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Communicating anger and contempt in intergroup conflict

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Chapter 3

Explaining When the Communication
of Group-based Anger Induces Empathy
in Intergroup Conflict: The Role of
Perceived Illegitimacy and Group Consensus

This chapter is based on De Vos, B., Van Zomeren, M., Gordijn, E. H., & Postmes, T. (2015). *Explaining when the communication of group-based anger induces empathy in intergroup conflict: The role of perceived perceived illegitimacy and group consensus*. Unpublished manuscript.

Explaining When the Communication of Group-based Anger Induces Empathy in Intergroup Conflict: The Role of Perceived Perceived Illegitimacy and Group Consensus

Peace requires something far more difficult than revenge or merely turning the other cheek; it requires empathizing with the fears and unmet needs that provide the impetus for people to attack each other

– Marshall Rosenberg (Speak peace in a world of conflict, 2005a, p. 129)

As the above quote suggests, feeling empathy for the outgroup may be one key prerequisite for harmonious intergroup relations. Indeed, past research has extensively documented positive effects of outgroup empathy (defined as the ability to understand, perceive and feel another person's feelings) in reducing intergroup prejudice and hostility (e.g., Batson et al., 1997; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). Empathizing emotionally with outgroup members typically leads to a concern for their welfare and more positive attitudes toward them (Batson et al., 1997; Dovidio, ten Vergert et al., 2004; Stephan & Finlay, 1999), which in turn leads one to act on behalf of the outgroup (Batson, 1991; Stephan & Renfro, 2002). Thus, increasing outgroup empathizing might be an important first step toward reducing intergroup conflict (Stephan, 2008).

Of course, increasing empathy in intergroup conflicts is often easier said than done, particularly when such conflicts include high stakes and a long history of contention (e.g., Halperin et al, 2011; Shnabel & Nadler, 2008). Such conflicts are also often conceptually complex to the extent that there are all kinds of psychological explanations for not empathizing beforehand (e.g., structural blaming of the other group, not seeking empathy in the first place). In the current paper, we therefore focus on lower-stake intergroup conflicts that have a stronger potential to examine an essential antecedent of increasing

empathy in intergroup conflict: The communication of group-based emotions like anger and contempt.

More specifically, although the communication of group-based contempt has been found to have distinctly negative consequences for conflict resolution (e.g., De Vos, Van Zomeren, Gordijn & Postmes, 2013; see Chapter 2), the communication of group-based anger has been found to *increase* outgroup empathy. The key reason for this is that the communication of group-based anger serves a distinctly *relational* function (De Vos et al., 2013). That is, among the broad spectrum of meanings and intentions potentially conveyed by group-based anger, a central element of meaning through its communication is a relational signal (a) that one's group feels that they are treated illegitimately by the other group (cf., Frijda, 1986; Lazarus, 1991; Roseman, 2001; Scherer, 2001; Scherer, Schorr, & Johnstone, 2001) and (b) that emphasizes the importance of maintaining a long-term relationship with the other group. Especially because of the latter aspect, the communication of group-based anger entails that individuals approach the other (Carver & Harmon-Jones, 2009) and implicitly ask the recipient of their anger to feel empathy for them as well as engage in reconciliatory behavior (and in this sense, group-based anger functions no differently than inter-personal anger: see Fischer & Roseman, 2007).

Although recent work indeed showed that the communication of group-based anger increased outgroup empathy in recipients, there should of course be boundaries to this positive potential of communicating anger in intergroup conflict. The aim of the current work is to zoom in on two potential antecedents of the empathy-inducing effects of the communication of anger derived from the emotion and intergroup conflict literatures. First, at a general level the communication of anger aims to let recipients recognize that the other party has been treated *illegitimately* (a key appraisal of anger; Frijda, 1986; Lazarus, 1991; Roseman, 2001), thereby entitling the other to the communication of their

anger (i.e., anger is appropriate). Put differently, the current research examines whether the communication of group-based anger decreases outgroup empathy when the recipient does not perceive that the group is treated unfairly and thus entitled to its anger. Second, at the level of the specific intergroup relation that the communication of group-based anger seeks to maintain, we examine whether the communicated anger needs to be perceived as *group-based* by the recipient (i.e., as shared within the outgroup; see Smith, Seger & Mackie, 2007). Put differently, we test whether the communication of anger fails to increase empathy when the anger is perceived as individual anger rather than as shared by the group. Investigating these potential boundary conditions for anger's empathy-inducing effects is important because this will further our understanding of when (and why) anger may help to solve intergroup conflict (rather than escalate it). We report three experiments that put these antecedents of the positive, empathy-inducing effects of the communication of group-based anger to the test in the context of 'low-stake' intergroup conflicts (but see Chapter 4 for a case of higher-stake conflict). Compared to the previous chapter, we zoom in through focusing on antecedent variables but also on empathy as the key dependent variable.

Perceived Illegitimacy as Basis for 'Their' Group-based Anger

According to appraisal theories of emotions (for an overview, see e.g., Scherer et al, 2001), one of the key appraisals that shape the experience of anger is unfairness (Miller, 2001) or illegitimacy (e.g., Roseman, Spindel, & Jose, 1990). Communicating anger thus effectively communicates the desire to address this sense of illegitimacy and demands from the other party some kind of reconciliation aimed at restoring justice. Indeed, through communicating anger disadvantaged group members may attempt to persuade the advantaged group that the treatment they are receiving is illegitimate and therefore that they are entitled to their anger.

However, the extent to which the recipients agree the outgroup is entitled to

its anger depends on the recipients' *perception* of its treatment as illegitimate (cf. Shields, 2005). Indeed, research on interpersonal relations showed that when the treatment of one person by another is perceived to be legitimate, the communication of anger is perceived as inappropriate and therefore may not lead to reconciliation (e.g., Van Kleef & Côté, 2007). If anything, an inappropriate display of anger might have detrimental consequences because it can be perceived as a sign of aggression (see also Lickel et al., 2006; Van Kleef & Côté, 2007). Thus, for any positive effects of the communication of anger to emerge, it seems pivotal that recipients of anger view it as appropriate. Although this implies that there is room for anger's empathy-inducing effects in intergroup conflict settings, it also implies that in conflicts where groups cannot imagine the other party's anger to be appropriate, communicating anger will unlikely have such positive effects. Experiment 1 directly manipulates this variable to test these hypotheses.

Perceived Outgroup Consensus as 'Their' Basis for Group-based Anger

If recipients of the communication of group-based anger need to perceive the outgroup's situation as illegitimate in order to feel empathy for them, then this may appear to suggest that, in the conflict settings we focus on, this is not only an antecedent but also a potentially *sufficient* condition for its positive effects. A similar argument can be made for the 'perceived groupness' of the anger that is communicated. Indeed, group-based anger is not only based in perceived illegitimacy, but also in a sharedness of that emotional experience within the group. Thus, if the communicated anger is not perceived as shared within the group (Smith et al., 2007), then one is simply faced with a lone angry voice that can be easily ignored or avoided and thus is unlikely to evoke empathy for the group as a whole.

By contrast, when people believe the outgroup *as a whole* to be angry (i.e., when anger appears to be shared), this should make the anger communicated by individual outgroup members an appropriate and valid expression of their

experience of intergroup emotion. Indeed, when the communicated anger is perceived to be *group-based* it implies a perceived sharedness (i.e., multiple people seem to experience it) and a high perceived consensus (i.e., people seem to agree about communicating it) within the outgroup concerning its communication (Smith et al., 2007). In line with the relational function of anger (Fischer & Roseman, 2007), the communication of group-based anger should be perceived by recipients as a signal that the outgroup *as a whole* cares about maintaining a positive intergroup relationship and therefore encourage recipients to feel empathy for them. We therefore argue that the perception of the communication of anger as group-based (i.e., as being perceived as consensual within the group) is a second potential antecedent for the positive, empathy-inducing effects of the communication of group-based anger. Experiment 2 directly manipulates this variable to test this hypothesis.

Our line of reasoning suggests that an absence of perceived illegitimacy or perceived outgroup consensus, within the conflict setting we examine, should lower outgroup empathy as a consequence of the communication of group-based anger. However, Experiments 1 and 2 do not include both factors in one design and thus cannot tell us much about the exact interrelationship between these potential antecedents. For this reason, Experiment 3 manipulates both variables in an explorative fashion to test whether each antecedent is sufficient to produce their predicted empathy-inducing effects. This is not to say that we believe that these two factors are universally sufficient – for instance, in the higher-stake intergroup conflicts that lead individuals to be defensive about and distrusting of any outgroup member, we do not assume that those factors will suffice for enabling the empathy-inducing effects of communicating group-based anger.

In sum, the key aim of this paper is to test the internal validity of the idea that perceived illegitimacy and outgroup consensus are antecedent conditions of the positive, empathy-inducing effects of the communication of group-based anger (Experiments 1-2). Furthermore, the more explorative aim of Experiment

3 was to illuminate their exact interrelationship within the (relatively lower-stake) conflict settings we examine. Across the three empirical experiments reported in this article, we employed an experimental approach to enable causal inferences from the findings. We thereby made some deliberate choices in the experiment design to increase experimental control, while keeping the contexts ‘real’ and believable for the participants (which in Experiments 1 and 2 were students, whereas in Experiment 3 they were dog-owners). The first two experiments made use of actual conflicts, either by means of an ostensibly real newspaper article (Experiment 1) or a vignette containing ostensibly real statements from outgroup members (Experiment 2). Experiment 3 employed a highly realistic scenario.

Across studies, we also varied the medium through which anger was communicated, either through mass media (Experiment 1), through statements of outgroup members (Experiment 2) or an imagined direct encounter with the communicator (Experiment 3). As in Chapter 2, we purposefully chose indirect ways of communicating group-based anger because outgroup anger is often not encountered in direct contact with an outgroup member, but through indirect channels such as mass media (Halualani, Chitgopekar, Morrison, & Dodge, 2004; Hargrave & Livingstone, 2009; Marsden, 1987; Postmes et al., 2014). Hence, we chose to realistically recreate such contexts across the reported experiments. Finally, to facilitate generalization across contexts, we used a variety of intergroup contexts outlining conflicts involving a situation of relative deprivation (Experiment 1), transgression (Experiment 2) and an incident (Experiment 3).

Experiment 1: The Role of Perceived Illegitimacy

Method

Participants were 51¹ participants first-year psychology students from the University of Groningen (38 women; $M_{\text{age}} = 21.10$; $SD = 1.47$) who participated for course credit. Participants were randomly assigned to one of

four conditions in a 2 (Communication of Anger: Absent / Present) X 2 (Perceived Treatment: Legitimate / Illegitimate) between-subjects design.

Upon entering the lab, participants were given a paper questionnaire consisting of a short, ostensibly real (but in fact fictitious) newspaper article and a series of questions related to the article. The article described the plans of the Dutch government to make education cuts, and reduce student funding. University students reacted to this by offering a petition with 5000 signatures to the state secretary in which they pleaded for a specific approach to applying these cuts to reduce study financing. In this petition they argued that students at Universities were entitled to higher funding than students studying at Higher Vocational Education (VE) institutions, because university tuition fees are higher, and because people with a university diploma are scarcer and therefore more valuable in the job market. In the *legitimate treatment condition*, university students argued that VE students should in the future get 95% of the funding of university students (i.e., almost the same as the ingroup), whereas in the *illegitimate treatment condition* the percentage was only 50% (i.e., much less).

Subsequently, the manipulation of anger took place. A VE student, Michel de Vries, reacted to this treatment by either specifically *communicating anger* (“This treatment by university students makes me really angry”) or by *communicating a general disapproval* (but no specific emotion; “I disapprove of this illegitimate treatment by university students”), which was specifically mentioned to be on behalf of the group. Additionally, the communicated emotion or lack thereof was manipulated in the title of the article (e.g., “VE students angry over / disapprove of treatment by university students”).

Each variable in the three experiments was, unless mentioned otherwise, measured on 7-point Likert-scales ($1 = absolutely\ not$, $7 = very\ much$). Two manipulation check items verified the effectiveness of the manipulation of anger (“To what extent did VE students express anger?”), and treatment legitimacy

(“To what extent did you perceive VE students to be treated legitimately?”). Empathy was measured with 8 statements of which 4 items related to affective empathy (e.g., “I empathize with VE Students, such as Michel”) and 4 items related to cognitive empathy / perspective taking (“I don’t find it difficult to take the perspective of VE students such as Michel”). Due to high convergence, these two subscales were combined into one single empathy scale ($\alpha = .88$).

Results & Discussion

Manipulation checks. A 2x2 ANOVA on the manipulation check of perceived anger revealed only the expected main effect of anger, $F(1, 47) = 13.49, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .22$. VE-students were indeed perceived to be more angry in the anger conditions ($M = 5.35, SD = 1.09$) than in the no anger conditions ($M = 3.88, SD = 1.74$). The main effect of legitimacy ($F(1, 47) = 2.48, p = .122$), and the interaction effect ($F(1, 47) = 0.06, p = .813$) were not significant. The manipulation check of treatment legitimacy revealed only the expected main effect of treatment legitimacy, $F(1, 47) = 13.90, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .23$: Participants perceived the treatment to be more legitimate in the legitimate treatment conditions ($M = 4.20, SD = 1.56$) than in the illegitimate treatment conditions ($M = 2.65, SD = 1.38$). The main effect of anger ($F(1, 47) = 0.91, p = .344$) and the interaction effect ($F(1, 47) = 0.11, p = .736$) were not significant. Thus, both manipulations were effective.

Outgroup empathy. A 2x2 ANOVA on empathy showed a significant main effect of treatment justice, $F(1, 47) = 16.61, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .26, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.10, 0.41]$. Participants empathized more with VE-students when they perceived their treatment to be illegitimate, ($M = 5.73, SD = 0.82$) rather than legitimate ($M = 4.92, SD = 0.64$). Importantly, this main effect was qualified by the predicted significant two-way interaction effect, $F(1, 47) = 7.67, p = .008, \eta_p^2 = .14, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.02, 0.29]$ (see Figure 1).

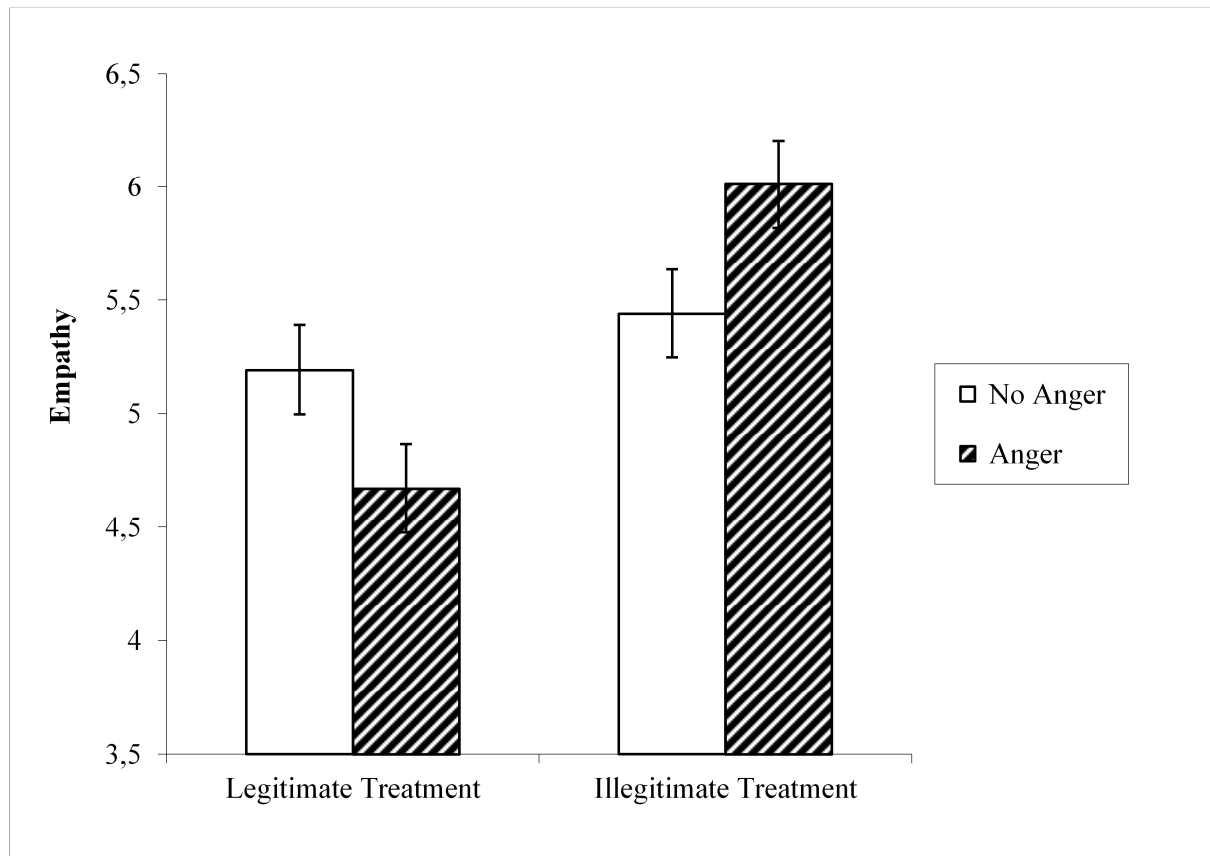


Figure 1. Means and standard errors of empathy towards Vocational Education students as a function of the treatment legitimacy and the presence or absence of anger, Experiment 1.

Simple main effect analyses showed that when VE students' treatment was perceived as legitimate, a marginally significant effect was found so that somewhat less empathy was felt when anger was communicated ($M = 4.67$, $SD = 0.59$) than when no anger was communicated ($M = 5.19$, $SD = 0.61$), $F(1, 47) = 3.40$, $p = .071$. Here, the expression of anger thus had somewhat negative effects. However, when VE students' treatment was perceived as illegitimate, significantly *more* empathy was felt after the communication of anger ($M = 6.01$, $SD = 0.63$) than when no anger was communicated ($M = 5.44$, $SD = 0.91$), $F(1, 47) = 4.31$, $p = .043$. Further simple main effects analyses showed that when VE students communicated anger, participants felt more empathy when the treatment was perceived as illegitimate, versus when it was perceived to be legitimate, $F(1, 47) = 23.92$, $p < .001$. Importantly, too, when they did not

communicate anger, there was no significant difference in felt empathy between the two legitimacy conditions, $F(1, 47) = 0.84, p = .37$.

Discussion. Results replicated support for the hypothesis that the communication of group-based anger results in increased outgroup empathy, but extended it by suggesting that this is only the case when the anger is expressed in response to a perceived illegitimate treatment. Importantly, whether the ingroup's treatment of the outgroup was illegitimate or legitimate did not, in and of itself, make any difference for the level of empathy that ingroup members felt. It was only under conditions that the outgroup expressed anger that perceived illegitimacy mattered, in the sense that an illegitimate treatment encouraged participants to empathize with the outgroup. This fits our idea that perceived illegitimacy is a sufficient antecedent condition for anger's positive, empathy-inducing effects, at least within low-stake conflicts as the one we studied.

Moreover, these results are in line with Van Kleef and Côté (2007) who showed that appropriate displays of anger in negotiation settings can lead to better personal outcomes, because the opponent tends to be less competitive and give in more easily in response to appropriate anger expressions. Our results fit with these findings because they show that appropriate displays of anger increase empathy for the angry outgroup in *intergroup* conflict situations as well. Importantly, however, they also move beyond them by pointing to the importance of perceptions of legitimacy and entitlement as important social psychological factors in determining when the communication of anger is deemed to be appropriate or not. Finally, and in line with the notion of the relational function of the communication of group-based anger, when treatment was perceived to be legitimate, the communication of anger appeared to backfire and, if anything, *reduced* outgroup empathy. Thus, our findings fit with a relational interpretation of individuals' responses to anger expressions in the

context of low-stake intergroup conflict. Anger here signals that the group feels wronged, and that its claim is hard to dismiss.

Experiment 2 explored a second antecedent condition for anger's positive, empathy-inducing effects: Outgroup Consensus regarding the communicated anger. Because an important function of the communication of group-based anger is to emphasize the importance of maintaining a positive intergroup relationship, we hypothesized that only when there was a perceived high consensus regarding the anger communication would it be effective in increasing empathy.

Experiment 2: The Role of Perceived Outgroup Consensus

Method

Participants were 51¹ first-year psychology students from the University of Groningen (32 women; $M_{\text{age}} = 21.69$; $SD = 2.43$) who participated for course credit. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in a 2 (Communication of Anger: Absent / Present) X 2 (Perceived Consensus: Low / High) between-subjects design. Participants were told that the experiment was about the conflict between students and Stadgers (a term referring specifically to city-born inhabitants of Groningen, or "locals"). Groningen is a medium-size city with a university founded in 1614, and similar to many inner-city universities where students have historically formed a sizable and visible minority among the local population, it has a pedigree of "town and gown" tensions between students and locals, which in centuries past occasionally erupted into physical violence and homicide. Although contemporary conflicts tend to be mild by comparison, there are still pervasive tensions that are extensively covered in the media and well known to all.

In the experiment, participants were first informed about the (real) ongoing conflict between students and locals in Groningen, and were subsequently told that they would be reading ostensibly real statements of two locals (Alfred and Tanja) talking about their experience of Groningen students causing excessive

noise, littering and other forms of antisocial behavior in their neighborhood. These are common complaints that have recently surfaced in the news. The statements either contained a specific *communication of anger* (e.g., “I am very angry that students in Groningen behave in such an antisocial way”), or a *general disapproval* (but no specific emotion; “Students in Groningen behave in an antisocial way”). Consensus was manipulated by including a final statement that research conducted by the University showed that 85% (high consensus) or 15% (low consensus) of locals share this emotion (whereby ‘emotion’ was replaced by ‘anger’ or ‘disapproval’, depending on the anger manipulation).

We used the same manipulation check item as in Experiment 1 for anger. Additionally, the manipulation of consensus was checked with a dichotomous item asking participants to indicate the extent to which they perceived low (0) or high (1) consensus concerning the message that *Stadjers* had communicated. Empathy was measured with the same 8 statements as in Experiment 1 (with items referring to *Stadjers*), which were again collapsed into one single empathy scale ($\alpha = .89$).

Results & Discussion

Manipulation checks. A 2x2 ANOVA on the manipulation check of perceived anger revealed the expected main effect of anger, $F(1, 47) = 12.34, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .21$. *Stadjers* were indeed perceived to be angrier in the anger conditions ($M = 5.50, SD = 1.98$) than in the no anger conditions ($M = 3.68, SD = 1.68$). The main effect of consensus ($F(1, 47) = 1.01, p = .321$) and the interaction effect ($F(1, 47) = 0.001, p = .976$) were not significant. A Logistic Regression on the manipulation check of consensus revealed the expected main effect of consensus, $\chi^2(1) = 19.45, p < .001$: Participants perceived the group of *Stadjers* to have more consensus concerning the communication of anger in the high consensus conditions ($M = 0.92, SD = 0.27$) than in the low consensus conditions ($M = 0.36, SD = 0.49$). The main effect of anger ($\chi^2(1) = 0.23, p =$

.629) and the interaction effect ($\chi^2(1) = 1.96, p = .161$) were not significant. Thus, both manipulations were effective.

Outgroup empathy. A 2x2 ANOVA on empathy showed a significant two-way interaction effect, $F(1, 47) = 5.43, p = .024, \eta_p^2 = .10, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.01, 0.25]$ (see Figure 2).

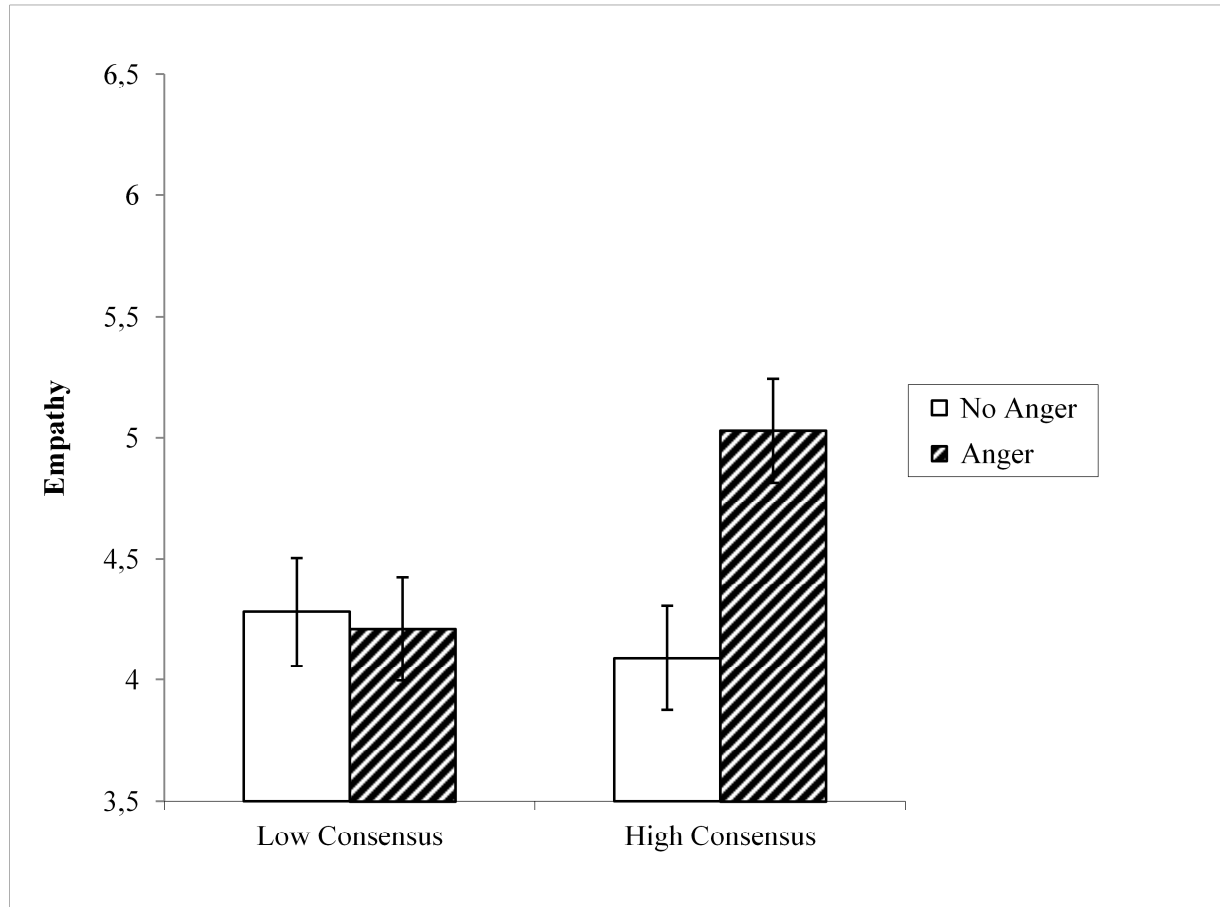


Figure 2. Means and standard errors of empathy towards “Stadjers” as a function of the level of consensus and the presence or absence of anger, Experiment 2.

Simple main effect analyses showed that when there was low consensus, there were no differences in felt empathy between conditions in which anger was communicated ($M = 4.21, SD = 0.61$) and when it was not communicated ($M = 4.28, SD = 1.10$), $F(1, 47) = 0.06, p = .82$.

It should be noted that, descriptively, average levels of empathy for the plight of Stadjers were somewhat lower as compared to those obtained in the

different Experiment 1 context (in the current experiment, they were slightly above the midpoint of the scale). However, when there was high consensus among locals, participants felt significantly more empathy after the communication of anger ($M = 5.03$, $SD = 0.65$) than when no anger was communicated explicitly ($M = 4.09$, $SD = 0.67$), $F(1, 47) = 9.54$, $p = .003$. Further comparisons of conditions showed that when locals did communicate anger, participants felt more empathy when perceived consensus was high versus when it was low, $F(1, 47) = 7.33$, $p = .009$. When they did not communicate anger, however, there was no difference in felt empathy between the two consensus conditions, $F(1, 47) = 0.37$, $p = .55$. In sum, the pattern of results revealed that participants empathized with Stadjers when they communicated anger *and* when there was high perceived consensus concerning this communication (a pattern confirmed by testing the appropriate contrast, $F(3, 47) = 3.92$, $p = .014$). This fits with the idea that perceived outgroup consensus is a sufficient antecedent condition for anger's positive, empathy-inducing effects, within the context of the low-stake intergroup conflicts that we studied.

Discussion. Results from Experiment 2 provided more support for our hypothesis that the communication of anger in an intergroup conflict results in an increase of felt empathy, but specified this prediction to be the case only when the anger is perceived to be group-based; that is, when there is high perceived outgroup consensus concerning its communication. A further interesting finding is that the level of perceived consensus concerning the communicated emotion (anger versus general disapproval) did not, in and of itself, affect the level of outgroup empathy. It was the level of perceived within group consensus concerning the communication of the specific emotion of *anger* that influenced the extent to which people felt outgroup empathy. This fits the idea that the high level of perceived consensus concerning the communication of anger emphasizes the group-based nature of the emotion. That is, high perceived consensus turns anger into an intergroup signal that functions as an implicit

signal for the other group to empathize with the disadvantaged group's plight. It signals that the *group* feels wronged, rather than a lone individual voice within that group that can easily be dismissed.

Taken together, Experiment 1 and 2 supported the idea that perceived illegitimacy and outgroup consensus reflect antecedent conditions of the positive, empathy-inducing effects of the communication of group-based anger. Experiment 3 was designed to explore whether each, within the low-stake intergroup conflicts that we studied, is a sufficient explanation of when (and thus why) anger has empathy-inducing effects. Because this was our key aim, we chose to include only conditions in which anger was communicated (and thus dropped the general disapproval conditions used in Experiments 1 and 2). We further chose yet another different low-stake intergroup conflict context in which to test our ideas in order to increase their external validity.

Experiment 3: Sufficient Conditions?

Method

Participants were 56¹ Groningen dog-owners (36 women; $M_{\text{age}} = 42.16$; $SD = 13.12$). Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in a 2 (Perceived Outgroup Consensus: Low / High) X 2 (Perceived Treatment: Legitimate / Illegitimate) between-subjects design. Participants were approached at a dog training school and asked to read a scenario and fill out a short questionnaire.

The introduction to the scenario read that the local government had passed legislation that dogs were allowed to walk off-leash only in designated areas. The participants were asked to imagine themselves in a scenario in which their dog was roaming free in the park. Perceived treatment legitimacy was manipulated by stating this occurred in one of the newly designated on-leash areas [illegitimate treatment] or in an off-leash area [a treatment that was comparatively more legitimate]. Participants subsequently read that their dog spotted another person, enthusiastically bounded towards the other and jumped

up on its hind legs in a non-aggressive way. In response to the dog jumping up, the person responded in anger by saying: “Keep your dog leashed! It really makes me so angry when this happens!” In the legitimate treatment condition, the dog is walking in an off-leash area and is therefore legitimately roaming free. This was intended to make the expressed anger appear less appropriate. In the illegitimate condition, the dog is running around in an on-leash area and is therefore clearly in the wrong. This was intended to make the expressed anger appear more appropriate. Put differently, in each of the 4 conditions anger was expressed, but the appropriateness of this response varied as a manipulation of treatment legitimacy.

After reading the scenario, the manipulation of perceived outgroup consensus was introduced: Participants read a statement saying that these situations occur more often and that, given this exact situation, recent studies have shown 25% (low consensus) or 75% (high consensus) of non-dog owners to agree with the anger communicated by the person. We used the same manipulation check items for perceived treatment legitimacy and consensus as in Experiments 1 and 2. Outgroup empathy was again measured with the same 8 statements as in Experiments 1 and 2, which were again collapsed into one scale ($\alpha = .89$).

Results & Discussion

Manipulation checks. A 2x2 ANOVA on the manipulation check of perceived treatment legitimacy revealed only the expected main effect of treatment legitimacy, $F(1, 52) = 5.13, p = .028, \eta_p^2 = .09$: Participants perceived the treatment [i.e., the dog’s behavior] to be more legitimate in the off-leash conditions ($M = 3.39, SD = 1.07$) than in the on-leash conditions ($M = 2.61, SD = 1.42$). The main effect of consensus ($F(1, 52) = 0.18, p = .68$) and the interaction effect ($F(1, 52) = 0.22, p = .64$) were not significant. A Logistic Regression on the manipulation check of consensus revealed only the expected main effect of consensus, $\chi^2(1) = 12.34, p < .001$: Participants perceived more

consensus in the high consensus conditions ($M = 0.85$, $SD = 0.37$) than in the low consensus conditions ($M = 0.40$, $SD = 0.50$). The main effect of treatment legitimacy ($\chi^2(1) < 0.00$, $p = 1.00$) and the interaction effect ($\chi^2(1) = 0.55$, $p = .456$) were not significant. Thus, both manipulations were effective.

Outgroup Empathy. A 2x2 ANOVA on empathy showed a significant two-way interaction effect, $F(1, 52) = 4.68$, $p = .035$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$, 95% CI [0.003, 0.21] (see Figure 3).

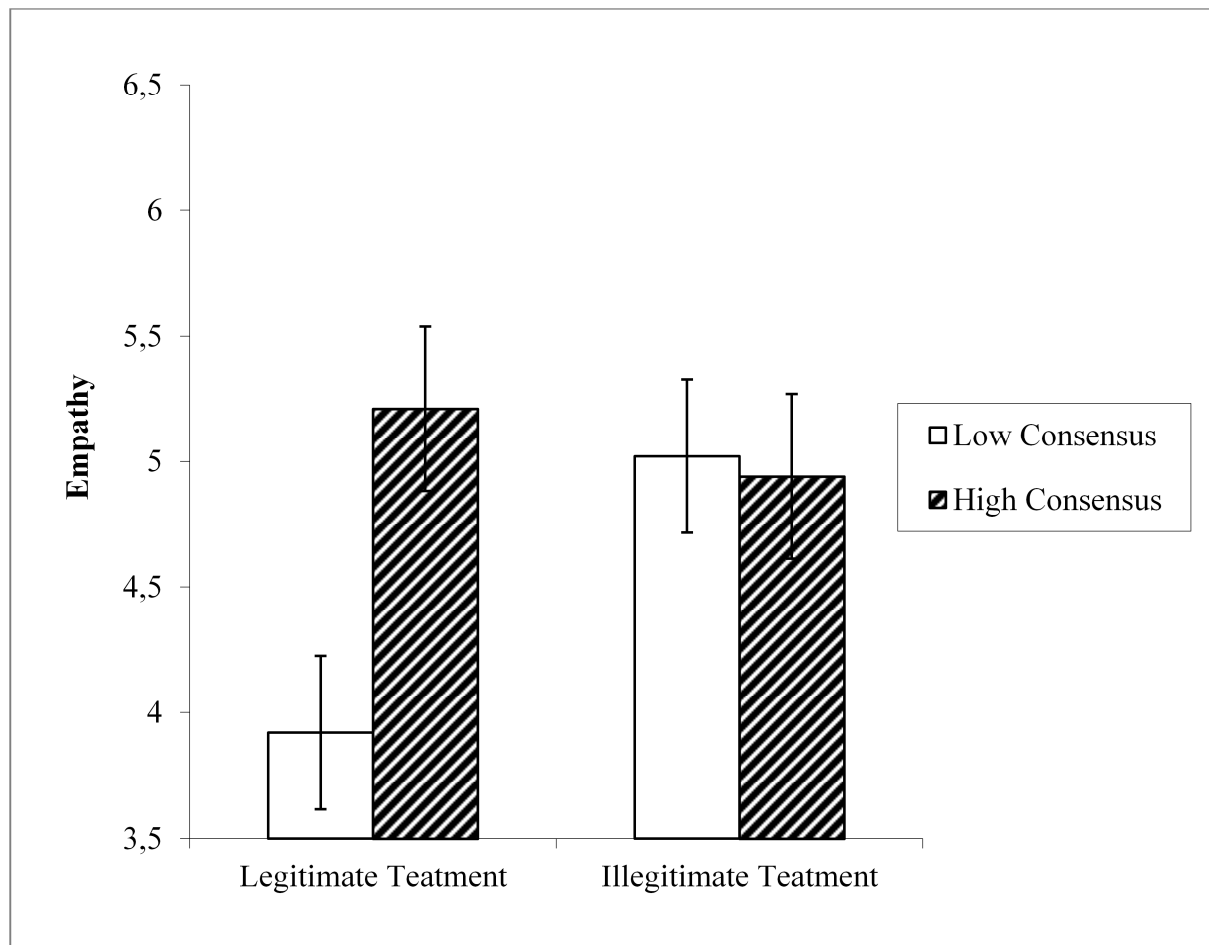


Figure 3. Means and standard errors of empathy of dog owners towards non-dog owners as a function of the treatment legitimacy and level of consensus, Experiment 3.

Simple main effect analyses showed that when non-dog-owners were treated *legitimately*, dog-owners felt less empathy when there was low perceived consensus in the communication of anger of non-dog-owners ($M = 3.92$, $SD =$

1.02) versus when there was high perceived consensus in the communication of anger ($M = 5.21, SD = 0.82$), $F(1, 52) = 8.37, p = .006$. Thus, perceived outgroup consensus increased empathy even in the absence of perceived illegitimacy. Moreover, when the treatment of non-dog-owners was *illegitimate*, no differences in felt empathy were found after anger was communicated with low perceived consensus ($M = 5.02, SD = 1.67$) versus with high perceived consensus ($M = 4.94, SD = 0.94$), $F(1, 52) = 0.028, p = .869$. Thus, perceived illegitimacy increased empathy even in the absence of consensus. Another way of summarizing this pattern of results is that only when treatment was perceived as legitimate *and* perceived consensus was low did this lead to the lowest level of empathizing, $F(3, 52) = 10.22, p = .002$.

Discussion. Whereas the Experiment 1 and 2 findings established the antecedent status of perceived illegitimacy and outgroup consensus as different factors that enable a positive, empathy-inducing effect of the communication of group-based anger, the results from Experiment 3 suggested that both variables are sufficient but not necessary in increasing outgroup empathy as a consequence of the communication of group-based anger in low-stake intergroup conflict. Thus, Experiment 3 offered an intriguing view on their exact interrelationship. We will discuss this in more detail and nuance below.

General Discussion

Three experiments showed support for the hypotheses that perceived illegitimacy and outgroup consensus are antecedents of the positive, empathy-inducing effects of the communication of group-based anger. Specifically, results of Experiment 1 showed that the communication of group-based anger by the outgroup was only effective in increasing empathy with the outgroup when the treatment of the outgroup was deemed illegitimate. In fact, consistent with research on the effects of inappropriate anger displays (Van Kleef & Côté, 2007), when treatment was perceived to be legitimate, the anger expression backfired to the extent that it even appeared to lower outgroup empathy.

Furthermore, results of Experiment 2 showed that group-based anger was only effective in increasing empathy when participants perceived high consensus concerning the anger communication. Importantly with respect to the presumed relational function of group-based anger, only perceived consensus regarding communicated anger (and not regarding a more general disapproval) increased outgroup empathy. Finally, results from Experiment 3 indicated that, within the context of the low-stake intergroup conflicts we studied, the presence of either perceived treatment illegitimacy or outgroup consensus was sufficient *but not necessary* to increase outgroup empathy. Put differently, only in the absence of either antecedent did the communication of group-based anger fail to increase outgroup empathy. This suggests, at least in low-stake intergroup conflicts, that there is much to say for communicating group-based anger with an eye to inducing empathy in the other party.

Implications

Being more explorative in nature, the results from Experiment 3 warrant further discussion and nuance. Specifically, the pattern of results indicates how the two antecedents interact with each other, but there may be several explanations for why, for instance, perceived illegitimacy does not require perceived outgroup consensus with respect to the positive, empathy-inducing effects of the communication of anger. First, in line with approaches like Moral Foundation Theory (Graham, Nosek, Haidt, Iyer, Koleva, & Ditto, 2011; Haidt & Graham, 2007), it is possible that the communicated moral transgression might have influenced the recipients' perception that they were somehow responsible for the harm done to the group communicating the anger. In this sense, regardless of the presence or absence of its group-based nature, anger should induce empathy, because it touches on the universal concept of fairness. Perceiving it as a moral violation might be sufficient to increase levels of empathic concern, even if it was merely a lone voice communicating the anger. However, not all perceptions of fairness or legitimacy have moral underpinnings

(Van Zomeren, 2013) and therefore future research could disentangle the two in more detail to test this explanation for why, in Experiment 3, neither perceived illegitimacy nor outgroup consensus were necessary for the proper working of the relational function of the communication of group-based anger.

A second explanation for this particular pattern of results revolves around the interpretation of the perceived consensus regarding the outgroup's communication of anger. Experiment 3 showed that even when treatment was in fact perceived as legitimate did this lead to outgroup empathy as long as there was perceived outgroup consensus. In our view this could be due to the possibility that (a) participants might have concluded that their assessment of the legitimacy of the situation was inaccurate or even incorrect (e.g., self-doubt), or that (b) they might have reasoned that even though they believed the outgroup was treated legitimately, such a shared plea for reconciliation requires empathy, if a positive intergroup relationship is to be maintained. The absence of an interaction effect on the illegitimacy manipulation check actually points to the latter explanation as the more likely one. Indeed, in our view this particular result can be interpreted as a particularly striking manifestation of the relational function of the communication of anger.

A final consideration refers to the contexts that we studied in the three experiments. Although we made use of different groups and issues, we did intentionally focus on relatively low-stake intergroup conflicts (for instance as compared to relatively high-stakes conflicts such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict). It is doubtful whether the current findings, including the notion that both antecedents are sufficient for inducing empathy, will generalize to such contexts. In such contexts, there may simply be too much defensiveness associated with the very notion of empathizing with the outgroup. Nevertheless, even in those contexts research has shown that, for example, the experience of anger toward the outgroup has more positive implications for resolving the conflict than, for instance, the experience of hatred (Halperin et al., 2011),

pointing to an important role for anger even in such high-stake intergroup conflicts. Future research should therefore test the viability of the current findings in higher-stake intergroup conflicts.

More generally, the current set of experiments extends prior research on the positive effects of communicating anger in intergroup conflict by focusing on the *relational* function of anger (Fischer & Roseman, 2007). The communication of group-based anger is meant as a social call for attention to an intergroup relationship at risk and communicates both a perceived illegitimate treatment by the outgroup as well as a deep-rooted unmet need for a positive relationship to be restored (Fischer & Roseman, 2007; see also Rosenberg, 2005b). As such, anger invites the recipient to empathize with the group's plight, which has been shown to be an important first step toward conflict reduction (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). In fact, prior research has shown the communication of anger to be a key factor in increasing empathy in intergroup conflict (De Vos et al., 2013; see Chapter 2). According to De Vos and colleagues, the reason why the communication of anger increases empathy (and subsequently reduces destructive conflict intentions) is, because it a) stresses perceived *treatment illegitimacy*, and b) emphasizes the importance of maintaining a positive *intergroup relationship*. However, these two proposed mechanisms were not directly tested. Yet, these mechanisms seem to suggest two things: a) if treatment is not perceived to be illegitimate, anger would be ineffective and could possibly even backfire, and b) if the anger is not communicated at a group level (i.e., there is low consensus regarding its communication), the anger could be ineffective and disregarded as merely a 'lone voice'. The current experiments provide support for these predictions by showing that both antecedents can positively affect the communication of group-based anger's empathy-inducing function, although, within the low-stake contexts we studied, neither requires the other.

The current findings are also in line with an increased recognition of anger as a ‘special’ emotion (e.g., Carver & Harmon-Jones, 2009). We argue that anger has three separate elements that affect recipients’ perception of the anger and their likely response to it. First, the communication of anger attracts the recipient’s *attention*, regardless of context or appropriateness. For example, research on the ‘face-in-the-crowd effect’ (Hansen & Hansen, 1988; Lipp, Price, & Tellegen, 2009) has shown that angry faces are detected faster than faces displaying other negative or positive emotions. Second, anger can also be seen as a social call for attention to the *intergroup* relationship in peril. It emphasizes that reconciliation is needed for a positive relationship to persist (De Vos et al., 2013, Chapter 2). And third, anger directs attention towards the conflict situation in an attempt to persuade the outgroup that one’s ingroup perceived their treatment as illegitimate (Frijda, 1986; Lazarus, 1991; Roseman, 2001; Scherer, 2001; Scherer et al., 2001). Whereas the first of these three elements always produces the same outcome (i.e., it grabs the recipient’s attention), we believe that the extent to which the latter two increase empathy largely depends on the extent to which the recipient’s interpretation of contextual factors such as treatment legitimacy and outgroup consensus match what the communicated anger implies. This means that the communication of anger likely is only effective in increasing empathy if targets perceive their treatment to be illegitimate and their anger to be shared by the outgroup, and this is what we found in Experiments 1 and 2 (though Experiment 3 suggests that either might suffice).

Finally, the current work affirms but also deviates from theory and research about the instrumental function of communicating anger (Van Kleef, 2009). Informed by the Emotions As Social Information model (Van Kleef, 2009), this research focuses more on the *strategic* use of anger in conflict settings (i.e., anger as an indicator of higher negotiation limits with the aim of forcing the recipient to cooperate). This does not mean that anger should be unreservedly

expressed without a concern for a proper way to express it. Prior research has stressed the ‘purity’ (i.e., being devoid of other emotional content) of anger (De Vos et al., 2013, Chapter 2) while the current experiments point to important antecedents of its purity, namely illegitimacy and outgroup consensus, that determine how and when anger should be communicated in order to be effective. Thus, whereas a strategic function of anger entails utilizing anger (felt or not) for personal gain, the relational function of anger entails tailoring the communication of felt anger for shared gain. Future research should consider integrating these different aspects of the communication of the same emotion in conflict settings.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

All experiments presented here relied on a manipulation of the communication of group-based anger using vignettes. Although results have been consistent across several contexts and populations (see also De Vos et al., 2013), it is unclear whether these findings would generalize to more natural interactions (e.g., face-to-face interactions or computer-mediated communication). As mentioned in the introduction, however, this is not necessarily a weak point of the current experiments, as the type of contact people most often have with outgroup members is through second-hand information such as mass media outlining intergroup attitudes and behavior (Hargrave & Livingstone, 2009; Postmes et al., 2014). Future research is needed though to test whether the current findings could also be translated to real-time interactions.

Another potential limitation is that we focused here on relatively low-stake conflicts and thus cannot generalize to higher-stake conflicts. Indeed, intergroup conflicts can be characterized by a long history of animosity and perhaps an unwillingness to experience empathy, and consequently a greater likelihood to act defensively when engaging an angry outgroup member. Our focus in the current experiments on relatively low-stake intergroup conflicts offered us

greater experimental control and a greater potential to find positive effects of communicating anger, yet comes at the expense of ecological validity. It is simply unclear at present whether our results would translate to high-stakes conflicts where pre-existing relationships are far from positive and where there appears to be little scope for relationship improvement. Recent evidence suggests, however, that even in conflicts with a negative history (Dutch people confronted with negative aspects of their colonial past in the Moluccas), the communication of group-based anger has positive effects, as long as it is communicated with reference to the present rather than the past (De Vos, Van Zomeren, Gordijn, & Postmes, 2015b, Chapter 4). This suggests that our rationale, although infused with this new moderator, could also hold in higher-stake conflicts where existing relationships are less than positive.

We welcome further research on those ideas in the context of high-stake intergroup conflicts. We already noted that we do not expect the communication of group-based anger to *always* have positive, empathy-inducing effects, especially in high-stakes conflicts where it could result in a host of defensive responses such as guilt and anger (rather than empathy). Such defensive responses seem particularly likely when contempt or a mix of anger and contempt is communicated, rather than ‘pure’ anger, as only the latter was found to increase empathy and de-escalate conflict (De Vos et al., 2013, Chapter 2). In higher-stakes conflicts, it may be much harder to communicate anger in such a ‘pure’ way and that it is likely to be perceived as infused with other, more detrimental emotions such as contempt, hatred, or fear (Cottrell, & Neuberg, 2005). Defensive reactions are thus more likely the less ‘pure’ anger is communicated and perceived, and this appears to particularly apply to higher-stake contexts. Thus, future research is needed to investigate *when* defensive processes are likely to occur, and how their presence affects the empathy-inducing effects of the communication of ‘pure’ group-based anger.

Conclusion

The current experiments point to the importance of communicating anger in intergroup conflict as it increases outgroup empathy which has been shown to be an important first step towards conflict resolution (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). For anger to have its positive effects, however, certain antecedents must be in place. We focused on what we believed to be two important antecedents: perceived treatment illegitimacy and outgroup consensus concerning the anger communication, and showed that the presence of either is sufficient to induce empathy within low-stake intergroup conflicts. This is a hopeful message. If peace indeed requires outgroup empathy, as Marshall Rosenberg (2005a) was quoted as suggesting at the very start of this article, then the current research adds to this that the communication of group-based anger can indeed be a powerful contributor to peace, or at the very least to more harmonious intergroup relations.