = 23.41$, $p < 0.001$. Older persons were the least likely to provide a response without any details, $\chi^2(2) = 19.62$, $p < 0.001$.

DISCUSSION

The present study analyzed responses provided by lay people of varied age groups concerning nonexistence of or reduction in ageism during wartime. The most notable finding of the present study concerns the fact that 42.4% of the sample reported a general perception of nonexistence of or reduction in ageism and 79.1% reported this based on their own personal experiences. These findings suggest that even the most horrific war, may serve as a catalyst of positive social change toward a society for all ages.

The findings are contrasted with recent findings showing a surge in ageism following extreme threats such as the pandemic and the changing climate.^{27,38} This provides further support to the importance of carefully attending to the framing of the threat.²⁸ Both the pandemic and the climate change discourse are broadly characterized as threats to the common goods and dwindling societal resources.^{27,38} In contrast, the current war has been portrayed from its inception as a war between Israel and its neighboring (and non-neighboring) countries. Under such circumstances, external threats to the safety of society have been highlighted. As predicted by the framing hypothesis,²⁸ threats made by outgroup members help to diminish differences and conflicts within society by instigating common ground and collaborative action. Further research will benefit from testing the framing hypothesis under different framing circumstances both in real life and in the lab.

It also is important to acknowledge that the same two open-ended questions also resulted in a substantial number of respondents who perceived and/or experienced an increase in ageism during the war.²⁶ This mixture of experiences aligns with past research which has followed perceived age discrimination in the workplace, finding divergent patterns over time.³⁹ This is because perceived exposure is not synonymous with actual exposure. For instance,

perceived exposure to ageism can be attributed to one's mental state, with people who report higher levels of depressive symptoms being more likely to report exposure.⁴⁰ Moreover, familiarity with the term ageism has been associated with increased likelihood of reporting exposure to ageism.⁴¹ Hence, further research will benefit from exploring reasons for the diverse experiences and perceptions of ageism following the understanding that in addition to the experience of war, people's mental state, familiarity with the term ageism and many other factors might intervene.

As many as 297 respondents acknowledged the existence of ageism during wartime, while reporting no first-hand experiences of ageism. This suggests that some individuals may perceive ageism as a broader societal issue-expressed in public discourse, media, or policy-even if they are not directly targeted or affected by it. Possibly, some people may hesitate to recognize or report personal experiences of ageism due to emotional discomfort, denial, or lack of awareness. In addition, one's sense of identification with his or her age group (e.g., seeing oneself as an older person) can influence one's perception of societal ageism, even in the absence of firsthand experiences.

Solidarity and collaboration between younger and older persons were identified as main reasons for reduced ageism. This is consistent with the contact theory,²⁹ which predicts that when groups work collaboratively toward a common goal, contact between the groups can reduce stigma and discrimination. As already noted, one of the most well-known interventions to reduce ageism consists of intergenerational contact.^{11,42} Explicit threat on the other hand, was hardly discussed as an incentive for bringing younger and older people together, though clearly it was present even in the formation of the research questions, which concerned wartime perceptions and experiences. Hence, it is possible that perceived threat plays an implicit rather than an explicit role in bringing people together and reducing barriers put forth by ageist assumptions and beliefs.

Most of the research to date, has examined how intergenerational contact results in reduced stigma toward older persons.^{11,42} The present study adds by showing that intergenerational contact results in reduced ageism toward both younger and older persons. Although clearly ageism toward older persons has profound negative consequences, several large-

scale studies have shown that ageism toward younger persons is more prevalent than ageism toward older persons.⁴³ In the present study, respondents spontaneously stated that younger persons were seen as selfish, spoiled, lazy, and inconsiderate prior to the war. These stereotypes are in line with past research which has found that younger persons often are seen as disrespectful or radically progressive.⁴⁴ As indicated by many of the respondents, the war has resulted in a shift in the public image of younger people. Most war casualties were younger people at their prime, who were fighting for their country. Their sacrifice is well-recognized and appreciated by the general population, which has become dependent on the lives of younger people. Likewise, older persons were viewed as contributing to society via acts of solidarity, such as knitting hats or cooking meals, which were appreciated and noted by the public. This interdependence between the generations has contributed to a reduction in ageism toward both younger and older people.

The distribution of age differences by themes found in the present study resembles past research concerning lay people's perspectives on intergenerational relationships in the context of climate change.⁴⁵ In both studies, the different age groups were more likely to think positively of themselves than of other age groups. This suggests that the traditional division between groups has not necessarily dissolved. Moreover, similar to past research,³⁸ older persons were most likely to acknowledge intergenerational solidarity as important. Hence, highlighting issues of generativity and legacy in older persons' perspective.

Conclusions and Implications

To conclude, the present study highlights an unexpected positive angle concerning intergenerational relations and the status of younger and older persons in society during times of war. Our findings show that there are three main reasons spontaneously provided by respondents to account for nonexistence or reduction in ageism during wartime. The first reason concerns collaboration between the generations, which results in greater intergenerational solidarity, whereas the latter two explanations emphasize the separate contribution of younger people and older persons, respectively. Hence, to some extent the latter two explanations

reflect neo-liberal values of deservedness based on one's contribution to society rather than simply reflecting human rights values of inclusivity and respect to all, regardless of their perceived contribution. The findings should be examined in relation to existing research conducted in Israel, which has shown that at times of threat such as the pandemic, for instance, there is a surge in ageism,^{46,47} thus possibly providing further support to the importance of the framing of the threat in determining intergroup relations.

The present study has several limitations that should be noted. First, this is a convenience sample which represents a more educated and digitally savvy segment of the population. Second, the reliance on open-ended responses has the advantage of eliciting respondents' inner thoughts with limited prompt and guidance. However, such an approach required the researchers to interpret the responses in a subjective manner. To overcome the challenge, we relied on three different raters in the coding process. Another limitation concerns the fact that data were gathered over a single point in time. Thus, we did not measure changes, but rather measured perceived changes. We also did not obtain information about wartime exposure or exposure to trauma in relation to ageism.

Nonetheless, the study provides an overlooked aspect related to war. The findings highlight the fact that ageism impacts different age groups and that when a reduction in ageism takes place, it impacts both young and old. The findings also stress that a horrific event, such as war and neo-liberal values that advocate for activity and contribution, may have some unexpected positive consequences in the form of reduced ageism and greater intergenerational solidarity. Our findings provide further support to the potential efficacy of intergenerational contact interventions by demonstrating the perceived benefits associated with collaborative work toward a common goal and the opportunity to contribute to society, regardless of one's age. However, although an external threat may instigate collaboration and solidarity, the use of external threats as part of intergenerational interventions should be done with caution as it is undesirable to turn one group against another or to solve the problem of ageism by instigating racism or sexism for instance.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

LA: Conceptualization, analysis, write-up, critical revisions; AS: Conceptualization, analysis, critical revisions; SO: Conceptualization, analysis, critical revisions.

DATA STATEMENT

The data have not been previously presented orally or by poster at scientific meetings.

DATA SHARING STATEMENT

Anonymized data are available upon obtaining and ethical approval followed by a request from the first author at liat.ayalon@biu.ac.il.

DISCLOSURES

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DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI AND AI-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN WRITING PROCESS

Generative AI was not used in this paper.

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