

# UC Santa Barbara

## UC Santa Barbara Previously Published Works

### Title

Group-level emotions

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/03g0c2mz>

### Authors

Smith, Eliot R  
Mackie, Diane M

### Publication Date

2016-10-01

### DOI

10.1016/j.copsyc.2016.04.005

### Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Peer reviewed



ELSEVIER

## Group-level emotions

Eliot R Smith<sup>1</sup> and Diane M Mackie<sup>2</sup>

Emotions can be experienced not only at the individual level, but also on behalf of social groups by people who belong to and identify with those groups. As outlined in Intergroup Emotions Theory, these emotions are driven by appraisals of objects or events in terms of their relevance for the group (rather than the individual). They shift depending on currently salient group memberships, and are moderated by the degree of identification with the group. Consequences of group-based emotions include treatment of outgroups (including bias and discrimination) as well as attitudes and behavior toward the ingroup (including ingroup affiliation and support). A particularly important new direction is the study of emotion regulation processes as they operate with group-based emotions, with some recent research suggesting that emotion regulation interventions may be helpful in ameliorating intractable intergroup conflicts.

### Addresses

<sup>1</sup> Indiana University, USA<sup>2</sup> University of California, Santa Barbara, USACorresponding author: Smith, Eliot R ([esmith4@indiana.edu](mailto:esmith4@indiana.edu))**Current Opinion in Psychology** 2016, 11:15–19This review comes from a themed issue on **Intergroup relations**Edited by **Jolanda Jetten** and **Nyla R Branscombe**<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2016.04.005>

2352-250/© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Emotions have traditionally been seen as an individual-level phenomenon. For example, pioneering appraisal theorist Arnold [1, p. 171] wrote 'to arouse an emotion, the object must be appraised as affecting me in some way, affecting me personally as an individual.' Now a range of research and theory has converged to overturn this assumption, introducing the concept of group-based emotions. Drawing on the social identity perspective [2], we now understand that when people identify with a group, the group identity becomes an aspect of the self through self-categorization. Like any aspect of the self, the group then becomes imbued with affective significance. One important consequence is that people will appraise objects and events in terms of their implications (positive or negative) for the group as a whole, rather than simply for the individual. Such group-based appraisals lead to the experience of group-based emotions, such as anxiety if the

group is perceived to be threatened, anger if the group is treated unfairly by others, or hope if the group is seen as potentially making gains [3,4]. We developed Intergroup Emotion Theory [5<sup>••</sup>] to explain these emotions as well as their causes and effects, and many other researchers now assume essentially compatible perspectives [6,7<sup>•</sup>,8–10]. Niedenthal and Brauer [11<sup>•</sup>] broadly define group-based emotion as an emotion experienced by individuals on behalf of a group to which they belong and with which they identify, a definition that captures what is common among all these perspectives.

Research establishes several key facts about group-based emotions. First, because they depend on self-categorization, the specific emotions that a person will experience depend on the currently salient group membership. For example, someone might experience more pride and less disgust when thinking of the self as a student of their university, compared to thinking of the self as a citizen of their country, if the individual perceives the university as outstanding but strongly disagrees with the country's national policies [9,12–14]. It further follows that group-based emotions will also differ from those experienced when self-categorizing at the individual (rather than group) level [15].

Second, because members of a group often perceive and appraise group-related events similarly, empirically they often tend to share common profiles of group-based emotions [12]. In effect, a group's typical emotion pattern becomes a group norm, so group members naturally tend to converge toward that pattern [16<sup>•</sup>,17]. However, it is important to note that this sharing is not part of the definition of group-based emotions, and may not always occur, for example if group members disagree on their interpretations of group-relevant events.

Third, group-based emotions are based on group-level rather than individual-level appraisals. For example, people who have not personally committed wrongdoing may still experience guilt when reminded of the misdeeds of other ingroup members [18,19].

Fourth, because group identification (e.g., the importance and centrality of a group membership to the individual) can vary across individuals and over time, identification moderates the effect of self-categorization on emotion. Thus, highly identified group members converge toward group emotion norms more readily than do less identified members, so they experience the emotion (and its downstream consequences) more strongly [17]. However, this pattern changes in

the case of negative group-based emotions, where highly identified group members may experience strong motivation to avoid feeling guilt, disappointment, or fear with regard to their groups, resulting in motivated reappraisals [18,20].

In summary, self-categorization as a group member sets the stage for group-based appraisals of social groups or other objects or events, but this relationship is modified by the extent of group identification. These appraisals generate group-level emotions, whose consequences then include group-related action tendencies and ultimately behavior.

The remainder of this review covers three areas of current research activity. First, we describe how group-based emotions regulate and influence people's judgments and behaviors toward outgroups, including prejudice and discrimination. Second, group-based emotions also affect people's feelings about and treatment of their ingroup. Finally, we discuss the role of emotion regulation processes with regard to group-based emotions, and their implications for potential interventions.

### Relations to prejudice and treatment of outgroups

The emotions felt toward outgroups — often negative but sometimes positive such as admiration or sympathy — have long been a central focus of work on group-based emotions, largely because they can provide a highly differentiated account of different types of intergroup behavior such as discrimination [3,21]. Indeed, group-based emotions toward other groups or events can better predict collective action, compared to more cognitive perceptions of those groups or events [22]. These actions can be highly differentiated: groups that are viewed with anger, fear, disgust, or contempt (for example) may be treated very differently [8].

Anger has been the most-studied emotion in this context, because it predicts aggression toward outgroups [4,12,23]. Part of the reason may be that anger tends to increase risk-taking behavior in general [17,24].

Other negative emotions are also relevant. Relations of fear to direct intergroup aggression are mixed [25,26]. Contempt, however, appears to be related to aggression as strongly as anger is. More worrisome, contempt is sometimes found to predict extreme and violent intergroup behavior, whereas anger predicts more 'normative' behaviors such as protest or advocating for exclusionary policies [27,28]. This makes sense because more broadly, contempt has been linked to moral exclusion (the removal of moral constraints), which can be a precursor to extreme harm against outgroups such as pogroms, enslavement, or even genocide. Recent work has examined dehumanization as a driver of extreme aggression in a

similar context [29] but further research is needed to identify the emotional correlates or precursors of dehumanization (see Haslam and Stratemeyer, this issue).

Positive emotions toward outgroups as well as negative, threat-related ones, are also relevant to people's treatment of those outgroups. Miller *et al.* [30] showed that a composite of positive emotions was a stronger mediator of the effect of intergroup contact on prejudice than was a composite of negative emotions. Seger *et al.* [31], using a representative sample of the U.S. population, analyzed several discrete emotions separately and found that feelings of admiration and respect were a strong mediator (stronger than anger) of contact effects on prejudice between major ethnic groups. The role of positive emotions (especially based on intergroup contact) makes sense in light of theories holding that experiencing cross-group friendships, rather than merely learning about an outgroup, is crucial for prejudice reduction [32].

Finally, a small but growing number of studies have examined the role of group-based emotions in the process of intergroup reconciliation. Leonard *et al.* [16\*] found that the effect of apology on forgiveness of an outgroup was mediated by changes in group-based emotions, especially anger and respect/admiration. Again, increases in positive emotions as well as decreases in negative ones are important.

### Relations to ingroup attachment and treatment of ingroup

Emotions toward the ingroup may powerfully drive actions relevant to the group (e.g., affiliation, support, or sacrifice for the group; pressuring group leaders for change). Positive ingroup-directed emotions ('ingroup love') may even play a more important role than outgroup-directed negativity ('outgroup hate') in causing intergroup bias and discrimination [33\*]. Maitner *et al.*, [19,34] found that group members experience emotions including anger, fear, or guilt when they disagree with the group's action. The role of these emotions in regulating the relationship to the ingroup is shown by the fact that they dissipate when the group actually performs the desired action. Similarly, the combination of anger and guilt at the ingroup predicts political action aimed at changing group policies [35].

Ingroup-directed emotions may often be biased by people's commitment to and identification with the group. The role of identification in biasing appraisals and therefore changing emotions has been examined by Maitner *et al.* [19], who found that highly identified group members appraised the ingroup's aggressive acts as more justified, thereby reducing their feelings of guilt. Other work has similarly found that group identification can bias appraisals and emotions [18,36].

Recent work suggests that group identification itself is multidimensional [37,38], raising the possibility that different dimensions may differentially relate to group-based emotions. The importance or centrality of a group membership to the self should encourage self-categorization, leading to increased tendencies to appraise events in group-relevant terms and to experience group-based emotions. Although this could be true for all types of emotions, a different dimension, superiority [38] or idealization of one's group may instead encourage people to feel positive emotions toward the ingroup, but to avoid negative emotions that might question the group's image of power and morality.

An area that is little explored in research is that group members may have qualitatively different kinds of affective ties with the group, which in turn may have consequences for their group-based emotions. Some may feel a bond with the symbolic meaning of the group as a whole, whereas others are tied to the group through interpersonal relationships with other group members [39,40]. One suggestion is that women are more likely to be interpersonally linked to others, whereas men are linked at the group level [41]. A clear implication of these ideas, not yet directly tested, is that people may experience different emotions when thinking about the group as a whole (e.g., hope for the group's future) than they do when thinking about other group members (e.g., disappointment at their failings). In turn these distinct types of emotions may have different behavioral implications; for example, actions directed at the group as a whole (contributions, verbal support) could be more positive than actions directed at other group members (disagreement, rejection).

### Emotion regulation and potential interventions

The idea that people tend to bring their group-based emotions into line with an ingroup norm for such emotions (described above; [17]) implies that emotion regulation occurs. But explicit consideration of emotion regulation processes is a new direction for this literature. A major theoretical paper by Goldenberg *et al.* [42<sup>••</sup>] integrated intergroup emotion theory and emotion regulation processes. The integration not only suggests ways that people may regulate their group-based emotions but also further develops ideas that are new to the existing emotion regulation literature, such as the notion (suggested in [14]) that people may shift their self-categorization or group identification as a way to modify their emotions.

There are already empirical demonstrations of regulation of group-based emotions. Halperin *et al.* [43] introduced emotion-regulation interventions in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and showed that the interventions effectively reduced participants' support for punitive policies against the outgroup, consistent with the

strong role of group-based emotions in driving intergroup aggression (reviewed above). Porat *et al.* [44] asked people to report their 'ideal' levels of group-based emotions such as anger directed at an outgroup. Over time, these emotion ideals influenced actually experienced emotions as well as measures of policy support, consistent with the hypothesis that ideal emotions serve as targets for regulating emotions.

Goldenberg *et al.* [45] demonstrated a different type of emotion regulation effect. Group members learned about an immoral act of their ingroup, and received manipulated information about the emotional responses of other ingroup members. If they believed other group members felt low levels of guilt, participants themselves reported more guilt (compared to participants who believed others felt much guilt). In effect, people regulated their own emotions to compensate if they believed the emotional response of other ingroup members was inadequate.

Finally, departing from emotion regulation per se, our own studies have demonstrated several other interventions that successfully change levels of group-based emotions. Rydell *et al.* [24] used a misattribution manipulation to decrease group-based anger. And other studies [16<sup>•</sup>,17] manipulated participants' beliefs about group norms for particular emotions and found that group members' emotions converged toward those supposed norms.

All this work strongly suggests that group-based emotions are not simply a 'given,' an unchanging fact that must be taken into account in any intergroup situation (such as an intractable conflict). Rather, group-based emotions, like individual emotions, are subject to regulation and change, with the potential to shift people's actions in the conflict.

### Conclusions

Research has now examined many aspects of the chain running from group identification, to group-based appraisals, to the experience of group-based emotions, to group-relevant behavior such as ingroup support, outgroup aggression, or various types of collective action. We are beginning to understand how the overall process may be moderated by people's different types of connection to the ingroup, such as qualitatively distinct dimensions of identification, or psychological ties to the meaning of the group as a whole versus ties to other group members. Finally, an emerging research area is the integration of emotion regulation processes with group-based emotions. This area has already generated increased understanding of how group identification and related processes may affect emotion regulation, but also of ways that regulation can shape the experience of group-based emotions. Equally important, this work shows promise of aiding the design of interventions that may ameliorate some of the worst potential consequences of group-based emotions, such as intergroup aggression.

## Conflict of interest statement

Nothing declared.

## References and recommended reading

Papers of particular interest, published within the period of review, have been highlighted as:

- of special interest
- of outstanding interest

1. Arnold MB: *Emotion and Personality*. Columbia University Press; 1960.
2. Tajfel H, Turner JC: **The social identity theory of intergroup behaviour**. *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*. 2nd ed.. Nelson-Hall; 1986: 7-24.
3. Smith E: **Social identity and social emotions: toward new conceptualizations of prejudice**. In *Affect, Cognition, and Stereotyping*. Edited by Mackie DM, Hamilton DL. Academic Press; 1993:297-315.
4. Mackie DM, Devos T, Smith E: **Intergroup emotions: explaining offensive action tendencies in an intergroup context**. *J Pers Soc Psychol* 2000, **79**:602-616.
5. Mackie DM, Smith E: **Intergroup emotions**. In *APA Handbook of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 2. Edited by Dovidio J, Simpson J. American Psychological Association; 2014:263-293.
- The authors review the empirical evidence for categorization, identification, and appraisal antecedents of group-level emotions as well as the research documenting the consequences of intergroup emotions for both positive and negative intergroup relations.
6. Cottrell CA, Neuberg SL: **Different emotional reactions to different groups: a sociofunctional threat-based approach to "prejudice"**. *J Pers Soc Psychol* 2005, **88**:770-789.
7. Van Zomeren M, Leach CW, Spears R: **Protesters as "passionate economists": a dynamic dual pathway model of approach coping with collective disadvantage**. *Personal Soc Psychol Rev* 2012, **16**:180-199.
- An integrative theory that describes collective action as driven by group-based anger (based on appraisals of blame) and by collective efficacy (based on perceptions of the group's power to produce social change).
8. Iyer A, Leach CW: **Emotion in inter-group relations**. *Eur Rev Social Psych* 2008, **19**:86-125.
9. Gordijn E, Wigboldus D, Yzerbyt V: **Emotional consequences of categorizing victims of negative outgroup behavior as ingroup or outgroup**. *Group Process Intergroup Relations* 2001, **4**:317-326.
10. Spears R, Leach CW: **Intergroup schadenfreude: conditions and consequences**. In *The Social Life of Emotions*. Edited by Tiedens LZ, Leach CW. Cambridge University Press; 2004:336-356.
11. Niedenthal PM, Brauer M: **Social functionality of human emotion**. *Annu Rev Psychol* 2012, **63**:259-285.
- Authoritative review of social dimensions of emotions, including but not limited to the type of group-based emotions discussed here.
12. Smith E, Seger CR, Mackie DM: **Can emotions be truly group level? Evidence regarding four conceptual criteria**. *J Pers Soc Psychol* 2007, **93**:431-446.
13. Seger CR, Smith E, Mackie DM: **Subtle activation of a social categorization triggers group-level emotions**. *J Exp Soc Psychol* 2009, **45**:460-467.
14. Ray DG, Mackie DM, Rydell RJ, Smith E: **Changing categorization of self can change emotions about outgroups**. *J Exp Soc Psychol* 2008, **44**:1210-1213.
15. van Zomeren M, Spears R, Leach CW: **Exploring psychological mechanisms of collective action: does relevance of group identity influence how people cope with collective disadvantage?** *Br J Soc Psychol* 2008, **47**:353-372.
16. Leonard D, Moons WG, Mackie DM, Smith E: **We're mad as hell and we're not going to take it anymore": anger self-stereotyping and collective action**. *Group Process Intergroup Relations* 2011, **14**:99-111.

Consistent with the idea that group-based emotions can represent a norm to which group members conform, studies demonstrate that women's beliefs about the level of other women's group-based anger changed participants' own anger as well as their collective action tendencies.

17. Moons WG, Leonard D, Mackie DM, Smith E: **I feel our pain: antecedents and consequences of emotional self-stereotyping**. *J Exp Soc Psychol* 2009, **45**:760-769.
18. Doosje B, Branscombe NR, Spears R, Manstead ASR: **Guilty by association: when one's group has a negative history**. *J Pers Soc Psychol* 1998, **75**:872-886.
19. Maitner AT, Mackie DM, Smith E: **Antecedents and consequences of satisfaction and guilt following ingroup aggression**. *Group Process Intergroup Relations* 2007, **10**: 223-237.
20. Roccas S, Klar Y, Liviatan I: **The paradox of group based guilt: modes of national identification, conflict vehemence, and reactions to the ingroup's moral violations**. *J Pers Soc Psychol* 2006, **91**:698-711.
21. Mackie DM, Smith ER (Eds): *From Prejudice to Intergroup Emotions: Differentiated Reactions to Social Groups*. Psychology Press; 2003.
22. Van Zomeren M, Postmes T, Spears R: **Toward an integrative social identity model of collective action: a quantitative research synthesis of three socio-psychological perspectives**. *Psychol Bull* 2008, **134**:504-535.
23. Iyer A, Schmader T, Lickel B: **Why individuals protest the perceived transgressions of their country: the role of anger, shame, and guilt**. *Pers Soc Psychol Bull* 2007, **33**:572-587.
24. Rydell RJ, Mackie DM, Maitner AT, Claypool HM, Ryan MJ, Smith E: **Arousal, processing, and risk taking: consequences of intergroup anger**. *Pers Soc Psychol Bull* 2008, **34**:1141-1152.
25. Spanovic M, Lickel B, Denson T, Petrovic N: **Fear and anger as predictors of motivation for inter-group aggression: evidence from Serbia and Republika Srpska**. *Group Process Intergroup Relations* 2010, **13**:725-739.
26. Miller DA, Cronin T, Garcia AL, Branscombe NR: **The relative impact of anger and efficacy on collective action is affected by feelings of fear**. *Group Process Intergroup Relations* 2009, **12**:445-462.
27. Tausch N, Becker JC, Spears R, Christ O, Saab R, Singh P, Siddiqui RN: **Explaining radical group behavior: developing emotion and efficacy routes to normative and nonnormative collective action**. *J Pers Soc Psychol* 2011, **101**:129-148.
28. Esses VM, Veenfliet S, Hodson G, Mihic L: **Justice, morality, and the dehumanization of refugees**. *Soc Justice Res* 2008, **21**:4-25 doi:10.1007/s11211-007-0058.
29. Kteily N, Hodson G, Bruneau E: **They see us as less than human: meta-dehumanization predicts intergroup conflict via reciprocal dehumanization**. *J Pers Soc Psychol* 2016, **110**: 343-370.
30. Miller DA, Smith E, Mackie DM: **Effects of intergroup contact and political predispositions on prejudice: role of intergroup emotions**. *Group Process Intergroup Relations* 2004, **7**:221-237.
31. Seger CR, Banerji I, Park SH, Smith ER, Mackie DM: **Specific emotions as mediators of the effect of intergroup contact on prejudice: Findings across multiple participant and target groups**. *Cogn Emot*, in press.
32. Pettigrew TF: **Intergroup contact theory**. *Annu Rev Psychol* 1998, **49**:65-85.
33. Greenwald AG, Pettigrew TF: **With malice toward none and charity for some: ingroup favoritism enables discrimination**. *Am Psychol* 2014 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0036056>.
- The authors argue that ingroup favoritism (ingroup love) plays an even more important role than outgroup-directed hostility ("outgroup hate") in causing intergroup bias and discrimination.
34. Maitner AT, Mackie DM, Smith E: **Evidence for the regulatory function of intergroup emotion: emotional consequences of**

- implemented or impeded intergroup action tendencies. *J Exp Soc Psychol* 2006, **42**:720-728.
35. Leach CW, Iyer A, Pederson A: **Anger and guilt about ingroup advantage explain the willingness for political action.** *Pers Soc Psychol Bull* 2006, **32**:1232-1245.
  36. Gordijn EH, Yzerbyt V, Wigboldus D, Dumont M: **Emotional reactions to harmful intergroup behavior.** *Eur J Soc Psychol* 2006, **42**:15-30.
  37. Leach CW, Van Zomeren M, Zeibel S, Vliek MLW, Pennekamp SF, Doojsje B, Ouwerkerk JW, Spears R: **Group-level self-definition and self-investment: a hierarchical (multicomponent) model of in-group identification.** *J Pers Soc Psychol* 2008, **95**:144-165.
  38. Roccas S, Sagiv L, Schwartz S, Halevy N, Eidelson R: **Toward a unifying model of identification with groups: integrating theoretical perspectives.** *Personal Soc Psychol Rev* 2008, **12**:280-306.
  39. Brewer MB, Gardner W: **Who is this "we?" Levels of collective identity and self representations.** *J Pers Soc Psychol* 1996, **71**:83-93.
  40. Prentice DA, Miller DT, Lightdale JR: **Asymmetries in attachments to groups and to their members: distinguishing between common-identity and common-bond groups.** *Pers Soc Psychol Bull* 1994, **20**:1-11.
  41. Gabriel S, Gardner W: **Are there "his" and 'hers' types of interdependence? The implications of gender differences in collective versus relational interdependence for affect, behavior, and cognition.** *J Pers Soc Psychol* 1999, **77**:642-655.
  42. Goldenberg A, Halperin E, Van Zomeren M, Gross JJ: **The process model of group-based emotion: integrating intergroup emotion and emotion regulation perspectives.** *Personal Soc Psychol Rev* 2016, **20**:118-141.
- The authors integrate intergroup emotions theory and the process model of emotion regulation to document the role of hedonic and instrumental goals, situation selection and modification, and identity change regulating group-based emotions.
43. Halperin E, Cohen-Chen S, Goldenberg A: **Indirect emotion regulation in intractable conflicts: a new approach to conflict resolution.** *Eur Rev Social Psych* 2014, **25**:1-31.
  44. Porat R, Halperin E, Tamir M: **What we want is what we get: group-based emotional preferences and conflict resolution.** *J Pers Soc Psychol* 2016, **110**:167-190.
  45. Goldenberg A, Saguy T, Halperin E: **How group-based emotions are shaped by collective emotions: evidence for emotional transfer and emotional burden.** *J Pers Soc Psychol* 2014, **107**:581-596.
- Group-level emotions are typically shared among group members. The authors provide evidence that when group members believe that the ingroup is feeling inappropriate group-level emotions, however, they can feel opposing group-level emotions even more strongly, either because they assume the responsibility for carrying the appropriate emotion in the name of the group, or transfer negative feelings they have toward the ingroup to the event itself.