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THE ROLE OF ANGER AND LINGUISTIC AGENCY ON INTENTIONS TO PARTICIPATE

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Abstract

This study examines the effects of anger and linguistic agency on message processing and activism behavioral intentions in the context of sexual assault. Despite social movements such as #MeToo and #TimesUp, sexual violence is still a common occurrence in the U.S. (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018). This thesis examines how anger and linguistic agency influence participation in social movements that spread awareness about the prevalence of sexual assault. A 2 (emotion: anger, control) $\times$ 2 (agency: human, abstract) independent group experiment ($N = 288$) was conducted. Two main effects were predicted: Anger (relative to the control condition) and human agency assignment (relative to abstract agency assignment) were predicted to increase anger perceptions, efficacy perceptions, and behavioral intentions to participate in activism. In addition, an interaction effect between anger and agency was hypothesized. Although the interaction effect was not significant, the results indicated that anger induction significantly increased perceptions of anger, and an increase in anger perceptions was positively associated with behavioral intentions to participate in activism. Furthermore, efficacy perceptions were found to bolster activism intentions. These and other results are discussed along with implications, limitations, and future research directions.

Keywords: linguistic agency, anger, sexual assault, message processing, emotion

Chapter 1: Introduction

In the U.S. alone, 43.6% (about 52.2 million) of women and 24.8% (about 27.6 million) men experienced some form of sexual violence in their lifetime (CDC, 2015). One in five women and one in fourteen men in the U.S. reported completed or attempted rape in their lifetime (CDC, 2015). Most of the female victims of completed or attempted rape experienced sexual victimization early in life, with 81.3% (about 20.8 million) reporting that it occurred before the age of 25 (CDC, 2015), indicating that most female assault survivors experience sexual violence by the time they graduate college. Sexual assault is rampant on college campuses. One in four women are raped in college and four out of five rape victims subsequently suffer from chronic physical or psychological conditions (DoSomething.org). Sexual violence clearly presents a considerable societal problem. To address it, recent social justice movements (e.g., #MeToo and #TimesUp) have been successful at capitalizing on public anger and outrage.

The anger that sparks activism is palpable. Many female activists associated with the movement have overtly expressed their anger. As author, teacher, and Black feminist, Brittney Cooper (2018) describes in her book, *Eloquent Rage: A Black Feminist Discovers Her Superpower*: "what I have is anger. Rage, actually. And that's the place where more women should begin – with the things that make us angry" (p. 1). The actress, Uma Thurman, and many other actors who worked with the convicted sexual offender, Harvey Weinstein, spoke out about the anger arising from Hollywood about sexual misconduct (Carlin, 2017). Their anger has motivated the public to join movements such as #MeToo (Garber, 2017), mobilizing women to unite against sexual assault and harassment.

Using energizing properties of anger to motivate action can be effective. Communication scholars and social psychologists have long recognized that anger effects can be adaptive, motivating attentional focus (Turner, 2013), desire to fix a problem (Averill, 1982), and support

for pro-social policy positions (e.g., Turner et al., 2019). Because anger is aroused from perceived injustice (Turner, 2013), a distinct action tendency of anger is the desire to restore justice and punish the anger-inducing entity (e.g., Lerner et al., 2015).

However, in the context of sexual assault, the target of blame is not always clear because the linguistic structures chosen to talk about this issue tend to rely on abstract terms (known as abstract agency assignment) like *sexual assault* instead of directly talking about the *perpetrators* of the assault (known as human agency assignment). The discourse tends to use ambiguous phrases such as "sexual assault was reported last night on campus" instead of a direct statement such as "a man sexually assaulted a woman." Thus, the first goal of this study is to integrate the research on anger and linguistic agency to understand whether and how these variables interact to influence people's attitudes and behavioral intentions to right the wrong or restore justice.

The present research has several theoretical and practical implications: (1) to draw possible connections between the anger and linguistic agency research areas, (2) to test the influences of anger, linguistic agency, and their interaction on efficacy and activism intentions, (3) to offer practical suggestions to message designers and public health practitioners who wish to incorporate public' anger along with different type of linguistic framing (based on agency assignment) in their messaging strategies about sexual assault to motivate activism and support for sexual assault victims. In the sections that follow, the literature review will begin with an explanation of each area of research and the rationale for study predictions.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Rationale

Anger

Since Darwin (1872), scientists have studied emotions and their influences on attitudes and behaviors. Frijda (1986) found that emotions serve as a signal resulting in a need-state

that motivates the organism to enact a certain behavior in response to it. Frijda labeled this process as *action tendencies*. His work focused on people's behavioral responses to emotions in social environments (Van Kleef, 2017, p. 212). Extensions of Frijda's work (Schwarz & Clore, 1988) helped establish that various emotions have different effects on information processing. In their examination of negative emotions and affective states, such as pain and fear, Nesse and Williams (1996) found that these emotions and states are signals to the body to warn us of danger. Specifically, pain signals the body that tissue is being damaged, fear signals that escape is desirable (Nesse & Williams, 1996), and anger alerts us that something unjust has occurred or that a goal attainment was interrupted (Lazarus, 1991; Reiser, 1999).

When an injustice or goal interruption is perceived to have occurred, it can give rise to an emotion like anger. Anger is an emotional experience that can range in intensity from feelings of annoyance to rage (Allcorn, 1994; Rubin, 1986). Because anger experience and expression can be quite intense, anger is often considered a socially undesirable emotion that should be avoided (Lambert, Eadeh, & Hanson, 2018). However, the effects of anger can be adaptive, motivating desirable behaviors directed at resolving the anger-inducing situation. Anger motivates people to remove the barriers that obstruct their goals (Lazarus, 1991) and to maintain or regain control of a situation (Pfau et al., 2001).

In addition to distinct action tendencies, anger influences message processing. Anger can spark an analytical thinking process (Lerner, 1990; Schwarz & Clore, 1988). Angry people use both the argument's quality and heuristics to make judgements and decisions on how to behave (Moons & Mackie, 2007). Specifically, angry people are more likely to evaluate a heuristic cue, such as source credibility, when making judgements (Bodenhausen et al., 1994). Although angry people tend to focus on heuristic cues, the cues are evaluated and are only relied upon when the

cue is relevant to judgement (Moons & Mackie, 2007). This means that angry people can have both the propensity and motivation to process and that their selective use of heuristic cues reflects the cue's perceived validity and not the failure to process analytically (Moons & Mackie, 2007). In addition to these effects, the level of anger the message induces and perception of efficacy influences the level of message processing. Overall, research indicates that anger has the ability to increase the depth of information processing (Chaiken, 1980, 1987; Moons & Mackie, 2007; Nabi, 2002; Nabi et al., 2007; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

There are several theories that offer useful frameworks to guide theorizing about the effects of anger. Building from Frijda's (1986) functional emotion theories (Lazarus, 1991) along with dual-process models (Chaiken, 1987), the Cognitive Functional Model (CFM; Nabi, 1999, 2002b) drew upon core elements from previous research to describe the effects of discrete emotions on message processing (Nabi, 1999). CFM states that when a theme of an emotion is recognized, it may give rise to an emotional response true to its relational theme. For instance, when goal interruption is perceived—a core relational theme of anger—the physiological arousal associated with anger is likely to follow. When a relational theme is recognized, the message will motivate attentional focus according to the attentional tendencies of a given emotion and bring about information processing consistent with the processing tendencies of that emotion (Nabi, 2002b). Depending on the type of emotion experienced, motivated attention will either impede (e.g., fear) or facilitate (e.g., anger) information processing. Similar ideas are echoed in Appraisal Tendency Framework (ATF; Lerner & Keltner, 2000), developed around the same time as CFM and grounded in the same foundational concepts.

Although originated in different fields of research—CFM (Nabi, 1999; 2002b) comes from communication and ATF (Lerner & Keltner, 2000, 2001; Lerner & Tiedens, 2006) comes

from psychology—both approaches contend that emotions not only derive from (Smith &

Ellsworth, 1985) but also elicit (Keltner et al., 1993; Lerner & Keltner, 2000; Tiedens & Linton,

2001; Nabi, 1999) specific cognitive appraisals and these appraisals result in emotion-driven

motivations, producing distinct judgments in decision-making (Lerner & Keltner, 2000) and

persuasive outcomes (Nabi, 1999). When cognitive appraisals such as anger are elicited, the

results are appraisals of certainty, control, low levels of pleasantness, and others' responsibility

(Lerner et al., 2015). This result is a perception that a negative event is managed by and induced

by others (Lerner et al., 2015). Together ATF and CFM provide the backbone for understanding

anger and its effect on persuasion and decision-making.

  Despite many conceptual similarities across CFM and ATF both theories diverge in their

views regarding the effects of anger. CFM predicts that anger appeals will likely produce

adaptive outcomes on cognitions and behavioral intentions, and ATF discusses anger as

detrimental to decision making (see Bessarabova, Banas, & Bernard, 2020, for a discussion).

Attempting to bridge these discrepancies in research Turner (2007) proposed Anger Activism

Model (AAM; Turner, 2007) that specifies instances wherein anger appeals are likely to produce

adaptive versus maladaptive outcomes on cognitions and behavioral intentions (Turner, 2007).

AAM posits that the individual must have strong efficacy beliefs and a high level of anger

intensity to maximize the adaptive behavior (Turner, 2013). Efficacy and magnitude of anger are

important aspects to consider when predicting behavior. When anger at a high intensity is paired

with a course of action to right a wrong or fix an injustice (i.e., high efficacy beliefs), potential

for behavioral intentions to avenge the injustice can be maximized. "When efficacy beliefs are

strong, anger has a linear effect on attitudes, cognitions, and intentions," but the relationship

between anger and these outcomes is curvilinear when efficacy beliefs are low (Turner, 2013).

This means that efficacy moderates the effect of anger on message processing and persuasion (Turner, Richards, Bessarabova, & Magid, 2019).

Research has long sought to comprehend the cognitive and emotional processes that motivate people to participate in activism behaviors such as protesting, signing petitions, and writing to government officials (Kornhauser, 1959). AAM argues that individual efficacy beliefs are the key to activism behaviors. Turner and colleagues' research experimentally manipulates efficacy (in addition to anger) to examine the effects predicted in AAM (e.g., Turner et al., 2019). However, in the absence of efficacy inductions, when individual efficacy beliefs are held equal across the experimental conditions through random assignment, the energizing properties of anger should be able to generate efficacy perceptions on their own (see Bessarabova et al., 2020, for a discussion) and subsequently motivate adaptive behaviors. This reasoning serves as the foundation for the first three predictions in this study:

H1: Relative to the control condition, anger induction increases (a) anger perceptions, (b) efficacy perceptions, (c) behavioral intentions to participate in activism.

H2: As anger perceptions increase, behavioral intentions to participate in activism increase.

H3: As efficacy perceptions increase, behavioral intentions to participate in activism increase.

In addition to its ability to incite action, the cognitive appraisals associated with anger can motivate people to focus on the agent responsible for an anger-inducing situation in search of a target that can be blamed (Lerner & Keltner, 2000). The target of blame in the context of sexual assault may not be immediately clear: The linguistic constructions often used to talk about this issue tend to rely on abstract terms, referring to sexual assault as something that happens to

the assault survivor, instead of directly naming the perpetrator of the assault as the linguistic

agent in the statement. To understand how these linguistic constructions affect behavioral

intentions and victim blaming of angry people, we turn to literature on linguistic agency.

Linguistic Agency

When describing an event, speakers make many choices in regard to lexicon and

grammar, and these choices convey attitudes about the event to their audience. One of these

decisions—an area that has recently been investigated in health communication (McGlone, Bell,

Zaitchik, & McGlynn, 2013)—is linguistic agency assignment. *Linguistic agency assignment* is

the attribution of action or change to one or more entities involved in an event (Dowty, 1991). It

determines causality for an event and, when assigned to a non-human entity, it implies human

passivity in the event (Dowty, 1991). For example, agency can be placed on the human (e.g.,

"The man sexually assaulted the woman"), and agency can be placed on the threat (e.g., "The

woman was sexually assaulted"). Sociolinguistics have identified different types of agency as

discussed below (Berman, 2005; w, Miller, & Beazley, 1995; McGlone & Harding, 1998;

Wiener & Mehrabian, 1968).

Agency assignments can often be flexible. For example, the entity that agency is assigned

to can be alive (e.g., "Ticks have made their way to Oklahoma") or inanimate ("The treatment

succeeded"), concrete ("The salt level increased") or abstract ("Climate change awareness

increased"). In addition, agency assignment can be used to indicate variations of responsibility

for events or actions. When an individual is told *they* will pick up or catch a disease, it implies

that due to their own behavior, they will contract an illness. When an individual is told the

disease will infect or target them, responsibility shifts to the illness (Dowty, 1991). When

assigning the action to people referred to as *human agency assignment,* the threat is described as

a passive entity. Alternatively, when assigning action to the threat, known as *threat agency assignment,* the threat is described as an active entity and its risk as less within an individual's control (Dragojevic, Bell, & McGlone, 2014). Much research has been done in the health communication field to examine the effect of agency assignment on perceptions of persuasive messages.

For example, McGlone et al. (2013) examined the effects of agency assignment on persuasive messages about the H1N1 influenza virus at the peak of the H1N1 pandemic. Their participants were randomly assigned to two agency conditions: a *human* agency and a *virus* one. The virus-agency condition contained language such as, "H1N1 will infect half of the U.S. population." The human-agency condition stated, "Half of the U.S. population will contract H1N1." Mc Glone et al.'s (2013) results indicated, participants perceived H1N1 as a more severe threat, felt more vulnerable to infection, and had stronger intentions to get vaccinated when agency was assigned to the virus rather than the humans. This study demonstrated that agency assignment can be effective at increasing perceptions of threat and motivating self-protective behaviors. Overall, the findings of McGlone et al. (2013) and other studies indicate that agency assignment can create difference in threat perceptions (e.g., Bell, McGlone, & Dragojevic, 2013) as well as preferences for policy positions (e.g., Bell, McGlone, & Dragojevic, 2014) with human agency assignment being associated with greater perceptions of threat and increased protective policy endorsement (i.e., vaccinations) relative to non-human agency assignments.

Recent research by Dragojevic, Bell, and McGlone (2014) has extended the literature on agency assignment to an inanimate health threat (i.e., radon gas) and subsequently examined the effects of threat agency language on efficacy. Past research (Bell et al., 2014; McGlone et al., 2013) has found that relative to threat agency, human agency increases one's perceived

effectiveness of the recommendations to protect oneself against the threat (i.e. response-efficacy) and their ability to follow the recommendations (i.e., self-efficacy). Based on the above reasoning the following hypothesis is offered:

H4: Relative to abstract agency assignment, human agency assignment increases (a) efficacy and (b) behavioral intentions to participate in activism.

Interaction between Anger and Agency

The present study fills the gap in research by examining the interaction between anger and agency. Examining anger by agency interaction helps test whether angry people are indeed careful information processors. If they are, they should respond differently to various types of agency manipulations. Differences in agency assignment allow to shift the perceptions of responsibility for a given action. Because anger motivates the focus on responsibility and blame, making the target of blame explicit (human agency assignment) might facilitate decision making for angry individuals. When the target of blame is clear, anger should increase efficacy perceptions and result in the highest behavioral intention to engage in action, relative to all other conditions. Based on this reasoning the following interaction effect is predicted:

H5: An interaction between anger and linguistic agency is proposed such that human agency paired with anger induction results in the highest efficacy perceptions and activism intentions, relative to all other conditions.

Method

This data collection was approved by the university's Internal Review Board (IRB).

Participants

To examine study predictions, a sample of undergraduate students ($N = 369$) was recruited from a large public university in south-central United States. Because the data were

collected online, participants who did not complete 100% of the survey and who spent less than 600 seconds (10 minutes) or above 2,848 seconds (about 47 minutes) were removed from the study for either not spending enough time or too much time (and thus, undermining the effectiveness of experimental inductions). Using these exclusion criteria resulted in the final sample of 288 participants. The age of the sample ranged from 18 to 37 years of age ($M = 19.72$, $SD = 1.72$). Fifty six percent of the participants ($n = 162$) self-identified as female, and 1 person self-identified as non-binary. Participants were allotted extra credit in their communication course in exchange for their participation. Approximately 75% of the sample self-identified as White/European American, 9% Hispanic/Latino, 5% African American/Black, 4% Asian, 4% American Indian/Native American, 1% Other, .7% Central Asian/Indian/Pakistani, and .3% Pacific Islander/Hawaiian.

Design and Procedure

A 2 (emotion: anger, control) × 2 (agency: abstract, human) independent-group design was employed wherein agency and emotion were manipulated. Participants self-selected to contribute to the study and were recruited through the communication department's research participation pool. They were invited to complete the survey online via Qualtrics.

After completing a consent form, participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions where they were asked to read a fictitious newspaper article headline describing a local event. A news headline was chosen as a modality to deliver experimental inductions because headlines are short and commonly contain less details, which allows to clearly represent the manipulations and maximize experimental control. Emotion was manipulated by assigning participants to either a news headline about sexual assault (anger induction) or the opening of a

sushi restaurant (control) and then asking them to write a guided essay about emotions that each headline induced. The wording of the emotion induction is as follows:

> In the questions above we asked you about your emotional reactions towards the headline you read, please describe in a paragraph or two what specifically about the situation described in the headline caused those emotional reactions. You will be required to stay on this page for at least two minutes before you can move on to the next page.

To manipulate agency, the action in the headline was either attributed to a person perpetrating the assault (human agency assignment) or was described in abstract terms without referencing the agent of the action (abstract agency assignment). In the anger-abstract-agency condition participants read: "Sexual Assault Reported by OKC Woman on Sunday," whereas in the anger-human-agency condition, the wording was as follows: "Local Man Sexually Assaulted OKC Woman on Sunday." In the control condition, participants were provided with a message that stated: "Sushi Restaurant Opened in OKC on Sunday" for the abstract agency condition and "Local Man Opened Sushi Restaurant in OKC on Sunday" in the human agency assignment condition. The headline was crafted to appear as a page of a newspaper to contribute to the realism of the experimental manipulations. For all inductions as they appeared in the experiment, see Appendix A-D.

After reading one of the headlines, participants were asked to report their perceived level of anger, efficacy, and behavioral intentions to participate in activism. Participants were then debriefed and provided contact information for the college's counseling center if they needed it. The debrief contained an explanation of the nature of the materials used in the study, as well as information for how they were altered for the purpose of the study.

Instrumentation

      Preliminary remarks. All continuous variables in the study (i.e., anger, efficacy, and intentions to participate in activism) were measured using magnitude scales (Lodge, 1981).

      Participants were asked to indicate their attitudes or opinions on a scale from 0 to infinity, with 100 indicating a moderate amount. Exact wording on these instructions, as well as all the questionnaire items comprising all indexes, can be found in the appendices. All dependent variables were examined for outliers and violations of normality assumption. Variables that appeared non-normal were first winsorized by recoding outliers to a lower value and then transformed to help meet the assumption of normality (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). An index of the dependent variable was formed by using principal component analysis with an unrotated one-component solution and saving standardized regression component scores, producing an index with $M = 0.00$, $SD = 1.00$, range $\approx$ -3.00 to +3.00 (Afifi, Clark, & May, 2004; DiStefano, Zhu, & Mîndrilă, 2009). The means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations between all variables in the study are provided in Table 1.

Dependent Variables

      Perceptions of anger. Participants were asked to indicate their level of anger across 7 items borrowed from Dillard and Shen (2005): angry, annoyed, irritated, aggravated (e.g. "How irritated do you feel after reading the headline"; α =.94).

      Perceptions of efficacy. Participants were asked to indicate their level of efficacy across 6-items using the scale from Meczkowski et al. (2016). The items were modified to fit the topic of the study. Participants were asked about their perceived sense of efficacy in regard to supporting survivors of sexual assault (e.g., "I am confident in my ability to do something to support people who were sexually assaulted"; α =.87).

Behavioral intentions to participate in activism. Participants were asked to indicate their level of intentions to participate in activism behaviors using 7 items adopted from Poorisat, Boster, and Salmon (2019). They were asked about their willingness to participate in activities such as sharing online content, writing a letter to a congressperson, chatting with friends online, to advocate for those who were sexually assaulted (e.g., "How willing are you to write on your personal web page about the need to allocate resources to help people who were sexually assaulted"; $\alpha = .94$).

Results

Analytics Strategy

Hypotheses 1, 4, and 5 were tested in a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) with the anger and agency inductions entered as the independent variables, and perceptions of anger, perceptions of efficacy, and behavioral intentions to participate in activism entered as the dependent variables. H2-3 were tested in a regression with anger and efficacy perceptions used as the independent variables and behavioral intention to participate in activism used as the dependent variable.

Multivariate Results

The multivariate effect of anger was significant, Wilks' $\Lambda = .39$, $F(3, 282) = 147.32$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .61$, and so was the multivariate effect of agency, Wilks' $\Lambda = .97$, $F(3, 282) = 2.89$, $p = .04$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$. However, the multivariate effect of anger by agency interaction was not significant, Wilks' $\Lambda = .99$, $F(3, 282) = 1.13$, $p = .34$.

Hypothesis Test

Hypothesis 1. H1 predicted that relative to the control condition, anger induction increases (a) anger perceptions, (b) efficacy perceptions, (c) behavioral intentions to participate

in activism. The univariate effects indicated that anger induction ($M = 0.77$, $SD = 0.78$) resulted in significantly higher perceptions of anger, $F(1, 284) = 432.33$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .60$, relative to the control condition ($M = -0.77$, $SD = 0.45$). These results indicate that the anger manipulation was successful and offer support for H1a. However, anger induction ($M = 0.06$, $SD = 1.09$) did not result in higher perceptions of efficacy, $F(1, 284) = .47$, $p = .50$, relative to the control condition ($M = -0.05$, $SD = 0.92$); thus, H1b was not supported. Similarly, the anger induction ($M = 0.07$, $SD = 1.06$) did not result in higher behavioral intentions to participate in activism, $F(1, 284) = 1.09$, $p = .30$, relative to the control condition ($M = -0.06$, $SD = 0.95$). Thus, H1c was also not supported.

Hypotheses 2-3. H2 predicting that as anger perceptions increase, behavioral intentions to participate in activism increase, and H3 predicting that as efficacy perceptions increase, behavioral intentions to participate in activism increase, were tested in a regression. The overall regression model was significant, $F(2, 285) = 76.46$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .35$, $R^2_{adj} = .35$. The results indicated that for one unit increase in anger, there was a .13 ($p = .009$) unit increase in behavioral intentions. Similarly, for one unit increase in efficacy, there was a .56 ($p < .001$) unit increase in behavioral intentions. Thus, H2 and H3 were supported.

Hypothesis 4. H4 predicted that relative to abstract agency assignment, human agency assignment increases (a) efficacy and (b) behavioral intentions to participate in activism. The univariate effects indicated that the human agency induction ($M = -0.15$, $SD = 0.93$) resulted in greater perceptions of efficacy, $F(1, 284) = 7.50$, $p = .007$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$, relative to the abstract agency induction ($M = 0.16$ $SD = 1.05$). Thus, H4a was supported. However, human agency induction ($M = -0.07$, $SD = 0.92$) did not affect behavioral intentions to participate in activism,

$F(1, 284) = .46$, $p = .50$, relative to the abstract agency induction ($M = 0.07$, $SD = 1.07$); thus, H4b was not significant.

Hypothesis 5. H5 predicted that an interaction between anger and linguistic agency is proposed such that human agency paired with anger induction results in the highest efficacy perceptions and activism intentions, relative to all other conditions. H5 was not supported: The interaction effect on efficacy perceptions was not significant, $F(1, 284) = 0.46$, $p = .29$, and so was the effect on activism intentions, $F(1, 284) = 1.86$, $p = .17$.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Eighty-one percent of women and 43% of men have experienced sexual harassment/assault in their lifetime (CDC, 2015). Social movements such as #MeToo and the subsequent #TimesUp have been successful at maximizing anger in the public around women's rights, specifically focusing on sexual violence. The goal of movements such as these is to unite people against sexual assault and harassment. In exploring how to motivate people to engage in activism, the current study sought to examine two factors—anger and linguistic agency assignment—to understand how these factors and their interaction affect perceptions of efficacy to solve sexual violence as a societal problem along with activism intention.

Building from previous theoretical research on anger and integrating it with agency research, the goal of the present study was threefold: (1) integrate emotion and linguistic agency literature, which has not been done before, (2) understand whether and how anger and agency interact to motivate people to participate in activism, and (3) test whether anger and linguistic agency affects efficacy perceptions and activism intentions. The first hypothesis predicted a main effect of anger induction on anger and efficacy perceptions, as well as behavioral intentions to participate in activism; this prediction was partially supported. Although anger induction fostered

significantly higher anger perceptions relative to the control condition (indicating a successful anger manipulation), it did not result in higher perceptions of efficacy, and it did not result in higher behavioral intentions to participate in activism. The second hypothesis predicted that perceptions of anger would increase behavioral intentions to participate in activism; the prediction was supported. Similarly, the third hypothesis predicted that perceptions of efficacy would increase behavioral intentions to participate in activism; this prediction was supported. The fourth hypothesis predicted that there would be a main effect of agency assignment on efficacy and behavioral intentions to participate in activism. The effect of agency on intentions was not significant. Although the main effect of agency on efficacy was significant, it was not in the predicted direction: Abstract agency (not human, as hypothesized) resulted in higher efficacy perceptions. Overall, these results do not offer support for H4. Lastly, the fifth hypothesis predicted that there would be an interaction effect of anger and linguistic agency on behavioral intentions to participate in activism and efficacy perceptions: Both parts of H5 were not supported. Together these results indicate that anger induction significantly increased perceptions of anger, and an increase in anger perceptions was positively associated with behavioral intentions to participate in activism. In addition, abstract agency increased efficacy beliefs (albeit contrary to the hypothesized relationship), and an increase in efficacy perceptions subsequently increased intentions to participate in activism. This means that neither the anger induction nor the agency induction had a direct effect on intentions to participate in activism. These relationships have implications for future research, which are explored in the next section.

Previous research on media effects has focused on aspects of language and text content. Specifically, communication and psychology researchers have long discovered that anger can be a motivator (Turner, 2013). Although the area of linguistic agency and persuasion is in its

infancy (Berman, 2005; Henly, Miller, & Beazley, 1995; McGlone & Harding, 1998; Wiener & Mehrabian, 1968), the present study extends theoretical research by integrating the two fields by examining the effects of these areas together. In addition to these extensions, the present study has implications for practical use.

A practical implication from the present study is that these findings may offer guidance to message designers regarding the linguistic choices to be made when crafting messages to raise awareness about sexual assault. The depiction of the abstract linguistic agency news article provided in this current study is consistent with how the perpetrators of sexual assault cases are traditionally portrayed in news media (e.g., Franiuk, Seefelt, Cepress, & Vandello, 2008). Contrary to the predicted effect, these results point to relative superiority of traditional framing (i.e., abstract agency assignment) as compared to human agency assignment: The study participants had greater perceptions of efficacy when abstract agency assignment was used and the increase in efficacy to address the problem subsequently increased activism intentions. Despite these results, researchers and practitioners should not underestimate the potential utility of human-agency assignment. Although the format of the human-agency messages may have seemed unusual to the participants, and that is why they indicated greater efficacy beliefs in the abstract agency condition. Using the traditional abstract constructions can also be more conducive to motivating the habitual responses to information about sexual assault resulting in an increase in victim-blaming and perpetuation of rape myths. Human agency assignment has potential to disrupt reliance on victim blaming because such constructions make the target or blame clear, subsequently motivating more empathetic treatment of assault survivors. Overall, government agencies and public health advocates should take these findings under advisement

when considering whether to modify the language of persuasive health messages to help better meet their goals of spreading awareness about public health threats.

Limitations and Future Directions

There are a number of limitations to discuss in the current study. The first limitation to address is that neither the anger or agency inductions had a direct effect on intentions to participate in activism. However, the anger induction did increase perceptions of anger, which in turn affected behavioral intentions. A similar relationship was found for abstract agency assignment that resulted in an increase in efficacy. In turn, efficacy increased behavioral intentions. These findings suggest a fully mediated relationship where the dependent variables are affected by the study inductions through their respective mediating variables: anger perceptions for anger induction and efficacy perceptions for agency induction. Future research should examine these relationships further.

The second limitation involves the number of induction messages employed. To strengthen the results, multiple messages should be used. Examining the effects of multiple messages would add to the validity of the study. In addition, future research should replicate this study with other dependent measures such as victim blaming, social distance, and others. Victim blaming (Gilmartin-Zena, 1983; Workman & Freeburg, 1999) and increased social distance (Esses & Dovidio, 2002; Grubb & Harrower, 2009), in particular, are typical and problematic reactions to sexual assault survivors; thus, these variables are important to consider. Because decreased victim blaming and increased perception of closeness to the survivor are imperative to sexual violence prevention, researchers should aim to identify the factors that contribute to more empathetic treatment of assault survivors.

Several future research directions stem from this study. As mentioned, the findings reported here should be replicated by using different topics and contexts. Anger has the power to mobilize an audience, and similar to the #MeToo movement, other movements such as Black Lives Matter, tend to also capitalize on anger to mobilize the public to participate in activism against racism. Thus, these results could be applicable beyond activism campaigns targeting sexual violence toward women. Future replications would help further validate these results (see Cook & Campbell, 1979, for a discussion).

Another potential future research area is to integrate anger and linguistic agency literature with the parasocial contact research (Schiappa et al., 2005). Celebrities such as Cate Blanchett, Kate Beckinsale, and Paz de la Huerta were victims of media mogul, Harvey Weinstein of Miramax, and have recently spoken out about their experiences with sexual violence. It is likely that combining human agency messages with celebrity advocacy would help magnify the persuasive potential of pro-social campaigns attempted to bring awareness about sexual violence, especially when directed at angry audiences.

Finally, future research should explore the effects of other discrete emotions in addition to anger. As mentioned, anger facilitates message processing whereas such emotions as fear, for instance, impedes it (Nesse & Williams, 1996). Future studies should compare the relative effects of these emotions. It is likely that fear would have the opposite effect on message processing and behavioral intentions to participate in activism as compared to anger.

Conclusion

This study explored the antecedents to activism intentions focusing on the topic of sexual assault. According to a recent study by CDC (2015), sexual assault is prevalent in the U.S., and as a result, survivors develop both detrimental mental and physical health problems. Although

recent social movements such as the MeToo movement (Bennett, 2017) have worked relentlessly to spread awareness about widespread sexual harassment and violence, the frequency of assault in the U.S. remain the same. To understand which variables can increase participation in social movements like MeToo, the effects of anger and agency manipulations were examined. Although the predicted anger by agency interaction was not supported, the results indicated that anger induction significantly increased perceptions of anger, and an increase in anger perceptions was positively associated with behavioral intentions to participate in activism. Contrary to the predicted relationship, abstract (not human) agency assignment increased efficacy perceptions, and the increase in efficacy was positively associated with activism intentions. Although the results did not provide consistent support for all the hypothesized relationships, these results have important theoretical and practical implications and offer promising directions for future research.

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Table 1. Bivariate Correlations between All Variables in the Study

	1	2	3	4
1. Anger Induction	--			
2. Agency Induction	-.09	--		
3. Anger Perceptions	.78**	-.05	--	
4. Efficacy Perceptions	.05	-.16**	.11	--
5. Intentions to Participate in Activism	.07	-.07	.19**	.58

Note. N = 176.

* *p* < .05; ** *p* < .01; *** *p* < .001

Appendix A - Anger Human Agency Condition

In this portion of the study we're going to show you a news headline. Please read it carefully. We will ask you questions to find out what you think of it.

Appendix B - Anger Abstract Agency Condition

Sexual Assault Reported by OKC Woman on Sunday

Appendix C - Control Abstract Agency Condition

Sushi Restaurant Opened in OKC on Sunday

Appendix D - Control Human Agency Condition

Local Man Opened Sushi Restaurant in OKC on Sunday

Appendix E - Attitude Anger Index

In this portion of the study we're going to ask you questions about the headline presented to you.

There are no right or wrong answers: We are just interested in your views.

1. How irritated do you feel after reading the headline?

2. How sad do you feel after reading the headline?

3. How angry do you feel after reading the headline?

4. How content do you feel after reading the headline?

5. How annoyed do you feel after reading the headline?

6. How happy do you feel after reading the headline?

7. How aggravated do you feel after reading the headline?

Appendix F - Behavioral Intentions to Participate in Activism

We have a few more questions to ask you about sexual assault. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers.

1. How willing are you to sign a petition to tell the government to allocate resources to help people who were sexually assaulted?

2. How willing are you to share online content to encourage others to support people who were sexually assaulted (e.g., forward emails, tweet or re-tweet information, share a link, click 'Like')?

3. How willing are you to write a letter to your congressperson asking them to allocate resources to help people who were sexually assaulted?

4. How willing are you to chat with your friends online about the need to allocate resources to help people who were sexually assaulted?

5. How willing are you to write on your personal web page (e.g., blog and Facebook) about the need to allocate resources to help people who were sexually assaulted?

6. How willing are you to participate in a demonstration to raise awareness about allocating resources to help people who were sexually assaulted?

7. How willing are you to give an oral presentation in public about the need to allocate resources to help people who were sexually assaulted?

Appendix G - Perceptions of Efficacy

1. I am able to do something to support people who were sexually assaulted.

2. I can easily do something to support people who were sexually assaulted if I want to.

3. I am confident in my ability to do something to support people who were sexually assaulted.

4. Supporting sexual assault victims is a good way to protect myself and others against assault.

5. Supporting people who were sexually assaulted is helpful if I want to avoid and help others avoid being sexually assaulted.

6. Supporting people who were sexually assaulted can help me prevent sexual assault from happening to me and/or others.