

Group-Based Emotion Regulation: A Motivated Approach

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The regulation of group-based emotions has gained scholarly attention only in recent years. In this article, we review research on group-based emotion regulation, focusing on the role of motivation and distinguishing between different emotion regulation motives in the group context. For that purpose, we first define group-based emotions and their effects on both intragroup and intergroup processes. We then review motives for group-based emotion regulation, suggesting 3 classes of group-based motives: (a) intragroup motives pertaining to what I want to be in relation to the group (e.g., increase sense of belongingness), (b) intergroup motives pertaining to what I want my group's relationship with other groups to be (e.g., preserve the status quo), and (c) meta group motives pertaining to what I want my group to be (e.g., perceive the ingroup more positively). We discuss the implications of these different motives for group-based emotion regulation and how they might inform scholars in the field.

Keywords: group-based emotion, emotion regulation, motivation

Supplemental materials: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/emo0000639.supp>

If you are angry today, or if you have been angry for a while, and you're wondering whether you're allowed to be as angry as you feel, let me say: Yes. Yes you are allowed. You are, in fact, compelled.

—Traister, 2018

Two days after Christine Blasey Ford testified in front of the Senate Judiciary Committee, accusing Justice Brett Kavanaugh of sexually assaulting her years earlier, the writer Rebecca Traister (2018) called upon American woman to get angry. In an op-ed titled, "Fury Is a Political Weapon and Women Need to Wield It," Traister argued that women need to upregulate their anger, because only anger will change political outcomes. Traister's observation regarding the role anger can play in achieving group-level goals is consistent with research on group-based emotions and their role in shaping social behaviors (see Mackie & Smith, 2018), but it also highlights that their experience can be motivated.

Group-based emotions are emotions that individuals experience as a result of their membership in, or identification with, a group (Mackie, Devos, & Smith, 2000). The experience of these emotions can shape intragroup and intergroup processes (Mackie & Smith, 2018). For example, with regard to the former, group-based emotions can determine how much group members identify with their group (Kessler & Hollbach, 2005) and engage in affiliative

behaviors, such as displaying a national flag or voting (e.g., Smith, Seger, & Mackie, 2007). With regard to the latter, group-based emotions can mobilize societies in support of war or peace (e.g., Cohen-Chen, Halperin, Crisp, & Gross, 2014; Halperin, 2011).

Group-based emotions are often spontaneous reactions to group-related events. However, they can be influenced by regulatory processes (Goldenberg, Halperin, van Zomeren, & Gross, 2016). Emotion regulation involves attempts to change an existing emotion into a desired emotion (e.g., Gross, 1998). Whereas the majority of research on the regulation of group-based emotions has focused on *how* they may be regulated (Goldenberg et al., 2016), our focus herein is on *why* people try to regulate them. People regulate their emotions in pursuit of different goals (e.g., Tamir, 2016). Tamir (2016) proposed a taxonomy that distinguishes between hedonic (i.e., maximizing immediate pleasure) and instrumental (i.e., pursuing other benefits of emotions) motives for emotion regulation. With some adjustments, these ideas can be extrapolated to the group level. Given that group-based emotions shape group-related outcomes, people may be motivated to regulate group-based emotions to attain group-related goals. Group-based emotions may be pursued for either hedonic benefits (e.g., feeling proud of your group may feel good) or for instrumental benefits (e.g., feeling proud of your group may help you feel part of the group). In this contribution, given space limitations, we focus on instrumental benefits.

We identify three classes of motives that could drive the regulation of group-based emotions: (a) motives pertaining to what I want to be in relation to the group, (b) motives pertaining to what I want my group's relationship with other groups to be, and (c) motives pertaining to what I want my group to be. Each class contains different group-level goals that may operate individually or interact with each other. Such motives can also influence emotion generation to the extent that they shape how people

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We thank Amit Goldenberg, Chelsey S. Clark, and the Coman Lab for their thoughtful comments.

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understand and react to their environment. However, in the current article, we focus on what people want to feel rather than how they are likely to feel. Given that this is a relatively new field of research, there is still only limited empirical evidence directly assessing motivation. As a result, we chose to review cases in which motivation was directly measured as well as cases in which we believe it may have played a role, even if it was not measured directly. Finally, we discuss the implications for future research.

Intragroup Motives: What I Want to Be in Relation to the Group

People are inherently motivated to belong to social groups (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and are therefore typically motivated to increase their sense of belongingness to the ingroup. However, sometimes people are motivated to decrease their sense of belongingness (Brewer, 1991). Given that emotions are instrumental for connecting individuals to their group (Kessler & Hollbach, 2005; Smith et al., 2007), we suggest that people may be motivated to experience group-based emotions if they believe these emotions can increase or decrease their sense of belongingness to their group.

One way of increasing sense of belongingness to the ingroup is by experiencing an emotion that is perceived to be normative in that group. Several studies support the notion that people experience and actively regulate their emotions in a manner that conforms to their group's emotion norm (Leonard, Moons, Mackie, & Smith, 2011; Lin, Qu, & Telzer, 2018; Nook, Ong, Morelli, Mitchell, & Zaki, 2016). With regard to the latter, Lin and colleagues (2016) found that both American and Chinese participants shifted their emotional reactions when exposed to ingroup, but not outgroup, emotional responses. With regard to the former, studies demonstrate that people mimic facial expressions of ingroup members but not necessarily outgroup members (Bourgeois & Hess, 2008; Weisbuch & Ambady, 2008). Experiencing normative emotions may contribute to one's sense of belongingness via two mechanisms. First, when experiencing normative emotions, one may be judged positively by other group members (Shields, 2005). For example, when looking at Twitter replies to two politically charged events, tweets expressing normative emotions were rewarded by more likes and shares (Goldenberg, Garcia, Halperin, & Gross, 2019). If experiencing normative emotions facilitates social acceptance, people may be motivated to experience them to increase acceptance by others. Second, experiencing normative emotions may enhance one's own sense of belongingness and connection (Páez, Rimé, Basabe, Włodarczyk, & Zumeta, 2015). With regard to the latter, Porat, Halperin, Mannheim, and Tamir (2016) demonstrated this mechanism in the context of the Israeli National Memorial Day, a day when most Israelis experience sadness. Individuals primed with the need to belong (vs. those who were not) were more motivated to experience sadness. This association was mediated by the belief that sadness would help them connect to their group. If experiencing normative emotions facilitates a sense of connection, people may be motivated to experience them to increase their sense of belonging to their group.

To strengthen their sense of belongingness to their group, people may be motivated to experience an emotion *with* the ingroup, but they might also be motivated to experience an emotion *toward* the ingroup or other ingroup members. For example, people tend to

spontaneously experience more empathy toward ingroup than outgroup members (Cikara, Bruneau, & Saxe, 2011). A recent study demonstrated that people are also motivated to experience more empathy toward their ingroup compared with their outgroup (Hasson, Tamir, Brahms, Cohrs, & Halperin, 2018).¹ We suggest that the motivation to experience emotions, such as empathy, toward one's ingroup can be generalized to other emotions as long as these emotions can potentially promote social belongingness (e.g., pride and love). Thus, people may want to experience certain emotions toward their ingroup if they believe such experiences can enhance their sense of belongingness.

Although people often want to increase their connection to their group, they may sometimes be motivated to decrease it. For example, people may seek to decrease belongingness when they feel their group has acted inappropriately. This can be achieved by experiencing an *outlaw emotion*—namely, an emotion that diverges from the normative response (Jaggar, 1989). Hochschild (1983) described such emotions as “misfitting feelings,” which alert individuals to a discrepancy between their values and the prevailing values of the group. For example, participants who learned that the majority of their ingroup felt low levels of guilt in response to an immoral action committed toward an outgroup member experienced greater levels of group-based guilt. Participants' negative emotions toward the ingroup mediated this effect (Goldenberg, Saguy, & Halperin, 2014). Although the study did not assess motivation directly, we propose that participants who felt negatively toward their ingroup may have upregulated guilt (i.e., the emotion that their group was not experiencing) to temporarily decrease their sense of belongingness to the misbehaving ingroup. People might regulate their emotions to either increase or decrease their sense of belongingness to their ingroup.

Intergroup Motives: What I Want My Group's Relationship With Other Groups to Be

Group-based emotions may be experienced toward ingroup or outgroup members. The emotions we experience toward other groups, and the emotions that other groups experience toward our group, may shape the nature of the relationship between the groups. Therefore, people may be motivated to regulate their emotions toward other groups to promote desired relations with such groups (i.e., intrapersonal regulation). People may also be motivated to regulate emotions of outgroup members to attain relational goals (i.e., interpersonal regulation).

People may regulate their emotions toward an outgroup if they believe these emotional experiences might influence their decision making. For example, Jewish Israelis actively downregulated anger or fear when they believed that the experience of these emotions toward Palestinians might impair their political decision making (Porat, Halperin, & Tamir, 2016). People may also regulate their group-based emotions to preserve or change the status quo. For example, Jewish-Israeli conservatives who were motivated to preserve the nature of the asymmetric relations between Israelis and Palestinians were more motivated than liberals to experience anger toward Palestinians (Porat, Halperin, et al., 2016). Similarly, Jewish-Israeli liberals

¹ We refer to *empathy* as capturing empathic concern, involving feelings of sympathy and compassion (Batson & Shaw, 1991).

who were faced with existential threat (vs. those who were not) were more motivated to experience collective angst. This might be because collective angst can justify aggressive actions against the outgroup that liberals typically do not endorse (Porat, Tamir, Wohl, Gur, & Halperin, 2019).

Another way of influencing the ingroup's relations with an outgroup is by regulating emotions of outgroup members. Such regulation has been studied at the interpersonal level (Netzer, Van Kleef, & Tamir, 2015). We propose that, at the group level, people may be motivated to regulate the emotions of outgroup members to attain group-related benefits. For example, participants who were motivated to deter the outgroup from attacking the ingroup wanted outgroup members to experience more fear and tried to shape the emotions of outgroup members accordingly. In contrast, participants who were motivated to negotiate and reconcile with the outgroup wanted outgroup members to experience more calmness (Netzer, Halperin, & Tamir, 2019). Similarly, members of a disadvantaged group who were motivated to correct outgroup injustice without impairing relations with them wanted outgroup members to feel more regret, whereas those who were motivated to punish the outgroup wanted outgroup members to feel more fear (Hasan-Aslih et al., 2018). People may regulate their emotions toward the outgroup or the emotions of outgroup members to attain relational goals.

Meta Group Motives: What I Want My Group to Be

Emotions may also be perceived as instrumental for shaping or influencing one's ingroup. We propose that emotions can be regulated in pursuit of goals pertaining to what individuals want the ingroup to be. This includes goals related to how the ingroup is perceived by the self and others and goals related to preserving or changing desirable values and policies.

Regarding the perception of the ingroup, people may seek to experience (and sometimes avoid) group-based emotions that help them perceive their ingroup more positively (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). Such motives are particularly salient among highly identified individuals (Branscombe & Wann, 1994). For example, when learning about an ingroup transgression, highly identified individuals downregulated collective guilt (Sharvit, Brambilla, Babush, & Colucci, 2015). Although the authors did not measure motivation directly, they speculated that highly identified individuals, who are motivated to maintain a positive perception of their ingroup, are likely motivated to decrease guilt to avoid perceiving their group as immoral. This is because guilt indicates that the group is accountable for the wrongdoing. Thus, people may regulate group-based emotions to promote a desirable perception of their ingroup (Haslam, Powell, & Turner, 2000).

People may also be motivated to experience group-based emotions to influence the policies endorsed by other ingroup members. For example, if one wishes to promote compensation of the outgroup for ingroup wrongdoings, one may be motivated to pursue an emotion that is perceived as instrumental for achieving this goal. Sharvit and Valetzky (2019) demonstrated this by manipulating the perceived instrumentality of guilt for motivating corrective action among group members. Participants who learned that the experience of group-based guilt can

motivate corrective action among group members upregulated group-based guilt.

People may also be motivated to regulate emotions to avoid group-level costs. At the individual level, Cameron and Payne (2011) showed that in the face of mass suffering, when one recognizes that the cost of assisting others is too high, one might downregulate the emotion that triggers such costly behavior. We suggest that a similar process may occur at the group level. When one realizes that experiencing an emotion may have costly implications for the ingroup, one might be motivated to decrease that emotion to avoid such cost. For example, one may downregulate anger, an emotion that facilitates collective action (van Zomeren, Spears, Fischer, & Leach, 2004), if one fears it would have negative consequences for the ingroup (i.e., violent repression by authorities).

Drawing from research on motivated reasoning (Kunda, 1990), we suggest that people are sometimes motivated to experience emotions that reinforce their group's core values and beliefs. For example, liberals, who value change over tradition, were more motivated than conservatives to experience hope, even in the face of intergroup violence (Pliskin, Nabet, Jost, Tamir, & Halperin, 2019). This association was mediated by liberals' beliefs that hope would be instrumental in reinforcing their ideological values. In contrast, conservatives were more motivated than liberals to experience fear, even when their group was facing no threat. This association was mediated by conservatives' beliefs that fear would be instrumental in reinforcing their ideological values. In summary, people may be motivated to regulate group-based emotions to influence their perceptions and beliefs about the ingroup as well as the policies the ingroup endorses.

Conclusions

We proposed three classes of motives that may drive instrumental regulation of group-based emotions. We argue that individuals have social motives that go beyond individual goals or a simple aggregate of such goals. These social motives are unique as they reflect inherently social concerns, intergroup relations, group identities, and power hierarchies. Indeed, such group-level motives can sometimes conflict with individual-level ones. For example, a person may want to upregulate empathy toward refugees entering her country to show she is a kind and moral person, and at the same time, she may want to downregulate empathy to avoid the financial burden that integrating them might place on her ingroup. Those interested in group processes and in emotion regulation may benefit from understanding such motives. First, group-based emotions have traditionally been studied as spontaneous reactions to social events. We propose that group-based emotions can also result from motivated regulation, in pursuit of group-related goals. Second, by understanding why and in which direction people regulate their emotions in group contexts, we may be able to design interventions that change group-based emotions. Although many of the ideas we propose await empirical testing, we believe testing them would lead to new insights into emotion regulation and experience at the group level. A list of recommended additional reading is provided in the [online supplemental material](#).

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Received December 4, 2018

Revision received May 13, 2019

Accepted May 14, 2019 ■