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Is there a place for sympathy in negotiation? Finding strength in weakness ☆

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ABSTRACT

Across five studies, we investigate the use of appeals to the moral emotion of sympathy in negotiations. We find that negotiators who actively appeal to the sympathy of their counterparts achieve improved outcomes, both in terms of distributive value claiming as well as integrative value creation. We also compare the effects of sympathy appeals to appeals based on rationality and fairness, and find that sympathy appeals are generally the most effective. These results, then, suggest that negotiators with certain sources of weakness may actually benefit from revealing their weakness, if doing so elicits sympathy in their counterparts. We also explore negotiator power as a possible boundary condition to sympathy appeals. Relative to low power negotiators, we find that high power negotiators' sympathy appeals are seen as more inappropriate and manipulative, and may damage the negotiators' relationship going forward.

> "*It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest.*"
>
> [Smith, 1776/1976, p. 18]

> "*Sympathy will have been increased through natural selection; for those communities, which included the greatest number of the most sympathetic members, would flourish best, and rear the greatest number of offspring.*"
>
> [Darwin, 1871/2004, p. 130]

1. Introduction

An enduring topic of debate among scholars is what drives and guides human behavior in strategic interactions, rationality or emotionality? On one extreme, decision making has been conceptualized as a cognitive process whereby "homo economicus" carefully weighs the pros and cons of alternatives to arrive at the decision most likely to maximize self-interested outcomes. To the degree that decision makers make suboptimal decisions, it is a result of heuristics and biases that lead them astray (Malhotra & Bazerman, 2007; Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). On the other hand, scholars dating at least as far back as Darwin have recognized the power of emotional appeals to sway choices. The current research speaks to these competing viewpoints via a systematic exploration into sympathy, and the conditions under which this emotion may trump rationality in determining behavior and the allocation of resources in interdependent decision making contexts.

A social functionalist account suggests emotions arise in response to problems in social relations (e.g., how to allocate resources fairly), and help guide interactions so that whatever relational problem has arisen may be resolved (Morris & Keltner, 2000). Moral emotions, or those that have bearing on the well-being and/or interests of others (Haidt, 2003), include sympathy, gratitude, contempt, anger, guilt, disgust, to name a few. Each of these emotions arises in response to a social problem. For example, anger arises when a social norm has been violated or when an injustice occurs. Sympathy is a moral emotion that addresses the social problem of protecting those who are vulnerable, such as children (Haidt, 2003; Morris & Keltner, 2000). When the weak are unable to protect themselves, caretaking by the strong is motivated by their feelings of sympathy.

With this perspective in mind, we explore the role that active sympathy appeals, made from one actor to another, play in negotiations. We propose that by revealing potential sources of vulnerability and need, negotiators can elicit sympathy in their counterparts, and as a consequence, achieve better negotiation

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outcomes by increasing the concern that their counterpart feels for them. Thus, contrary to classic economic thinking, individuals in difficult or disadvantaged situations may actually benefit from revealing their sources of weakness.

We seek to make several theoretical contributions with this work. First, we build upon existing work that has examined the effects of empathy, guilt, and disappointment in controlled decision-making contexts such as the prisoner's dilemma and ultimatum game (e.g., Batson & Ahmad, 2001; Batson & Moran, 1999; Handgraaf, Van Dijk, Vermunt, Wilke, & De Dreu, 2008; Ketelaar & Tung Au, 2003; Lelieveld, Van Dijk, Van Beest, & Van Kleef, 2013) by exploring the role of sympathy in face-to-face negotiations. Prior work has generally excluded face-to-face interaction and has manipulated emotions externally (for instance, via a reflection task as dictated by the experimenter, e.g., Galinsky, Maddux, Gilin, & White, 2008; Ketelaar & Tung Au, 2003) or via a single communication from a simulated counterpart (Lelieveld et al., 2013). We examine whether sympathy can have similar effects when it arises more naturally, via face-to-face communication between pairs of live individuals. Second, we examine whether individuals can actively appeal to the sympathy of their counterparts by revealing information about their sources of vulnerability and need, and by doing so, improve their negotiation outcomes. Thus, we focus on sympathy that arises in response to situational factors – specifically, the information communicated by the counterpart – rather than individuals' long-term dispositions toward feeling sympathy (e.g., Davis, 1983), and investigate an actionable negotiation tactic for negotiators. Third, we directly compare the effectiveness of sympathy appeals to rational appeals. Prior work on the effects of empathy on decision-making has tended to compare it to non-empathy control conditions or to perspective-taking (e.g., Batson et al., 2003; Galinsky et al., 2008); here, we pit sympathy appeals against the kind of rational appeals traditionally prescribed to negotiators (Farmer, Maslyn, Fedor, & Goodman, 1997; Thompson, 2005; Yukl & Tracey, 1992). Further, face-to-face negotiation is an engrossing context that is often perceived as competitive and arouses motivations to outperform the other side (Thompson, 2005). By comparing sympathy appeals to rational appeals in this context, we aim to provide a strong test of sympathy's influence on behavior. Fourth, we examine how sympathy appeals can not only improve the individual outcomes achieved by negotiators who make them, but also how they can increase the size of the negotiation pie for both sides. Fifth, we examine the power of negotiators who make sympathy appeals as a potentially important moderator of their effectiveness, both in terms of short-term negotiation outcomes achieved, as well as longer-term relational outcomes such as trust, liking, and the perception that the other party behaved in an appropriate versus manipulative fashion. Because sympathy is a moral emotion that arises from recognizing another's weakness, appealing to sympathy may backfire when initiated by the strong. Finally, we contribute to a growing literature on the interpersonal nature of emotions (Van Kleef, De Dreu, & Manstead, 2010) by exploring how individuals can elicit emotions in others.

1.1. The role of emotions in driving negotiation behavior

Emotions are a fundamental part of the human experience, helping individuals organize and prioritize their behavior in order to respond to the complex social environments within which they reside (Frank, 1988; Frijda, 1986; Keltner, Haidt, & Shiota, 2006; Keltner & Kring, 1998; Lazarus, 1991) and a substantial body of research has documented the many ways in which experiencing emotions can affect our behavior (for a brief review of both the intra- and inter-personal effects of emotions within negotiations, see Van Kleef, De Dreu, & Manstead, 2006). For instance, positive emotions increase trust and receptiveness to advice (Dunn & Schweitzer, 2005; Gino & Schweitzer, 2008), and lead to more cooperative behavior, higher joint gains, and the use of fewer contentious tactics in negotiations (Carnevale & Isen, 1986; Forgas, 1998; Kramer, Newton, & Pommerenke, 1993); whereas negative emotions reduce trust and receptiveness to advice (Dunn & Schweitzer, 2005; Gino & Schweitzer, 2008), and can lead to suboptimal negotiation agreements (Allred, 1999; Allred, Mallozzi, Matsui, & Raia, 1997). With regard to more specific emotions, angry negotiators tend to be less concerned about their opponents' interests and fail to maximize joint gain (Allred et al., 1997; Van Kleef, De Dreu, & Manstead, 2004), and feelings of anxiety can reduce outcomes by causing the anxious negotiator to flee the bargaining table (Brooks & Schweitzer, 2011).

In addition to this research into the intrapersonal effects of emotional experience, more recent work has explored the interpersonal nature of emotions, or the ways in which individuals are influenced by the emotional expressions of others (Van Kleef et al., 2006, 2010). One way in which this can happen is via emotional contagion, whereby interacting individuals come to experience similar emotions (Anderson, Keltner, & John, 2003; Barsade, 2002; Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1994). In addition, emotional expressions are thought to provide information into the thoughts, goals, and likely behavior of the expresser, serving as a communication system that may lead the perceivers of emotional expressions to modify their behavior (Morris & Keltner, 2000; Van Kleef et al., 2010). For example, expressions of anger in negotiations can signal toughness and an unwillingness to back down from high demands and can thus elicit concessions from the other side, leading to better outcomes for the angry negotiator (Sinaceur & Tiedens, 2006; Van Kleef et al., 2004) – although this is only true under certain conditions (Adam, Shirako, & Maddux, 2010; Lelieveld, Van Dijk, Van Beest, & Van Kleef, 2012; Van Dijk, Van Kleef, Steinel, & Van Beest, 2008). This implies that negotiators might actively manage their emotional expressions for strategic purposes (Barry, Fulmer, & Van Kleef, 2004; Kopelman, Rosette, & Thompson, 2006; Morris & Keltner, 2000; Potworowski & Kopelman, 2008; Thompson, Nadler, & Kim, 1999). Indeed, customer service representatives amplify their displays of positive emotion to elicit positive evaluations from customers (Pugh, 2001), bill collectors strategically express anger to encourage payments (Sutton, 1991), and police interrogators use displays of sympathy and anger to engage in a "good cop, bad cop" technique to elicit confessions (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1991).

We build upon this work by examining whether individuals can actively appeal to and elicit sympathy within their interaction partners, and by doing so, improve negotiation outcomes. Researchers studying emotional intelligence have suggested that individuals can indeed strategically "manage" the emotions of others (Kilduff, Chiaburu, & Menges, 2010; Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2000), and a recent scale ("managing the emotions of other" or MEOS) has been developed to assess individuals' self-reported tendencies toward eliciting positive and negative emotion in others (e.g., "I sometimes use my knowledge of another person's emotional triggers to make them angry"; Austin & O'Donnell, 2013). Further, in the realm of negotiations, Thompson and colleagues argue that negotiators can engage in *emotional tuning*, tailoring their "message to an audience so as to regulate the other person's emotional reactions" (Thompson et al., 1999, pp. 149–150). Indeed, the effectiveness of anger expressions in negotiations has been linked to the fact that they can evoke fear in one's counterpart (Lelieveld et al., 2012). Further, recent work has shown that expressions of disappointment can elicit cooperative behavior in others, not just because they signal a lack of satisfaction, but because they can evoke feelings of guilt (Lelieveld, Van Dijk, Van Beest, Steinel, & Van Kleef, 2011; Lelieveld et al., 2012). Here, we look not so much at how the