

To Feel or Not to Feel When My Group Harms Others? The Regulation of Collective Guilt as Motivated Reasoning

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Abstract

Four studies tested the proposition that regulation of collective guilt in the face of harmful ingroup behavior involves motivated reasoning. Cognitive energetics theory suggests that motivated reasoning is a function of goal importance, mental resource availability, and task demands. Accordingly, three studies conducted in the United States and Israel demonstrated that high importance of avoiding collective guilt, represented by group identification (Studies 1 and 3) and conservative ideological orientation (Study 2), is negatively related to collective guilt, but only when mental resources are not depleted by cognitive load. The fourth study, conducted in Italy, demonstrated that when justifications for the ingroup's harmful behavior are immediately available, the task of regulating collective guilt and shame becomes less demanding and less susceptible to resource depletion. By combining knowledge from the domains of motivated cognition, emotion regulation, and intergroup relations, these cross-cultural studies offer novel insights regarding factors underlying the regulation of collective guilt.

Keywords

collective guilt, emotion regulation, motivated reasoning, moral disengagement

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Conflicts between social groups entail some of the most extreme displays of human aggression in the modern world. In the course of such conflicts, individuals and groups carry out harmful acts against members of the rival group, often in ways that would be considered illegitimate under different circumstances. For example, killing an enemy soldier during war is often considered legitimate, at least at the time of the act, while killing a person under most other circumstances is considered a severe moral violation.

When group behavior violates moral standards to which its members are committed, group members may experience group-based moral emotions, such as collective guilt and shame (Branscombe & Doosje, 2004; Giner-Sorolla, 2013; Lickel, Steele, & Schmader, 2011). When experienced, group-based moral emotions can motivate various forms of reparative behavior (Brown & Čehajić, 2008; Brown, González, Zagefka, Manzi, & Čehajić, 2008; Mari, Andrighetto, Gabbiadini, Durante, & Volpato, 2010; Zebel, Zimmermann, Viki, & Doosje, 2008), which, in turn, may reduce group-based moral emotions (Maitner, Mackie, & Smith, 2006). However, research indicates that there are many ways in which individuals can avoid group-based moral emotions without engaging in reparative behaviors. For example, they may come up with various justifications that provide legitimacy to their group's harmful behavior

(Miron, Branscombe, & Schmitt, 2006; Roccas, Klar, & Liviatan, 2006), deny their group's responsibility for the harmful outcomes (McGarty et al., 2005), minimize the harm to the outgroup, or shift the standards against which they judge the legitimacy of their group's actions (Miron, Branscombe, & Biernat, 2010). All of these can be considered mechanisms of moral disengagement (Bandura, 1999; Castano, 2008), and what they all have in common is that they allow group members to continue engaging in harmful behaviors toward the outgroup, or living with the consequences of past actions, without experiencing the negative emotional implications.

It may be argued that the avoidance of group-based moral emotions through various mechanisms of moral disengagement is a form of emotion regulation via reappraisal. Reappraisal involves emotion regulation through cognitive

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change, whereby individuals change their appraisal of the meaning of a situation in a way that alters its emotional impact (Gross, 2002). When individuals engage in processes of moral disengagement to reduce group-based moral emotions, they are essentially changing their appraisal of their group's harmful behavior, which, in turn, alters their emotional experience (Branscombe & Miron, 2004). Hence, they are engaging in reappraisal.

In the present research, we argue that the regulation of collective guilt through reappraisal is a specific case of motivated reasoning. Therefore, we predict that the regulation of collective guilt should be a function of factors known to affect motivated reasoning. We test this proposition in three different cultural contexts (the United States, Israel, and Italy), while combining knowledge from the domains of motivated cognition, emotion regulation, and intergroup relations. In doing so, we hope to arrive at new insights regarding the processes through which collective guilt is regulated. In the following sections, we discuss motivated reasoning, the factors that affect it, and their relation to the regulation of collective guilt.

Regulation of Collective Guilt as Motivated Reasoning

Motivated reasoning refers to situations in which individuals' cognitive processes of accessing, constructing, and evaluating beliefs are biased by their wishes, desires, or preferences concerning the outcomes of the reasoning process (Kunda, 1990). If individuals prefer to experience less collective guilt and change their appraisal of the situation so that they might experience less guilt, then it might be argued that they are engaging in motivated reasoning.

Cognitive energetics theory (CET) of motivated cognition proposes that the likelihood of goal-directed thinking, including motivated reasoning, is a function of a balance among driving and restraining forces (Kruglanski et al., 2012). The theory maintains that motivated reasoning, like all goal-directed thinking, requires some degree of effort. Thus, the driving force, which increases the likelihood of goal-directed thinking, is a combination of two factors: availability of mental resources and goal importance. The latter determines the willingness to apply resources toward goal attainment. The restraining force, which decreases the likelihood of goal-directed thinking, is a function of (a) the demands of the activity (i.e., how difficult or easy it is to arrive at conclusions consistent with one's goals), (b) individuals' tendency to conserve mental resources, and (c) competing goals.

If the regulation of collective guilt through moral disengagement is a case of motivated reasoning, then it too should be a factor of driving and restraining forces. In the present research, we investigate this possibility and test the effects of goal importance, resource availability, and demands of the activity on the regulation of collective guilt.

Factors Affecting the Regulation of Collective Guilt

The literature on collective guilt suggests several factors that might affect the importance of the goal of regulating this emotion. One factor that has received extensive attention is group identification. Information about harmful behavior by one's ingroup toward another group can pose challenges to group members' social identity (Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999). The higher the individuals' identification with their group, the greater their motivation to uphold a positive view of their group (Branscombe & Wann, 1994; Doosje, Ellemers, & Spears, 1995). Hence, the importance of down-regulating collective guilt should increase as group identification increases (Doosje, Branscombe, Spears, & Manstead, 1998; Miron et al., 2010). Some scholars have pointed out that certain components of group identification are especially likely to elicit the motivation to down-regulate collective guilt (Leach et al., 2008; Roccas et al., 2006) and to disengage morally (Leidner, Castano, Zaiser, & Giner-Sorolla, 2010).

Another factor that might affect the importance of down-regulating collective guilt is ideological orientation. In situations of intergroup conflict, harmful actions toward outgroups are often carried out in the service of advancing the ingroup's interests. An individual's ideology may define certain ingroup goals (e.g., self-determination, defending the group's territory) as more important than avoiding harm to others. Moral foundations theory (Graham et al., 2013) suggests that avoidance of harm is one out of several principles that serve as bases for evaluation of the morality of actions. Individuals with a liberal political orientation endorse and apply the moral foundation of avoiding harm (as well as fairness) more than other moral foundations, while conservatives consider avoidance of harm as equally important as other foundations, including loyalty to the ingroup (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009). Hence, harming others in the service of the ingroup's interests may pose a greater moral dilemma to conservatives than to liberals, which may increase conservatives' motivation to down-regulate guilt through moral disengagement and resolve the dilemma. Consistent with this notion, Leidner and Castano (2012) suggest that shifting from the moral foundations of harm and fairness to those of loyalty and authority, which conservatives tend to endorse more than liberals (Graham et al., 2009), can aid the process of moral disengagement in the face of harmful ingroup behaviors.

CET suggests that in addition to goal importance, the driving force is a function of availability of mental resources. In other words, motivated reasoning is cognitively demanding. Accordingly, research indicates that motivated reasoning is disrupted when mental resources are depleted (Kruglanski et al., 2012; Pica, Pierro, Bélanger, & Kruglanski, 2013; Roets, Van Hiel, & Kruglanski, 2013). Additional findings suggest that self-serving and ingroup-serving biases in reasoning and moral judgment are also cognitively demanding.

For example, engagement in processes intended to uphold a positive ingroup view reduces performance on a secondary task (Coull, Yzerbyt, Castano, Paladino, & Leemans, 2001). Furthermore, biased judgments of moral transgressions decrease when mental resources are constrained by cognitive load (Valdesolo & DeSteno, 2008). However, these biases have not been directly linked to the regulation of moral emotions.

The above arguments lead to the hypothesis that among individuals who are highly motivated to down-regulate collective guilt, such as high identifiers and conservatives, depletion of mental resources by cognitive load should disrupt the down-regulation of collective guilt by reappraisal, resulting in higher levels of collective guilt. Stated differently, our reasoning predicts that to the extent that the relationship between collective guilt and group identification or ideological orientation results from motivated down-regulation of guilt among high identifiers or conservatives, then depletion of mental resources by cognitive load should attenuate this relationship. Studies 1 to 3 tested this hypothesis.

Thus far we have discussed the factors that affect the driving force of motivated reasoning (i.e., goal importance and resource availability) and their relation to the regulation of collective guilt. CET also addresses the factors that affect the restraining force and reduce the likelihood of motivated reasoning. One important restraining factor is task demands. A motivated reasoning task or activity is considered demanding when it is difficult to arrive at conclusions that are consistent with one's motivations because the available information is not conducive to such conclusions. The theory predicts that the more demanding the task, the more resources individuals will invest in it within the constraints of their available resources (Kruglanski et al., 2012). It follows that the more conducive the available information is to one's desired conclusion, the less likely is motivated reasoning to be disrupted by depleted resources, because even limited resources should be sufficient to arrive at the desired conclusion. Applying this reasoning to the regulation of collective guilt, we predict that when information about harmful ingroup behaviors is presented along with information that can facilitate the down-regulation of collective guilt, such as justifications for the harmful behavior, then the process of down-regulating guilt will be less demanding. Under such circumstances, the down-regulation of collective guilt is less likely to be disrupted by mental resource depletion. This hypothesis was tested in Study 4.

The Present Research

We conducted a series of studies intended to test hypotheses derived from CET as applied to the regulation of collective guilt, based on the assumption that the regulation of collective guilt is a motivated reasoning process. In Studies 1 to 3, we tested the role of factors affecting the driving force of motivated reasoning, namely goal importance and resource

availability, in the regulation of collective guilt. In Studies 1 and 3, we assessed group identification as an indicator of the importance of down-regulating guilt in two different contexts (the United States and Israel). In Study 2, we assessed ideological orientation as an indicator of goal importance. In all three studies, we depleted mental resources by introducing cognitive load while presenting participants with information about harmful actions by their ingroup against another group. We expected that participants who are highly motivated to down-regulate collective guilt will invest cognitive resources in doing so, and therefore cognitive load would disrupt this process. Accordingly, we expected that cognitive load would attenuate the relationship between collective guilt and group identification or ideological orientation.

Study 4 was conducted in Italy and added a factor expected to affect the restraining force of motivated reasoning, namely task demands. We introduced information that could be used to justify the harmful group behavior and expected it to make the down-regulation of collective guilt less demanding and less dependent on resource availability. Accordingly, we expected that when justifications were available, the down-regulation of collective guilt will not be disrupted by cognitive load even among the highly motivated.

The three contexts in which the studies were conducted (the United States, Israel, and Italy) differ considerably in terms of culture, political traditions, and history of intergroup relations. By testing our hypotheses across different cultural contexts, we hoped to increase the generalizability of our conclusions.

Study 1

The participants in Study 1 were Americans presented with information about the harsh interrogation methods that had been used by U.S. officials on terror suspects detained in the Guantanamo Bay facility. We examined group identification as an indicator of the motivation to regulate collective guilt in response to this information. On the basis of previous research (Doosje et al., 1998; Leach et al., 2008; Miron et al., 2010), we expected that when confronted with information about harmful behavior by the ingroup, high identifiers would be motivated to down-regulate collective guilt more than low identifiers. In addition, on the basis of CET (Kruglanski et al., 2012), we expected the regulation of collective guilt to be dependent on available resources. Therefore, we hypothesized that depletion of mental resources via cognitive load would disrupt the down-regulation of collective guilt among high identifiers and therefore would attenuate the relationship between group identification and collective guilt.

Method

Participants. One hundred and forty-three undergraduate students from the University of Maryland (UMD) participated in

exchange for partial course credit. Four participants who indicated that they were not U.S. citizens were excluded, leaving a final sample size of 139 (41 men, 97 women, 1 did not specify gender). Age ranged between 18 and 24 years ($M = 19.72$, $SD = 1.27$). Gender did not interact with any of the other independent variables and is not considered further.

Materials and procedure. At the beginning of the study, we assessed participants' identification as Americans using two scales that had been used in previous studies (Doosje et al., 1995; Powell, Branscombe, & Schmitt, 2005), while eliminating recurring items. Subsequent analysis indicated that the scores on the two scales were very highly correlated, and therefore they were combined into a single 10-item index ($\alpha = .96$). A sample item is "I am comfortable being American" (1 = *completely disagree*, 7 = *completely agree*).

After completing these measures, participants were told that the next part of the study concerned reactions to news stories. Half were then randomly assigned to a cognitive load condition and told that often, while reading the news, people have other things on their mind. Supposedly to investigate this, they were asked to memorize a string of nine different digits and retain it while reading the subsequent news story and responding to questions. The digits appeared on the screen for 20 s and then disappeared. The other half of the participants were told that they would get a short break from the study before proceeding. The instructions remained on the screen for 20 s.

The ostensible news story that participants read described some of the very harsh interrogation methods being used (at the time of the study) by U.S. officials on suspected terrorists detained at the Guantanamo Bay facility in Cuba (e.g., sleep deprivation, low temperature, loud noise). The story was edited from several stories that had appeared in the mainstream news media in the United States (e.g., CNN, The Washington Post). The text was presented on a background of a screenshot from the CNN web site (with the original text removed), creating the illusion that it was an actual CNN story.

After reading the story, participants completed a measure of their collective guilt in response to the information that they had just read. The scale consisted of 10 items adapted from measures of collective guilt used in previous studies (Branscombe, Slugoski, & Kappen, 2004; Brown et al., 2008; Powell et al., 2005). A sample item is "I feel guilty about the harsh treatment of the detainees at Guantanamo bay" (1 = *completely disagree*, 7 = *completely agree*). Exploratory factor analysis with principal axis factoring indicated that all items loaded highly on a single factor ($\alpha = .93$). Upon completing this measure, participants in the cognitive load condition reported the nine-digit string that they had memorized and all participants were fully debriefed.

Results

Descriptive statistics indicated that the overall level of identification as American was quite high in our sample

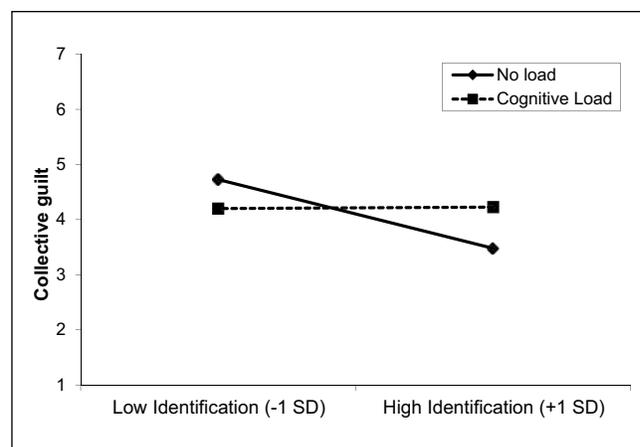


Figure 1. Moderation of the relationship between group identification and collective guilt by cognitive load among Americans.

($M = 5.76$, $SD = 1.03$). Hence, we could expect a negative relationship between identification and collective guilt (Klein, Licata, & Pierucci, 2011). However, our hypothesis states that cognitive load should moderate this relationship. To test this hypothesis, we centered the identification scores and then regressed collective guilt on cognitive load condition (1 = load, -1 = no load), identification, and their interaction. Main effects were entered at Step 1 and the interaction at Step 2. The results revealed a significant main effect of identification on collective guilt ($b = -.31$, $SE = 0.10$, $t = -2.98$, $p = .003$, 95% confidence interval [CI] = [-0.41, -0.10]), supporting the expected negative relationship between collective guilt and identification. However, consistent with the hypothesis, this effect was qualified by a significant interaction of identification with cognitive load ($b = .32$, $SE = 0.10$, $t = 3.10$, $p = .002$, 95% CI = [0.12, 0.52]). Simple slope analysis revealed that, as predicted, the relationship between identification and collective guilt was significant in the no load condition ($b = -.63$, $SE = 0.16$, $t = -3.82$, $p < .001$), but not significant in the cognitive load condition ($b = .01$, $SE = 0.12$, $t = 0.10$, $p > .10$). See Figure 1.

Discussion

Study 1 demonstrated that depletion of mental resources can attenuate the relationship between group identification and collective guilt. Previous research has already suggested that high identifiers are motivated to down-regulate collective guilt (Miron et al., 2010). The present findings extend these results by demonstrating that high identifiers invest mental resources in the down-regulation of guilt and are disrupted when their resources are depleted. These findings are consistent with the notion that the regulation of collective guilt is a motivated reasoning process that is cognitively demanding, as predicted by CET (Kruglanski et al., 2012). In Study 2, we sought to provide further support for the predictions derived

from CET regarding the regulation of collective guilt by examining a different indicator of the motivation to regulate, namely political orientation.

Study 2

Like Study 1, Study 2 was conducted among American participants presented with information about the harsh Guantanamo Bay interrogations. In light of previous research indicating that conservatives more than liberals attach importance to moral foundations other than avoidance of harm (Graham et al., 2009), we expected that the issue of Guantanamo Bay interrogations would create a greater moral dilemma for conservatives than for liberals. More specifically, conservatives tend to consider the moral foundation of loyalty to the ingroup as more important than liberals do (Graham et al., 2009). Hence, conservatives may be more likely than liberals to consider that protection of their ingroup (Americans) outweighs the harm to the detainees. Accordingly, we expected that when confronted with information about the Guantanamo Bay interrogations, conservatives would be more motivated than liberals to resolve the moral dilemma and down-regulate collective guilt.

As in Study 1, we expected that the regulation of collective guilt would be cognitively demanding, and therefore would be disrupted under cognitive load. Accordingly, we expected that cognitive load would attenuate the relationship between political orientation and collective guilt. Consistent with this prediction, a previous study found that the differences between conservatives and liberals in the importance attached to different moral foundations were reduced when cognitive resources were depleted (Wright & Baril, 2011). More specifically, under resource depletion conservatives reduced the importance attached to the “binding” moral foundations (i.e., ingroup, authority, and purity), which can aid the process of moral disengagement in the face of harmful ingroup behaviors (Leidner & Castano, 2012). However, previous studies have not linked the differences between conservatives and liberals in moral foundations to collective guilt and its regulation.

Method

Participants. One hundred and sixty-three undergraduate UMD students participated in exchange for partial course credit. Ten participants who indicated that they were not U.S. citizens were excluded. Three additional participants were excluded because their responses during debriefing indicated that they either did not believe the information presented or did not understand it (e.g., indicated that no Americans were responsible for the harsh treatment of detainees). This left a final sample size of 150 (41 men, 109 women). Age range was 18 to 24 years ($M = 19.20$, $SD = 1.25$). Gender had no effect on collective guilt scores and did not interact with any of the other independent variables.

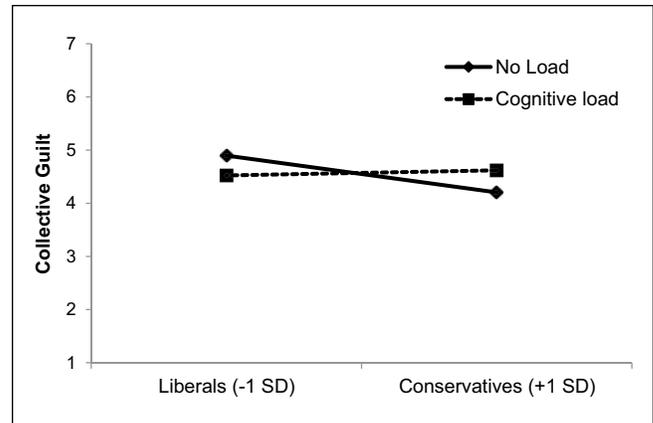


Figure 2. Moderation of the relationship between political orientation and collective guilt by cognitive load among Americans.

Procedure and measures. The design was identical to that of Study 1 except for the assessment of political orientation instead of group identification. Participants indicated their political orientation on a 7-point scale ranging between 1 = *very liberal* and 7 = *very conservative* (for a similar use of a single-item measure to assess political orientation, see Amodio, Jost, Master, & Yee, 2007; Jost et al., 2007; Landau et al., 2004; Nail, Harton, & Decker, 2003). In a separate study with a sample of 52 UMD students (15 men, 37 women, $M_{age} = 19.50$, $SD_{age} = 1.20$), we found no significant correlation between this measure of political orientation and a measure of identification as American identical to the one used in Study 1 ($r = .19$, $p = .184$).

Results

To test our main hypothesis that cognitive load would moderate the relationship between political orientation and collective guilt, we centered the political orientation ratings and then regressed collective guilt on cognitive load condition (1 = *load*, -1 = *no load*), political orientation, and their interaction. Main effects were entered at Step 1 and the interaction at Step 2. The main effects of political orientation and cognitive load were not significant (political orientation: $b = -.15$, $SE = 0.10$, cognitive load: $b = .01$, $SE = 0.10$, both $ps > .10$). However, there was a significant Political orientation \times Cognitive load interaction ($b = .20$, $SE = 0.10$, $t = 2.07$, $p = .040$, 95% CI = [0.01, 0.39]). In keeping with our hypothesis, simple slope analysis revealed that the relationship between political orientation and collective guilt was negative and significant in the control condition ($b = -.35$, $SE = 0.13$, $t = -2.72$, $p = .007$), but not significant under cognitive load ($b = .05$, $SE = 0.14$, $t = 0.34$, $p > .10$). See Figure 2.

Post-Test

An underlying assumption of Study 2 was that conservatives would be more motivated than liberals to down-regulate

collective guilt in response to the story about Guantanamo Bay interrogations because the story would pose a greater moral dilemma for conservatives. We suggested that due to the consideration of different moral foundations (Graham et al., 2009), conservatives are more likely than liberals to reason that protection of their ingroup (Americans) outweighs the harm to the detainees. This assumption was not tested in the main study, and therefore we conducted a post-test to support it.

Fifty-two UMD students who were U.S. citizens (19 men, 33 women, $M_{age} = 20.06$, $SD_{age} = 1.78$) participated in the post-test. They reported their political orientation in the same manner as in the main study (1 = *very liberal* to 7 = *very conservative*) and read the same story about Guantanamo Bay interrogations. They then rated their agreement (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*) with several statements representing different moral judgments of the story. Consistent with our assumption, ideological orientation was positively related to agreement with two statements suggesting that protection of the ingroup may outweigh the harm to others: "Harsh interrogation methods may be acceptable if they yield information that helps protect Americans" ($r = .35$, $p = .012$) and "The government should strive to protect Americans, even at the expense of harming detainees" ($r = .31$, $p = .023$). In addition, political orientation was negatively related to agreement with a statement suggesting that avoidance of harm outweighs other considerations: "Interrogation methods that are harmful to detainees are unacceptable under any circumstances" ($r = -.32$, $p = .023$).

Discussion

The findings of Study 2 support the hypothesis that cognitive load would attenuate the relationship between political orientation and collective guilt. The findings of the post-test are consistent with our reasoning that group behaviors which are beneficial to the ingroup but harmful to others pose a greater moral dilemma for political conservatives than for liberals due to the consideration of different moral foundations (Graham et al., 2009). In combination, the findings are consistent with our underlying assumption that political orientation is associated with a motivation to regulate collective guilt, and that the regulation of collective guilt is a resource demanding motivated reasoning process. More generally, Studies 1 and 2 support the hypotheses derived from CET (Kruglanski et al., 2012) regarding the regulation of collective guilt with two different indicators for the importance of regulating guilt.

Study 3

The main aim of Study 3 was to replicate Study 1 in a different context, namely that of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. The Israeli–Palestinian conflict has been ongoing for decades, and is considered a prototypical case of an intractable conflict (Bar-Tal, 1998). One characteristic of intractable conflicts is

that they play a central role in the everyday lives of the involved societies and their members (Bar-Tal, 2013). This is somewhat different from the U.S. fight against terrorism, which, although important from a national perspective, most likely did not play a central role in the everyday lives of American university students at the time of the study. When the conflict plays a major role in the group's everyday life, justifying harm to the outgroup might become habitual. Hence, it is interesting to explore whether the down-regulation of collective guilt would be dependent on mental resource availability as predicted by CET (Kruglanski et al., 2012) even under these conditions.

In addition to replicating Study 1 in a different context, we introduced a small methodological change in Study 3. In Studies 1 and 2, participants in the "no load" condition were simply told to do nothing for a short while after reporting their group identification or political orientation and before receiving the information about their ingroup's harmful behavior. These participants may have been less distracted from their earlier responses than participants in the cognitive load condition, who spent the same time completing another task (i.e., rehearsing the nine-digit string). Hence, participants in the control condition may have been more motivated and/or able to maintain consistency between their responses to the early and later measures. This could be an alternative explanation to the significant relationship between collective guilt and group identification or political orientation found in the control condition but not the cognitive load condition. To rule out this possibility, control participants in Study 3 were given the same task as participants in the cognitive load condition, but were asked to retain a string of three digits instead of nine digits in the high cognitive load condition.

Method

Participants. One hundred and forty-three (103 women, 40 men) Jewish Israeli undergraduate students from the University of Haifa participated in the study in exchange for partial course credit or payment of 20 NIS (approximately US\$5.50). Age range was 20 to 37 years ($M = 24.54$, $SD = 3.37$). Gender had no effect on collective guilt scores and did not interact with any of the other independent variables.

Procedure and measures. The procedure was similar to that of Study 1. At the beginning of the study participants filled out an eight-item measure of their identification as Israelis ($\alpha = .91$), which had been used in previous research in Israel (Roccas et al., 2006). A sample item is "Being Israeli is an important part of my identity" (1 = *completely disagree*, 7 = *completely agree*). After completing this measure, participants were randomly assigned to the high or low cognitive load conditions. The high load condition was identical to Study 1. The low load condition was identical to the high load condition, except that participants were asked to memorize a string of three digits instead of nine digits.

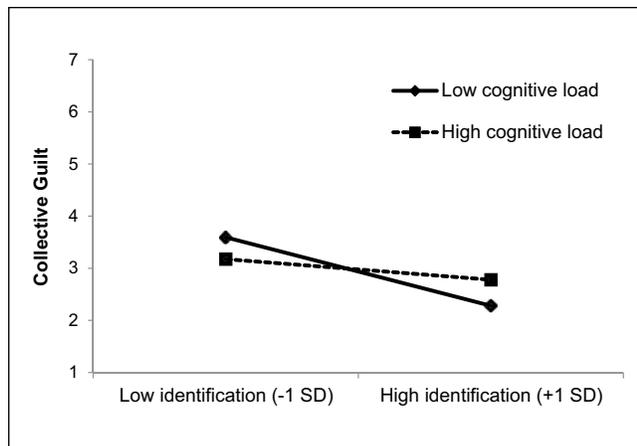


Figure 3. Moderation of the relationship between group identification and collective guilt by cognitive load among Israeli Jews.

Next, participants were shown a video segment that contained two television news stories taken from Channel 2 news, which is the highest rated news show in Israel. The stories described incidents in which Israeli soldiers had mistreated Palestinians who had been detained and posed no threat to the soldiers. Some of the incidents involved infliction of physical pain, though most of them involved forcing the detainees to perform humiliating acts that were not physically painful. Participants then completed a Collective Guilt scale similar to the one used in Study 1. The scale included 10 items ($\alpha = .96$) adapted to the Israeli–Palestinian context (e.g., “I feel guilty for what we Israelis do to the Palestinians”).

Results

As in Study 1, participants’ levels of identification as Israelis were quite high ($M = 5.70$, $SD = 1.10$). Therefore, we expected a negative relationship between group identification and collective guilt when mental resources were available (Klein et al., 2011). To test our hypothesis that cognitive load would moderate the relationship between group identification and collective guilt, we centered the identification ratings and then regressed collective guilt on cognitive load condition (1 = *high load*, -1 = *low load*), identification, and their interaction. The analysis revealed a significant main effect of group identification on collective guilt ($b = -.43$, $SE = 0.11$, $t = -3.76$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [-0.65, -0.20]). However, in keeping with our hypothesis, this effect was qualified by a significant Cognitive load \times Identification interaction ($b = .23$, $SE = 0.11$, $t = 2.02$, $p = .046$, 95% CI = [0.01, 0.45]). Simple slope analysis revealed that, as hypothesized, the relationship between group identification and collective guilt was negative and significant in the low cognitive load condition ($b = -.66$, $SE = 0.15$, $t = -4.37$, $p < .001$), but not significant under high cognitive load ($b = -.20$, $SE = 0.17$, $t = -1.16$, $p > .10$). See Figure 3.

Discussion

The findings of Study 3 replicate those of Study 1 in a different context, demonstrating again that collective guilt is a function of an interaction between the motivation to regulate guilt, as reflected in group identification, and cognitive resource availability. This is consistent with the hypotheses derived from CET (Kruglanski et al., 2012) and provides additional support to the proposition that the regulation of collective guilt through reappraisal is a motivated reasoning process.

Study 3 was conducted in the context of an intractable conflict, which is very central to the lives of members of the involved societies (Bar-Tal, 2013). We suspected that in such a context, justifying harm to the rival group might become habitual. However, our findings suggest that even in the context of an intractable conflict, the regulation of collective guilt may still be a resource demanding process. Nevertheless, our findings also indicate that the overall levels of collective guilt in Study 3 ($M = 2.95$, $SD = 1.43$) were considerably lower than those observed in Study 1 ($M = 4.14$, $SD = 1.21$) and in Study 2 ($M = 4.52$, $SD = 1.15$). This suggests that collective guilt and its regulation may be a function not only of individuals’ motivations and cognitive resources, but also of certain aspects of the social context. In Study 4, we sought to investigate the role of one aspect of the social context, which we considered especially likely to affect the regulation of collective guilt, namely the availability of justifications.

Study 4

In Studies 1 to 3, we demonstrated that the regulation of collective guilt is a function of goal importance and resource availability, which, according to CET, constitute the driving force of motivated reasoning (Kruglanski et al., 2012). In Study 4, we added one factor comprising the restraining force, namely the demands of the activity or the ease or difficulty of arriving at conclusions that are consistent with one’s motivations. Specifically, availability of information that can be used to justify harmful behavior toward an out-group can reduce the difficulty of down-regulating collective guilt. Hence, in keeping with CET, we predicted that when justifications for the ingroup’s harmful behavior are made available, the regulation of collective guilt will be less susceptible to the effects of resource depletion by cognitive load than in the absence of such justifications.

To test this hypothesis, we needed a context in which the baseline availability of justifications for the ingroup’s harmful behavior would be low, so that it could be manipulated experimentally. We conducted the study in Italy and confronted participants with information about the negative treatment of immigrants in Italian society. This is an issue with which most Italian university students are expected to be less familiar than Israelis with the Israeli–Palestinian conflict or even Americans with terrorist suspect interrogations.

Hence, we expected that the down-regulation of collective guilt in the face of such information would be a difficult and demanding activity for those motivated to do so, unless justifications for the harmful behavior were provided by the experimenters. More specifically, we assessed group identification as an indicator of the motivation to down-regulate collective guilt and manipulated cognitive load and availability of justifications. In the absence of available justifications, we expected to observe the same identification by load interaction as in Studies 1 and 3. However, when justifications were made available we expected that cognitive load would no longer have an effect on collective guilt and would not interact with identification.

In addition to manipulating the availability of justifications, we added a dependent measure of collective shame to Study 4. Shame and guilt are both self-conscious emotions that arise following acknowledgment of a transgression by the self or ingroup. Although often correlated, research indicates that they are distinguishable. While guilt is associated with acceptance of responsibility for a specific act, shame is focused on the implications of the act for the individual's character and reputation (Brown et al., 2008; Tangney, 1991; Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007). At the collective level, the concern for character and reputation may have implications for individuals' social identity, and therefore may be associated with group identification. Johns, Schmader, and Lickel (2005) found that collective shame and group identification were positively related when a prejudicial act by an ingroup member was perceived as highly negative, but negatively related when the act was judged as less conclusively negative. They concluded that those who are highly identified with the group are motivated to justify negative acts by ingroup members, but can only do so when the event is ambiguous and open to interpretation. This is consistent with our predictions, based on CET, that group identification would increase the motivation to down-regulate collective shame by reappraisal, and that the likelihood of such down-regulation would depend on resource availability and the difficulty (or ease) of arriving at the desired conclusions. Hence, we advance similar hypotheses regarding collective shame and guilt. Specifically, we predicted that cognitive load would attenuate the relationship between group identification and collective guilt and shame, but only when reappraisal requires resources, that is, only when justifications for the group's harmful behavior are not immediately available.

Method

Participants. Two hundred undergraduate students from the University of Milano–Bicocca participated in the study in exchange for partial course credit. Three participants who indicated that their nationality was not Italian were excluded, leaving a final sample size of 197 (75 men, 122 women). Age range was 19 to 44 years ($M = 23.85$,

$SD = 3.31$). Gender had no effect on collective guilt and shame scores and did not interact with any of the other independent variables.

Procedure and measures. At the beginning of the study, participants filled out a six-item measure of the centrality of their Italian identity ($\alpha = .79$; Cameron, 2004), which has been used in previous research in Italy (Castano, Yzerbyt, Paladino, & Sacchi, 2002; Sacchi, Carnaghi, Castellini, & Colombo, 2013). A sample item is “Being Italian is an important reflection of who I am.” Next, we introduced a manipulation of justification availability. Half of the participants were randomly assigned to the “justifications available” condition. These participants read an ostensible newspaper editorial about the roots of the “authentic” Italian identity, which, according to the article, had a strong basis in Catholic Christianity as well as the cultural traditions of the country. There was no direct reference to immigrants in the article, but it implied that those who do not follow said traditions were not quite “authentic” Italians. Therefore, the information could later be used as justification for the mistreatment of immigrants. The other half of the participants were asked to read an unrelated ostensible newspaper article about nutrition. Then, we manipulated cognitive load in the same manner as in Studies 1 and 2 and orthogonally to the manipulation of justification availability.

Following the two manipulations, all participants read another ostensible newspaper story, which described violations of human rights in the treatment of immigrants in Italy. Finally, we assessed participants' experiences of collective guilt and shame in response to the story. Collective guilt was assessed using an Italian version of the measure used in Studies 1 through 3. Preliminary analysis indicated that one of the items in the Italian version had a low correlation with the total score ($r = .38$). Hence, we decided to exclude this item from the scale. The nine remaining items had a reliability of $\alpha = .93$. Collective shame was assessed using a measure comprised of 11 items ($\alpha = .92$) adapted from Brown et al. (2008). A sample item is “I feel shame when I think about the way Italians behave toward immigrants” (1 = *completely disagree*, 7 = *completely agree*).

Results

Our prediction was that the relationship between group identification and collective guilt or shame would be a function of the availability of justifications and mental resources. To test this prediction, we centered the identification ratings and then regressed collective guilt and shame on justification availability condition (1 = *available*, -1 = *not available*), cognitive load condition (1 = *cognitive load*, -1 = *no load*), identification, the three possible two-way interactions, and the three-way interaction. Main effects were entered at Step 1, two-way interactions at Step 2, and the three-way interaction at Step 3.

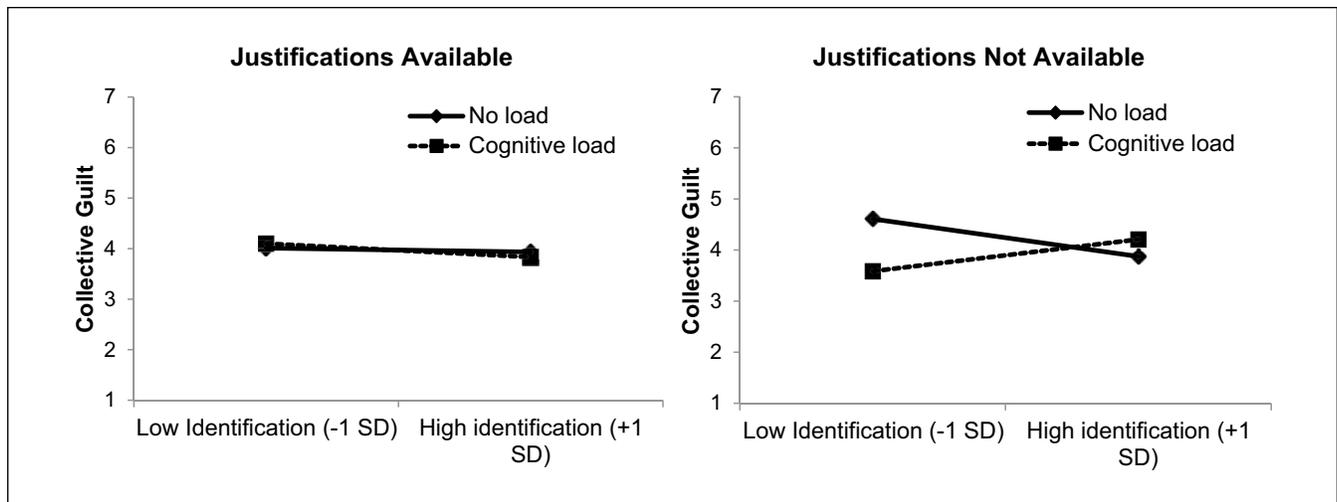


Figure 4. Moderation of the relationship between group identification and collective guilt by cognitive load and availability of justifications among Italians.

The results for collective guilt revealed no significant effects apart from a marginally significant three-way interaction of Identification \times Cognitive load \times Justifications availability ($b = -.19$, $SE = 0.10$, $t = -1.96$, $p = .052$, 95% CI = $[-0.39, 0.002]$). Further probing of this interaction indicated that as in Studies 1 through 3, the two-way Identification \times Cognitive load interaction was significant when no justifications were available ($b = .34$, $SE = 0.13$, $t = 2.54$, $p = .012$, 95% CI = $[0.08, 0.60]$). However, in keeping with the hypothesis, this interaction was not significant when justifications were available ($b = -.05$, $SE = 0.15$, $t = -0.32$, $p > .10$, 95% CI = $[-0.33, 0.24]$).

Simple slope analysis of the interaction obtained when justifications were not available indicated that, in keeping with Studies 1 and 3, the relationship between identification and collective guilt was negative and significant in the absence of cognitive load ($b = -.37$, $SE = 0.18$, $t = -2.04$, $p = .043$), but not significant under cognitive load ($b = .31$, $SE = 0.20$, $t = 1.58$, $p > .10$). Conversely, when justifications were available, none of the simple slopes were significant. See Figure 4.

The results for collective shame were highly similar. No effects were significant apart from the three-way interaction of Identification \times Cognitive load \times Justifications availability ($b = -.21$, $SE = 0.09$, $t = 2.34$, $p = .021$, 95% CI = $[-0.39, -0.03]$). Further probing of this interaction indicated that the two-way Identification \times Cognitive load interaction was significant when no justifications were available ($b = .30$, $SE = 0.12$, $t = 2.40$, $p = .018$, 95% CI = $[0.05, 0.54]$). However, in keeping with the hypothesis, this interaction was not significant when justifications were available ($b = -.13$, $SE = 0.13$, $t = -0.96$, $p > .10$, 95% CI = $[-0.39, 0.14]$). Simple slope analysis of the interaction obtained when justifications were available indicated that, as in the case of collective guilt, the relationship between identification and collective shame was

negative and significant in the absence of cognitive load ($b = -.40$, $SE = 0.17$, $t = -2.33$, $p = .021$), but not significant under cognitive load ($b = .20$, $SE = 0.18$, $t = 1.10$, $p > .10$). When justifications were available, none of the simple slopes were significant. See Figure 5.

Discussion

Study 4 replicated the findings of Studies 1 and 3, showing that cognitive load attenuated the negative relationship between group identification and collective guilt. Study 4 demonstrated that a similar pattern is observed in the case of collective shame. Moreover, Study 4 demonstrated that when justifications for the negative behavior are immediately available, the regulation of collective guilt and shame is no longer susceptible to the effects of cognitive load. The latter finding indicates that the regulation of collective guilt and shame is not only a function of individuals' motivations and mental resources, but also of the degree to which the available information is conducive to the desired regulation goal.

Taken together, the four studies demonstrate that the regulation of collective guilt and shame is dependent on three factors, which are expected to affect motivated reasoning according to CET: (a) the importance of the goal of regulating guilt and shame (as reflected in group identification and ideological orientation), (b) the availability of mental resource, and (c) the ease or difficulty of the regulation activity in light of the available information (Kruglanski et al., 2012). This supports the central proposition of the present work that the regulation of collective guilt and shame by reappraisal is a motivated reasoning process. In what follows, we discuss some of the implications of these findings.

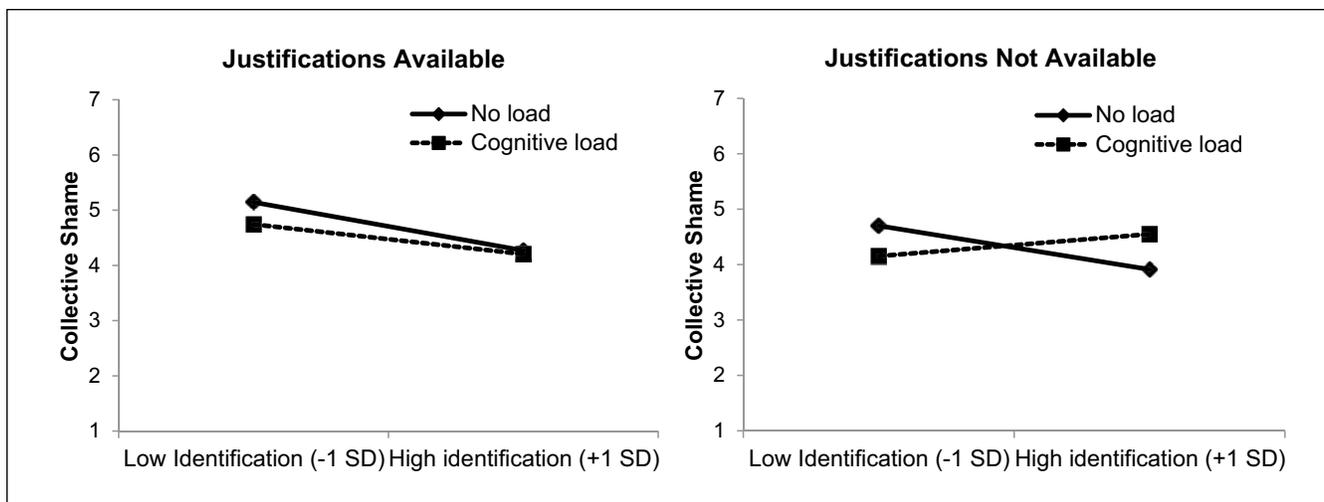


Figure 5. Moderation of the relationship between group identification and collective shame by cognitive load and availability of justifications among Italians.

General Discussion

The aim of the present research was to demonstrate that the regulation of collective guilt and shame by reappraisal involves a process of motivated reasoning, in which the goal is emotion regulation. In a series of four studies, we were able to demonstrate that collective guilt and shame are a function of two factors that comprise the driving force of motivated cognition, namely goal importance and resource availability, and one factor that is part of the restraining force, namely task demands (Kruglanski et al., 2012). The findings regarding goal importance and resource availability were replicated in three different contexts of intergroup relations and with two different indicators of the importance of regulating collective guilt (group identification and ideological orientation).

The reasoning behind the present research combines insights from the domains of motivated cognition (Kruglanski et al., 2012), emotion regulation and reappraisal (Gross, 2002, 2008), moral disengagement (Bandura, 1999; Castano, 2008; Leidner et al., 2010), and intergroup relations. By integrating these diverse lines of research, we were able to provide new insights regarding the factors that underlie the regulation of collective moral emotions, and by implication, moral conduct in the context of intergroup conflicts. When experienced, collective guilt and to some extent shame can facilitate behaviors intended to repair the harm and compensate the outgroup (Brown & Čehajić, 2008; Brown et al., 2008; Mari et al., 2010; Zebel et al., 2008), which can improve intergroup relations. The absence of such emotions, in contrast, can enable the continuation of harmful acts toward the outgroup and increase intergroup hostility. Hence, the findings of the present research suggest that motivational and cognitive processes occurring at the individual level can potentially affect intergroup relations through their effect on emotion regulation processes.

Moreover, the findings of Study 4 suggest an additional way in which individual and collective processes may interact in relating to the regulation of moral emotions. In this study, justifications for the harmful behavior were provided by the experimenters. However, outside of the laboratory, the availability of justifications can often result from social processes. Group members often share beliefs about the situation of their group (Bar-Tal, 2000). Such beliefs may, at times, provide justification for a social order in which some groups enjoy greater advantages than others (Jost, Kay, & Thorisdottir, 2009; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). More specifically, in situations of intractable intergroup conflict, group members develop shared belief systems that allow them to cope with the challenges that the conflict poses, and at the same time provide justifications for the group's actions in the conflict. Because these beliefs are widely shared and serve group members' needs, societies invest great efforts in disseminating and imparting them to their members. Consequently, these shared beliefs often dominate the social discourse (Bar-Tal, 2013). Hence, the availability of justifications for harmful behavior toward outgroups can be a function of large-scale social processes. The present findings suggest that high availability of justifications for harmful group behaviors not only allows such behaviors to continue, but also makes the down-regulation of moral emotions in response to them less demanding. Future research could further investigate the role of social processes in facilitating the down-regulation of collective guilt and shame through the availability of justifications.

It is worth acknowledging that the attenuation of the relationship between collective moral emotions and group identification or political orientation under cognitive load might reflect not only disruption of the down-regulation of collective guilt and shame among high identifiers and conservatives, but also a reduction in collective guilt and shame among low identifiers and liberals. There are a number of

reasons that cognitive load might lead to reduced collective guilt and shame. For example, research indicates that the experience of emotion itself demands cognitive resources and is reduced by cognitive load (Kron, Schul, Cohen, & Hassin, 2010). In addition, cognitive load could have facilitated down-regulation of collective guilt and shame through distraction (Gross, 2008). However, neither of these processes should have been moderated by group identification or political orientation. Hence, we might also consider the possibility that among low identifiers and liberals, cognitive load disrupted a motivated reasoning process aimed at up-regulating collective guilt and shame. Recent studies have demonstrated that individuals may seek to up-regulate emotions, including aversive ones, to the extent that they believe that these emotions are useful to their goals (Tamir, Bigman, Rhodes, Salerno, & Schreier, 2015; Tamir, Ford, & Gilliam, 2013). Other research suggests that individuals may challenge their group's norms if they believe that the group's conduct is harmful to the collective (Packer, 2007; Packer & Chasteen, 2010). Because collective guilt can motivate reparative behavior (Brown & Čehajić, 2008; Brown et al., 2008; Mari et al., 2010; Zebel et al., 2008), individuals who seek to improve their group's conduct may be motivated to up-regulate collective guilt even if it is aversive and even if it poses challenges to the group. To the extent that motivated reasoning is used to up-regulate guilt in such cases, CET predicts that it would be disrupted by cognitive load (Kruglanski et al., 2012). This possible interpretation of our findings is therefore consistent with CET.

The above reasoning suggests directions for future research that could also help address one major limitation of the present studies, namely that we inferred the motivation to regulate collective guilt and shame from distal indicators, that is, group identification and ideological orientation, and did not assess or manipulate it directly. Although there are good reasons to believe that group identification and ideological orientation affect the motivation to regulate collective guilt and shame, a stronger test of our proposition that such regulation is a motivated reasoning process might be provided by studies that manipulate the motivation to regulate directly. If individuals up- or down-regulate emotions as a function of the emotions' usefulness to their goals (Tamir et al., 2015; Tamir et al., 2013), then the motivation to regulate collective guilt and shame can be manipulated by varying their perceived usefulness. For example, if individuals can be convinced that experiencing collective guilt and shame can be beneficial (e.g., to improve future group conduct) or detrimental (e.g., creating cleavages within the ingroup), then they may regulate their emotions accordingly. Under such conditions, it should be possible to test whether the regulation of collective guilt and shame is a function of factors expected to affect motivated reasoning.

In the past few years, there have been considerable advances in research on the role of emotion regulation in intergroup conflict (see reviews in Halperin, 2014; Halperin

& Pliskin, 2015). Most of this research has focused on the effects of interventions intended to utilize emotion regulation as a means of advancing conciliatory attitudes and intentions. The present research suggests that even in the absence of external intervention, individuals engage in emotion regulation in situations of intergroup conflict, and this may at times have adverse consequences for intergroup relations. It follows that any interventions intended to improve intergroup relations, which are based on emotion regulation, need to carefully consider their potential effects on and interaction with already ongoing emotion regulation processes.

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Supplemental Material

The online supplemental material is available at <http://pspb.sagepub.com/supplemental>.

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