



The consequences of faking anger in negotiations

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HIGHLIGHTS

- ▶ In two experiments, we examine the consequences of faking anger in negotiations
- ▶ Faking anger increases the demands of negotiation counterparts
- ▶ Faking anger has this effect because it erodes trust

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ABSTRACT

Past research has found that showing anger induces cooperative behavior from counterparts in negotiations. We build on and extend this research by examining the effects of faking anger by surface acting (i.e., showing anger that is not truly felt inside) on the behavior of negotiation counterparts. We specifically propose that surface acting anger leads counterparts to be intransigent due to reduced trust. In Experiment 1, surface acting anger increased demands in a face-to-face negotiation, relative to showing no emotion, and this effect was mediated by (reduced) trust. In Experiment 2, surface acting anger increased demands in a video-mediated negotiation, relative to showing no emotion, and this effect was explained by (reduced) trust, as in Experiment 1. By contrast, deep acting anger (i.e., showing anger that is truly felt inside) decreased demands, relative to showing no emotion, and this effect was explained by (increased) perceptions of toughness, consistent with prior research on the effects of showing anger in negotiations. The findings show that a complete understanding of the role of anger in negotiations requires attention to how it is regulated. In addition, the results suggest that faking emotions using surface acting strategies may generally be detrimental to conflict resolution.

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Introduction

Research on conflict resolution has repeatedly found that negotiators cooperate when their opponents display anger. Across several studies, negotiators made larger concessions to angry opponents than to neutral or happy opponents (e.g., Sinaceur & Tiedens, 2006; Sinaceur, Van Kleef, Neale, Adam, & Haag, 2011; Van Kleef, De Dreu, & Manstead, 2004a). This research suggests that expressing anger can be an effective way to evoke cooperative behavior in others and get things done. But what happens when negotiators display anger that they do not truly feel? Does faking anger also elicit cooperation?

Anecdotal evidence suggests that it may not. After the British Petroleum oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico in the spring of 2010, U.S. President Barack Obama was criticized for his calm response to the incident (Pareene, 2010). He eventually showed anger about the incident on a television show, but his display further undermined his support, because his display was deemed not to be genuine. Obama drew considerable skepticism (Raum, 2010), and veteran newscaster

Sam Donaldson commented that “That’s not him” (Chalian, 2010). This anecdote suggests that showing anger that is not truly felt may not induce cooperation, and that it may even backfire. To illuminate this issue, in two experiments, we examined the effects of surface acting anger – efforts to show anger that one does not feel – on the behavior of negotiation counterparts.

Past findings on the effects of expressing anger in negotiations

Past research has shown that displays of anger are interpreted as signals of dominance and toughness (Knutson, 1996; Tiedens, 2001) that intimidate others and persuade them to comply (Averill, 1983). Studies of leadership, for instance, found that leaders’ displays of anger influenced subordinates to exert more effort toward their tasks (Sy, Côté, & Saavedra, 2005), especially when subordinates paid close attention to the information contained in these displays (Van Kleef et al., 2009).

Past research on negotiations has identified effects that are consistent with these findings. Individuals who negotiated with angry opponents believed that these opponents were tough, had ambitious goals, and were unlikely to make substantial concessions (Van Kleef

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et al., 2004a). In turn, they tended to make large concessions to angry opponents. In one study, participants made larger concessions to angry opponents than to non-emotional or happy opponents because participants believed that angry opponents had more ambitious goals (Van Kleef et al., 2004a). Likewise, in another study, participants perceived angry counterparts as tougher than non-emotional counterparts, and this led participants to concede more to angry counterparts (Sinaceur & Tiedens, 2006). These findings suggest that negotiators who show anger elicit concessions from their counterparts because these responses are perceived to be tough.

The previous studies, however, do not cover all of the potential effects of showing anger in negotiations. In previous studies, participants had no reason to doubt that their counterparts did not truly feel the anger that they displayed. For instance, in the studies conducted by Van Kleef et al. (2004a), participants received a message from their counterparts that they were angry (without actually seeing their counterparts and their facial displays of anger). In addition, participants were led to believe that their counterparts did not know that their emotional reactions would be sent to the participants. Participants had an explicit reason to believe that their counterparts' expressions were real rather than faked for strategic reasons. Thus, in these studies, there was nothing to indicate that the counterparts might not have actually felt angry. The past findings may primarily concern the effects of anger that is presumed to be truly felt, and not necessarily the effects of showing anger that one does not truly feel. The effects may be different when displayed anger is not truly felt, because the discrepancy between the displayed and felt anger has consequences for the authenticity of the expressions.

The consequences of surface acting anger for the authenticity of the displays

Individuals often fake anger – by showing anger that they do not genuinely feel – to achieve their personal goals and promote their own interests (Tamir, Mitchell, & Gross, 2008). For instance, in one study, participants acknowledged expressing more anger than they felt to influence another person to make better offers in an ultimatum game (Andrade & Ho, 2009). In another study, managers indicated that they sometimes deliberately showed anger that they did not feel to influence their subordinates (Fitness, 2000). And, one investigation showed that bill collectors displayed anger even when they felt a different emotion, because this strategy was deemed most effective by their organization to compel certain debtors to pay (Sutton, 1991). Although this past research suggests that surface acting anger is prevalent, its effects have so far been overlooked in the research on negotiations.

One common way in which individuals fake their emotions is surface acting (Côté, 2005; Grandey, 2000; Gross, 1998). Surface acting is an emotion regulation strategy in which individuals modify their external display of emotion, but they do not change their internal feelings (Côté, 2005; Grandey, 2003; Hochschild, 1983). When surface acting anger, individuals “put on a show” by generating expressive displays of anger that they do not actually feel (Gross, 1998). For example, negotiators may pretend to be angry externally about an offer made by their counterparts even though they are not really angry inside. Surface acting anger thus creates a mismatch between publicly displayed and privately felt emotions, because subjective experiences of emotions are left intact (Côté, 2005).

The divergence between outwardly expressed and internally felt emotions has important consequences. Past research has shown that feigned displays of emotions appear different than spontaneously felt emotions (Ekman, 2003; Ekman, Friesen, & O'Sullivan, 1988). Relative to spontaneous displays, feigned displays were less symmetrical, so that muscle movements that appeared on one side of the face were less likely to be the same as those that appeared on the other side (Ekman, Hager, & Friesen, 1981; Hager & Ekman, 1985; Skinner

& Mullen, 1991). Individuals who surface act emotions tend to be perceived as relatively inauthentic by observers because of these differences in the displays (Côté, 2005).

In one study, observers rated service providers who surface acted emotions as less authentic than those who expressed genuine emotions (Grandey, Fisk, Mattila, Jansen, & Sideman, 2005). In another study, surface acting emotions at work was negatively related to coworker ratings of affective delivery, which encompasses sincerity, warmth, courtesy, and friendliness (Grandey, 2003). And, across several studies, individuals who reported surface acting often tended to feel less authentic (Brotheridge & Lee, 2002; Gross & John, 2003), reported that they had less social support available to them (Srivastava, Tamir, McGonigal, John, & Gross, 2009), and were perceived by their peers as having lower quality relationships (Gross & John, 2003). These findings suggest that during negotiations, surface acting anger may lead to different behaviors from counterparts than expressing anger that is truly felt or showing no emotions.

The consequences of surface acting anger in negotiations

We propose that in the context of negotiations, surface acting reduces trust. Trust is defined as expectations of goodwill, benevolence, and integrity in the other party (Ferrin, Bligh, & Kohles, 2007; Kramer, 1999; Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1994), and assurance that the other party will not exploit them (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). Negotiators may infer that because the anger is not truly felt, their counterparts do not have a valid reason for being angry. Negotiators may infer that the counterparts have not been treated unfairly, otherwise they would truly be angry, given that anger tends to arise when one has been treated unfairly by others (Smith, Haynes, Lazarus, & Pope, 1993). Thus, negotiators may interpret displays by counterparts who surface act anger as dishonest, opportunistic, and calculated attempts to control them (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1989). In turn, negotiators may believe that they are at risk of being exploited when their counterparts pretend to be angrier than they really are as a result of surface acting.

Support for this reasoning is indirect yet suggestive. In previous investigations, participants exhibited more trust, assigned more favorable traits (e.g., honesty), and cooperated more in a prisoner's dilemma and a trust game when others displayed authentic rather than inauthentic smiles (Johnston, Miles, & Macrae, 2010; Krumhuber et al., 2007). These findings support the notion that faking anger will erode the trust of negotiation counterparts.

In turn, past research suggests that negotiators who do not trust each other protect themselves from potential harm in an effort to ensure that they are not exploited (Ferrin et al., 2007; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). If negotiators perceive that their opponents lack integrity, they may believe that their opponents may be willing to take advantage of them. Negotiators who do not trust each other are thus particularly likely to adopt a competitive stance.

In support of this proposition, across a series of studies, lack of trust was associated with less exchange of information between negotiators (De Dreu, Beersma, Stroebe, & Euwema, 2006; De Dreu, Giebels, & Van de Vliert, 1998) and more retribution (Ross & LaCroix, 1996). Lack of trust should thus lead negotiators to place high demands on their opponents. Surface acting anger and the ensuing erosion in trust should also harm the relational outcomes of negotiations – intangible assets such as mutual liking and commitment to continuing the relationship (Gelfand, Major, Raver, Nishii, & O'Brien, 2006) – because negotiators should develop negative attitudes about those who lack integrity.

Overview of the research strategy

We conducted two experiments to examine the consequences of surface acting anger in negotiations. In Experiment 1, we tested the effects of surface acting anger, relative to a neutral control condition,

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