The Role of Intergroup Emotions in Political Violence

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Abstract

Emotions can drive intergroup behavior, including intergroup violence. We propose that anger, contempt, and disgust (ANCODI) work together in combination to motivate action, devaluation of the other group, and then elimination of their members. We tested the ANCODI hypothesis by examining speeches given by leaders of extreme political groups prior to major events or rallies that either turned violent (e.g., Kristallnacht in Nazi Germany) or did not (e.g., Gandhi's Salt March in India). Three studies assessed these speeches in the year prior to the critical event and coded for verbal and nonverbal emotional and emotional-appraisal content in references to the nemesis group. Amounts of all three of the ANCODI emotions and their precursor appraisals, in text or video, were elevated 3 months prior to violent events, whereas only anger was elevated prior to nonviolent events. These results suggest that leaders using the ANCODI emotions can generate violence against others, and that identifying this combination prior to an event may facilitate interventions to reduce intergroup violence.

Keywords

ANCODI, extremist groups, intergroup emotions, politics, violence

The 20th century has been replete with instances of genocidal acts committed by humans on humans. The reasons for such heinous behavior are myriad, but it is agreed by theologians (e.g., Aguilar, 2009), philosophers (e.g., Smith, 2011), and social scientists (Newman & Erber, 2002) that dehumanization of others has been a key element. We have recently embarked upon a program of research that seems to have identified more clearly this element in the genocide chain, which may be relevant more broadly to violence. Our *ANCODI hypothesis* proposes that the combination of the emotions of anger, contempt, and disgust (ANCODI) produce a more volatile mix than any one of these emotions alone, and thus their presence in speeches and behavior predicts intergroup hostility and political violence (Matsumoto, Hwang, & Frank, 2012a, 2013a). These emotions function through the ability of anger to motivate action, of contempt to motivate devaluation of others, and of disgust to motivate the elimination of others. A close examination of the presence of these emotions in the speeches and behaviors of leaders such as Gandhi and Hitler in the 1930s helped portend why Gandhi's protest march against the British tax on salt did not turn violent, whereas German propaganda against the Jews culminated in the violence of Kristallnacht.

Theoretical Background

Emotions are evolutionarily evolved information-processing systems that aid in the survival of the organism (Darwin, 1872/1998; Matsumoto, Frank, & Hwang, 2013). They are transient, fleeting reactions to events that have implications for our welfare and potentially require immediate response; they also prime behaviors by initiating unique physiological signatures and mental structures, aid in bonding memories and cognitions, and, most importantly, are a major source of motivation for behavior (Ekman, 2003; Frijda, Kuipers, & ter Schure, 1989; Tomkins, 1963).

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Emotions also motivate behavior in groups. Group-level emotions are emotions directed toward a group, often about the group members' own groups (in-groups), known as *intragroup emotions*, or other groups (out-groups), known as *intergroup emotions* (Matsumoto et al., 2008). A group-level emotion is woven into the group's overarching narratives of life and thus provides guidelines for making attributions about in-groups and out-groups. For example, some groups have long-standing biases against other groups attributable to some historical event (e.g., previous oppression of one's group) or violations of sacred values (Ginges, Atran, Medin, & Shikaki, 2007). Similar to how they operate at the individual level, emotions and their management at the group level aid in regulating social behavior and preventing social chaos (Matsumoto et al., 2008). Because emotions are motivating (Tomkins, 1963), they are essential for understanding group behavior, including the oft-replicated findings of positive bias toward in-groups and negative bias toward out-groups (e.g., Tajfel, 1970).

Previous research has shown that the emotions anger and fear are linked to intergroup aggression (Halperin & Gross, 2011) and the emotions anger, contempt, and disgust to violations of moral codes (Rozin, Lowery, Imada, & Haidt, 1999) and, with fear added, to hatred (Sternberg, 2003). Disgust has been implicated in dehumanization (Buckels & Trapnell, 2013). These emotions are involved in prejudice as well (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005). Our approach views emotions as discrete and distinct entities, whether in an individual or within a group (Ekman, 1999). They have the advantage of being measurable from autonomic nervous system measures, central nervous systems measures, self-report, and behavioral signals (Ekman, 2003).

It is from this framework that we propose how the ANCODI emotions motivate hostility, as a change in intergroup emotions can portend a change in behavior toward the out-group. We believe that hostility and violence are the direct result of the planned inculcation and methodical nurturing of hatred in political groups and are thus emotional at their core. These emotions are often transmitted through easy-to-communicate narratives (e.g., in which out-group members figure as enemies and in-group members as servants of God) and become a platform by which group emotions can be fostered, as well as color the group's perception of all new information (Green & Donahue, 2011).

The ANCODI model suggests that some past event, or historical narrative, produces outrage and thus anger. These events are reappraised from a position of the present moral superiority of the in-group, and thus moral inferiority of the out-group, which involves the emotion of contempt. The out-group is further reappraised such that it must be completely separated from the in-group in the future through avoidance, shunning, or even elimination; this is accomplished through the emotion of disgust. This model is consistent with all the previous research, but it is unique in putting all three ANCODI emotions together for predicting direct, real-life intergroup hostility.

It further argues that powerful leaders set the tone for groups to interpret or reinterpret events in certain ways that then lead to group emotions. Leaders do this by creating stories based on their appraisals or reappraisals of critical events and situations and by communicating the emotions associated with their reappraised stories to their followers and subordinates. The communication occurs directly and indirectly through the careful use of specific types of emotion-laden words, metaphors, images, and analogies, as well as nonverbally through their facial expressions, voices, and gestures.

Testing the ANCODI Hypothesis

We tested the ANCODI hypothesis by examining the shift in the emotional tone of speeches made by ideologically driven leaders prior to major political events that turned violent, compared to major political events that did not (Matsumoto et al., 2012a). Specifically, we examined the emotions expressed in these speeches toward the archrival out-group in three different analyses—concerning, first, the emotions expressed in words (Matsumoto, Hwang, & Frank, 2012b); second, the appraisals underlying these emotions as expressed in words (Matsumoto et al., 2013a); and third, the nonverbal expression of these emotions in those speeches captured on video (Matsumoto, Hwang, & Frank, 2013b). There had never been an analysis of the emotional content of such political statements in the historical archives, and these archives served as potentially rich sources of information that allowed us to test the ANCODI hypothesis. We also included for comparison analyses of a small set of acts and speeches of ideologically motivated groups that had despised opponent out-groups but did not result in violence. The violent events ranged from the U.S. government's declaration of the Indian Removal Act of 1830 to the assassination of Dr. George Tiller (a doctor who performed late-term abortions) in 2009. The comparison nonviolent events ranged from the Salt Satyagraha (otherwise known as Gandhi's Salt March) in 1930 to pro-Tibet protests at the Olympics in China in 2008 (selection was based on historians' recommendations and adequate data sample size, including clear acts of terrorism; see Matsumoto et al., 2012a, 2012b, for criteria). We examined texts of speeches at three different points in time: 12, 6, and 3 months before each event. We predicted that violent events would be preceded by an increase in anger, contempt, and disgust toward the nemesis out-groups in speeches, whereas

speeches before nonviolent events would not show such an increase in these emotions.

Emotional content of speeches

Two independent coders were briefed on the events and identified those segments of speeches that referenced the out-groups directly (e.g., "Osama bin Laden") or indirectly (e.g., "enemies of freedom"). Only those segments agreed upon by both coders were isolated for analysis. This produced a total of 7,800 sentences and 191,763 words for analysis across all speeches and events. Coders were blind to the hypothesis and rated each segment for the intensity of the seven "basic" emotions (anger, contempt, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness, surprise); the coders agreed strongly with each other.

We then compared the emotions and found that there were no changes in emotions from 12 months prior to the event until 6 months prior to the event for either type of event. However, as predicted (see Fig. 1), we found that from 6 months prior to the event until 3 months prior, there was a significant increase in the anger, contempt, and disgust content of the speeches preceding the violent events. There was no change in the other emotions (fear, happiness, sadness, or surprise). Moreover, the pattern held for different cultures and when comparing the 18th- and 19th-century speeches with the 20th-century speeches (see Matsumoto et al., 2012b, for more details).

In contrast, for nonviolent events, the amounts of anger, contempt, and disgust decreased 6 to 3 months prior to the event, with roughly no change in the other emotions. And when the usage of anger, contempt, and disgust terminology was directly contrasted between the violent and nonviolent events for the period between 6 months and 3 months prior to each event, the amounts of these three emotions were significantly higher for the violent events.

Finally, we correlated the amounts of anger, contempt, and disgust in the speeches and found that these emotions all correlated positively with each other, which suggested they functioned as a unit.

Underlying appraisals in the speeches

We also examined whether these speeches pushed for the appraisals that would underlie each emotion. For example, appraisals of obstruction and/or injustices often underlie anger; appraisals of superiority and inferiority underlie contempt; and appraisals of intolerability underlie disgust (e.g., Ortony, Clore, & Collins, 1990). Therefore, we coded these speeches for the appraisals underlying each emotion and found a pattern that was similar, but not identical, to that of the previous study (Matsumoto
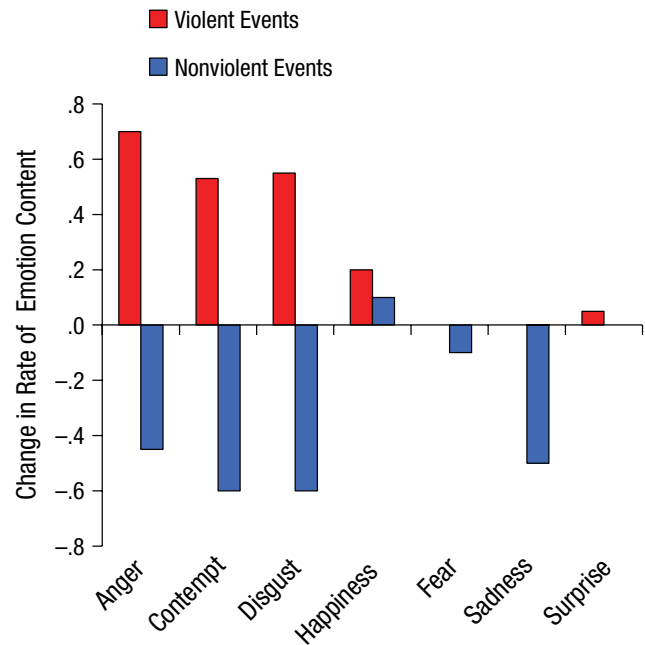

Fig. 1. Change in the rate of emotion content in the language used by extremist group leaders from 6 to 3 months prior to violent and nonviolent events.

et al., 2013a). We found increases in contempt appraisals (inferiority) and disgust appraisals (intolerability) for violent events, yet no changes in these appraisals prior to nonviolent events. We did not find any changes in appraisals relating to anger for violent acts, but we did find a slight increase in anger appraisals (obstruction) for nonviolent acts prior to the event. There were no changes in the appraisals for positive emotions (Matsumoto et al., 2013a). Taken together, these results suggested that the speeches prior to violent events not only pushed for the emotions of anger, contempt, and disgust but for the most part also drove appraisals that would lead a follower to infer or feel these emotions.

Nonverbal communication of ANCODI

When leaders deliver their speeches, members also see their leaders' faces and gestures and hear their tone of voice, which can substitute, amplify, or even contradict the messages expressed by words (Matsumoto et al., 2013). Therefore, we predicted that leaders of ideologically motivated groups would express nonverbally the ANCODI emotions prior to violent events but not prior to nonviolent events.

We examined the emotions expressed by leaders in videos prior to identified acts of violence or nonviolence, which limited us to more contemporary events (Matsumoto et al., 2013b). We utilized an adaptation of the Emotional Expressive Behavior coding system (Gross

& Levenson, 1993) to code the behaviors of the leaders. We compared the leaders' emotional displays when speaking about their opponent out-group versus other out-groups and examined them separately for those events that turned violent and those that did not. As predicted, leaders of groups that eventually committed violence expressed significantly more contempt and disgust when talking about their archrival opponent out-groups than leaders of groups that did not commit violence. There was no difference in the amount of anger expressed overall. When we compared within-speech references to opponent out-groups versus other out-groups, we found that the violent-group leaders expressed significantly more anger, contempt, and disgust, but not other emotions, when referring to the opponent out-groups compared to other groups. No such difference was found for the nonviolent-group leaders (see Fig. 2). We again noted that the ANCODI emotions seemed to operate as a unit. The amount of anger, contempt, and disgust expressed nonverbally by violent-group leaders correlated significantly only when they referenced the opponent out-group; they did not correlate when the violent-group leaders referenced something other than their opponent out-group.

Conclusion

Consistent with the ANCODI hypothesis, anger, contempt, and disgust, along with their underlying appraisals, were the verbally and nonverbally expressed emotions

Fig. 2. Difference in amounts of emotion expression in references to opponent versus non-opponent out-groups by extremist group leaders prior to violent and nonviolent events.

associated with acts of political violence—acts that spanned languages and centuries. When people feel these emotions, it is easier for them to evaluate the targets of those emotions as inherently bad or contaminated and to feel that there is no chance for rehabilitation, and thus to make a permanent assessment of the moral worthiness of the opponent out-group rather than a temporary judgment about an act committed by that group. We suggest a gunpowder metaphor for understanding ANCODI, where gunpowder's components charcoal, sulfur, and potassium nitrate by themselves have their own caustic properties—like anger, contempt, and disgust do—but are not explosive. However, when compressed together, they become a dangerous, combustible mix. This suggests a more measurable insight into the processes involved in dehumanization and, ultimately, terrorism.

Practically, these results suggest that monitoring the verbal and nonverbal expression of emotions by group leaders may provide not only early-warning mechanisms of impending violence but also a method to gauge the effects of one's own group's actions toward other groups. Developing systems to assess emotions and their intensity among members of groups may provide insight into how terrorist or other groups are being primed for action. It can also be used to track the effectiveness of interventions into intergroup conflict situations by monitoring the verbal and nonverbal exchanges between members of opponent groups to assess whether they are reducing the contempt and disgust rhetoric and thus reducing the odds of violence.

Although there seems to be a special role for anger, contempt, and disgust in the escalation of political violence, there are still many questions. These data are correlational, although promising work in progress has begun to document the causal connections using controlled studies and emotion manipulations. It is not clear whether these emotions underlie decisions of leaders to motivate followers, regardless of personal belief, or are simply a reflection of the behaviors of followers who carry out the leader's decisions. Moreover, demonstrating that leaders of political groups express emotions in their speeches does not demonstrate that members of those groups hearing those speeches accurately perceive those emotions as intended. We also do not know if this phenomenon applies to individual acts of violence. Regardless, this work is a start toward identifying and preventing one of the most serious and sadly recurrent events that plague humankind.

Recommended Reading

Cosmides, L., & Tooby, J. (2000). Evolutionary psychology and the emotions. In M. Lewis & J. M. Haviland-Jones (Eds.), *Handbook of emotions* (2nd ed., pp. 91–115). New York, NY: Guilford Press. A great piece as usual from this team
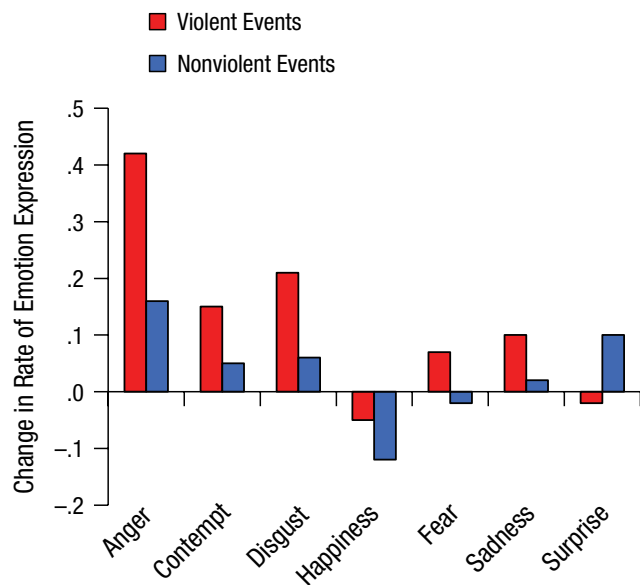
that details how these emotions derived in the ancient world drive us in our present world.

Ekman, P. (2003). *Emotions revealed* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Times Books. A very useful book by the man who reignited and elaborated on Darwin's ideas about emotion, expression, and what it does, putting all his ideas together, yet written for the intelligent layperson.

Forgas, J. P., Kruglanski, A., & Williams, K. D. (Eds.). (2011). *The psychology of social conflict and aggression*. New York, NY: Psychology Press. A wonderful book that places a lot of the current social psychological thinking about violence and conflict into sharp relief.

Matsumoto, D., Hwang, H. S., & Frank, M. G. (2012a). The role of emotion in predicting violence. *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, *81*, 1–11. The authors' initial summary of the first study of their work for a wider audience; to see the specific studies, with all the normal scientific detail, please see the various Matsumoto, Hwang, and Frank articles listed in the References.

Rozin, P., Lowery, L., Imada, S., & Haidt, J. (1999). (See References). A great article that details the logic behind the ANCODI emotions discussed here and the supporting work behind it, written for the scientist.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

Funding

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