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## More than a feeling: strategic emotion expression in intergroup conflicts

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## Breaking Ground

### Two Components of Strategic Emotion Expression

***Note:** This chapter is based on Sasse, J., Spears, R., & Gordijn, E.H. (2017). When to Reveal what You Feel: How Emotions towards Antagonistic Out-group and Third Party Audiences are Expressed Strategically.*

## **Abstract**

We investigated whether emotions in intergroup conflicts are expressed strategically to different audiences. That is, we tested whether emotion expression differs from emotion experience, and whether emotion expression (more than emotion experience) is used to pursue specific goals. Specifically, we focused on whether support-seeking emotions (fear and sadness) are used to call for support from a powerful third party and contempt to distance from an antagonistic out-group. We tested our hypotheses in two studies using the same ostensible conflict but different experimental designs to reduce the influence of methodological limitations in the assessment of emotions. In both studies, we found that members of a disadvantaged group expressed *less* support-seeking emotions towards the out-group than they experienced, providing support for the assumption that emotion expression does not necessarily reflect experience. Further, in Study 2, we found in line with expectations that the goal to call for support was more important in the communication with the third party than with the antagonistic out-group, and was best predicted by expressed support-seeking emotions, providing support for the assumption that emotion expression is used to pursue goals. Interestingly, we only found this association for a beneficial goal (i.e., calling for support) and not for distancing, a destructive goal. These results support the proposed strategic use of emotion expression and as such advance our understanding of the function of expressed emotions.

Intergroup conflicts of any form, be it a minor dispute or a violent fight, come with a multitude of emotions, ranging from humiliation, fear, anger, and hatred to - in the best case - hope. Importantly, emotions are not only the product of conflicts but also *affect* conflicts (Lindner, 2006): Experienced emotions motivate actions (Mackie et al., 2000; van Zomeren et al., 2004) and expressed emotions shape reactions of others (de Vos et al., 2013; Kamans et al., 2014). That expressed emotions seem to have the power to influence an audience raises the question whether emotions are expressed strategically, precisely because they trigger specific responses in an audience. In this paper, we set out to approach this question by investigating whether emotion expression may differ depending on an audience (i.e., third parties versus antagonistic out-groups) and whether the expression of specific emotions is associated with specific goals. By doing so we hope to advance our knowledge about the function of expressed emotions in intergroup conflicts.

### **Emotions in Intergroup Conflicts**

Anger, contempt, and fear are just some of the many emotions experienced during intergroup conflicts. These emotions do not arise out of the blue but depend on how members of a group evaluate their group's position (with respect to status and power) and events related to the conflict (e.g., acts of offense or retaliation) – in other words how they appraise the situation (Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003; Smith et al., 2007). In this paper, we focus on emotions commonly experienced by weak or disadvantaged groups as changing the status quo is of importance to them and thus strategy should be relevant.

Feeling weak or in a vulnerable position is associated with experiencing fear and sadness (Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003). These emotions are also assumed to signal a sense of need (Clark, Pataki, & Carver, 1996). Importantly, those appraisals not only precede emotion experience but audiences also seem to infer them from expressed emotions. Kamans and colleagues (2014) showed that members of an uninvolved third party were more likely to support a disadvantaged group when its members expressed fear about their situation than when they

expressed anger. This suggests that fear not only arises in response to feeling inferior but also enlists actions that may help to overcome the current situation. This is in line with van Kleef's suggestion that (expressed) emotions constitute information that allows the audience to draw inferences about the cause of the emotion (Van Kleef, 2009; Van Kleef, Van Doorn, Heerdink, & Koning, 2011).

Anger is also an emotion that often arises during conflicts, even though it often has rather negative effects. In general, anger is more associated with powerful groups yet it also occurs in weaker groups in response to experienced injustice or unfair treatment (Kamans et al., 2011). Interestingly, while Kamans and colleagues (2014) found that disadvantaged groups should not express anger about the perpetrator out-group towards a third party, de Vos and colleagues (2013) in fact found it can have positive effects if they express it to the perpetrator out-group themselves, suggesting that the effects of expressed anger can be manifold. Specifically, they showed that perceiving an angry out-group can actually increase empathy for this out-group, which in turn motivates more constructive action intentions. The reason for this, they argue, is that by showing anger the out-group communicates that it has been treated in an unfair way. This means anger not only arises in response to experienced injustice but it also seems to communicate it (at least under certain conditions). De Vos and colleagues (2013) compared the effects of *pure* anger with anger mixed with contempt and showed that the latter combination has rather detrimental effects as it leads groups that are confronted with this mixture of anger and contempt to react destructively. This is in line with Fischer and Roseman's (2007) characterization of contempt as an emotion that arises when after a relationship has been harmed repeatedly and distance rather than reconciliation is sought.

To summarize, fear, anger, and contempt are emotions likely to be experienced by disadvantaged group during conflict yet their expression leads to very different reactions from audiences. Based on the findings described above disadvantaged groups should choose to express fear (and sadness) if their goal is to enlist third party support. An out-group's willingness to work constructively

on the other hand seems to be positively influenced by expressed anger while contempt should only be openly expressed if the goal is to end a relationship. Although people are unlikely to be fully aware of these specific influences of emotion expression, their lay-theories about how it could help them to reach specific goals might lead them to express emotions strategically.

### **Shaping Emotion Expression Strategically**

As expressed emotions pose information for an audience they may be regarded a channel of communication with an audience. Undoubtedly other channels of communication are given such as language and actions but we consider emotion expression of special importance for several reasons. Firstly, emotion expression is subtler than language and actions, and though it may lead to negative reactions it is not obviously punishable or costly. This notion of subtlety may further be strengthened by the seemingly common idea that being emotional is authentic and contrary to being rational (or indeed strategic), which makes the deniability of any attempt to influence more plausible than for language or actions. More importantly, emotions may be efficient as they convey powerful information for the audience (Van Kleef, 2009) but at the same time capitalize on a certain ambiguity. They communicate a message without making it explicit or appearing deliberate and have a “plausible deniability” less possible in overt speech. Emotions may thus incur few costs in terms of both effort and potential sanctions.

Using emotion expression as a communicative tool presupposes that emotions can – at least to a certain extent – be manipulated by the expresser. Indeed, research has shown that emotions can be influenced (i.e., regulated) intentionally and this is not only done in order to feel more positive emotions but also negative emotions if this is considered beneficial (e.g., experiencing anger in preparation for a confrontation (Tamir, Mitchell, & Gross, 2008; Tamir, 2009)). Such instrumental emotion regulation has been investigated in the context of interpersonal emotions but also occurs for group-based emotions (Goldenberg et al., 2016). While emotion regulation shows the general malleability of emotions,

research has strongly focused on the regulation of *experienced* emotions and its consequences for the individual (or in-group). The instrumentality of emotion regulation should however not be limited to experienced but also *expressed* emotions. Evidence that emotions are intentionally expressed (or suppressed) stems to a large part from research showing how emotions may be expressed to fulfill cultural norms or follow display rules (Fischer, Manstead, Evers, Timmers, & Valk, 2004; Zummuner & Fischer, 1995) but this tells us little about whether and how specific goals are pursued. Some initial evidence for this was provided by Andrade and Ho (2009) who exposed participants to an unfair treatment to provoke anger. This anger was expressed to a greater extent to the opponent than it was reported confidentially. Importantly with respect to whether emotion expression is goal-directed, participants were aware of the fact that they changed their emotion expression and did so to obtain a fairer offer subsequently.

### **The Present Research**

In this paper, we are interested in whether emotions are expressed strategically in the context of a group facing a potential collective disadvantage. The notion of strategy entails two important components: The basic first component is the assumption that emotion expression may differ from emotion experience and that expression about the same subject may differ from audience to audience. That allows emotion expression to be tailored to specific goals rather than being fully driven by experience. Naturally, we expect emotion experience and expression to correlate, yet an emotion can be played up or down when it comes to expression.

As the second and necessary component of strategic expression, we propose that emotions are used to pursue specific goals. As such, we should be able to find a direct association between expressed – over and above experienced – emotions and such goals. While the first component is necessary for allowing strategic tailoring of emotion expression in principle, it does not necessarily have to manifest in observable (or rather measurable) differences between experience and expression: It may happen that experience and strategic expression correspond. However the association between expression and goals should always be detectable.

In Study 1, we tested the basic first component of strategic emotion expression that emotion expression may differ from experience. Following from the findings regarding the effects expressed emotions have on third parties and out-groups (de Vos et al., 2013; Kamans et al., 2014) we expect members of a disadvantaged group to express more support-seeking emotions than they experience towards a third party and to express more contempt towards the out-group in response to their offense. As the results for the effects of anger have been mixed we explore its strategic use exploratively. Potentially, anger is used to stress experienced disadvantage yet it may also be reduced given its reputation (albeit not always warranted in reality) as a destructive emotion. In Study 2, we further extend the exploration of strategic emotion expression and test whether the association between expressed emotions and goals is indeed stronger than between experienced emotions and goals, which is the second component of strategic emotion expression.

We tested our predictions in a manufactured conflict, which gave us full control over the properties of the conflict. It may for example be that the extent to which a third party or the out-group have (perceived) control over the outcome of the conflict influence both support-seeking emotions and contempt. To control for this, we assigned all power to the third party which should stimulate intentions to win its support and at the same time to distance the in-group from the out-group. While we used the same conflict in both studies we used different experimental designs to measure emotion experience and expression to control for methodological limitations. To make it more credible that participants were actually communicating with an audience we employed a between-subjects design in Study 1. In Study 2 we measured emotion experience and expression towards different audiences repeatedly to stress potential differences and employed bogus physiological measures to detect potential experimenter effects and potential diminution in repeated emotion reports.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Note that in addition to the measures reported here we assessed several measures for exploratory purposes and to disguise the purpose of the studies, such as additional emotions (negative as well as positive). As these measures were not central to answering our research questions they are not reported in this chapter but are available upon request.



# Study I

## Method

**Participants and design.** International (i.e., non-Dutch) undergraduate students participated in the study and either received course credit or could enter a lottery (four 25-euro Amazon-vouchers). We excluded 28 participants who did not finish the study and two participants who indicated that one of their parents was Dutch (per condition, numbers of excluded participants and of those that dropped out *after* the introduction of the manipulation amounted to two to three and were thus comparable across conditions, final sample  $N = 86$ , age  $M = 21.41$ ,  $SD = 2.05$ ; 42 female, 13 missing values).

The study was approved by the Psychology Ethical Committee of our host institution, and conducted in accordance with its ethical guidelines. Upon accessing the study participants were informed about its format, duration, reward, and anonymity. They were asked to give consent to participate by moving forward in the online questionnaire. At the end of the study participants were fully debriefed and thanked for their participation.

Participants were randomly assigned to conditions in a 2 (expression towards out-group: yes vs. no) by 2 (expression towards third party: yes vs. no) between-subjects design. As main dependent variables we assessed anger, contempt, and support-seeking emotions.

**Materials and procedure.** We conducted the study online (using Qualtrics) and consent was obtained from all participations. To obscure the actual aim of the study we presented it as a survey about studying abroad to get insight into international students' life and their experiences. Participants received a full debriefing at the end of the study.

The first part of the study focused on the experiences of international students to make the social identity of international students in relation to Dutch students salient: We assessed participants' identification with international students (Leach et al., 2008), and we asked participants to rate seven statements about their experiences with Dutch and international students (e.g., "I experience

Dutch students to be friendly and cooperative” or “I prefer to stay amongst students from my home country”).

Next, we introduced a fake conflict: Participants received information about a new law enabling universities to raise tuition fees individually due to the financial crisis. Based on this law a group of Dutch students (out-group) wrote a proposal for higher tuition fees of 3000 euros per year solely for international students (i.e., participants’ in-group). The proposal was justified by the claim that international students profit from the Dutch education system but do not contribute to society (e.g., by paying taxes). A University Committee, consisting of staff members, would decide about the proposal and either accept or reject it and thus served as a (powerful) third party in this conflict. Subsequently, participants were asked how they appraised the proposal and how they felt about it. Before giving their answers, the *audience manipulation* was introduced by informing participants that the results of this survey would either be confidential (i.e., no audience: baseline condition), communicated to Dutch students (out-group audience condition), to the University Committee (third party audience condition) or to both groups (both audiences condition).

First, participants appraised the proposal with regard to injustice, morality, uncertainty, expectancy, and sense of controllability. We expected that the proposal should be appraised as unjust, immoral and causing uncertainty and to a certain extent as expected, irrespective of the audience. Controllability should be low as international students did not have a say in the decision making process. Each appraisal was assessed with four items [with two being reversed coded; 7-point Likert scale, 1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*; examples: injustice “The proposal is unjust” ( $\alpha = .80$ ) adapted from Tausch et al., 2011, morality “The proposal is immoral” ( $\alpha = .79$ ), uncertainty “The proposal renders me uncertain about my future” ( $\alpha = .83$ ), expectancy “The proposal was to be expected” ( $\alpha = .87$ ), uncontrollability “The proposal is beyond our control” ( $\alpha = .79$ )].

Participants were then asked to report anger (angry, irritated, revolted, Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .84$ ), contempt (contemptuous, disdainful, scornful,  $\alpha = .81$ ), and

support-seeking emotions, which included items covering sadness and fear (sadness: sad, depressed, down,  $\alpha = .80$ ; fear: scared, anxious, frightened,  $\alpha = .93$ ) on 7-point scales (1 = none, 7 = a lot). The reliability of all fear and sadness items together was very high ( $\alpha = .91$ ) and supports our assumption that – in the given context - they serve the same central function (i.e., support-seeking), thus we combined them to support-seeking emotions.

## Results

**Identification.** As expected, identification was on average moderate ( $M = 4.44$ ,  $SD = 0.83$ ) and did not differ between conditions,  $ps \geq .15$ .

**Table 2.1**

Means and Standard Deviations (in parentheses) of Appraisals in Study 1 and Study 2.

	Injustice	Immorality	Uncertainty	Controllability	Expectancy
Study 1	4.98*** (1.13)	4.79*** (1.06)	4.55*** (1.18)	4.04 (1.03)	4.61*** (1.20)
Study 2	4.46*** (1.15)	4.23+ (1.10)	4.17 (0.97)	4.15 (1.13)	4.2 (1.15)

Note. In Study 2, means are reported across bogus pipeline conditions. Asterisks indicate differences from scale midpoint (4).

+ $p < .1$ , \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

**Appraisals.** How participants appraised the proposal did not differ depending on audience,  $ps \geq .17$ . Comparisons of means to the scale midpoint (across conditions) showed that, overall, the cover story created the intended perception of mistreatment amongst participants (see Table 2.1).

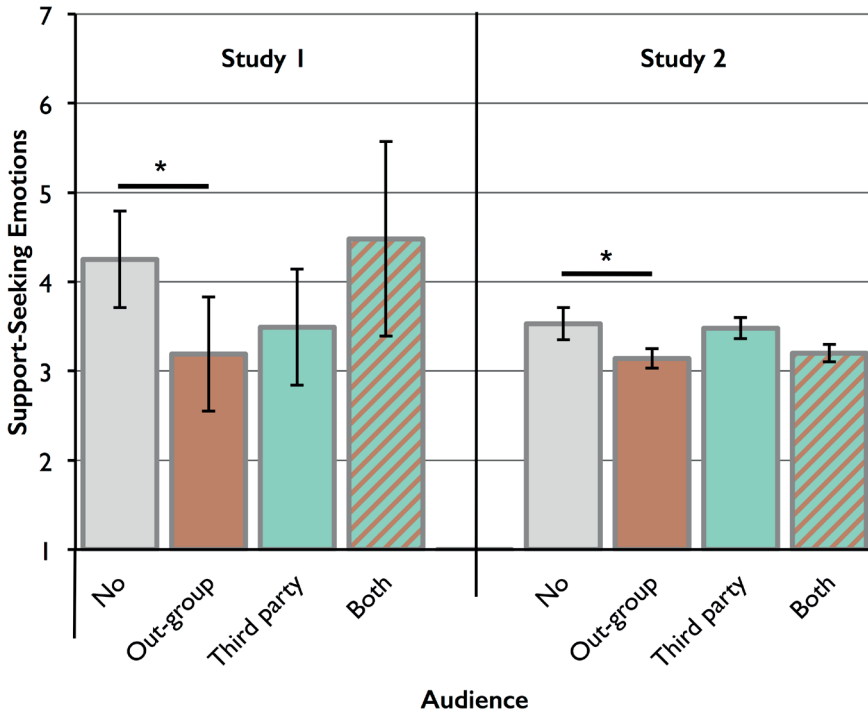
**Emotions.** We subjected support-seeking emotions, anger, and contempt to separate 2x2 between subjects ANOVAs (out-group audience x third party audience). Comparisons between the no audience condition (i.e., reflecting emotion experience) and single audiences (i.e., out-group or third party) were relevant to answer the question whether expression towards different audiences differs from expression (the both audiences condition completed the experimental design and may provide insight into which audience determined

emotion expression when both audiences were addressed).

Neither out-group audience nor third party audience showed a main effect on support-seeking emotions,  $ps > .36$ , however, the interaction was significant,  $F(1,82) = 12.71, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .13$  (Figure 2.1, left panel). Participants expressed support-seeking emotions *less* towards the out-group than they reported to experience them (baseline condition),  $F(1,82) = 6.52, p = .01, \eta_p^2 = .07$ . The expression towards the third party was marginally reduced,  $F(1,81) = 3.41, p = .07, \eta_p^2 = .04$ . The expression towards both audiences together was higher than towards the out-group,  $F(1,82) = 6.19, p = .02, \eta_p^2 = .07$ , and towards the third party,  $F(1,82) = 10.32, p = .002, \eta_p^2 = .11$ .

Neither factor showed main effects on contempt,  $ps \geq .24$ , but the interaction was significant,  $F(1,82) = 5.10, p = .03, \eta_p^2 = .06$  (Table 2.2). The expression of contempt towards the third party was lower than experience,  $F(1,82) = 5.84, p = .02, \eta_p^2 = .07$ . In contrast, communication of contempt to the out-group did not differ from baseline,  $F(1,82) = 0.54, p = .46, \eta_p^2 = .01$ . Also compared to both audiences together expression towards the third party was reduced,  $F(1,82) = 6.24, p = .01, \eta_p^2 = .07$ , while expression towards the out-group did not differ,  $F(1,82) = 0.62, p = .43, \eta_p^2 = .01$ .

Neither out-group audience nor third party audience showed a main effect on anger,  $ps \geq .68$ . The interaction was significant,  $F(1,82) = 4.16, p = .045, \eta_p^2 = .05$ , yet none of the simple effect tests yielded significance ( $ps \geq .15$ , Table 2.2). Only the expression towards the third party was marginally lower than towards both audiences together,  $F(1,82) = 3.17, p = .08, \eta_p^2 = .04$ .



**Figure 2.1.** Support-seeking emotions in Study 1 (left panel) and Study 2 (right panel). Error bars depict 95% confidence intervals. Note that the size of error bars differs between studies due to the difference in experimental designs. \*  $p < .05$ .

**Table 2.2**

Means and Standard Deviations (in parentheses) for Contempt and Anger in Study 1 and Study 2.

		Audience			
	Emotion	None	Out-group	Third party	Both
Study 1	Contempt	3.72 (1.24)	3.46 (1.06)	2.89* (1.13)	3.72 (1.04)
	Anger	4.58 (1.1)	4.1 (1.64)	3.97 (1.63)	4.71 (1.1)
Study 2	Contempt	3.68 (0.99)	3.24* (1.20)	3.21* (1.26)	3.16* (1.26)
	Anger	4.30 (1.45)	3.80* (1.65)	3.82* (1.59)	3.75* (1.64)

Note. Asterisks indicate significant differences from experience (i.e., no audience conditions)

\* $p < .05$ .

## Discussion

We tested the first component of strategic emotion expression, namely that expression may differ from experience. In the present context, we expected the expression of support-seeking emotions to be more important in the communication with a third party. Interestingly, we did not find the expected *increase* in the expression towards the third party but rather a *decrease* in the communication with the out-group. The expression towards the third party on the other hand reflected what they experienced. These results support the general hypothesis that expression may differ from experience, though it manifested in a reduction of support-seeking emotions towards the out-group rather than an increase towards the third party (so the relative relation between these audiences is as expected). Possibly, in-group members were less willing to admit their weakness and tried to play down their need for support when communicating towards the out-group. Such an admission might represent a loss of face, and as very little support can be expected from the out-group it would be perceived as damaging the in-group's image. At the same time, we found

that contempt expression towards the third party was lower than experience: Presumably, it is not desirable to express destructive emotions to a third party but to appear reasonable and cooperative. Anger expression did not differ from experience or between audiences. This does not support the idea that anger may be reduced to avoid potentially destructive responses from the out-group. Rather, it may indeed be expressed to communicate the experience of wrongdoing.

Comparisons between single audiences and both audiences together were less clear but it is noticeable that expression towards both audiences was generally high. Thus, if participants reduced their support-seeking expression (towards the out-group) or contempt expression (towards the third party) strategically this strategy does not seem to be applied when both audiences were present at the same time. The reasons for this are not clear and speculation unwarranted without further research.

In summary, Study 1 supported the prediction that emotion expression may differ from experience and showed that differences are not general but specific to different audiences yet we can thus far only speculate about the reasons for this. Therefore in Study 2 we turned to investigating goals associated with emotion expression.

## **Study 2**

While Study 1 provided initial support for the first component of strategic emotion expression, namely that emotion expression may differ from experience, Study 2 focused on strategic considerations presumed to underlie differences in emotion experience and expression by investigating the role of emotion expression in goal pursuit. In the presented context, strategic consideration should be most important for the expression towards the third party, which was presented as holding the power of decision, and thus was the audience that can actually improve the in-group's situation. We thus predicted that the goal of members of the disadvantaged group would be to seek support from the third party, and that expressed help seeking emotions would be used

to try to achieve this goal. With respect to the out-group on the other hand we predicted that the need for support would not be disclosed but the main goal would be to create distance: The out-group was responsible for the proposal creating injustice and at the same time did not have any influence on the further decision making process. We expected that expressed contempt would be used to try to achieve this goal.

We also aimed to make the difference between experienced and expressed emotions more salient. To do this we asked participants firstly how they *feel* about the conflict and secondly how they would like to *express* their emotions towards each of the audiences in a repeated measures design. To reduce the influence of repeated assessment and to increase confidence in our measurements of experienced and expressed emotions we further employed two different bogus physiological measures (Jones & Sigall, 1971).

## Method

**Participants and design.** Undergraduate psychology students participated in this study in exchange for course credits. Data from two participants had to be excluded because they knew about the cover story or partly grew up in the Netherlands (final sample  $N = 83$ , age  $M = 20.77$ ,  $SD = 2.34$ , 65 female).

The achieved power in Study 1 was rather low (e.g., interaction effect on contempt .64) so to increase power in Study 2 we computed the required sample size with G-Power (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007). Using audience this time as a within-subjects factor and based on the effect size for contempt in Study 1 ( $f = .25$ ; as a more conservative benchmark compared to the effect size for support-seeking emotions),  $\alpha = .05$ , power = .80, and (expected) correlation between the measures  $r = .70$  a sample size of 15 would be required. In addition to replicating the effect of audience we further expected that emotion reports should *not* be influenced by either of the bogus pipeline manipulations. If however either of the bogus pipeline factors would show a small interaction effect with audience ( $f = .10$ ) a sample size of 84 would be required to detect it ( $\alpha$



= .05, power = .80, and (expected) correlation between the measures  $r = .70$ ) Our sample size should thus be sufficient to detect such an effect.

The study was approved by the Psychology Ethical Committee of our host institution, and conducted in accordance with its ethical guidelines. Upon arrival to the lab participants were informed about its format, duration, reward, and anonymity, and asked to give written consent to participate. In conditions in which we used bogus physiological measures participants were informed that those measures were neither dangerous nor invasive in any way. At the end of the participation participants were fully debriefed and thanked for their participation.

We used a 2 (experienced emotions: bogus pipeline on vs. off) x 2 (expressed emotions: bogus pipeline on vs. off) x 4 (audience: no (i.e., experience), out-group audience, third party audience, both audiences) mixed design, with the latter factor being a repeated measure. Participants were randomly assigned to conditions. Again, anger, contempt, and support-seeking emotions were the main dependent variables. In addition, we assessed goals of emotion expression.

**Materials and procedure.** We used the same cover story and conflict as in Study 1. Participation took place in the lab in individual cubicles and participants in conditions including one of the bogus pipeline procedures received additional information about physiological measures and that these were neither invasive nor dangerous. The order of premeasures and dependent variables as well as the cover story were similar to Study 1. To keep the study duration reasonable we used a single item measure of identification (Postmes, Haslam, & Jans, 2013).

Phase 1 was designed to assess emotion experience (i.e., no audience presented). For half of the participants we used *facial response sensors*, four electrodes attached next to and below both eyes and connected to an amplifier. These were ostensibly able to detect activity patterns in facial muscles from which the experience of distinct emotions can be inferred. Allegedly, these muscular responses are not controllable and thus a mismatch between muscular

activity and emotion reports would reveal insincerity.

Participants were then asked how they feel about the proposal. As the reliability of emotion scales in Study 1 was very high and we aimed to keep the study duration reasonable (taking into account the repeated measures design) we excluded the adjectives that reduced reliability the least [correlations across conditions,  $ps < .001$ : anger (angry, irritated,  $r = .59$ ), contempt (scornful, disdainful,  $r = .72$ ), fear (scared, frightened,  $r = .84$ ) and sadness (depressed, down,  $r = .71$ ), combined support-seeking emotion measure  $\alpha = .89$ ].

In Phase 2, we assessed emotion expression towards different audiences repeatedly. Here, the second bogus pipeline procedure was used to investigate whether emotion *expression* was reported sincerely, i.e., as emotions actually would be expressed towards each particular audience. Half of the participants were assigned to this second bogus pipeline physiological measurement. For these participants, a single electrode, introduced as *deviation polygraph*, was attached to their left hands at the beginning of the study. This electrode was ostensibly able to detect changes in skin conductance response. Such changes were stated to detect increased arousal and thus indicative of an attempt to conceal one's actual expression intentions.

Phase 2 began with the assessment of how participants would express their emotions towards the out-group. After this we measured goals of emotion expression (7-point scale, 1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). To measure the goal to seek support we used two items ("My intention is to show that we need assistance", "My intention is to show that we are victims", correlations for all audiences  $rs \geq .33$ ,  $ps < .05$ ) and to measure distancing from the out-group participants were asked to rate the extent to which they want to show that the relationship with Dutch students is disrupted. We embedded the items for these two focal goals in a list of several items.

Next, all measures were repeated with the only difference that participants were asked to imagine that they were addressing the third party. In a third round participants were asked to respond as if both audiences were

present at the same time.

Although the two bogus physiological measures seem to be similar, they addressed two different issues: In Phase 1, facial response sensors were supposed to ensure that participants report how they *truly feel* about the proposal. On the contrary, the deviation polygraph in Phase 2 was intended to make participants *express* their emotions like they would when actually facing the respective audience. This procedure helped to overcome shortcomings of the experimental setting: Reporting emotions repeatedly may be influenced by consistency concerns, thus producing similar emotion reports in each condition while suppressing existing strategic considerations. In addition, when reporting emotions four times, a decline in levels of emotions may be expected. The constant reminder of the necessity to be sincere should prevent this.

## Results

**Identification.** Identification among participants was high ( $M = 5.71$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ) and comparable across the four bogus pipeline conditions,  $ps > .27$ .

**Appraisals.** During the assessment of appraisals none of the two bogus pipeline devices was “active”, but were already attached in the respective conditions. As expected, the mere presence of electrodes had no effects on appraisals,  $ps \geq .22$ .

As we had intended, comparisons to scale midpoints showed that participants appraised the proposal mainly as unjust and somewhat immoral (Table 2.1).

**Emotions.** For every emotion we computed a mixed ANOVA (experienced emotions bogus pipeline x expressed emotions bogus pipeline x audience). Neither of the bogus pipeline procedures influenced emotion reports,  $ps \geq .13$ . The fact that participants in conditions without bogus pipeline measures reported their emotions similarly to participants in bogus pipeline conditions (in which insincere reports would be unmasked) increases our confidence in the self-reports of emotions (as used in Study 1). Thus, we can assume that emotions were communicated as experienced (Phase 1) and as they would be expressed to the audiences (Phase 2).

Having established confidence in our measures, we focus in the following on the main effects of audience. As we predicted differences between emotion experience and expression we computed planned contrasts (simple) to compare the first level (no audience) to each of the subsequent levels.

Audience had an effect on support-seeking emotions,  $F(3,237) = 6.77, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .08$  (Figure 2.1, right panel). As in Study 1, the expression towards the out-group was significantly lower than experience,  $F(1,79) = 9.55, p = .003, \eta_p^2 = .11$ . The same was true for both audiences at the same time compared to experience,  $F(1,79) = 6.05, p = .02, \eta_p^2 = .07$ . The expression towards the third party was similar to experience reported in the baseline condition,  $F(1,79) = 0.16, p = .69, \eta_p^2 = .002$ .

Contempt differed depending on audience,  $F(3,234) = 12.67, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .14$  (Table 2.2). Contempt expression towards every audience was reduced compared to baseline (out-group audience:  $F(1,78) = 15.97, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .17$ , third party:  $F(1,78) = 16.18, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .17$ , both:  $F(1,78) = 16.45, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .17$ ).

We found an effect of audience on anger,  $F(3,237) = 8.12, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .09$  (Table 2). The expression towards every audience was lower than baseline (out-group,  $F(1,78) = 10.40, p = .002, \eta_p^2 = .12$ ; third party,  $F(1,78) = 10.91, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .12$ ; both,  $F(1,78) = 12.37, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .16$ ).

**Goals.** To assess whether goal importance differed between audiences we computed mixed ANOVAs (experienced emotions bogus pipeline x expressed emotions bogus pipeline x audience). If audience showed an effect, planned contrasts (repeated) were computed. Neither bogus pipeline procedures affected goals,  $ps \geq .17$  (only for relationship disruption we found a marginally significant interaction of both factors,  $F(1,77) = 3.38, p = .07, \eta_p^2 = .04$ ).

The goal to *call for support* differed between audiences,  $F(2,158) = 15.90, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .17$ , and was, as expected, higher for the third party audience ( $M = 4.34, SD = 1.41$ ) than for the out-group audience ( $M = 3.82, SD = 1.25$ ),  $F(1,79) = 23.86, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .23$ , but also than for both audiences at the same time ( $M$

= 4.14,  $SD = 1.38$ ),  $F(1,79) = 7.44$ ,  $p = .01$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .09$ . These findings confirm our prediction that support would be sought primarily from the third party.

Next, we tested whether the goal to call for support was predicted by expressed support-seeking emotions. We computed three hierarchical multiple regressions (per audience) and entered both bogus pipeline factors, *experienced* anger, contempt and help-seeking emotions in Step 1, followed by *expressed* anger, contempt and support-seeking emotions in Step 2.

For each of the audiences, at Step 1 experienced support-seeking emotions were the best predictor for the goal to call for support. This effect however was overridden when we added expressed emotions in Step 2: Here, *expressed* support-seeking emotions were the only predictor of call for support from each of the audiences (for statistics see Table 2.3).

We expected that it is more important for participants to *show that their relationship with Dutch students* (i.e., the out-group) is disrupted in communication with them and indeed we found a difference between audiences,  $F(2,154) = 10.14$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .12$ . To our surprise however its importance was rated higher in emotion expression towards the third party ( $M = 3.60$ ,  $SD = 1.55$ ) and not the out-group ( $M = 3.01$ ,  $SD = 1.39$ ),  $F(1,77) = 16.85$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .18$ ; The importance did not differ between third party and both audiences ( $M = 3.41$ ,  $SD = 1.58$ ),  $F(1,77) = 2.57$ ,  $p = .11$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .03$ .

In line with this, showing that the relationship with the out-group is disrupted is only predicted by expressed support-seeking emotions towards the third party,  $B = .48$ ,  $SE = .19$ ,  $t(73) = 2.53$ ,  $p = .01$ , 95%  $CI = [0.10, 0.86]$ , (Step 1,  $F(5,81) = 0.91$ ,  $p = .48$ ,  $R^2 = .06$ , adj.  $R^2 = -0.01$ , all predictors  $ps \geq .41$ ; Step 2,  $F(8,81) = 2.19$ ,  $p = .04$ ,  $R^2 = .19$ , adj.  $R^2 = .11$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .14$ , all other predictors  $ps \geq .14$ ), and not by expressed contempt towards the out-group,  $B = -.19$ ,  $SE = .16$ ,  $t(73) = -0.93$ ,  $p = .36$ , 95%  $CI = [-0.58, 0.21]$  ( $R^2 = .07$  for Step 1;  $\Delta R^2 = .08$  for Step 2, both models ns). If both audiences were addressed expressed anger was the best predictor,  $B = .45$ ,  $SE = .17$ ,  $t(73) = 2.61$ ,  $p = .01$ , 95%  $CI = [0.36, 0.29]$  (both models however non-significant,  $R^2 = .03$  for Step 1;  $\Delta R^2 = .13$  for Step 2).

**Table 2.3.**

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analyses for Support-Seeking Emotions Predicting the Goal to Call for Support for Different Audiences in Study 2 ( $N = 83$ ).

Audience	Predictor	$B$	$SE B$	$\beta$
Out-group	Step 1			
	Experienced support-seeking emotions	0.22	0.10	.27*
	Step 2			
	Experienced support-seeking emotions	-0.003	0.13	-0.003
Third Party	Step 1			
	Experienced support-seeking emotions	0.31	0.11	.33**
	Step 2			
	Experienced support-seeking emotions	-0.04	0.14	-0.04
Both groups	Step 1			
	Experienced support-seeking emotions	0.33	0.11	.35**
	Step 2			
	Experienced support-seeking emotions	0.05	0.15	0.05
Both groups	Step 1			
	Expressed support-seeking emotion	0.36	0.13	.45**
	Step 2			
	Expressed support-seeking emotions	0.50	0.15	.60**

Note. We also included both bogus pipeline manipulations as well as experienced and expressed anger and contempt as predictors, results are not presented in the table for brevity of presentation. Out-group audience  $R^2 = .20$  for Step 1;  $\Delta R^2 = .12$  for Step 2. Third party audience  $R^2 = .27$  for Step 1;  $\Delta R^2 = .13$  for Step 2. Both groups audience  $R^2 = .23$  for Step 1;  $\Delta R^2 = .09$  for Step 2; all  $ps < .05$ .

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ .

## Discussion

Neither bogus pipeline procedures influenced emotion reports. As emotion reports did not differ between conditions where insincere responding would be possible (i.e., no verification via bogus pipeline) or would be uncovered (i.e., bogus pipeline conditions) this gives us confidence that emotions reported in the no audience condition indeed reflect experienced emotions. Moreover, it also suggests that emotions expressed in the different audience conditions would be similarly expressed in actual confrontations.

We replicated the finding that support-seeking emotions expression

towards the out-group is *lower* than experience while expression of it towards the powerful third party is similar to what they experience. Further, the goal to call for support was more important in the communication with the third party than the out-group. As predicted, emotion expression was used to accomplish this goal: Expressed support-seeking emotions were the strongest predictor of call for support. This was true for all audiences, however it is important to note that both the expression of support-seeking emotions and the goal to call for support were lower for the out-group audience. This finding provides support for the proposed second component of strategic emotion expression, namely that expression has a stronger link to a desired goal than experience. In addition, we found virtually no evidence that the expression of contempt is used to distance from the out-group. Potentially, distancing from the out-group is a less important goal and was already achieved by the out-group when offending the in-group. Also, in the scenario used the out-group does not have any power over the handling of the conflict. This might have made strategy less important. While we had expected that distancing from the out-group would be particularly important in the communication with the out-group, results showed that it was in fact more important in the communication with the third party or both audiences at the same time. Interestingly, we also found that expressed support-seeking emotions were used to communicate distancing from the out-group towards the third party. While at first sight this seems surprising, it suggests that participants might have used support-seeking emotion expression to blame the out-group for the experienced disadvantage.

## **General Discussion**

In two studies, we investigated whether members of disadvantaged groups express emotions strategically in order to tackle their situation. To do so, we looked at two components of their emotion expression: Firstly, we tested whether emotion expression differs depending on the audience rather than reflecting experience. In both studies, we found that support-seeking emotion

expression towards the out-group was *played down* in comparison to emotion experience (i.e., no audience). We further found less expression of contempt in comparison to experience. In Study 1 this was only true in the case of the third party audience but in Study 2 we found an overall reduction of contempt expression. With respect to anger we found mixed results. While in Study 1 we found no differences between experience and expression towards out-group or third party in Study 2 we found an overall reduction in expression compared to experience. As such, we found support for the claim that expression may differ from experience for different emotions.

Secondly, in Study 2 we examined the association between emotions and goals, predicting that members of disadvantaged groups would use support-seeking emotion expression to call for support and contempt expression to distance from the out-group. We indeed found that expressed support-seeking emotions predicted calling for support over and above experienced support-seeking emotions. However, we did not find the expected link between contempt and distancing. Instead, we found an association between expressed support-seeking emotions and distancing when the third party was the only audience and an association between expressed anger and distancing when communicating with both audiences at the same time. Thus, rather than using contempt to distance from the out-group, we have some evidence that participants used anger to do so. We further interpret the association between support-seeking emotions and distancing from the out-group in front of the third party audience as a way to blame the out-group for the in-group's disadvantage. The motivation for this may be to create distance between the third party and the out-group which would serve the in-group's interests.

Overall, these findings support the proposed association between expressed emotions and goals, but our results suggest that this may be particularly true for *beneficial* goals (e.g., enlisting support) and less so for destructive goals in the communication with the out-group (e.g., distancing from the out-group). Arguably, pursuing destructive goals in the communication with an out-group



requires less strategy while beneficial goals on the other hand – especially in conflicts – may require more strategic considerations and adjustments to emotion expression. Nonetheless we cannot rule out that attack-related emotions such as anger, contempt, or even hatred are never expressed in a strategic manner. In fact, looking at actual conflicts such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it seems likely that such emotions could indeed be expressed strategically to provoke retaliatory responses, which call (international) attention to the conflict.

These findings advance our understanding of emotion expression in intergroup conflicts in two important ways. The function of expressed emotions has so far mostly been investigated with a focus on how expressed emotions influence an *audience* (de Vos et al., 2013; Kamans et al., 2014; Van Kleef, 2009). By showing that emotions can be expressed strategically we complement those findings from the *expresser* perspective. Not only do emotions influence an audience it seems as if expressers may specifically intend such influence, which is an important link in the inference of strategic behavior. In particular, our findings complement those by Kamans and colleagues (2014). While they found that third parties were particularly likely to support a disadvantaged group that expressed fear, we could show that members of disadvantaged groups used fear (together with sadness) to enlist third party support. Thus it seems as if participants were – at least to a certain extent – aware that the emotions they communicated to an audience would influence the audience. This suggests that lay theories that we hold regarding the effects of support-seeking emotions match with research findings: Not only do support-seeking emotions enlist support but they are also consciously used to do so.

The fact that we found a reduction of contempt expression (towards the third party in Study 1 and all audiences in Study 2) suggests that participants were aware of its potential detrimental effects (de Vos et al., 2013) however we were not able to establish the link between contempt and the distancing goal. For anger, the results were mixed and importantly we did not find an association between anger expression and beneficial goals. On the contrary, we found an

association between expressed anger and distancing from the out-group when communicating with both audiences. This suggests that the positive effects of anger expression that have been demonstrated (de Vos et al., 2013; de Vos, van Zomeren, Gordijn, & Postmes, 2016) are not incorporated in lay beliefs. This fits well with the common lay understanding of anger as a negative emotion, despite the apparently positive effects it can have (Hess, 2014).

Further our results also provide interesting insights in light of instrumental emotion regulation. While research in this area mostly focuses on how individuals want to *feel* (Goldenberg et al., 2016; Tamir, 2009) we could show that also what individuals want to *express* for utilitarian purposes.

A question often raised in emotion research is how accurately we can measure emotions. By employing two different experimental designs (i.e., a between-subjects design in Study 1 and a within-subjects design in Study 2) while keeping the context constant in both studies we aimed to reduce measurement error. Using both designs we found a reduction of support-seeking expression towards the out-group on comparison to experience. To further verify the results obtained using rating scales we used the bogus pipeline technique in Study 2. The fact that we did not find any differences in emotion reports with and without the bogus pipeline manipulations gives us some confidence in the measure used (Study 2). Nevertheless, it would be desirable to replicate the differences found between emotion experience and expression also with other measures. Importantly, such measures have to distinguish specific emotions and allow for strategic adjustment of emotion expression so that many physiological measures would not be appropriate but any written or verbal account should be considered in future research.

### **Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

We would like to point out some limitations that could give rise to follow-up research. Firstly, with respect to strategic emotion expression in general, we have initial evidence that participants used their emotions as a subtle tool to influence the audience. In order to further strengthen the claim that participants

choose expressed emotions due to their subtlety future research should compare emotion expression as a way to communicate with and influence an audience to more direct ways of communication (such as language and action). For example, in ongoing research we currently investigate both direct verbal and subtle emotional calls for support.

Secondly, the finding that support-seeking emotions are used to enlist support should be tested under less restricted conditions. In the studies presented here we tested our hypotheses only in one particular, artificial context with a powerful and undecided third party. While this allowed us to explore the fundamentals of strategic emotion expression in follow-up research we have turned to investigate whether the emotional call for support is primarily driven by the fact that the third party had power or whether that it was not primarily responsible for the proposed changes that would bring about disadvantages for the in-group.

## **Conclusion**

Our research contributes to the understanding of the function of emotion in intergroup conflicts in general and in particular to the role of emotion expression. While the function of emotions was mostly studied in the context of how experienced emotions influence own actions (Mackie et al., 2000) and how expressed emotions influence actions of audiences (de Vos et al., 2013; de Vos et al., 2016; Kamans et al., 2014) we can now add that emotion expression itself is also likely to serve a function, namely to pursue a goal that is considered beneficial for the own group. Thus, not only experienced group-based emotions are regulated for instrumental purposes (Goldenberg et al., 2016) but also expressed emotions. The notion of benefit seems to be important as we did not find strategic emotion expression of potentially destructive emotions towards the out-group. Thus, emotion expression is more than merely expressing what we feel but serves as a tool to overcome a disadvantaged situation.



*Breaking Ground*

