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# Together we cry: Social motives and preferences for group-based sadness

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Group-based emotions play an important role in helping people feel that they belong to their group. People are motivated to belong, but does this mean that they actively try to experience group-based emotions to increase their sense of belonging? In this investigation, we propose that people may be motivated to experience even group-based emotions that are typically considered unpleasant to satisfy their need to belong. To test this hypothesis, we examined people's preferences for group-based sadness in the context of the Israeli National Memorial Day. In two correlational (Studies 1a and 1b) and two experimental (Studies 2 and 3) studies, we demonstrate that people with a stronger need to belong have a stronger preference to experience group-based sadness. This effect was mediated by the expectation that experiencing sadness would be socially beneficial (Studies 1 and 2). We discuss the implications of our findings for understanding motivated emotion regulation and intergroup relations.

*Keywords:* Emotion regulation; Motivation; Social belonging; Group-based emotions.

We, the Israelis, are unlike any other people. Our joy is always incomplete. A cloud of sadness envelops us. It is hidden deeply but stares out of our eyes. (Remarks of President Shimon Peres at the opening commemoration ceremony of Israel's Memorial Day, 5 May 2014)

In his blog, 16-year-old Ido, a Jewish-Israeli teenager, talks about his feelings during ceremonies at his school that commemorate days of national significance. Ido is confused and frustrated because he does not cry on the Jewish Holocaust Memorial Day. To point out that this is uncharacteristic of him, Ido says that on the Israeli National Memorial Day—a day commemorating Israeli soldiers who died during their

military service and civilians who died in terror attacks—he feels sad. On that day, he also feels the most connected to his country. He describes this feeling as “a feeling of unity with all of my people in pain”. In his experience, although sadness is painful, it connects him to other members of his group.

As conveyed in this real-life example, group-based emotions, like sadness, may help people establish a sense of belonging. People can influence their emotional experiences through processes of emotion regulation (Gross, 1998). Previous research also demonstrated that people sometimes prefer emotions that help them achieve

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their goals, even when they consider the experience of these emotions as unpleasant (e.g., Tamir, 2009; Tamir & Ford, 2012; Tamir, Mitchell, & Gross, 2008). To date, however, instrumental emotion regulation has been studied primarily in the service of intrapersonal motives (e.g., improved performance). We propose that instrumental emotion regulation is also used in the service of social motives, such as the need to belong to a group (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). The goal of the current investigation, therefore, is to test whether people may be motivated to experience even group-based emotions that are typically considered unpleasant in order to satisfy social group-based motives.

## THE INSTRUMENTAL APPROACH TO EMOTION REGULATION

Emotion regulation is the process by which individuals try to influence the type or amount of emotion they (or others) experience, when they (or others) have them, and how they (or others) experience and express these emotions (Gross, 1998). Importantly, people can regulate their emotions in both individual (e.g., Gross, 2007; Gross, Richards, & John, 2006) and in group contexts (e.g., Halperin, Pliskin, Saguy, Liberman, & Gross, 2014; Halperin, Porat, Tamir, & Gross, 2013).

The direction in which people regulate their emotions depends on what they want to feel (e.g., Mauss & Tamir, 2014; Tamir, 2009). According to the instrumental approach to emotion regulation (e.g., Bonanno, 2001; Parrott, 2001; Tamir, 2009), individuals may be motivated to experience emotions that are instrumental in pursuing their goals, even when they consider them to be unpleasant (e.g., Tamir & Ford, 2012; Tamir, Mitchell, & Gross, 2008). For example, people wanted to experience anger when they prepared for a task that required aggression (e.g., Tamir et al., 2008), but fear when they prepared for a task that required avoidance (e.g., Tamir & Ford, 2009). Such cases of motivated emotion regulation were mediated by the expectation that emotions

would have beneficial effects on performance (e.g., Tamir & Ford, 2012).

In addition to their intrapersonal benefits, emotions also offer interpersonal benefits (e.g., Frijda & Mesquita, 1994; Keltner & Haidt, 1999). For instance, emotions can promote social bonding and create a sense of belonging (Kessler & Hollbach, 2005). If people are motivated to experience emotions to gain their instrumental benefits, such benefits should extend beyond intrapersonal ones. Therefore, we hypothesized that people may be motivated to experience emotions to satisfy social motives, such as the need to belong to social groups.

To examine this hypothesis, we assessed the motivation to experience group-based emotions. Previous research has demonstrated that group members tend to simultaneously experience certain emotions (e.g., Bar-Tal, Halperin, & de Rivera, 2007; Peters & Kashima, 2007; von Scheve & Ismer, 2013). We suggest that such group-based emotional experiences do not result exclusively from emotional contagion but also from active regulation in pursuit of social group-based motives.

## THE BENEFITS OF GROUP-BASED EMOTIONS

Group-based emotions refer to emotions that are felt by individuals as a result of their membership in and identification with a certain group or society (Mackie, Devos, & Smith, 2000; Smith, 1993; Smith & Mackie, 2008). Such emotions arise in response to events that have perceived relevance for the group as a whole. For example, a person is likely to experience individual sadness when hearing that a loved one has passed away. She may also experience group-based sadness when hearing that someone significant in the group has passed away, even if she had no personal acquaintance with that group member.

Group-based emotions foster group formation and influence how one relates to one's group (Peters & Kashima, 2007). For example, different scholars have demonstrated that stronger levels of

group-based happiness (Kessler & Hollbach, 2005) and group-based pride (Smith, Seger, & Mackie, 2007) were linked to increased identification with the group. Similarly, collective angst enhanced individuals' commitment to their group, as indicated by an increased desire to engage in group-strengthening behaviours (i.e., behaviours that are deemed desirable by the group; Wohl, Branscombe, & Reysen, 2010). Thus, whether they are typically experienced as pleasant or unpleasant, group-based emotions may promote a sense of belonging to the group.

If people are inherently motivated to belong to social groups (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), and group-based emotions connect people to their group, then people may be motivated to experience group-based emotions in order to attain their social benefits. Therefore, we hypothesized that social group-based motives would motivate people to experience group-based emotions, even when they are considered unpleasant.

## THE CURRENT INVESTIGATION

To test our hypotheses, we conducted four studies in the context of the Israeli National Memorial Day, focusing on preferences for group-based sadness. The experience of sadness usually occurs with respect to a meaningful loss (Lazarus, 1991; Levenson, 1999), when one feels helpless about preventing that loss (Frijda, 1986; Seligman, 1975) or restoring it (Smith & Lazarus, 1993). Group-based sadness occurs when the group experiences a meaningful loss that cannot be prevented.

In Israel, Memorial Day is a day of national grief and mourning. As demonstrated in the opening example, many Israelis experience sadness during Memorial Day, as members of the Israeli nation, regardless of whether they have personally suffered as a result of war or terror attacks. Building on the unique context of the Israeli National Memorial day, we examined the associations between the need to belong to the in-group,

the expected social impact of sadness and preferences for group-based sadness. We predicted that the higher people's need to belong to the Israeli society, the more motivated they would be to experience group-based sadness on Memorial Day.

In Study 1a we examined whether people with a higher need to belong to the Israeli society were more motivated to experience group-based sadness on Memorial Day. We predicted that this association would be mediated by the expectation that sadness would promote one's connection to the Israeli society. To establish the external validity of these predicted findings, in Study 1b we tested these associations immediately prior to Memorial Day. Next, to test our causal model, in Studies 2 and 3 we manipulated the need to belong using two distinct manipulations. We predicted that those who were motivated to belong would be more motivated to experience group-based sadness, compared to those who were not. For all studies, we report how we determined our sample size, all data exclusions (if any), all relevant manipulations and measures.

## STUDY 1A

In the context of the Israeli National Memorial Day, we expected Israelis who were more motivated to belong to the Israeli society to consider group-based sadness on that particular day more socially instrumental. As a consequence, we expected these individuals to be more motivated to experience group-based sadness that day.

### Methods

#### *Participants*

We recruited 94 Jewish-Israeli undergraduate students<sup>1</sup> ( $M_{\text{age}} = 23.28$  years, standard deviation [ $SD$ ] = 2.33, 68 females) from two Israeli academic institutions to participate in an online study in exchange for course credit. In terms of political orientation, 42.6% of participants self-defined as leftists, 22.3% as centre, and 35.1% as rightists.

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<sup>1</sup> Four additional participants were excluded from the analyses because they were not Jewish.

### Procedure

Participants were told the study examined attitudes and emotions regarding Memorial Day. To measure the need to belong, participants rated their agreement (1 = not at all; 7 = very much) with the following item: "It is important for me to feel a part of the Israeli society." Adapting previous measures of the expected utility of emotions (e.g., Tamir & Ford, 2012), participants also rated (1 = not at all; 6 = very much) their agreement with the following item: "Sadness on Memorial Day helps me feel a part of the Israeli society." Finally, as in prior research (e.g., Ford & Tamir, 2012; Tamir, Ford, & Ryan, 2013), to assess emotional preferences, participants rated the extent to which they wanted to feel sad on Memorial Day. Such self-report measures have been proven valid in studies that established their convergence with behavioural indices of emotional preferences and their predictive validity (e.g., Tamir & Ford, 2012; Tamir et al., 2013). These items were not rated consecutively, but instead interspersed between various other items, including unrelated items for other research projects. Finally, participants indicated their levels of religiosity (1 = Secular; 5 = Ultra-Orthodox), political ideology (1 = extreme right; 7 = extreme left), age and gender.

### Results and discussion

Table 1 presents means, SDs, and simple correlations between our key variables. As expected,

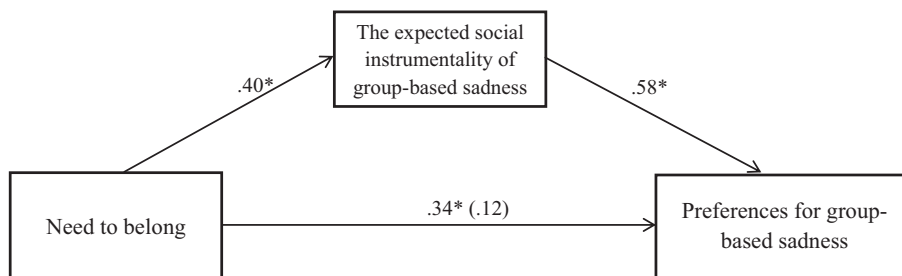
participants with a stronger need to belong were more likely to expect group-based sadness to connect them to their group and wanted to experience more group-based sadness. Furthermore, the more participants expected feeling sad on Memorial Day to help them connect to their group, the more they wanted to experience sadness on Memorial Day.

We employed the regression procedure of Baron and Kenny (1986) and found evidence for mediation when predicting preferences for group-based sadness (Figure 1). This was confirmed when using the procedure of Hayes (2013) PROCESS bootstrapping macro (model 4: 5000 iterations). The total effect of the need to belong on preferences for group-based sadness ( $b = 0.25$ , standard error [ $SE$ ] = .07,  $t = 3.51$ ,  $p < .001$ ; 95% confidence interval [ $CI$ ] [0.10, 0.39]) became insignificant when the expected social impact of group-based sadness was entered in the model ( $b = 0.09$ ,  $SE = .06$ ,  $t = 1.39$ ,  $p = .16$ ; 95% CI [-0.03, 0.22]). The indirect effect was statistically different from zero ( $b = 0.15$ ,  $SE = .05$ ; 95% CI [0.06, 0.27]). Participants with a stronger need to belong to the Israeli society expected group-based sadness to be more socially instrumental, which in turn, was associated with stronger preferences for group-based sadness on Memorial Day. These results remained unchanged when we entered religiosity, political orientation, age and gender as covariates. These results suggest that at the group level, people might pursue emotions that are typically considered unpleasant, if they expect them to promote the need to belong.

Table 1. Means, SDs and correlations of key variables (Study 1a)

	Mean (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Need to belong	5.83 (1.67)	1						
2. Expectations about group-based sadness' instrumentality	4.40 (1.33)	.40*	1					
3. Preferences for group-based sadness	4.56 (1.23)	.34*	.58*	1				
4. Religiosity	1.71 (1.02)	.26*	.14	-.02	1			
5. Political orientation	4.12 (1.35)	-.19	-.12	-.04	-.45*	1		
6. Age	23.28 (2.33)	.09	.04	.20*	-.13	.28*	1	
7. Gender	1.74 (0.44)	.16	.24*	.11	.18	-.25*	-.43*	1

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).



**Figure 1.** *Need to belong and preferences for group-based sadness as mediated by the expected social instrumentality of group-based sadness (Study 1a).*

## STUDY 1B

Study 1b was designed to replicate and establish the external validity of the findings in Study 1a by testing our predictions several days before Memorial Day in a larger sample. As the study was conducted in close proximity to Memorial Day (3 days to 2 hours before the beginning of national commemoration), we also controlled for current sadness. This enabled us to rule out the possibility that our effects could be explained by state-congruent preferences.

## Methods

### Participants

We recruited 237 Jewish-Israeli undergraduate students<sup>2</sup> ( $M_{age} = 26.16$  years,  $SD = 6.26$ , 104 females) from two academic institutions in Israel to participate in a short study in exchange for 10 New Israeli Shekel. In terms of political orientation, 30.4% of participants self-defined as leftists, 17% as centre and 52.6% as rightists (one participant did not report his political orientation).

### Procedure

We approached participants on campus 3 days to 3 hours before the beginning of Memorial Day and invited them to participate in a study on attitudes and emotions towards Memorial Day. Participants first rated (1 = not at all; 5 = to a large extent) the extent to which they currently felt sad.

Then they were asked to answer a series of questions containing the research variables (as in Study 1a) and provide socio-demographic information.

## Results and discussion

Table 2 presents means, *SDs*, and simple correlations between our key variables. Similar to Study 1a, the need to belong was positively associated with the expected social instrumentality of group-based sadness, as well as with participants' preferences to experience group-based sadness. Furthermore, the more participants expected feeling sad on Memorial Day to help them connect to their group, the more they wanted to experience sadness on Memorial Day.

We used the same procedure as in Study 1a to test for mediation. As shown in Figure 2, we found evidence for mediation. The total effect of the need to belong on preferences for group-based sadness ( $b = 0.26$ ,  $SE = .07$ ,  $t = 3.47$ ,  $p < .001$ ; 95% CI [0.11, 0.41]) became insignificant when the expected social instrumentality of group-based sadness was entered in the model ( $b = 0.08$ ,  $SE = .07$ ,  $t = 1.16$ ,  $p = .24$ ; 95% CI [-0.05, 0.23]). The indirect effect was statistically different from zero ( $b = 0.18$ ,  $SE = .04$ ; 95% CI [0.10, 0.28]). Participants with a stronger need to belong to the Israeli society expected group-based sadness to be more instrumental to them, which in turn, was associated with stronger preferences for group-based

<sup>2</sup>Twenty-two additional participants were excluded from the analyses, because they were not Jewish.

Table 2. Means, SDs and correlations of key variables (Study 1b)

	Mean (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Need to belong	4.32 (0.90)	1							
2. Expectations about group-based sadness' instrumentality	3.51 (1.19)	.33*	1						
3. Preferences for group-based sadness	3.68 (1.08)	.22*	.46*	1					
4. Concurrent sadness	2.31 (1.28)	.00	.17*	.12	1				
5. Religiosity	1.94 (1.10)	.19*	.19*	.17*	.03	1			
6. Political orientation	3.60 (1.39)	-.18*	-.26*	-.17*	-.04	-.45*	1		
7. Age	26.16 (6.26)	.04	.05	.01	.19*	-.01	.18*	1	
8. Gender	1.44 (0.49)	.10	.20*	.17*	.07	.05	-.06	-.07	1

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

sadness on Memorial Day. These results remained unchanged when we entered the concurrent experience of sadness, religiosity, political orientation, age and gender as covariates.

Taken together, Studies 1a and 1b demonstrate the predicted associations between the need to belong and preferences for group-based sadness on Memorial Day. In Studies 2 and 3, we tested the causal role that social motives might play in shaping preferences for group-based sadness.

## STUDY 2

Previous research showed that the need to belong is especially prevalent under social threat (Elder & Clipp, 1988; Hogg, 2000; Hogg, Sherman, Die-selhuis, Maiter, & Moffitt, 2007; Rofe, 1984). Therefore, to experimentally increase the need to belong to one's group, we threatened participants' perceived ability to recognize faces of in-group

members. We did so by providing participants with bogus feedback on a face recognition task. Participants in the experimental condition were told they failed to differentiate faces of in-group members (i.e., Israelis) from faces of out-group members (i.e., Palestinians). Our assumption was that people believe that as loyal group members they should be able to easily identify other group members and that when they fail to do so, they might think their connection to the group is under threat. This is especially true when the failure to identify faces of other group members involves confusion with faces of the rival out-group (i.e., Palestinians). We suggest that in this context, the need to connect with the in-group increases to cope with the experienced threat.

In Study 2 we also wanted to test whether the need to belong influences preferences for group-based sadness, in particular. In the Israeli society, sadness in the context of Memorial Day is considered a collective emotion because it is shared

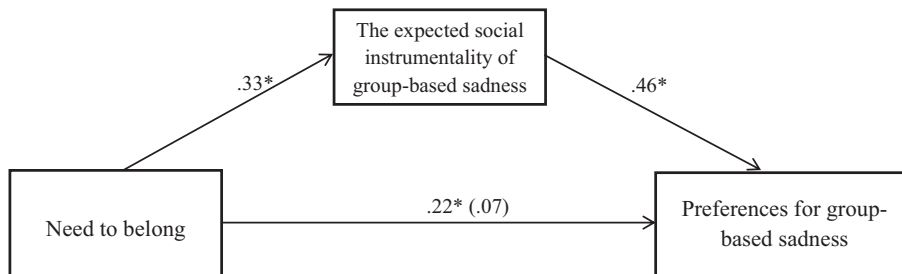


Figure 2. Need to belong and preferences for group-based sadness as mediated by the expected social instrumentality of group-based sadness (Study 1b).

by the majority of the group, considered the appropriate emotion to experience and by that is linked to the joint identity of Israelis at large. We compared preferences for sadness to preferences for fear, because this emotion is also typically considered unpleasant and prevalent in the Israeli society. However, it is not considered appropriate in the context of Memorial Day and therefore can be considered as individual rather than group-based emotion, in that context. We assumed that when considering Memorial Day, participants with a stronger need to belong would want to experience the appropriate group-based emotion (i.e., sadness), but not necessarily other emotions (i.e., fear).

## Methods

### *Procedure*

Participants were invited to participate in two ostensibly unrelated studies. To disguise the fact that the two studies were related, participants were told that the first study was conducted by researchers from the psychology department, whereas the second was conducted by researchers from the political science department. The first was presented as a study examining individual differences in recognition of facial expressions. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions. In both conditions, participants were presented with four pairs of pictures depicting male faces. They were told that each pair contained a picture of an Israeli (i.e., in-group member) and a picture of a Palestinian (i.e., out-group member). For each pair of pictures, participants were asked to specify which of the two men was a member of their in-group (i.e., Israeli). We manipulated the need to belong by creating a threat to one's perceived ability to recognize in-group members. Participants in the experimental condition received bogus feedback suggesting that they failed to identify their in-group member in

three out of the four trials. Participants in the control condition were told that they succeeded in identifying their in-group member in three out of the four trials. We then thanked participants and asked them to proceed to the second study.

The second study was presented as examining attitudes and emotions of Israelis towards a highly debated topic in the Israeli society—the separation of Memorial Day from Independence Day.<sup>3</sup> Participants were told they would soon be presented with an article related to this topic. Before presenting the article, participants rated the perceived instrumentality of group-based sadness (as in Studies 1a and 1b) and their motivation (1 = not at all; 6 = very much) to experience sadness and fear when reading the article. To disguise the goal of the study, participants were presented with an article related to the topic, followed by questions regarding their emotions and attitudes. Participants were then asked to provide socio-demographic information. To ensure the manipulation affected participants' need to belong to the Israeli society, they were asked to rate three items ( $\alpha = .85$ ), for example: "It is important to me to feel a part of the Israeli society." Finally, to probe for suspicion, participants were asked about the goal of the study and what the researchers expected to find. None of the participants suspected that the studies were related.

### *Participants*

We recruited 55 Jewish-Israelis ( $M_{\text{age}} = 31.78$  years,  $SD = 9.28$ , 27 females)<sup>4</sup> via the Internet using snowball techniques, to participate in an online study. In terms of political orientation, 20% of participants self-defined as leftists, 27.3% as centre and 52.7% as rightists.

## Results and discussion

Table 3 presents means and *SDs* for our key variables. To test the effects of our manipulation,

<sup>3</sup> In Israel, Memorial Day and Independence Day are commemorated sequentially. In recent years, voices in the Israeli society have called for the separation of these days to allow the bereaved families to celebrate Independence Day as well.

<sup>4</sup> Ten additional participants were excluded from the analyses for the following reasons: three were under-aged, three were not Jewish and four were not Israeli.



Table 3. Means and SDs of key variables (Study 2)

	Experimental condition, Mean (SD)	Control condition, Mean (SD)
1. Need to belong	5.20 (0.99)	4.56 (1.23)
2. Perceived instrumentality of group-based sadness	4.52 (1.02)	3.57 (1.53)
3. Preferences for group-based sadness	3.50 (1.23)	2.49 (1.44)
4. Preferences for fear	1.25 (0.44)	1.26 (0.65)
5. Religiosity	1.60 (1.04)	1.54 (0.91)
6. Political orientation (1 = extreme right; 7 = extreme left)	3.45 (1.43)	3.17 (1.54)
7. Age	30.35 (7.28)	32.60 (10.26)
8. Gender (1 = male; 2 = female)	1.55 (0.51)	1.46 (0.50)

we conducted independent-sample *t*-tests. Results confirmed that participants in the experimental condition had a higher need to belong ( $M = 5.20$ ,  $SD = 0.99$ ) compared to participants in the control condition ( $M = 4.56$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ),  $t(53) = -1.97$ ,  $p = .05$ , Cohen's  $d = -.57$ . They also expected group-based sadness to be more instrumental in connecting them to their group ( $M = 4.52$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ) compared to participants in the control condition ( $M = 3.57$ ,  $SD = 1.53$ ),  $t(52) = -2.42$ ,  $p < .05$ , Cohen's  $d = -.73$ .<sup>5</sup> In addition, participants in the experimental condition ( $M = 3.50$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ) had stronger preferences to experience group-based sadness than control participants ( $M = 2.49$ ,  $SD = 1.44$ ),  $t(53) = -2.63$ ,  $p < .05$ , Cohen's  $d = -.75$ . In contrast, participants in the experimental condition did not show a stronger preference to experience fear ( $M = 1.25$ ,  $SD = 0.44$ ) compared

to control participants ( $M = 1.26$ ,  $SD = 0.65$ ),  $t(53) = .04$ ,  $p = .96$ .

We used the same procedure as in Studies 1a and 1b to test for mediation and found that the effects of our manipulation on preferences for group-based sadness were mediated by the expected social instrumentality of group-based sadness (see Figure 3). The total effect of the manipulation on preferences for group-based sadness ( $b = 1.04$ ,  $SE = .39$ ,  $t = 2.64$ ,  $p < .05$ ; 95% CI [0.24, 1.83]) became insignificant when the expected social instrumentality of group-based sadness was entered in the model ( $b = 0.71$ ,  $SE = .39$ ,  $t = 1.80$ ,  $p = .07$ ; 95% CI [-0.07, 1.50]). The indirect effect was statistically different from zero ( $b = 0.32$ ,  $SE = .16$ ; 95% CI [0.07, 0.77]). These results remained unchanged when we entered religiosity, political orientation, age and gender as

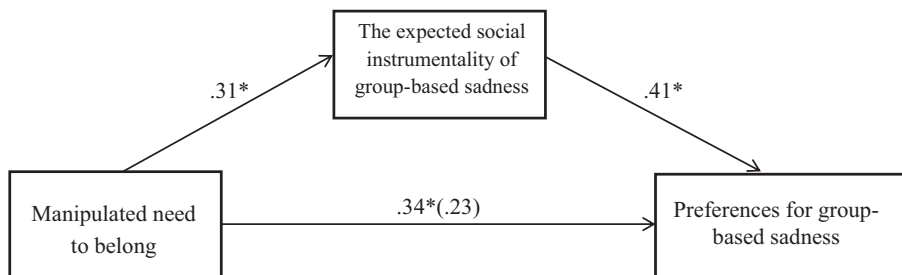


Figure 3. Manipulated need to belong and preferences for group-based sadness as mediated by the expected social instrumentality of group-based sadness (Study 2).

<sup>5</sup>We omitted one participant from the analysis because his score on this item was more than 2.5 SDs from the mean.

covariates. These findings suggest that social motives play a causal role in shaping preferences for group-based emotions (i.e., group-based sadness), but not other emotions (i.e., fear).

### STUDY 3

Study 3 was designed to further test the validity of our causal predictions, by using a different manipulation of the need to belong and by using more reliable multiple-item measures. To manipulate the need to belong in Study 3, participants were assigned to read a short paragraph that either described the importance of group belonging or personal autonomy.<sup>6</sup> We expected participants who learned about the benefits of belongingness to be more motivated to belong and, as a result, to have a stronger preference for group-based sadness, but not fear, which is not a group-based emotion.

### Methods

#### *Procedure*

Participants were invited to participate in a study about the way people deal with various situations, as individuals or in groups. They were randomly assigned to one of two conditions. Participants in the belonging condition read a paragraph about the basic human need to belong to a social group and its benefits (e.g., “In order to thrive and succeed in life, people need to feel a part of a larger social group”). Participants in the autonomy condition read a paragraph that was equivalent in length and content, but highlighted the basic human need for personal autonomy and its benefits (e.g., “In order to thrive and succeed in life, people need to act according to their personal goals and desires”). After reading the paragraph, participants were asked to describe two advantages of group belonging (or personal autonomy).

To ensure the manipulation affected participants’ need to socially belong, we conducted a pilot study ( $n = 42$ ). In the pilot study, following the manipulation, participants rated (1 = highly disagree; 7 = highly agree) three items measuring their need to belong, for example: “being part of a group is important to me” ( $\alpha = .81$ ). We also measured participants’ levels of attachment to the Israeli society, using the eight-items scale of Roccas, Klar, and Liviatan (2006) (e.g., “It is important to me to view myself as an Israeli,” and “being an Israeli is an important part of my identity”; ( $\alpha = .94$ ). Results confirmed that, compared to participants in the autonomy condition, those in belongingness condition had a higher need to belong ( $M = 4.68$ ,  $SD = 1.65$  and  $M = 5.95$ ;  $SD = 1.06$ , respectively),  $t(40) = 3.04$ ,  $p < .01$ , Cohen’s  $d = .91$ , and felt more attached to the Israeli society ( $M = 4.43$ ,  $SD = 1.63$  and  $M = 5.71$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ , respectively),  $t(39) = 2.87$ ,  $p < .01$ , Cohen’s  $d = .88$ .

Following the manipulation, participants were told they would read an article on Memorial Day. Participants rated their preferences (1 = not at all; 6 = very much) to experience sadness, melancholy and gloom when reading the article ( $\alpha = .75$ ), as well as fear. To rule out the possibility that participants’ preferences merely reflected their current emotional states, participants rated (1 = not at all; 6 = very much) the extent to which they currently felt sadness, melancholy and gloom ( $\alpha = .83$ ). As in Study 2, to support the cover story, participants were then presented with an article, followed by questions regarding their emotions and attitudes. Participants provided socio-demographic information and were asked about the goal of the study and what the researchers expected to find.

#### *Participants*

We recruited 109 Jewish-Israeli undergraduate students<sup>7</sup> ( $M_{age} = 23.35$  years,  $SD = 2.09$ , 75

<sup>6</sup>To minimize the possibility of carry-over effects, in this study we did not assess the perceived utility of sadness.

<sup>7</sup>Six participants were omitted from the analysis either because they were not Jewish, were more than 2.5  $SD$ s from the mean score or came from bereaved families and therefore for them, Memorial Day carries a unique personal meaning that may or may not be associated with their group membership.

females) from two academic institutions in Israel to participate in a short study in exchange for course credit. In terms of political orientation, 33% of participants self-defined as leftists, 19.3% as centre and 47.7% as rightists.

## Results and discussion

Table 4 presents means and *SDs* for our key variables. To test the effects of our manipulation on preferences for group-based sadness, we conducted an independent-sample *t*-test. Results confirmed that participants in the experimental condition ( $M = 3.62$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ ) wanted to experience more group-based sadness than participants in the autonomy condition ( $M = 2.97$ ,  $SD = 1.30$ ),  $t(107) = 2.74$ ,  $p < .01$ , Cohen's  $d = .52$ . Participants in the two conditions did not differ in their preference for fear,  $t(107) = -1.03$ ,  $p = .30$  ( $M = 2.60$ ,  $SD = 1.63$  in the belongingness condition and  $M = 2.28$ ,  $SD = 1.55$  in the autonomy condition). These results remained unchanged when we entered current sadness, religiosity, political orientation, age and gender as covariates.

These findings further demonstrate that social motives play a causal role in shaping preferences for group-based emotions. Importantly, as in Study 2, we found that the need to belong was related to preferences for sadness and not fear. Although fear may be an appropriate group-based emotion in some contexts (e.g., under external threat), it is not considered appropriate in the context of Memorial Day, and therefore, it cannot serve the need to belong to the group.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

This investigation demonstrates that people seek out emotions to improve their connection with their group. Focusing on group-based sadness, we demonstrated that the more people wanted to connect to their group, the more motivated they were to experience group-based sadness.

In Studies 1a and 1b, people with a stronger need to belong to the Israeli society expected the experience of group-based sadness on the Israeli Memorial Day to be instrumental in helping them connect to the Israeli society. This expectation, in turn, was associated with a stronger preference to experience group-based sadness. In Study 2, we demonstrated that social group-based motives might play a causal role in shaping preferences for group-based emotions. We found that participants who were motivated to increase their connection to their group through a social threat wanted to experience more sadness when considering the Israeli Memorial Day. Study 3 provided further evidence to this effect using a more direct manipulation of the need to belong.

## THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of the current investigation demonstrate the importance of considering the uniquely social implications of emotions when studying what people want to feel. In this respect, our findings have important implications for the study of motivated emotion regulation. They demonstrate for the first time that the need to socially

Table 4. Means and *SDs* of key variables (Study 3)

	Experimental condition Mean ( <i>SD</i> )	Autonomy condition Mean ( <i>SD</i> )
1. Preferences for group-based sadness	3.62 (1.15)	2.97 (1.30)
2. Preferences for fear	2.60 (1.63)	2.28 (1.55)
3. Current sadness	1.52 (0.67)	1.49 (0.70)
4. Religiosity	1.69 (1.03)	1.81 (1.07)
5. Political orientation	3.87 (1.23)	3.72 (1.44)
6. Age	23.34 (2.20)	23.35 (2.19)
7. Gender	0.68 (0.46)	0.69 (0.46)

belong may shape emotional preferences. Whereas other research has shown that people want to experience emotions to influence their behaviour (in both intrapersonal and interpersonal contexts; Fischer & Manstead, *in press*), we show that people want to experience emotions to influence their sense of group connection. In addition, whereas other research has suggested that people may want to regulate their emotional expression for social reasons (e.g., Clark, Pataki, & Carver, 1996; Fischer, Manstead, & Zaalberg, 2003), we show that group-based reasons may drive the regulation of emotional experience as well. Finally, our findings extend the instrumental approach to emotion regulation to group-based emotions.

Our findings also have important implications for the study of group-based emotions. Scholars studying emotional experience at the group level have long established that emotions can be felt simultaneously by the majority of the group and that such experience can strengthen group bonding and identification (e.g., Bar-Tal et al., 2007; von Scheve & Ismer, 2013). The current findings shed new light on the processes that influence such collective emotional experiences, as they demonstrate that group-level emotional processes may be instrumentality motivated. Emotions that are experienced by group members could, therefore, be a function of active regulation, driven by group-based motives. This investigation also highlights the role of context in shaping emotional preferences. While a number of emotions may play a role in connecting the individual to his/her group, we found that people are likely to desire the emotion that is deemed most appropriate by the group in the given context.

Finally, our findings might also carry implications for the study of intergroup relations, more generally. Previous research has shown that the experience of negative emotions leads to more support of aggressive actions towards the adversarial group (Cheung-Blunden & Blunden, 2008; Halperin et al., 2013; Skitka et al., 2006). The current investigation suggests that such emotional experiences may be driven by a desire to strengthen group coherence. For instance, if feeling group-based anger towards the out-group

increases the individual's sense of group belongingness, in-group members may be motivated to sustain such emotions to feel connected to their group. Such group-based anger may enhance group belonging, but come at the cost of an escalated intergroup conflict.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The current investigation has a number of limitations. We tested our hypothesis in the context of Memorial Day, examining preferences for sadness, in particular. Future studies should examine preferences for other group-based emotions as well, in different contexts. In addition, we measured preferences for group-based sadness using self-reports. Although such measures have proven to be valid (e.g., Tamir & Ford, 2012), future studies could further establish the validity of the current findings by using behavioural measures as well.

With respect to the study of motivated emotion regulation, our investigation sought to show that emotional preferences can operate in the service of social group-based motives. To do so, we focused on one of the most basic social motives—namely, the need to belong (e.g., Baumeister & Leary, 1995). However, people are motivated to satisfy a variety of group-based motives (e.g., maintain a positive image of the in-group or changing the in-group), and to the extent that emotions can serve such motives, each of these motives could influence what people want to feel. One important task for future research is to identify the different social motives that determine what people want to feel and distinguish them from behavioural or other motives (see Tamir & Bigman, 2014).

With respect to the study of preferences for group-based emotions, our investigation focused on how social group-based motives shape preferences for emotions targeted at the in-group. However, future research should explore whether group-based motives also shape preferences for emotions towards out-group members (e.g., anger or hatred). It would also be important, in the future, to examine whether and how preferences

for group-based emotions influence attitudes and behaviour in group contexts, as mediated by relevant emotional experiences.

Finally, the current investigation examined the effect of social group-based motives on emotional preferences. Future research should build on these findings and examine how group-based motives influence the actual regulation and subsequent experience of emotions. For instance, could people be driven to decrease group-based anger by helping them feel connected to their group in other ways? By studying preferences for group-based emotions and the motives that underlie them, our research raises this and other related questions.

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