

## **Je Suis Charlie? The Framing of In-group Transgression and the Attribution of Responsibility for the *Charlie Hebdo* Attack**

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This article examines the effect of historical transgressions associated with individuals' in-group on attribution of responsibility for the attack on the French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*. While the capacity of media frames to induce emotional states is well documented, the current study expands the understanding of the underlying processes associated with the framing effect by highlighting the ability of frames to induce collective-level emotions. Through an online experiment, we suggest that framing the attack in reference to American transgressions (abuses at the Abu Ghraib prison) initiated collective guilt, resulting in less attribution of responsibility for the attack to Islam and less support for anti-immigration policy in the United States. Conversely, framing the event in terms of American victimization (9/11 attack) engendered high levels of collective victimization, subsequently heightening the perceived responsibility of Islam in the attack and harnessing support for anti-immigration policy. Relevant moderators are considered, and practical and theoretical implications are discussed.

*Keywords: collective guilt, framing, victimization, attribution, Islamophobia*

On January 7, 2015, two self-identified members of the Islamist terrorist group Al Qaeda opened fire on the Paris headquarters of French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, killing 12 people, including two staff cartoonists, and wounding 11 others. A standard set of questions typically arises in the period of

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uncertainty following such crises (Canel & Sanders, 2010): Who is to blame? How could this have been prevented? And what remedies and responses should be implemented? The most fundamental facts of crises covered by the news media tend to be clearly established and agreed on, but more nuanced questions of cause, responsibility, blame, relative harm, remedial actions, and larger underlying social concerns and causes are usually debatable (Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2003). Here the role of the media is less straightforward. In this case, although the attack was not the first time terror associated with Islamic fundamentalism erupted in Europe, the media coverage in the United States was particularly interesting. Among the diverse frames used, several appealed to American collective memory. For instance, coverage referencing the Abu Ghraib detention camp linked American soldiers' abuse of Muslim detainees with an increase in anti-American and anti-Western sentiment throughout the Muslim world, a provocation posited to have led to increased fundamentalism and terrorism (Postel, 2013). Other frames labeled the attack in Paris as "the French 9/11," maintaining that, just as Osama Bin Laden had targeted the World Trade Center as a symbol of American arrogance and economic overconfidence, the *Charlie Hebdo* attackers similarly targeted what they perceived to be a symbol of arrogance and misuse of freedom of expression.

Drawing on previous research and theories of framing, collective guilt, and victimization, we assessed the effects on media consumers' attributions of responsibility for causes of the *Charlie Hebdo* attack and the frames' subsequent influence on support for anti-immigration policy in the United States. The attack on *Charlie Hebdo* serves as an interesting context for the study of framing effects for three reasons. First, the emphasis on collective-level emotions, such as guilt and victimization, expands our understanding of the relationship between frames and emotions by shifting the focus away from emotions as short-lasting mental states of arousal (Kim & Cameron, 2011; Nabi, 2003) to emotions as shared and long-lasting motivational states. Second, while the vast majority of framing research has looked at incidents in which people's groups have been directly involved, the *Charlie Hebdo* attack is an international incident that is only distally related to Americans. Finally, the current study extends the scope of the field by examining whether and how the distal incident affects attitudes and support for policy at home.

### Framing

The roots of the framing paradigm can be traced to the seminal work of Kahneman and Tversky (1979, 1984), who observed that subtle changes in how events are framed can significantly affect processing, evaluation, and recall (Cappella & Jamieson, 1996). Framing essentially involves the coalescence of selection and salience (Entman, 1993). Although framing theory is not explicitly associated with the notion of the omnipotent mass media, it accredits the press with significant power to set the frames of reference that readers or viewers use to interpret and discuss public events (Tuchman, 1978). For example, Nelson, Oxley, and Clawson (1997) demonstrated the effect of news frames on tolerance for the Ku Klux Klan. One frame presented research participants with a Klan rally as a free speech issue, and the other framed it as a disruption of public order. Participants who viewed the free speech story expressed more tolerance for the Klan than participants who were presented with the public order story. Likewise, de Vreese, Boomgaarden, and Semetko (2011) showcased the effect of news framing on support for membership of Turkey in the European Union. The authors recorded a significant difference in the level

of support for Turkish membership between respondents who were exposed to a news frame with a positive valence and those who received a negative frame.

This is not to suggest, of course, that most journalists set out to intentionally spin a story or manipulate their audiences (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Framing is, to a significant extent, an inevitable and necessary tool required to reduce the complexity of an issue given the constraints of the news media format (Gans, 1979). Because frames play to existing cognitive schemas (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007), they are a powerful tool for presenting complex issues efficiently and accessibly. Accordingly, a person's information processing and interpretation of events are co-influenced by the frames and their preexisting meaning structures. For example, Hong (2012) found that regardless of the specific frame being used, participants selected online information that was congruent with their prior beliefs. Zaller (1992) has also observed that when people are questioned about their attitudes toward events that they are not experiencing directly, they will provide responses influenced either by the framing of the question itself or by the accessibility of information.

### **Attribution of Responsibility**

One of the most commonly referenced outcomes of framing is attribution of responsibility, which emphasizes reliance on schemas and mental shortcuts for understanding events and determining their cause (Weiner, 1985). When people make judgments about responsibility, they typically seek out information about the actors and actions associated with an event. In reality, however, rarely does an individual have sufficient information and motivation to objectively assess a situation and reach an unbiased conclusion. Three characteristics of attribution theory are important to note. First, humans are cognitive misers who try to minimize cognitive effort when allocating responsibility (Fiske & Taylor, 2013). Second, personal motivation is a key tenet affecting the attribution process, such that an incentive to process information in depth may result in a less biased conclusion. Third, emotions can affect the process of attribution by influencing the ways in which we experience events.

Returning to the framing of the *Charlie Hebdo* attack as relating to Abu Ghraib, we might ask: What are the consequences of the juxtaposition of a terror attack that happened in France and an Iraqi detention camp to an American audience? Conversely, the framing of the terror attack as the "French 9/11" begs the question: What are the consequences of inducing collective victimization with regard to the interpretation of the event and its relevance to the United States' domestic policy? To answer these questions, we need to examine the relationship between frames and attribution of responsibility as a *mediated process* rather than a *direct effect*. Following Nabi (2003) and others (Kim & Cameron, 2011; Lecheler, Schuck, & de Vreese, 2013) who demonstrated the relationship between emotions and frames, this study focuses on the motivational aspects of guilt and victimization. Moreover, we extend prior conceptualizations of emotion-induced frames by systematically comparing opposing frames that directly target collective-level emotions.

In contrast to other more instinctive emotions (e.g., fear, disgust, surprise, and happiness), guilt and victimization involve a considerable amount of evaluation and the realization that we are (in the case of guilt) or someone else is (in the case of victimization) responsible for wrongdoing. To alleviate the uncomfortable internal state of guilt, individuals are motivated to try to undo or redress harm (Burnett &

Lunsford, 1994). In contrast, to mitigate distress associated with victimization, individuals are motivated to minimize or discard transgressions associated with their own behavior and instead emphasize external offenses (Law, Shapka, Hymel, Olson, & Waterhouse, 2012). Thus, presumably, guilt and victimization may serve as interesting intermediary links between framing and attribution of responsibility, because they can be aroused vicariously to induce self-examination or the scrutiny of others, which often motivates individuals to reconsider their attitudes, beliefs, and behavior (Peloza, White, & Shang, 2013; Roberts, Strayer, & Denham, 2014).

### Collective Guilt

According to Tajfel (1972), people's perceptions, emotions, and behaviors are heavily influenced by their social identity. Along these lines, the idea of the in-group was developed by Tajfel and Turner (1979, 2004) in the context of the so-called Mere Categorization Effect, whereby the authors demonstrated that social categories operate not only as organizing elements but as motivational states. To that end, an abundance of research has indicated that when our in-group (e.g., family, team, class, workplace, community, race, or nation) achieves success, we take pride in our affiliation (Kirk, Swain, & Gaskin, 2015). What happens, however, when our in-group transgresses?

People do not need to directly commit a harmful behavior to experience guilt. Research has suggested an in-group's history of treatment of another group has a direct effect on an individual's feelings of collective guilt, subsequent attitudes, and behavioral intentions (Doosje, Branscombe, Spears, & Manstead, 1998). Studies have pointed to the possibility that a group's behavioral history has an impact on compensatory behavioral tendencies, prompting people to be more willing to compensate when their group has been unfair to another (Brown & Cehajic, 2008; Harvey & Oswald, 2000; Wohl, Branscombe, & Klar, 2006). Thus, members of any nation or social group whose history includes acts of persecution, exploitation, or unfairness toward others are candidates for experiencing collective guilt (Wohl et al., 2010).

Moving beyond the conditions that invoke collective guilt, Schmitt, Branscombe, and Brehm (2004) considered the experience of collective guilt as a motivational state. The authors argued that support for reformation is harnessed through motives for redemption to dispel feelings of guilt. A meta-analysis (O'Keefe, 2000) assessing the strength of guilt as a compliance motivator suggested that compliance occurs irrespective of the nature of transgression (accidental or purposeful), the subsequent request (direct request or opportunity to help), and the benefit (whether compliance benefits the victim).

Accordingly, we expected that linking the *Charlie Hebdo* attack and the Abu Ghraib detention camp, the site of documented torture and prisoner abuse, would arouse higher levels of collective guilt among Americans, reminding them of their history as transgressors against Muslims. After all, for many Americans, the photographs from the detention camp produced an element of communal guilt (Kennicott, 2004). Therefore, exposure to coverage of the *Charlie Hebdo* attack through the Abu Ghraib frame should result in a more sympathetic response to the Muslim community in France and Muslims in general as well as less attribution of responsibility for the attack to Islam or religious fundamentalism. Likewise, in coincidence with the assumption that being in a state of guilt entices compassion for out-group members,

we also suggest that collective guilt will promote more tolerant attitudes toward immigrants in the United States.

Given this background, we posited the following hypothesis:

*H1: The direct effect of the Abu Ghraib frame on the level of support for anti-immigration policy in the United States will be mediated by collective guilt and attribution of responsibility, such that exposing participants to the Abu Ghraib frame will increase collective guilt and decrease attribution of responsibility for the attack to Islam, resulting in less support for anti-immigration policy in the United States.*

### **Collective Victimization**

Parallel to collective guilt, evidence has suggested that in-group victimization can traverse generations (Wohl & Van Bavel, 2011). Whereas higher levels of collective guilt may lead to feelings of compassion toward the target of transgression and a motivation to exonerate the in-group, higher levels of collective victimization may alleviate moral concerns, encouraging the downplay or justification of in-group wrongdoing. This theory is supported by a series of studies that examined the consequences of remembering historical victimization for emotional reactions to a current adversary (Wohl & Branscombe, 2008). For example, Jewish Canadians who were primed with the Holocaust experienced less collective guilt for their in-group's actions (i.e., Israelis' actions) toward Palestinians. Correspondingly, Americans reported less collective guilt for their group's actions in Iraq following reminders of the 9/11 or Pearl Harbor events. Applying a similar logic, we expected linking 9/11 and the *Charlie Hebdo* attack would initiate higher levels of collective victimization, motivating individuals to attribute responsibility for the attacks to factors related to Islam. As mentioned, the attack on *Charlie Hebdo* was framed in many news outlets as "France's 9/11" (Alfon, 2015).

Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H2: The direct effect of the 9/11 frame on the level of support for anti-immigration policy in the United States will be mediated by collective victimization and attribution of responsibility, such that exposing participants to the 9/11 frame will increase collective victimization and attribution of responsibility for the attack to Islam, resulting in higher levels of support for anti-immigration policy in the United States.*

### **Moderators**

In line with the literature on social identity (Muldoon, 2013; Postmes, Tanis, & de Wit, 2001; Tajfel, 1972), we expected the effect to be moderated by in-group identification. When individuals see their in-group as an integral part of their self-definition, that membership plays a bigger role in their processing of information. For instance, British participants who highly identified with their national in-group displayed more support for the war in Afghanistan and more allegiance to the United States than those who did not identify with their in-group, irrespective of how the war was framed (Adarves-Yorno,

Jetten, Postmes, & Haslam, 2013). In cases where in-group members transgress, high levels of identification with the in-group are manifested not only in support for in-group members but in defensive reactions against the victims of transgression such as denial, victim blaming, and derogation. This defensive processing was recorded in studies that analyzed the response of Dutch students to the role of the Netherlands during the colonization of Indonesia (Doosje et al., 2006) and the response of Caucasians to America's history of enslaving Africans (Miron, Branscombe, & Biernat, 2010), with high identifiers shifting their standard for confirming injustice upward so that in-group wrongdoing no longer elicited collective guilt (Rotella & Richeson, 2013). Hence, the tendency to discount in-group transgression is proportional to the relative role played by group membership in the overall self-definition of the individual. Analogously, increasing the salience of affiliation with a victimized group can reduce willingness to forgive perpetrator group members. For instance, in the context of the Holocaust, Wohl and Branscombe's (2005) results suggest that increasing the salience of the victimized in-group can dramatically decrease the likelihood of forgiveness for historical transgressions. Importantly, these defensive responses are not incidental—they are motivated in service of reducing the social identity threat associated with belonging to a group that was a victim of transgression or a group that has transgressed (Rotella & Richeson, 2013).

Thus, we expect that:

*H3: The framing effect will be moderated by in-group identification such that high identifiers will tend to discount collective guilt and overemphasize collective victimization compared to their counterparts who identify less with the American in-group.*

Last, we expect the framing effect to be moderated by political knowledge. As suggested by Lecheler and de Vreese (2012), political knowledge is one of the most important moderators of framing. Individuals with low levels of political knowledge tend to be more affected by news frames (Schuck & de Vreese, 2006). Indeed, political sophisticates are more likely to take a side in a debate that depends largely on their prior knowledge and preexisting attitudes rather than on the contextual frame (Powlick & Katz, 1998). As summarized by (Bechtel, Hainmueller, Hangartner, & Helbling, 2015), political knowledge tends to mitigate framing effects, as less knowledgeable individuals have few stable attitudes, lower probability of having already been exposed to similar frames, and limited resources to counterargue with the message. Hence, the capacity of news frames to induce collective guilt and collective victimization should be more pronounced among less politically knowledgeable individuals.

Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H4: The framing effect will be moderated by political knowledge such that political sophisticates will be less affected by the frame (Abu Ghraib or 9/11), unlike participants who have less political knowledge.*

## **Method**

### ***Participants and Procedure***

The study employed a between-subject experimental design in which the framing of in-group transgression was manipulated. A sample of 136 participants was exposed to one of two versions of a news article (Abu Ghraib frame versus 9/11 frame). The recruitment took place on Amazon's Mechanical Turk in April 2015 (about three months after the attack on *Charlie Hebdo*). Eligible participants were U.S. citizens age 18 or older who were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions. All participants accepted an informed consent agreement prior to participation and received compensation for their time. Participants were presented with a news article describing the *Charlie Hebdo* attack and instructed to dedicate a few minutes to reading it carefully. After reading the stimulus, participants completed a questionnaire.

### ***Material***

The goal was to produce two news articles that provided the same substantive information about the attack and differed only in their reference to the Abu Ghraib detention camp or the 9/11 terror attack. The manipulation was based on the work of Valkenburg, Semetko, and de Vreese (1999), in which each story had an identical core component, but the title, opening paragraph, and closing paragraph were varied to reflect a specific frame. We wanted the articles to be as informative as possible without offering a dominant interpretation of the events, and we based our stimulus on news articles that appeared in *The New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and *The New Yorker* during the week of the attack.

Participants in the Abu Ghraib condition were exposed to an article titled "From Abu Ghraib Prison Abuses to Terror in Paris," whereas the headline in the 9/11 condition read, "From September 11th Attack to Terror in Paris." The introductory paragraph and the concluding paragraph in both conditions included an explicit reference to the corresponding frame. Apart from this allusion, both versions of the stimulus included 10 paragraphs and were identical in their descriptions of the radicalization of Cherif Kouachi and his older brother, Said, the two jihadists who carried out the attack.

### ***Measures***

After exposure to the stimuli and the subsequent manipulation check, a questionnaire measured participants' attribution of responsibility for the attack in France, attitudes toward anti-immigration policy in the United States, level of collective guilt, collective victimization, in-group identification, political knowledge, and other covariates.

#### ***Manipulation Check***

To ensure that the framing was successful in exerting an effect, we conducted a manipulation check by asking participants to write as many reasons they could think of for "why people *should* be proud to be American" and "why people *should not* be proud to be American." Concurring with the theoretical

assumptions, we expected that participants in the Abu Ghraib condition would exhibit a larger repertoire of reasons not to be proud of being American than the 9/11 condition. Likewise, participants in the 9/11 condition were expected to list more reasons to be proud to be American than their counterparts in the Abu Ghraib condition. The number of unique arguments listed by participants was coded.

*Attribution of responsibility* for the *Charlie Hebdo* attack was measured by the level of agreement among participants with four Likert scale items with response options ranging from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 7 (*completely agree*). The items included "Islamic values justified the attack on Charlie Hebdo," "Islam encourages violence against those who practice freedom of speech," and "The attack on Charlie Hebdo does not reflect Islamic values" (reversed item). Higher scores indicated more attribution of responsibility to Islam ( $\alpha = .87$ ). These items were based on a pilot study ( $n = 78$ ) administered in the week after the attack, which asked respondents who or what was responsible for the terror attack.

*Level of support for anti-immigration policy in the United States* was assessed by agreement among participants with eight anti-immigration policies proposed in the United States, with responses rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly oppose*) to 7 (*strongly support*) ( $\alpha = .92$ ). This operationalization was designed to capture the content of the concept, because it evokes policies related to diverse aspects of immigration such as border control, employment, economy, children of immigrants, deportation, and imprisonment. The items included statements such as "Undocumented immigrants should be detained in American prisons if they are discovered" and "Employers that hire undocumented immigrants should be punished."

*Collective guilt* was measured on a validated scale adapted from Branscombe, Slugoski, and Kappen's (2004) construct ( $\alpha = .94$ ). The scale consisted of five Likert items with response options ranging from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 7 (*completely agree*). The items included statements such as "I feel regret for some of the things Americans did to other groups in the past" and "I believe we should try to repair the damage caused to other groups by Americans."

*Collective victimization* was based on Branscombe et al.'s (2004) scale ( $\alpha = .89$ ). We assessed this measure via agreement of participants with six Likert scale items ranging from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 7 (*completely agree*). The items included statements such as "It upsets me that the American way of life has been threatened by other groups throughout history" and "Other groups should acknowledge past wrongs that they have done to Americans."

*In-group identification* was adopted from a scale by Brown, Condor, Mathews, Wade, and Williams (1986) ( $\alpha = .89$ ). We omitted three items from the original scale that did not pertain to our research subject. The 7-point Likert scale items included "I see myself as an American" and "Sometimes I try to hide my American identity" (the latter item was reverse-coded).

*The political knowledge* instrument was based on Delli Carpini and Keeter's (1993) work, and it estimated participants' political knowledge with six multiple-choice items, including fact-based questions such as "How much of a majority is required for the U.S. House and Senate to override a presidential

veto?" and "Who is the current Secretary-General of the United Nations?" The political knowledge measure was computed by summing the correct answers, which resulted in a scale ranging from 0 to 6.

The final part of the questionnaire measured political ideology on a semantic-differential scale ranging from 1 (*conservative*) to 7 (*progressive*), religious affiliation, gender, age, level of education (years of schooling), race, income (estimated yearly household income), and political involvement (likelihood to vote in the 2016 presidential election, party registration, and whether the respondent voted in the November 2014 midterm election). All of the analyses were conducted in SPSS v.21.

## Results

As the general sample characteristics indicate (see Table 1), participants tended to be Christian, be politically knowledgeable, identify themselves as Americans, be overwhelmingly liberal, and have at least some college education. In terms of differences between the conditions, the randomization was successful, because all variables were equally distributed between the groups.

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for the Main Research Variables by Condition.**

Variable	Condition		$\chi^2/t$
	9/11	Abu Ghraib	
Age	44.61 (12.85)	42.21 (12.83)	1.09
Gender			0.38
Men	47.6%	53%	
Women	52.4%	47%	
Religion			10.34
Christian	40.3%	55.4%	
Atheist	30.6%	27.7%	
Unaffiliated	12.9%	10.8%	
Muslim	0.0%	1.5%	
Other	16.2%	4.6%	
Political knowledge	4.58 (1.33)	4.68 (1.2)	0.32
In-group identification	5.71 (1.12)	5.86 (1.12)	0.72
Political ideology	8.02 (3.5)	9.03 (2.72)	1.88
Education	14.24 (2.12)	13.94 (2.24)	1.14

To assess the effectiveness of our manipulation, we coded all open-ended answers based on the number of distinct arguments (positive and negative). Two individuals content-coded the answers, and the level of intercoder agreement was evaluated based on a subset of 34 participants (25% of the sample for both open-ended questions). The intercoder reliability was high, with a Krippendorff's alpha of .96 for

positive reasons and .91 for negative reasons. Assessment of the manipulation check revealed a significant mean difference between the conditions with respect to the number of reasons why participants *should be proud to be American* ( $t[133] = -1.94, p < .05$ ) and why people *should not be proud to be Americans* ( $t[133] = 5.78, p < .01$ ). Specifically, after exposure to the Abu Ghraib frame, on average, participants thought of 3.11 ( $SD = 1.95$ ) positive reasons and 3.43 ( $SD = 1.51$ ) negative reasons, whereas participants in the 9/11 condition listed an average of 3.72 ( $SD = 1.67$ ) positive reasons and 2.08 ( $SD = 1.11$ ) negative reasons.

Table 2 includes the comparison of the main study outcomes by the framing condition. To test *H1* and *H2*, we used PROCESS, a SPSS macro using ordinary least squares regression models and bootstrap estimation of 1,000 samples to test for the significance of the mediated effects (Hayes, 2013). PROCESS provides a bootstrap estimate of this indirect effect, together with a 95% confidence interval. Specifically, we used two serial mediation models with attitudes toward anti-immigration policy in the United States as the dependent variable, frame condition as the independent variable, and collective guilt/victimization and attribution of responsibility as mediators (model 6). For hypotheses *H3* and *H4*, we used the moderated mediation model (model 7), which enables us to estimate the conditional indirect effect of framing on attribution of responsibility, taking into account in-group identification and political knowledge.

**Table 2. Summary of Principal Outcome Measures by Framing Condition.**

Measure	Condition	
	9/11	Abu Ghraib
Collective guilt	4.28 (1.89)**	5.05 (1.48)
Collective victimization	4.94 (1.39)***	4.13 (1.38)
Attribution of responsibility	4.51 (1.73)*	3.94 (1.75)
Anti-immigration policy	5.02 (1.38)***	3.72 (1.56)

Note. All the scales were computed by averaging items measured on a 1–7 Likert scale.

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

Before examining the specific research hypotheses, we wanted to establish whether the framing condition has a direct effect on attribution of responsibility and support for anti-immigration policies. Interestingly, an ordinary least squares regression model recorded a significant direct effect only for the frame condition on policy ( $b = -1.09, SE = 0.25, p < .05, 95\% CI = -1.57, -0.61$ ) but not on attribution of responsibility ( $b = -0.38, SE = 0.31, p = .21, 95\% CI = -0.97, 0.21$ ). In other words, while exposure to the Abu Ghraib frame tended to result in more favorable attitudes toward immigrants in the United States, it did not have a significant effect on attribution of responsibility to Islam.

According to the model, the frame condition had a significant effect on collective guilt. As expected, participants in the Abu Ghraib condition tended to report higher levels of collective guilt than their counterparts in the 9/11 frame ( $b = 0.77, SE = 0.29, p < .05, 95\% CI = 0.19, 1.34$ ). The estimate for the direct effect of collective guilt on attribution of responsibility for the attack was also significant ( $b = -0.25, SE = 0.09, p < .05, 95\% CI = -0.42, -0.08$ ), where higher levels of collective guilt were associated

with less attribution of responsibility to Islam. In terms of the direct effect of attribution of responsibility on support for anti-immigration policy, we found support for our hypothesis suggesting that attribution of responsibility to Islam is a positive predictor of support for anti-immigration policy ( $b = 0.29$ ,  $SE = 0.07$ ,  $p < .05$ , 95%  $CI = 0.15, 0.43$ ). Finally, the estimate of the mediated effect of the frame condition on support for anti-immigration policy, through collective guilt and attribution of responsibility, was significant as well ( $b = -0.06$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ ,  $p < .05$ , 95%  $CI = -.16, -0.01$ ). Overall, the serial mediation model accounted for 27.86% of the variance in support for anti-immigration policy [ $F(3,132) = 16.99$ ,  $p < .001$ ].

A similar model assessed the indirect path of the framing condition on support for anti-immigration policy through collective victimization and attribution of responsibility. As hypothesized, the condition frame was a significant predictor of collective victimization ( $b = -0.81$ ,  $SE = 0.24$ ,  $p < .05$ , 95%  $CI = -1.28, -0.33$ ), with participants exposed to the Abu Ghraib frame reporting lower levels of collective victimization than those exposed to the 9/11 frame. Likewise, we found support for the positive contribution of collective victimization to attribution of responsibility ( $b = 0.26$ ,  $SE = 0.11$ ,  $p < .05$ , 95%  $CI = 0.05, 0.47$ ). Hence, participants who reported higher levels of collective victimization tended to attribute responsibility for the terror attack to Islam. Further, the analysis recorded a significant effect of attribution of responsibility on support for anti-immigration policy that was identical to the previous model. Additionally, the indirect effect of frame condition on support for anti-immigration policy through collective victimization and attribution of responsibility was significant ( $b = -0.06$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ ,  $p < .05$ , 95%  $CI = -0.18, -0.01$ ). The total explained variance for the second serial mediation model accounted for 28.32% of the variance in support for anti-immigration policy [ $F(3,132) = 17.39$ ,  $p < .001$ ].

To examine *H3* and *H4*, we ran a moderated mediation model with the framing condition as the independent variable, attribution of responsibility as the dependent variable, collective guilt/collective victimization as mediators, and political knowledge and in-group identification as moderators. While the results suggest that in-group identification was a significant predictor of collective victimization ( $b = 0.33$ ,  $SE = 0.14$ ,  $p < .05$ , 95%  $CI = 0.06, 0.61$ ), neither in-group identification (collective guilt:  $b = -0.02$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ , 95%  $CI = -0.15, 0.08$ ; collective victimization:  $b = 0.01$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ , 95%  $CI = -0.09, 0.13$ ) nor political knowledge (collective guilt:  $b = 0.03$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ , 95%  $CI = -0.05, 0.15$ ; collective victimization:  $b = -0.04$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ , 95%  $CI = -0.17, 0.02$ ) demonstrated a significant moderation effect.

## Discussion

The results provide considerable insight into the emotive mechanism of collective guilt and collective victimization and their subsequent effects on perceptions and attitudes. In particular, it seems that American collective memory plays a significant role for in-group members in interpreting events that are not immediately related to them. Yet the influence of the frame does not end there. The interpretation of distal events can promote either support for or opposition to policies at home. Participants exposed to the *Charlie Hebdo* attack coverage through the Abu Ghraib frame tended to experience more collective guilt, which resulted in less attribution of responsibility for the attack to Islam. These results concur with the theoretical knowledge of the motivational strength of guilt appeals (Dillard & Nabi, 2006; O'Keefe, 2000). When participants' past in-group transgression was given salience, they felt at odds with their own standards (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1994; O'Keefe, 2002). This unpleasant state motivated

participants to exonerate themselves (and their in-group) by alleviating responsibility from what they perceived to be the corresponding out-group of the victims associated with the Abu Ghraib transgression. Thus, an uncomfortable sensation of guilt produced a sense of vulnerability and heightened a desire and willingness to alter perception and behavior to alleviate that discomfort.

Further, the results demonstrate that attribution of responsibility initiated by collective guilt has consequences not only for an individual's perceptions but for the potential to exert an effect on decision making. In this case, participants induced with collective guilt were less likely to support anti-immigration policies in the United States. Although previous studies have demonstrated that a change in attitudes is a possible outcome of collective guilt (Harvey & Oswald, 2000; Karaçanta & Fitness, 2006), the current study advances our understanding in this area by suggesting that the attitude change associated with collective guilt can occur even if the victim of the relevant transgression is not the beneficiary of the attitude change. Hence, although illegal immigration in the United States is primarily associated with Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and the Philippines (Krogstad & Passel, 2014), collective guilt motivated American respondents to indicate less support for anti-immigration policies.

Moreover, the results clearly reveal that collective victimization influenced in-group members' perceptions of international news events. Consistent with the literature, participants who were induced to think about 9/11 experienced higher levels of collective victimization and subsequently tended to attribute more responsibility for the *Charlie Hebdo* attack to Islam. Keeping in mind that framing the *Charlie Hebdo* attack as the French 9/11 became prominent in media coverage of this event, this finding may be a cause for concern since it indicates the possibility that the salience of in-group victimization may result in negative overgeneralizations and stigmatization. With respect to the mediated effect on support for anti-immigration policy, the results are also somewhat alarming. When induced with feelings of collective victimization, participants tended to indicate greater support for anti-immigration policy, irrespective of its relevance to the direct transgressors in the frame. Keeping in mind that our sample was overwhelmingly liberal, this finding is especially surprising. Indeed, the fact that liberals tended to support anti-immigration policy as a result of exposure to the 9/11 frame emphasizes the persuasive potential of collective victimization and the disturbing link between collective victimization and xenophobia. More generally, these findings extend the literature by stressing the potential of collective victimization as a compliance strategy. If collective guilt harnesses support for reformations by tapping into motivations to dispel feelings of guilt, then collective victimization may use motives of defensiveness or retaliation to attenuate feelings associated with being a victim. Although the underlying mechanisms for each of the constructs are strikingly similar, their outcomes are quite opposite.

Contrary to the theoretical expectation, this study did not find evidence for the moderating role of in-group identification. This is especially interesting because previous research has outlined in-group identification as prerequisite of collective guilt (Doosje et al., 1998). A possible explanation for this discrepancy relates to the specific conditions in our study that may have resulted in a ceiling effect. Namely, terror attacks may serve as extreme events that evoke the rally 'round the flag syndrome. A similar point was made by Hetherington and Nelson (2003), suggesting that terror events tend to arouse patriotic emotions, symbolizing national unity and power. Indeed, the high mean scores of participants on the 7-point scale of in-group identification provide some credence to this explanation. Likewise, the

relevance of political knowledge to the framing effect was not recorded in our models. Thus, the assumption that people with low knowledge will be most affected should be revisited. In fact, as suggested by Zaller (1992) and others (Nelson et al., 1997; Price & Zaller, 1993), the moderating effect of prior knowledge may be nonlinear, where those with a moderate level of knowledge are affected most. A closer look at the moderated-mediation model seems to support this claim, as the conditional effect of the frame on collective guilt and victimization is significant for moderate-level political knowledge (3.37–4.33), but not for the lower (below 3.36) and upper (above 4.34) extremes.

Some elements of the current study limit its external and internal validity. The first criticism deals with a potential confound in our design. It is possible that the results observed in the study reflected the effects of the manipulation check rather than the framing itself. That is, individuals were not merely exposed to the Abu Ghraib and 9/11 frames but immediately after, they were guided to think about reasons why they should or should not be proud to be American. This type of introspection might arouse emotions and considerations that go beyond the framing effect. Another limitation deals with the overwhelmingly liberal sample we used, which might threaten our conclusions because liberals might have more negative emotions associated with Abu Ghraib and more positive attitudes toward immigration in the United States. Nonetheless, as mentioned, the results associated with the 9/11 frame and collective victimization seem to partly mitigate this concern, suggesting that, to some extent, emotions induced by effective frames can override political ideology. An additional limitation deals with our use of two very specific types of frames. In particular, whereas events associated with the 9/11 terror attack are extremely salient in the United States' collective memory, we cannot be fully confident about how familiar the respondents were with the Abu Ghraib affair and to what extent it was still vivid in their minds. Certainly, different levels of familiarity with the frames can threaten our internal validity, but they also greatly enhance our external validity, because these are the same frames that were de facto used by media outlets as the *Charlie Hebdo* event was unfolding. This limitation is also linked to a more general concern regarding the generalizability of framing studies and whether particular sets of frames can be applicable in different contexts (Cacciatore, Scheufele, & Iyengar, 2016). Given this criticism, the current study tried to put less emphasis on the distinct events that the frames referenced (9/11 terror attack and the controversy associated with Abu Ghraib) and more emphasis on the equivalence between the frames and how it can be manipulated either to induce collective guilt or to engender collective victimization.

Moreover, the fact that our data were gathered three months after the attack can also introduce certain limitations, because over time, individuals had the opportunity to situate the event in a broader context or adopt a specific interpretation that echoes their general belief system. In addition, although participants were randomly assigned to the framing conditions, the causality of direct and indirect effects retrieved from the mediation analysis should be interpreted with caution. Indeed, it would be equally plausible to assume a reversed causation between the mediators and the dependent variable, or even a spurious causation caused by an intervening variable that is not accounted for by the model. All these alternative explanations impede our ability to infer a causal mediation. Finally, keeping in mind that our hypotheses suggested two serial moderated mediations, structural equation modeling might have been a more appropriate method to examine the theoretical model. Regrettably, the limited sample size together with the relatively complex model would have prevented us from examining our hypotheses in a statistically meaningful way (Kline, 2015). As recently estimated by Wolf, Harrington, Clark, and Miller

(2013), mediation models that exhibit indirect effects similar to those obtained in the current study require sample sizes of 180 to 440.

The results and implications of these studies—particularly when placed in the context of existing literature and theorizations about attribution of responsibility, collective guilt, and victimization—suggest promising directions for continued exploration. Future research in this area should continue to examine the role and implications of collective guilt and collective victimization in other contexts and from different perspectives. It may be fruitful to examine how processes of collective guilt are affected by the perceived closeness or immediacy of out-groups. The experience of something like White guilt might carry different salience than guilt related to drone strikes, which are beyond the realm of personal experience for most U.S. citizens. Moreover, there is an opportunity to delve into collective guilt and collective victimization with greater nuance than is afforded in the study presented here. Certainly, a closer examination of varying degrees of collective guilt and collective victimization would add valuable depth and dimension. Finally, a better understanding could be achieved with further examination of these concepts with regard to different types of processing. Namely, guilt and victimization should be analyzed differently if they induce systematic or heuristic processing of information. Currently, both options seem equally plausible, because guilt and victimization should lead to higher levels of ego involvement (associated with systematic processing), but at the same time, as emotional appeals, they are primarily associated with heuristic processing.

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