



# Mothers' Motivation for Group-Based Empathy in Their Children as a Function of Type and Extent of Group Identification

Noa Boker Segal<sup>1</sup> , Shira Ran<sup>1</sup> , Danfei Hu<sup>1</sup> , Eran Halperin<sup>1</sup>, Maya Tamir<sup>1</sup> , and Michal Reifen-Tagar<sup>2</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Social Sciences, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel

<sup>2</sup>School of Psychology, Reichman University, Herzliya, Israel

**Abstract:** Parents vary in the extent to which they want their children to feel empathy toward different groups. In the current investigation, we tested whether Jewish–Israeli mothers' motivation to have their children feel group-based empathy toward members of their ingroup (Jews) and outgroup (Arabs) differed as a function of the types of group identification mothers experience with their own group – namely attachment to and glorification of Israel. We found that the more mothers identified with Israel, both in terms of attachment and glorification, the more they wanted their child to feel empathy toward ingroup members. However, only to the extent that mothers glorified their group, did they want their child to feel less empathy toward outgroup members. Our findings point to potential importance of considering mothers' group identity as related to the transmission of intergroup empathy and the perpetuation of intergroup conflict across generations.

**Keywords:** motivated emotion regulation, group-based empathy, group identification, group attachment, group glorification

Emotions play a central role in intergroup conflicts. For example, some emotions, such as hate and anger, can increase support for aggression against outgroups. Other emotions can play a positive role in intergroup conflict. Central among these is empathy, which promotes intergroup prosociality and reconciliation (Halperin & Reifen-Tagar, 2017; Taylor et al, 2020). Empathy is the cognitive-emotional process of recognizing and sharing others' emotions (Čehajić et al., 2009). In the context of intergroup conflict, empathy is commonly experienced as a group-based emotion – that is, an emotion one feels as a member of one's group and when appraising events in terms of their implications for one's group (Mackie & Smith, 2018). As such, empathy as a group-based emotion entails members of one group understanding and sharing the affective experience of members of another group (Sirin et al., 2015).

Group-based empathy is not just passively experienced, people can choose to willfully increase or decrease their level of empathy through a process of emotion regulation, depending on their motivation to feel it (Porat et al., 2020; Tamir, 2016). People can be motivated to regulate their own empathy or the empathy of another (Zaki,

2014). In particular, parents could be motivated to regulate their children's empathy. Ran et al. (2023) found that Jewish–Israeli mothers differed in the extent to which they wanted their children to feel empathy toward Arabs and that such motivational differences corresponded both to mothers' socialization practices with their children and to children's own group-based empathy toward the outgroup.

What motivates mothers to want to increase or decrease their child's group-based empathy? According to Porat et al. (2020), when people regulate their emotions in the intergroup context, they can be guided by group-related goals. These may involve intragroup goals (i.e., one's desired relations to one's ingroup) and intergroup goals (i.e., one's desired relations between one's ingroup and the outgroup). In the current work, we examined the extent and type of Jewish–Israeli mothers' ingroup identification and how it was related to the mothers' motivation to regulate her child's group-based empathy. Such motivation among mothers is important to examine in the context of violent and intractable intergroup conflicts, such as that of Jewish–Arab relations in the Middle East, as such conflicts tend to span across generations (Bar-Tal, 2013).

We draw on the distinction offered by Roccas et al. (2006) between two types of group identification: group attachment and group glorification. Attachment refers to the emotional tie and extent of identification with one's own group. Attachment captures only connection with one's ingroup and does not include any reference to the outgroup (Roccas et al., 2006). Among other things, attachment increases people's tendency to take the perspective of their ingroup (e.g., Berndsen et al., 2018). Glorification, on the other hand, involves both a strong emotional tie and identification with the ingroup (like attachment does) and a belief that the ingroup is superior to other groups (Roccas et al., 2006). High glorifiers consider outgroups as inferior to the ingroup (which indicates both the way they perceive the outgroup and the hierarchy between the groups), which often results in prejudice (Berndsen et al., 2018). Consequently, high glorifiers are less likely to take the perspective of outgroup members (Berndsen et al., 2018; Roccas et al., 2006).

Based on this distinction, we expected mothers who are more attached to their ingroup to want their child to feel more empathy toward the ingroup (vs. outgroup), whereas mothers who glorify their ingroup more to want their child to feel less empathy toward the outgroup (vs. ingroup). We tested these hypotheses during a period in which parents are likely to consider what emotions they want to transmit to their children (Porat et al., 2016), namely during Israel's National Days of Observance. This is a period of three consecutive days, including Memorial and Independence Day. Memorial Day commemorates Israeli fallen soldiers as well as victims of terrorism during and since the establishment of the state. Independence Day, which is celebrated from the eve of Memorial Day until the day after, celebrates the Israeli declaration of independence in 1948, capturing the renaissance of the state for the Jewish nation.

We focus on mothers only in this study and not fathers nor other socialization agents. This is because, of the varied socialization agents that are active in shaping children's societal attitudes and beliefs in the context of intergroup conflict, parents are primary (Nasie et al., 2021). Furthermore, with regard to emotions, mothers are especially pertinent, as they tend to talk to their children about emotions more often (Aznar & Tenenbaum, 2013) and in a more detailed manner (e.g., Zaman & Fivush, 2013) than do fathers.

## Method

The full materials, Supplementary Materials, as well as data and code are available in [https://osf.io/5gxx2/?view\\_only=2f6f676d232c46808989711b7f8b4f0b](https://osf.io/5gxx2/?view_only=2f6f676d232c46808989711b7f8b4f0b) (Segal et al., 2023).

## Participants

Sample size was determined based on an a priori power analysis conducted using G\*power software. The analysis indicated that a sample of 200 mothers is required for detecting a small effect size (0.10) in a within-between interaction design in a repeated-measures ANOVA, with an  $\alpha$  of .05 and power of .80.

We solicited from an Israeli online survey company named "Ipanel" a sample of 200 Jewish-Israeli mothers of children aged 6–12 years, whose native language was Hebrew. In the beginning of the survey, mothers were asked to indicate their religion and whether they had children aged 6–12 years. Participants who did not fit the criteria could not advance past the demographic questions. Among the 205 complete responses we received, nine were removed from analyses due to respondents not being Jewish, leaving us with a final sample of 196 mothers. Of the final sample, 34% self-identified as holding a right-wing political stance, 32.5% identified as centrists, and 33.5% identified as holding a left-wing political stance. Mothers were asked if they had more than one child in the relevant age group, if so, they were randomly asked to think either of their oldest or youngest child in this age group. Children were 52.3% male and 47.7% female, and their mean age was 9.52 ( $SD = 1.88$ ).

## Procedure

The study was conducted during the period of three days that mark the National Days of Observance in Israel and include both Memorial Day and Independence Day. Mothers could fill out the survey at any point over these three days. Mothers gave informed consent and provided sociodemographic information. To make sure all mothers defined empathy in the same manner, mothers read a definition of empathy and answered three comprehension questions regarding that definition. Mothers could proceed with the study only after answering these comprehension questions correctly. Next, mothers indicated their motivation for their child to feel empathy toward various ingroups and outgroups in the context of Memorial Day. Afterward, mothers were asked to indicate their motivation for their child to feel empathy toward the same groups in the context of Independence Day. Lastly, mothers completed measures that assessed their level of attachment and level of glorification of their ingroup.

## Measures

### Identification With the Ingroup

Mothers rated their agreement (1 = *completely disagree*; 7 = *agree to a great extent*) with items on the Identification

with the Ingroup Scale (Roccas et al., 2006). The scale includes an 8-item attachment subscale (e.g., "Being Israeli is an important part of my identity,"  $\alpha = .90$ ) and an 8-item glorification subscale (e.g., "Israel is better than other states in all respects,"  $\alpha = .87$ ).

### Motivation for Child's Empathy Toward Groups

Mothers were presented with various social groups and asked to rate how much empathy they wanted their child to feel toward each group (based on Ran et al., 2023). Ratings were presented on a scale ranging from 0 = *no empathy at all* to 100 = *maximal level of empathy*. We included groups that are directly relevant to the Jewish-Israeli narrative of Memorial and Independence Days, pertaining to the ingroup (Israeli; Jews; victims of hostilities and terror attacks; Israeli bereaved families; Olim – the Jewish community who came to Israel at the time of its establishment; the Jewish Defense Organizations during the British mandate – the underground forces of the Jewish community prior to the establishment of Israel; and Israel's current military soldiers) and to the outgroup (Arabs from Arab countries; Israeli Arabs; Palestinians; Palestinian bereaved families), along with several groups that are not part of the shared narrative of Memorial Day and Independence Day as filler items (e.g., seculars, Ethiopians, settlers). Groups were presented one at a time in a randomized order. In order to make sure that the ingroup and outgroup targets load on two distinct factors, we performed an exploratory factor analysis (with "oblimin" rotation) using the "psych" package in R. The results showed that ingroup targets consistently loaded onto their corresponding factor between 0.65 and 0.85 and had cross-loadings smaller than 0.08. The outgroup targets loaded on a separate factor with loadings ranging between 0.87 and 0.95 and had cross-loadings under 0.23. Together, these findings indicate that mothers perceived these social targets as representing distinct groups (i.e., the ingroup and the outgroup), with no overlap.

### Behavioral Manifestation of Motivation

We also included an exploratory measure to explore whether differences in mothers' type and extent of attachment were associated with socialization efforts. Specifically, we asked mothers three questions: To what extent they talked to their child about National Days of Observance, to what extent they exposed their child to

materials pertaining to the National Days of Observance, and to what extent they tried to influence their child's emotions. Responses were rated on a scale of 1 (= *not at all*) to 7 (= *very much so*).<sup>1</sup>

## Results

See Supplementary Materials for means, SDs, and correlations between the different variables.<sup>2</sup> We examined whether the target (i.e., ingroup vs. outgroup) interacted with the type of group identification (i.e., attachment and identification) to predict mothers' motivation for their child's empathy, by fitting multilevel models (individual rating of ingroup and outgroup was nested within participants). In both models, random intercepts were allowed to vary, as were the random slopes of group identification. We also controlled for the day on which participants completed the survey (i.e., Memorial Day or Independence Day) and the priming of each target trial (i.e., whether participants answered with regard to Memorial Day or Independence Day when rating their motivation on individual targets). Models were estimated using full-information maximum likelihood and an unstructured covariance of random effects. Effect sizes for fixed effects were calculated as semipartial adjusted  $R^2$  (Edwards et al., 2008). Additionally, we calculated the marginal  $R^2$  of each model, which captures the proportion of the variance explained by the fixed effects of the model, as well as the conditional  $R^2$ , which captures the proportion of the variance explained by both the fixed and the random effects of the model.<sup>3</sup> Post hoc power analysis for each multilevel model was calculated via the *simr* package in R. Based on 1,000 simulations, for the effect found below, the current sample was 99% and 100% powered to detect the significant interactions with attachment and glorification, respectively.

First, we observed a significant main effect of attachment and a significant main effect of target group (see Table 1). These main effects were qualified by a significant interaction between attachment and target type,  $B = -3.39$ ,  $SE = .62$ ,  $t(3,718.19) = -5.48$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI  $[-4.61, -2.18]$ ,  $R^2_{\text{adj}} = .007$  (see Figure 1A and Table 1). Specifically, when responding to ingroup targets, attachment was positively linked to motivation for child's

<sup>1</sup> In addition to these items, we added one more exploratory measure pertaining to the socialization acts of the education system during National Days of Observance and the mother's interaction with it. We did not perform an analysis on these data as it was not the focus of our research. The full measure can be found in the Full Materials for this article.

<sup>2</sup> Previous research indicated that empathy is related to both children's age and gender (e.g., Schwenck et al., 2014). We therefore also analyzed the data controlling for children's age and gender and found no differences across analyses. See Supplementary Materials.

<sup>3</sup> We also conducted the analyses using repeated-measures ANOVA, and the pattern of results did not change.

**Table 1.** Interaction between group identification and target type on mother's motivation for child's empathy

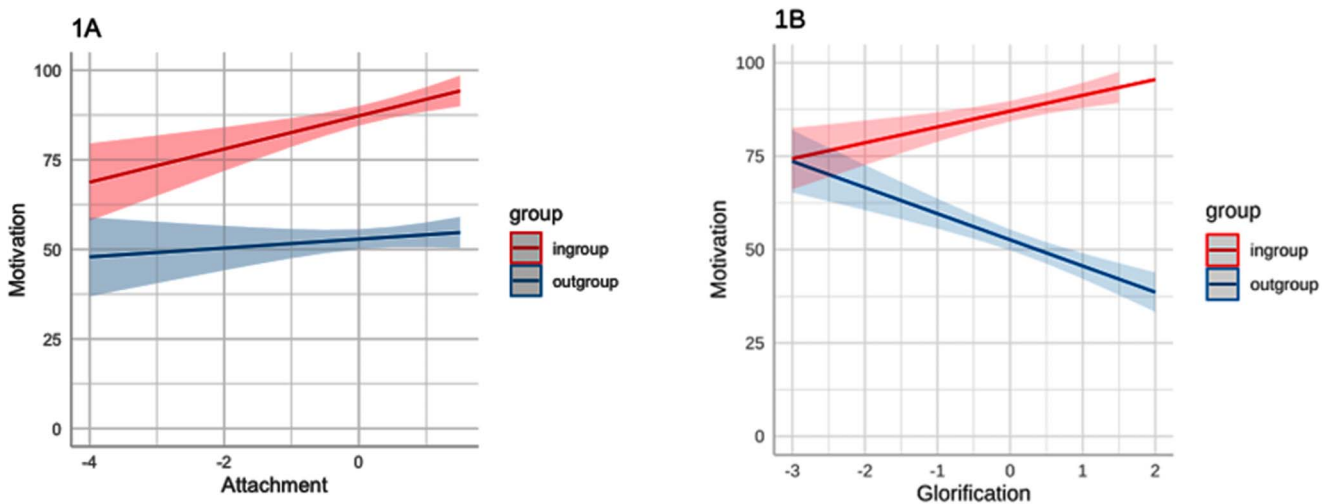
	<i>B</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI	$R^2_{adj}$
Attachment						
Fixed effects						
(Intercept)	87.27 (1.37)	228.66	63.91	<.001	84.59, 89.94	
Attachment	4.63 (1.27)	98.89	3.64	<.001	2.14, 7.12	.031
Target	-34.42 (0.62)	3,718.17	-55.54	<.001	-35.63, -33.20	.416
Day	2.32 (2.41)	18.01	.96	.337	-2.41, 7.05	.003
Priming	-.82 (0.61)	3,718.08	-1.35	.178	-2.01, .37	<.000
Attachment × Target	-3.39 (0.62)	3,718.19	-5.48	<.001	-4.61, -2.18	.007
Variance						
Random effects						
Intercept	202.02					
Attachment	28.24					
Residual	360.48					
Marginal $R^2$ / Conditional $R^2$	.336/.595					
Glorification						
Fixed effects						
(Intercept)	87.05 (1.40)	225.27	62.35	<.001	84.31, 89.78	
Glorification	4.24 (1.24)	85.06	3.41	.001	1.80, 6.67	.028
Target	-34.45 (0.59)	3,718.15	-57.95	<.001	-35.61, -33.28	.434
Day	2.83 (2.52)	19.02	1.12	.264	-2.12, 7.77	.004
Priming	-.82 (0.58)	3,718.07	-1.41	.159	-1.96, .32	<.000
Glorification × Target	-11.24 (0.59)	3,718.22	-18.90	<.001	-12.41, -1.07	.075
Variance						
Random effects						
Intercept	222.91					
Glorification	19.88					
Residual	331.55					
Marginal $R^2$ / Conditional $R^2$	.355/.628					

Note.  $n = 196$ . Target: ingroup (reference level) versus outgroup. We recoded the variable "Day" so that Memorial Day will be the reference point. The same logic of coding applied to the variable "Priming."

empathy,  $B = 4.63$ ,  $SE = 1.27$ ,  $t(98.89) = 3.64$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [2.14, 7.12]. However, this association was not significant when participants rated outgroup targets,  $B = 1.23$ ,  $SE = 1.30$ ,  $t(108.59) = .95$ ,  $p = .346$ , 95% CI [-1.32, 3.78].<sup>4</sup> Overall, the more mothers felt attached to their ingroup, the more empathy they wanted their child to experience toward ingroup members, but not outgroup members.

Similarly, glorification significantly interacted with target type to predict motivation for child's empathy,  $B = -11.24$ ,  $SE = .59$ ,  $t(3,718.22) = -18.90$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [-12.41, -10.07],  $R^2_{adj} = .075$  (see Figure 1A). Similar to the findings with attachment, the more mothers glorified their ingroup, the more empathy they wanted their children to feel toward ingroup members,  $B = 4.24$ ,  $SE = 1.24$ ,

<sup>4</sup> Note that the absence of a significant effect does not necessarily indicate the absence of a relationship. We therefore calculated the Bayes factor to quantify the evidence for the absence of the *attachment-outgroup empathy* effect. We found a posterior probability for  $H_0$  that is close to 1. Hence, we concluded that our data provided strong evidence that there was no association between attachment and outgroup empathy.



**Figure 1.** Interaction plot between group identification and target type on mother's motivation for child's empathy. The shaded areas represent the 95% confidence intervals for the predicted values of motivation.

$t(85.06) = 3.41, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} [1.80, 6.67]$ . In contrast to the findings with attachment, the more mothers glorified the ingroup, the less empathy they wanted their children to feel toward outgroup members,  $B = -7.01, SE = 1.27, t(93.17) = -5.51, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} [-9.50, -4.52]$ . This interaction qualified a significant main effect of glorification and a significant main effect of target group (see Table 1). These results indicate that the more mothers glorified their ingroup, the more they wanted their child to be empathetic toward ingroup members. However, the opposite pattern was observed when responding to outgroup members, such that the more mothers glorified their ingroup, the less they wanted their child to experience empathy toward outgroup members.

In an exploratory analysis, we performed three linear regressions to examine the extent to which mothers' group identification influenced behavioral manifestations of motivation. First, we tested whether attachment and glorification predicted how much mothers talked to their children about National Days of Observance. A significant main effect was found for attachment,  $B = .55, SE = .14, t(193) = 3.96, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} [.28, .83], \eta^2 = .13$ , but not for glorification,  $B = -.01, SE = .14, t(193) = -.10, p = .924, 95\% \text{ CI} [-.29, .26], \eta^2 = .00$ . Second, we tested whether attachment and glorification predicted the extent to which mothers exposed their children to materials pertaining to National Days of Observance, and found the same pattern, with significant effects for attachment,  $B = .60, SE = .15, t(193) = 3.96, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} [.30, .90], \eta^2 = .16$ , but not glorification,  $B = .08, SE = .15, t(193) = .51, p = .609, 95\% \text{ CI} [-.22, .38], \eta^2 = .001$ . Third, we tested whether glorification and attachment predicted how much mothers tried to influence their child's emotions during the National Days of

Observance. Here, we found that glorification significantly predicted the extent to which mothers wanted to influence their children's emotion,  $B = .35, SE = .16, t(193) = 2.21, p = .028, 95\% \text{ CI} [.04, .66], \eta^2 = .02$ . However, the predictor of attachment was not significant,  $B = .002, SE = .16, t(193) = .01, p = .989, 95\% \text{ CI} [-.31, .31], \eta^2 = .02$ .

## Discussion

The goal of the current investigation was to examine the relations between mothers' identification with their ingroup and how much they want their children to experience group-based empathy, in the context of the Israeli Days of Observance. We found that the more mothers identified with their ingroup, in the form of both group attachment and group glorification, the more they wanted their child to feel empathy toward ingroup members. Furthermore, the more mothers glorified the ingroup (but not the more attached they were to it), the less empathy they wanted their child to feel toward outgroup members. Together, these findings suggest that both the extent and the type of group identification are meaningfully linked to mothers' motivation for their child's experience of ingroup and outgroup empathy.

This investigation could contribute to the study of motivated emotion regulation in intergroup contexts. Most of the literature on motivated emotion regulation refers to processes of intrapersonal or interpersonal emotion regulation (e.g., Porat et al., 2016). To the best of our knowledge, little research has been done in the intergroup context on motivated emotion regulation in the parent-child context (for an exception, see Ran et al., 2023). Focusing on this

social context could be helpful not only to better understand the nature of motivated emotion socialization but also to understand how children learn about group-based emotions and when and toward whom such emotions should be experienced. This investigation may also inform the study of group-based empathy and its developmental origins. Many scholars study processes and mechanisms of empathic failures (e.g., Cikara et al., 2014). Trying to understand the role mothers (and potentially parents in general) might play in shaping their children's emotional reactions to different social groups could contribute to our knowledge of the roots of such emotional patterns.

Another potential contribution of this study might be for research on group identification and its relation to group-based emotions. Most of the research on attachment and glorification and emotions links different types of identification to different emotions or emotional outcomes (e.g., guilt; Schori-Eyal et al., 2015, or perspective taking; Berndsen et al., 2018). The current investigation extends the current literature by suggesting that the extent and type of identification with the ingroup may also affect processes of motivated emotion regulation. Furthermore, the current investigation extends the current literature by suggesting the possibility that people's type and extent of identification with the ingroup may be associated with how much group-based empathy their children experience, pointing at possible intergenerational ripples.

The main limitation of the current study is its correlational nature. We did not manipulate type or extent of group identification in an experimental design. Future studies could test whether attachment and glorification can causally shape mothers' motivation for empathy in their children. This can be done by making either attachment or glorification with the ingroup temporarily more (or less) salient. Future work could also examine this dynamic in a different intergroup context, moving beyond Israeli-Jewish society. For example, does parent (type and extent of) identity translate to motivation for child upregulation or downregulation of empathy (or other emotions) toward outgroups outside the context of violent conflict? Do other types of parents' identity – for example, religious, racial, or gender identity – impact their motivation for their child to feel empathy toward the corresponding outgroups?

Another consideration regarding this study is the fact that in the current investigation, we focused on mothers' *motivation* for their child to feel empathy toward ingroup and outgroup targets. Recent work has shown that mothers' motivation for empathy is linked to their children's emotional experience (Ran et al., 2023). We also included in the current study an exploratory examination of maternal behaviors which showed that ingroup identification was associated to some active attempts by the mother to influence child's emotions, with glorification but

not attachment predicting mothers' reported attempts to influence children's emotions. However, given the limited scope and exploratory nature of these findings, inferences regarding mothers' socialization practices would be premature. Future work is needed to examine the impact of such motivation on child outcomes.

A further consideration regarding this study is the timing in which it was conducted. The study took place during Israel's National Days of Observance, in order to examine the research question during a time when motivation for emotional socialization is likely to manifest. Our goal was to test whether there might be a link between mothers' group identification and their motivation to have their child feel empathy toward others, rather than to test when such motivation is more likely to arise. Accordingly, our findings do not allow us to infer generalizability to nonholidays. This remains a question for future research. For the same reason, we believe that the results observed in this study do not necessarily apply to other group identities. These unique circumstances prevent us from determining with certainty that our results will replicate to other group identities. They might be generalized to other prolonged violent intergroup conflicts during days of national significance.

In sum, this investigation examined the relationship between the type and extent of mothers' identification with the ingroup and how much empathy they wanted their children to feel toward the ingroup and the outgroup. We found that attachment to the ingroup was positively correlated with motivation for child's empathy but only toward the ingroup and not toward the outgroup. In contrast, glorification was positively correlated with motivation for child's empathy toward the ingroup and negatively correlated with motivation for child's empathy toward the outgroup. Despite its limitations, this investigation sheds new light on the process of motivated interpersonal emotion regulation in intergroup contexts.

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## Authorship

Noa Boker Segal and Shira Ran contributed equally to this work.

## Open Data

The full materials, Supplementary Materials, as well as data and code are available in [https://osf.io/5gxh2/?view\\_only=2f6f676d232c46808989711b7f8b4f0b](https://osf.io/5gxh2/?view_only=2f6f676d232c46808989711b7f8b4f0b) (Segal et al., 2023).

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## ORCID


Noa Boker Segal

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4902-0788>

Shira Ran

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4454-9201>

Danfei Hu

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6228-692X>

Maya Tamir

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2675-8042>

Michal Reifen-Tagar

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0960-9114>

## Michal Reifen-Tagar

School of Psychology

Reichman University

8 Ha'Universita Street

Herzliya 4610101

Israel

michal.reifen@runi.ac.il