More than a feeling: strategic emotion expression in intergroup conflicts
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General Introduction
"We, sir - we - are the diverse America who are alarmed and anxious that your new administration will not protect us, our planet, our children, our parents, or defend us and uphold our inalienable right" (Mele & Healy, 2016). The actor Brandon Victor Dixon received a lot of attention when he addressed these words to United States Vice President-elect Mike Pence at the end of a performance of the musical Hamilton. It appears that Dixon chose to communicate the emotions – feeling alarmed and anxious - of the diverse America to send a powerful message, probably not only to Mike Pence personally, but to the entire new administration and maybe even the American society in general. This is precisely what lies at the heart of this dissertation: I investigate the communicative function of emotions by looking at how and why emotions are expressed. In particular, I am interested in whether people who experience injustice or disadvantages because they belong to a particular group express their emotions in a strategic manner on behalf of their group. Members of disadvantaged groups should have a particular interest in changing the status quo to improve their situation, for example by speaking up against injustices in front of the antagonistic out-group or by winning support from bystander groups (i.e., third parties). In this dissertation, I look at whether members of disadvantaged groups use emotion expression to achieve these goals. In other words, I investigate whether emotions in intergroup conflicts can be expressed strategically. In a broader context, this should help us to understand better the functionality of expressed emotions and extend our knowledge regarding strategic considerations to the emotion domain.

**Influencing Audiences: The Need for Strategy**

Conflicts in which one group inflicts harm or injustice upon another group are as old as humankind and range from large-scale conflicts between nations to disputes between two families, and may manifest themselves in violent clashes, heated debates, or cancelled negotiations. Irrespective of its scale and form, it is often difficult for disadvantaged or weaker groups to overcome their situation without concessions from the antagonistic out-group or support from third parties, thus the interaction with those groups can be crucial for the
fate of the group. Consequently, how members of the disadvantaged groups behave should not only be guided by their group’s norms and ideology but also be influenced by whom they are interacting with, namely their audience, as proposed in the Social Identity Model of Deindividuation Effects (SIDE; Reicher, Spears, & Postmes, 1995). In other words, actions on behalf of one’s group are not only guided by its norms but may be tailored to the norms and expectations of an audience. This implies that actions become to a certain extent intentional or strategic as the effects actions are likely to have on an audience are taken into account (Klein, Spears, & Reicher, 2007). While such strategic considerations have so far been investigated with respect to more overt behavioral actions, I set out to investigate whether emotion expression might also be strategic. The reasoning behind this idea is that how an audience sees and acts towards a group is not only influenced by its deeds but also by the emotions it expresses (de Vos, van Zomeren, Gordijn, & Postmes, 2013; Kamans, van Zomeren, Gordijn, & Postmes, 2014). One advantage of using emotion expression instead of more explicit means (such as verbal accusations and demands or actions) to communicate on behalf of the group is its plausible deniability: While goals and motives hardly can be denied when voiced explicitly and fought for, they are arguably more subtly and indirectly communicated through emotion expression. More so, expressed emotions are often seen as sincere by coming from the heart, and thus far from being used strategically. Although expressed emotions could be perceived negatively or as inappropriate by an audience, yet actual punishment is surely unlikely and would be hard to justify. Hence, we expect that strategic emotion expression will encounter fewer restrictions than strategic actions due to plausible deniability and subtlety and should therefore be a particularly powerful tool to communicate in-group relevant goals to an audience.

**The Functionality of Emotions in Conflicts**

When researchers began to investigate the functionality of emotions in intergroup conflicts they first looked at the functionality of experienced emotions. Typically, members of the same group experience the same emotions...
about something that happens to their group and those who are highly identified with the group experience them more strongly (Smith, Seger, & Mackie, 2007). Importantly, emotions determine actions and thus may decisively influence the cause of an intergroup conflict. Two emotions that are often experienced by disadvantaged groups in conflicts are anger and fear (Kamans, Otten, & Gordijn, 2011). Experiencing anger typically leads to confronting the out-group (Kamans et al., 2011; Mackie, Devos, & Smith, 2000; Yzerbyt, Dumont, Wigboldus, & Gordijn, 2003). Anger can motivate constructive approaches to conflict resolution (Tagar, Federico, & Halperin, 2011), but only in the absence of more destructive emotions such as hatred (Halperin, Russell, Dweck, & Gross, 2011). Such positive effects of anger match the finding that experienced anger, despite leading to initial aggression, often results in attempts to reconcile and improve the relationship (Fischer & Roseman, 2007). In contrast to anger, experiencing fear leads to avoidance (Kamans et al., 2011).

While this shows the functionality of experienced emotions, recent research demonstrated that expressed emotions in conflict can be also functional. That is, emotions, when expressed, can influence how others feel about the expressing party (i.e., affective reaction) or view the expressing party and think about its motives (i.e., inferences). This in turn can influence how others behave towards those who express their emotions, and suggests that expressed emotions can serve as social information (Van Kleef, 2009). In other words, reactions to expressed emotions go beyond the accurate detection of which emotion is expressed (Bänziger, Grandjean, & Scherer, 2009) and encompass reasoning about why it is expressed.

Research focusing on the interpersonal (rather than the intergroup) level has shown that when someone expresses anger others assume he or she is of high status (Tiedens, Ellsworth, & Mesquita, 2000; Tiedens, 2001) and are more willing to make concessions or act conform (Van Kleef & Côté, 2014). Expressing sadness on the other hand leads others to infer low status (Tiedens et al., 2000; Tiedens, 2001) and to offer support (Van Kleef & Côté, 2014). Importantly, recent
research findings suggest that expressed emotions are also used as information in the intergroup context. De Vos and colleagues (2013) showed that if members of a disadvantaged group expressed anger members of the out-group experienced more empathy, which in turn motivated constructive action intentions. These findings tie in nicely with the constructive effects of anger experience (Halperin et al., 2011; Tagar et al., 2011), and support the idea that anger may have beneficial effects on the course of a conflict. It is however important to note that these beneficial effects of expressed anger may be restricted: If anger is not expressed *purely* but together with contempt (de Vos et al., 2013), or if a group’s disadvantaged position is seen as deserved (Solak, Shuman, Tagar, Cohen-Chen, & Halperin, 2017), it leads to rather destructive responses. Another factor that was shown to influence the reactions to anger is the extent to which the expressing group holds power: Kamans and colleagues (2014) showed that third parties were likely to legitimize the use of violence if groups of high power but not low power expressed anger. If groups were of low power, third parties were more likely to grant legitimization if fear was expressed.

In summary, research conducted in both the intergroup and the interpersonal context suggests that sadness and fear are usually associated with low power or status, in other words lower control over the situation, and are likely to enlist support. Contempt on the other hand seems to lead to rather destructive reactions. Lastly, anger has a somewhat ambiguous role and – depending on the context – may evoke constructive or destructive reactions.

There is strong evidence that emotion experience and expression serve social functions in an intergroup context and can contribute to the escalation or resolution of conflicts. We could also say that expressed emotions have a *communicative* function as they provide audiences with information about a group’s motives and goals. Importantly, communication is a bilateral matter but so far research has focused on the effects of expressed emotions on the perceiving side (i.e., the audience). It is my goal to complement this by investigating *how emotions are actually expressed* in intergroup conflicts. That is, I investigate
whether expressing parties (in the current dissertation disadvantaged groups) take the effects of their expressed emotions on an audience into account and consequently tailor their expression strategically, similar to how actions can be performed strategically.

**Putting Strategy into Emotion Expression**

What do I mean by strategic emotion expression? The key idea is that emotion expression is tailored to influence an audience. An assumption behind this reasoning is that people *know* (or think they know) the effects that the expression of specific emotions will have on their audience. Further, strategic emotion expression should consist of two components: Firstly, emotion expression may differ from emotion experience. Indeed this is necessary in so far as expression can be adjusted to a present audience. Secondly, emotion expression should be associated with a goal, which is relevant to the in-group in front of a particular audience. Thus, I expect that the association between expressed emotions and such goals is stronger than the association between the original experienced emotions and such goals. Concretely and based on research on the effects of expressed emotions (de Vos et al., 2013; Kamans et al., 2014; Van Kleef & Côté, 2014), I expect that sadness and fear should be expressed to win support from a third party and contempt to distance from an antagonistic out-group. As anger was shown to have ambiguous effects I expect that it may be associated with either constructive or destructive goals, probably depending on the context.

Evidence that emotions may be intentionally changed stems to a large part from research on the regulation of *experienced* emotions. Importantly, emotion regulation not only occurs to make us feel better but also for us to experience emotions that are considered *useful* in a given situation (Tamir, 2009). More recently, it was proposed that group-based emotions may also be regulated in a similar way (Goldenberg, Halperin, van Zomeren, & Gross, 2016). This supports our idea that emotions can be adjusted for particular purposes, whereas focusing on solely experienced emotions it sheds little light on the
communicative function of expressed emotions.

That expression may differ from experience has, for example, been investigated in the context of emotional labor in service roles where expression primarily has to meet customers’ expectations (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). Evidence from non-work related contexts stems from research by Andrade and Ho (2009) who demonstrated that participants who had been treated unfairly in a dictator game expressed more anger to their opponent than they experienced, and did so with the goal to receive a better offer in subsequent games. An association between emotion expression and goals (or motives) has further been demonstrated by research on gender differences in emotion expression, which showed that the same emotion may be expressed for different reasons: While women reported to express anger for cathartic reasons men did so with the intention to appear in control (Timmers, Fischer, & Manstead, 1998). Further, women in traditional relationships were shown to experience anger to the same extent as their male partners but to refrain from expressing it, arguably because they take negative social consequences more into account (Fischer & Evers, 2011). Taken together, these examples suggest that emotion expression does not necessarily reflect experience and may be used to communicate specific goals or intentions. However, to date we know little about whether similar effects also occur at the intergroup level. Further, research often seems to take only one audience into account while we are interested in whether emotion expression and associated goals within the same conflict may differ depending on different audiences, namely antagonist out-groups and third parties.

**What Factors Influence Emotion Expression?**

One goal in the exploration of strategic emotion expression is to uncover factors that influence strategy. So first, I aim to investigate the two components underlying strategic emotion expression in Chapter 2 and in Chapters 3 and 4 to test the factors that may influence strategy.

Strategy should strongly depend on who a group is communicating with, that is, who the audience is. Two often relevant audiences mentioned before are
antagonist out-groups and (initially) uninvolved third parties; but also fellow in-group members can be considered an audience. If we focus on the former two as audiences, the relations between in-group and antagonist out-group and in-group and third party differ substantially as the out-group can be seen as a perpetrator while the third party can maybe be mobilized as a potential ally (Saab, Tausch, Spears, & Cheung, 2015; Thomas & Louis, 2014). Thus, the goals pursued in the communication with these two groups should differ and consequently so should emotion expression. Both sadness and fear have been previously linked to having little control over a situation and enlisting support from third parties (Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003; Kamans et al., 2014) while contempt could be used to signal a damaged relationship to the out-group (Fischer & Roseman, 2007).

I thus decided to base large parts of my investigations of strategic emotion expression on a three-cornered conflict by investigating emotions expressed towards an antagonist out-group and a third party. Not only does this seem like a more accurate representation of many conflicts than the simple binary of in-group and out-group (Subašić, Reynolds, & Turner, 2008), but it also allows us to investigate how different emotions are used to pursue different goals within the same conflict.

Of course, the relations between in-group, out-group and third party are not always the same but depend on various factors such as the extent to which each group holds power or changes its opinion and interests. Those factors influence the dynamics within a conflict and should thus also influence goals. In particular, in Chapter 3 I chose to investigate how the opinion and power of the third party influence whether groups strategically express sadness and fear to seek support of this third party. Both third party stance and power affect the relations between groups by affecting the likelihood that the in-group can win (effective) support. In Chapter 4 I then investigate how support from fellow in-group members and identification with one’s group can affect emotion expression. Thus, here I focus on factors that affect the ties of an individual with one’s group and can thus affect the willingness to express emotions on behalf of it.
Overview of the Empirical Chapters

Chapter 2. Inspired by research on strategic actions (Klein et al., 2007; Reicher et al., 1995) and effects of emotion expression on audiences (de Vos et al., 2013; Kamans et al., 2014), I set out to investigate whether emotions in intergroup conflicts can be expressed strategically to pursue in-group relevant goals. The goal of Chapter 2 was to explore the previously introduced two components of strategic emotion expression; namely that expression may differ from experience and that emotion expression should be used to communicate in-group relevant goals to an audience. As such, Chapter 2 lays the foundation for our research on strategic emotion expression.

Using a three-cornered conflict, I investigated whether members of a disadvantaged group play up sadness and fear expression (in comparison to experience) in the communication with the third party with the goal to enlist support. In contrast, I expected that contempt would be played up in the communication with the out-group to communicate that the relationship is beyond repair.

Concretely, I tested these ideas in two studies, in which we introduced a conflict between international and Dutch students. In this conflict, international students (disadvantaged in-group) were confronted with a proposal for higher tuition fees solely for international students allegedly written by Dutch students (antagonistic out-group). A University Committee tasked to respond to the proposal served as the powerful and so far undecided third party. Creating a conflict rather than testing predictions in an existing conflict allowed to fully control power and stance of the groups involved in the conflict (i.e., in-group and out-group had low power while the third party was powerful; third party was undecided). In Study 1, I tested the first component of strategic emotion expression, namely that expression might differ from experience. The goal of Study 2 was then to replicate and extend findings from Study 1 by investigating whether the expression of sadness and fear predict calling for support and whether the expression of contempt predicts distancing from the out-group.
Chapter 3. Having laid the foundations of strategic emotion expression in Chapter 2, I zoomed in on the finding that sadness and fear (i.e., support-seeking emotions) can be used to call for support from third parties. In particular, I investigated how strategic emotion expression is influenced when key characteristics of the third party change, namely its power and stance. Changes in these two characteristics shift the dynamics between all groups involved in the conflict and should affect the likelihood of winning third party support and how effective this would be in overcoming the in-group's disadvantaged position. Consequently, I expected this to influence the need of expressing emotions strategically in order to communicate need for support.

If a third party tends to favor the opinion of one of the two groups in conflict I expected that it is no longer seen as an independent entity but as being closer to the favored group. In other words, favoring one over the other group evokes the perception of a common identity (Gaertner, Dovidio, Anastasio, Bachman, & Rust, 1993). How would this affect the strategic expression of support-seeking emotions with the goal to enlist support? I expected that while support from an in-group favoring third party might be most desired, winning it should require least strategy. If the third party on the other hand favor the out-group much more is at stake: The chances of winning support are low, thus more strategy should be required. At the same time a third party favoring the out-group may be distrusted, possibly reflected in less strategic expression of emotions. In Chapter 3, I investigated how both stance in favor of the out-group and in favor of the in-group affect strategic emotion expression by manipulating it in two scenario conflicts and measuring it in an actual conflict.

Arguably, third party stance alone is not decisive for a disadvantaged group to seek its support but it does matter whether it has the power to change the situation for the better. Thus, in the final study of Chapter 3, I investigated the effects of third party power in addition to third party stance.

Interestingly, the results in Chapter 3 showed that third party stance and power do not necessarily affect the extent to which support-seeking emotion
expression is played up or down or is predictive of communicating the in-group's need for support. Instead, an in-group favorable stance primarily seemed to encourage the use of anger expression to seek third party support. This suggests that anger with its conflicting effects is believed to encourage support, arguably by highlighting injustice or by mobilizing action.

**Chapter 4.** The previous chapter showed that members of disadvantaged groups not only use support-seeking emotions to enlist support from a third party but also rely on anger expression if the third party shows an in-group favorable stance. An in-group favorable stance may lead to the experience of opinion support, that is, knowing that others share one's perception of the given situation as unjust (van Zomeren, Spears, Fischer, & Leach, 2004). In Chapter 4, I investigated more closely how experiencing social support from fellow *in-group* members (rather than a third party) can encourage the expression of anger.

Why should anger expression be encouraged? As pointed out before, expressed anger can have positive effects even on an antagonistic audience by eliciting empathy and constructive actions (de Vos et al., 2013) and if fellow in-group members are angry too it may encourage them to take action (van Zomeren et al., 2004). Hence, expressing anger towards both in-group and out-group members may help to overcome disadvantages or tackle unjust treatment. Interestingly, people often do not realize the potential benefits anger may have and typically, it is seen as a purely negative emotion (Hess, 2014); thus people might refrain from expressing it when facing disadvantages. I expect that this effect is particularly pronounced when women experience disadvantages due to their gender (for example in form of sexism). This is because women often fear negative social consequences from expressing anger (Fischer & Evers, 2010; Fischer & Evers, 2011) and associated expressing anger with feminists (Twenge & Zucker, 1999), a label that many women try avoid (Burn, Aboud, & Moyles, 2000). Thus, I expected that women would express less anger about disadvantages that women as a group face than they experience.

I did however expect that not all women would reduce their anger
expression in comparison to experience to the same extent but that this depends on identification with women and feminists (Van Breen, Spears, Kuppens, & de Lemus, 2017). Being highly identified with one’s group generally leads to more intense emotion experience (Smith et al., 2007) and increases the willingness to take action against unjust treatment (Van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008). In the particular context of expressing anger about sexism, I expect that especially higher identification with feminists (as the more politicized identity) would affect anger expression positively while identification with women should – if at all – reduce it. This is because women’s identity is rather concerned with group characteristics such as femininity with which anger is incongruent.

In two studies, I tested whether women express less anger about collective disadvantages than they experience by confronting them with a sexist text. Additionally, I investigated how aspects that influence the relationship between the individual and women as a group affect the expected reduction: In both studies, I tested whether identification with women and feminists moderates the reduction of anger expression and in Study 2 I investigated whether in-group support can prevent the reduction of anger expression.

Summary

It seems as if in recent times, emotions have gained influence in our everyday life: Often, we hear that decisions are emotion-rather than fact-driven and that world leaders express emotions for various reasons, ranging from comforting to intimidating their people and from appeasing to provoking others. With this dissertation, I aim to contribute to our understanding of how emotions function. In particular, I investigate how disadvantaged groups express their emotions to change the status quo. I do so by testing the basic assumption that emotions can be expressed strategically and by investigating how this may be influenced by changing intergroup relations and by changing relations between the individual and the group.

¹ As the research reported in the empirical chapters in this dissertation was developed and conducted in collaboration with others I use “we” instead of “I” throughout the next chapters.