Emotion and Intergroup Relations

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Abstract

When the social identities people develop as members of groups become salient, people perceive the world in terms of the costs and benefits to that salient group membership. This means that events that have no implications for the individual him or herself can be perceived as harmful, beneficial, offensive, complimentary, unfair, or just, for example, depending on the consequences those events have for the group. As a result, perceptions of intergroup events, anticipated intergroup interactions, or ongoing structural intergroup relations elicit group-based emotions—emotions that individuals feel as members of their groups. These emotions influence individuals' perceptions, interpretations, and actions toward their ingroup, relevant outgroups, and any other objects and events that are relevant to group membership. Thus, emotions play a critical role in intergroup relations, energizing desires to cooperate or compete, to retaliate or make peace. Focusing on the role of such emotions has contributed to an understanding of the social nature of emotion, as well as to the antecedents of intergroup conflict and the necessary conditions for its resolution. That understanding will be promoted by further clarification of the nature of social identity, the process of identification, the anticipation of emotions in others, and the time course of emotions, both in general and in the context of group membership in particular.

INTRODUCTION

Group memberships, and the social identities people develop because of them, have a profound influence on the way people experience the world. When social identities become activated, people perceive the world in terms of the costs and benefits to, or values and norms associated with, that salient group membership. This means that events that have no implications for the individual him or herself can be perceived as harmful, beneficial, offensive, complimentary, unfair, or just, depending on the consequences those events have for the group. As a result, perceptions of intergroup events, anticipated intergroup interactions, or more continuous structural intergroup relations elicit *group-based emotions*—emotions that individuals feel on behalf of their groups (Mackie, Maitner, & Smith, 2009; Niedenthal & Brauer, 2011;

Smith, 1993). These emotions influence individuals' perceptions, interpretations, and actions toward members of other groups. Thus, emotions play a critical role in intergroup relations, energizing desires to cooperate or compete, retaliate or make peace.

The way people perceive and interpret events that impact their groups depends first on which social identity has been activated. Different circumstances impel people to consider themselves as members of a particular group at a particular time. Seeing someone sport a rival team sweatshirt, viewing a billboard for one's own company, visiting a foreign country, or walking into a church, synagogue, or Mosque can all subtly or not so subtly activate social identities. However a social identity is activated, it changes the group member's frame for perceiving the world (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987).

Together with situation and context, a group member's perception and emotion also depends on how important or valued that group membership is to his or her sense of identity. Events that threaten the group's welfare, for example, are perceived as harmful, whereas events that advance the group's goals are appraised as beneficial. However, the more individuals value their group membership, the more emotionally consequential events that have positive or negative implications for their groups become. The extent to which individuals identify with or value their groups changes the extremity and direction of how they appraise group-relevant outcomes, in line with the implications those outcomes have for their groups.

Appraisals then elicit specific and distinct emotional reactions which, in turn, elicit specific and distinct behavioral intentions. Perceptions of harm and injustice, for example, elicit feelings of anger, which elicits support for aggressive responses. Whether individuals support group behavior that is aggressive or conciliatory, avoidant or apologetic, or whether they get personally involved in collective action depends on the specific emotional reaction they experience (Mackie, Smith, & Ray, 2008).

Thus, the study of emotion in intergroup relations has allowed for a more nuanced understanding and an improved ability to predict specific outcomes in intergroup interactions (Parkinson, Fischer, & Manstead, 2005). Going beyond the study of prejudice—simple liking or disliking for another group and its members—the study of emotion allows for differential prediction of the five aggressive manifestations first outlined by Gordon Allport in 1954 (from antilocution, to avoidance, discrimination, physical attack, and finally to extermination), as well as predictions about positive intergroup relationships shared by allies, or apology and forgiveness that may improve intergroup relations.

FOUNDATIONAL RESEARCH

Early research on the role of emotion in intergroup relations investigated anxiety as a cause of prejudice and discrimination. Subsequent work on the role of group-based emotion in intergroup relations focused on the impact that social categorization (making a particular social identity salient) and group identification (the extent to which that group membership is important to an individual) had on group-based appraisals of intergroup interactions, as well as how specific appraisals of an intergroup event elicited specific emotions and behavioral responses. Much of this work focused on emotion as a mediating process between perception and action.

Social Categorization and Identification

Thinking about oneself in terms of a particular group membership changes the way people respond to intergroup events. This process of *self*-categorization makes group members feel like relatively interchangeable representatives of the group and take on the goals and characteristics that they think represent the group. As a result, activating a social identity makes individuals view information relevant to that identity as personally relevant, even when it has no direct implications for them as individuals. This personalization of intergroup events translates into emotional reactions. For example, when European participants thought about themselves as Westerners, rather than as Europeans, they reported more fear when reflecting on the events of September 11, 2001, as Westerners could be seen as a direct target of those events, whereas Europeans could not (Dumont, Yzerbyt, Wigboldus, & Gordijn, 2003). Similarly, when local students at the University of Colorado learned about a proposal to increase tuition for residents of other states, they perceived more injustice and felt more anger when categorized as students (who would be negatively affected by the proposal) than when made to think about themselves as Colorado residents (who might be benefited by the extra state income; Gordijn, Yzerbyt, Wigboldus, & Dumont, 2006). These studies, in line with many more, show that identity activation influences the way events are perceived and emotionally experienced.

  Activating a particular social identity also changes general emotional reactions toward other groups. Thinking about oneself as an American or woman, for example, increases anger, fear, and disrespect reported toward Muslims, compared to activating an identity such as "student," an identity that typically places a high value on diversity (Kuppens & Yzerbyt, 2012; Ray, Mackie, & Smith, 2008). Such outcomes show how ongoing, structural relations between groups and an individual's currently activated social identity influences emotional evaluations. However, importantly it also

shows how changing a social identity, and therefore shifting the perceived relation between oneself (as a member of the group) and another group, also changes emotional reactions to that group.

Such emotional responses also depend on the extent to which the perceiver identifies with that group. Thus, social identification influences the general extremity of appraisals, but also biases the appraisal process in group-enhancing or group-defensive ways, with consequences for group-based emotions.

Emotion Processes

When individuals perceive the world through a group lens, they appraise and interpret the environment in line with group goals and outcomes. A group-based appraisal process assesses the goals, motives, and resources of the group in relation to a given social context. Thus, when an outgroup presents some sort of threat to the ingroup, categorized individuals balance the valence of the threat (to the group) in the current context with the ingroup's coping resources in determining whether they feel anger, fear, or contempt for an outgroup. Likewise, when an outgroup presents a more positive interactive opportunity, categorized individuals balance costs and benefits in determining whether they feel envy, respect, gratitude, or satisfaction for the group.

More specifically, people are likely to feel angry on behalf of their groups to the extent that they perceive an event as being harmful or threatening to their group and as representing some sort of injustice. People feel guilt on behalf of their groups when they perceive their own groups' action as harmful to another group and likewise unjust. In contrast, group members feel satisfaction when they perceive that their group has performed an action—either harmful or beneficial—that resulted from a just process and successfully implemented a strategic goal. Group members feel fear when they perceive a threat to their group being made by a particularly strong or powerful entity. In contrast, group members feel envy for groups who are high in status but unlikely to cooperate with the ingroup. Finally, group members feel respect for other groups when they see those groups making concessions to them, or when they believe those groups respect them as well (Iyer & Leach, 2008; Smith, Seger, & Mackie, 2007).

The extremity of people's emotional reactions is predicted by the extremity of their appraisals, which means that highly identified group members tend to feel the most anger and pride, but, because they justify harmful actions taken by the group, they also feel the least guilt (Doosje, Branscombe, Spears, & Manstead, 2006). As one's identity interacts with situational features to elicit more extreme, and possibly more biased appraisals, such appraisals

elicit more extreme emotions and therefore the most support for aggressive behavior, and the least support for conciliatory behavior.

BEHAVIORAL OUTCOMES

One of the benefits of knowing a group's distinct emotional reaction to an event or object is an increase in predictive specificity about the likely nature of intergroup interactions (Mackie *et al.*, 2009). Anger felt for some other group tends to increase support for violently aggressive, harmful, and exclusionary behavior while reducing the likelihood of cooperation or negotiation. Fear felt for some group increases avoidance of the target group and support for the ingroup. Sadness likewise increases avoidance of a threatening group. Contempt or moral disgust motivates both aggressive harm and avoidance, and is associated with dehumanization of target group members, opening up the opportunity for that most extreme form of discrimination—extermination. Thus, experiencing negative outgroup-directed emotions, including anger, fear, and contempt, both creates and maintains conflict (Otten, 2009; Tausch *et al.,* 2011).

   Other emotions, however, play a role in diffusing conflict. Moral emotions such as guilt and shame, as well as anger directed toward one's own group, result in desires to make amends for past atrocities either through apology or direct reparation. Although the contribution of each emotion to this process is debated, the existence of any of the three is likely to reduce support for continued aggression or discrimination. Feelings of respect for another group also promotes more cooperative intergroup behavior, and when respect is perceived as being conveyed by another group, it is often reciprocated.

   When guilt, shame, or ingroup-directed anger motivate apology, this apology may attenuate the outgroups' desire to retaliate, opening the door to forgiveness and reconciliation. However, the process is complicated: how an apology is expressed (whether it is accompanied by a genuine expression of shame or remorse, as opposed to whether it is motivated by fear), how it is perceived, and whether it redresses the core insult or harm caused by the precipitating action, all influence an apology's effectiveness. In other words, the apology needs to be appraised by the target group, and this process follows all of the details outlined above. Nevertheless, it is clear that emotions play a critical mediating role in ameliorating intergroup conflict, transforming it into reconciliation or cooperation (Blatz & Philpot, 2010; Leonard, Mackie, & Smith, 2011).

   Overall, research has established that individuals can and do feel emotion as members of groups. These emotions result from categorization and identification processes. Social identities impact appraisal processes,

eliciting specific emotions and specific behavioral intentions or patterns of support for group action.

CUTTING EDGE RESEARCH

Building on this foundation, more recent work has investigated additional implications of emotion experienced in the context of intergroup relations. Some newer developments have focused on the similar consequences of group-based and individually experienced emotion for a range of cognitive functions. Other research has recently broadened the earlier focus on emotions toward outgroups with greater consideration of group-based emotions toward ingroups as well. In addition, newer work has applied the concept of group-based emotion to the study of ongoing seemingly intractable conflicts and to reactions to terrorist attacks or threats. This cutting edge research demonstrates the very practical benefits of the general theoretical approach.

INFORMATION PROCESSING

Group-based emotional reactions have implications not only for behavioral outcomes but also for a wide range of cognitive functioning. Emotions have been linked to information processing in general, and research on group-based emotions confirms that these feelings also impact the extent to which individuals engage in systematic processing (Rydell *et al.*, 2008). People feeling group-based anger, for example, engage in less systematic processing of subsequently presented information, suggesting that group members may not have the ability to systematically consider proposals to reduce conflict unless or until anger has subsided.

Group-based emotions also impact both risk perception and risk-taking behavior. In the case of intergroup conflict or insult, the more people are feeling fear, the more risk they tend to perceive in the environment and the less risk they take overall. Anger, in contrast, increases risky decision-making and risky action. Such findings shed light on the kinds of decisions countries or leaders or teams may make in the face of threat or offense (Rydell *et al.*, 2008).

Finally, emotions can also shape the explanations individuals make for antagonistic intergroup interactions, including whether or not individuals make causal attributions in the first place, and whether individuals perceive responsibility in their own group, the outgroup, or the situation. The more groups are encouraged to place blame elsewhere, the more likely they may be to support aggressive responses to provocation, and thus a link from anger to externalization of blame is particularly detrimental. In contrast, feelings of sadness elicit less attributions of blame overall (Sadler, Lineberger, Correll, & Park, 2005). Thus, one useful direction of current

research is understanding how the many consequences of group-based emotion for cognitive functioning contribute to the nature of intergroup conflict.

INGROUP-DIRECTED EMOTIONS

Thinking about group-based emotions had its roots in trying to understand prejudice and discrimination and so it was natural that early research focused on the emotions directed by one group toward another that explained how the other group was treated and why. However, one of the earliest emotions to be studied in this tradition was guilt, an emotion that is more about the ingroup (we feel bad about us, about what we have done) than about the specific outgroup to whom it was done. Thus, members of groups who commit or who have committed either historical or contemporary transgressions feel guilt not only about the transgressions but also about group characteristics that might have made the transgression more likely. Although ingroup-directed anger seems necessary to actually get the ingroup to actually act on behalf of a wronged outgroup, the inward focus of guilt appears to motivate reparation or cessation of aggression (Iyer & Leach, 2008). The flip side of group guilt, group pride, is associated with increased affiliative behaviors such as spending time with other ingroup members, as well as with increased display of group identifying symbols and signs such as flags and emblems (Smith *et al.*, 2007).

  Thus, just like outwardly directed group-based emotions, emotions directed toward the ingroup seem to play a regulatory and motivating role. Anger, guilt, pride, and satisfaction might all be directed at the ingroup as a means of motivating particular behaviors. For example, group members who disagree with their group's action feel increased anger, fear, or guilt until the group performs the desired action, in which case those emotions subside and satisfaction increases (Maitner, Mackie, & Smith, 2006, 2007). Ingroup-directed emotion might also explain different forms of outward-directed behavior. Is ingroup pride more likely to encourage extreme aggression against other groups than ingroup warmth, for example? Recent group-based emotion research has thus made clear the benefits of now focusing on the role of a wider range of inwardly directed emotions, including collective nostalgia, hubris, and grief, and so forth, for more fully understanding motivated intergroup behavior.

APPLICATION TO CONTEMPORARY INTERNATIONAL CONFLICTS

Although sprung from the study of ethnic and racial prejudice, the study of emotion in intergroup relations is now being profitably turned to help

understand and perhaps even unravel international conflicts, including intransigent clashes such as the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, and contemporary developments such as terrorist attacks. Such research has demonstrated that both situation-specific, appraisal-based emotional reactions, and more long standing emotional sentiments such as hatred—emotional evaluations of the other group that have formed and stabilized over time—contribute to protracted conflict (Halperin, 2008; Spanovic, Lickel, Denson, & Petrovic, 2010). Research in this vein has also started to delineate the intra-national as well as the international consequences of terrorist acts. An angry response to terrorism triggers support for aggressive military retaliation, whereas a fearful response elicits expectations of future attack and support for avoidant responses such as expelling or containing assumed terrorist group members (Fischhoff, Gonzalez, Lerner, & Small, 2005). Both anger and fear elicit widespread and relatively long term political intolerance (Skitka, Bauman, & Mullen, 2004). Even in the absence of an actual attack, making a specific, imminent, terror threat salient increases concern for homeland security versus civil liberties, and escalation of terror threat levels increases support for national leadership (Willer & Adams, 2008). Both acute incident-specific, appraisal-based emotions and long-standing group-focused emotions also play a role in how interactions are perceived and experienced, and how those temporal experiences influence support for peace proposals or cooperative efforts (Tam *et al.*, 2007).

These recent efforts also throw into relief the practical payoffs that attending to distinct emotional reactions can bring in terms of conflict interventions. Focusing on emotions makes salient interventions targeting antecedent process—categorization, identification, or appraisal—as well as those targeting emotion itself—cognitive reappraisal, regulation, and misattribution—that constitute viable options for reducing long-standing prejudice and reinforcing positive intergroup relations.

KEY ISSUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

One of the key contributions of this approach to emotions has been to demonstrate that emotions are associated with a social psychological identity rather than with a biological entity, that is, the emotions experienced at any given time are a product of the meaning of events for the perceiver's relationships with others. The same biological individual could perceive events differently, depending on whether he was thinking about the self as a devoted family man, an American, a marketing executive, one of several people pumping gas at a gas station, or a unique individual.

This makes *the nature of social identities* a key issue for future research. Given that identities vary so broadly, are the emotions experienced as

a consequence of every different identity similar? Most of the research described here focuses on emotions born of identification with a social category like female, Muslim, Spanish, or elderly, and those identifying with such groups have been members of independent, integrity-focused cultures. However, what about emotion rooted in smaller, more intimate, and less malleable groups such as family or close friends? Alternatively, emotions shared only because many strangers experience the same wait for a bank teller or for a rock concert to begin? Moreover, are these processes the same for group members in more interdependent or honor-valuing cultures? To begin answering this question, we recently asked people to imagine themselves as members of three different "types" of collectives—intimacy groups (like close friends and family), task groups (like committees and sports teams) and loose associations (like people watching a movie or waiting in line) in addition to social categories (like gender and nationality) and to tell us what they were feeling in that identity (Banerji *et al.*, 2011). We found that although the content of emotions associated with each identity changed dramatically, the differentiation of individually based versus group-related emotions, the convergence of emotions on a shared experience, and the impact on emotions of the intensity of one's ties to the group were similar for intimacy, task, and social category groups. Importantly, one's attachment to a loose association did not predict the intensity of one's emotions, marking more meaningless collections of people as quite psychologically different from the other types of groups. Extending this work to close relationships and other attachment-based relations, as well as to other interpersonally shared identities such as best friend, would profitably extend the benefits of understanding group-based emotion from intergroup into intragroup and interpersonal domains as well. Similarly, extending the study of group-based emotion across cultures will shed further light on whether and how cultural imperatives might modulate the nature and function of the emotional consequences of identity as revealed by research so far.

A second key issue is *the nature of identification* itself. Identification is the psychological tie between the individual and the group to which he or she belongs. It is now clear that what was once regarded to be a fairly unidimensional construct of attachment to a group is in fact multi-dimensional (Leach *et al.*, 2008; Roccas, Sagiv, Schwartz, Halevy, & Eidelson, 2008), and that the nature, not just the intensity, of that tie could have profound effects for emotion. In addition to investigating the impact of centrality and importance of the identity to the self, commitment to the group, the assumed superiority of the group, and whether the individual is tied to the group by over-arching symbolic ideals or by specific interpersonal attractions to other members have all been suggested as changing the nature of an individual's embeddedness in his or her group. As the concept of ingroup-directed

emotion discussed earlier suggests, ingroup memberships might also over time become characterized by particular "signature" emotions (Smith *et al.*, 2007), so that some individuals might be tied to some groups by admiration and respect, some by warmth and affection, others by guilt, shame, or pity, and so forth. Thus, identification could be usefully differentiated by the nature of various emotions activated by ingroup membership, and the different kinds of behaviors that members of such groups might perform.

A third key issue for furthering our understanding of group-based emotion is how *perceptions and predictions of such emotions in others* contribute to the on-going choreography of intergroup interactions. Earlier we noted that a group's specific emotional reaction improved one's ability to predict precisely how they would react in a given intergroup situation. This of course, confers the advantage of knowing how to react in turn, or perhaps even to manage, that reaction. This benefit accrues not just to researchers, of course, but also to the group's allies and rivals. How well can members of one group predict how another group is feeling? Do men know how women feel as women? How well can Democrats predict what Republicans feel as members of that political party? Two factors limit accuracy when it comes to predicting in general how other groups feel. First, group members, just like other individuals, tend to project the ingroup's emotions onto the outgroup. Therefore, if the ingroup is feeling guilty, group members assume that the outgroup is feeling guilty too. Second, groups show some ingroup-favoring bias in their predictions. People are sure that other groups feel more negative and less positive emotions than their own group feels. These biases notwithstanding, however, people are fairly accurate in knowing what other groups feel in general (Seger, Smith, Kinias, & Mackie, 2009).

Much more could usefully be known about this process, however. Psychologists studying individuals' abilities to forecast their own affective reactions to specific events have shown that people over-estimate both the intensity and duration of emotions they will experience. A similar proclivity at the group level might well explain why intergroup encounters often seem to escalate or spiral downward more quickly. Well-established emotional stereotypes are likely to introduce further bias into this predictive process. At the general level, ingroup members are attributed a wide range of subtle, social, and complex "human" emotions (such as regret, compassion, and anguish), whereas outgroup members are often assumed to be capable of experiencing only primary emotions such as fear and anger (Leyens *et al.*, 2000). More specific stereotypes about groups—women do not feel anger; Italians are volatile—can also affect predictions. Thus, both general and specific biases seem likely to introduce systematic errors in prediction of both the ingroup and the outgroup's group-based emotion, with concomitant effects on behavior.

A final direction for investigation is the *time-dependent nature of group-based emotions* (Smith & Mackie, 2006). Thinking about emotions as an important contributor to intergroup relations makes it necessary to pay attention to time, for emotions ebb and flow, and are experienced in specific episodes, in contrast to more cognitive constructs such as stereotypes and prejudice, which are traditionally seen as highly stable and difficult to change. As emotions are experienced in response to specific group-relevant events—whether events in the real world or those that are recalled, imagined, or feared—how long do they last? Might they motivate specific behaviors immediately (while the perceiver is in an emotional state) and potentially different behaviors at a later time once the acute emotional arousal has passed? Might the answers to these questions change if there is a recurring pattern of similar emotional episodes felt about a specific group (e.g., repeated instances of anger at attacks by a threatening enemy outgroup)? Finally, of course, changes over time in emotions may be caused by active emotion regulation processes, not only by passive exposure to ongoing events. People may often seek to regulate their emotions to make them more positive, but not always: When an important ingroup is under attack, people may up-regulate negative emotions such as anger to help motivate group-supportive actions. Studying changes in emotions over time may help understand the group-related processes that give rise to them, as well as potentially offering new insights into ways that emotions can shape constructive rather than destructive intergroup behavior.

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FURTHER READING

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