Interpersonal Expectation Management: How do People Respond When Others Manipulate their Expectations?

Ho Phi Huynh
Texas A&M University – San Antonio

The following studies employed the expectation disconfirmation framework to examine anger and aggression in response to interpersonal expectation management. Four studies tested two competing hypotheses. Hypothesis A predicted that participants would be more aggressive when outcomes fell short of their expectations (negative disconfirmation) than when outcomes met their expectations (confirmation). Hypothesis B predicted the opposite; there would be more aggression with confirmation than negative disconfirmation. In Study 1, participants imagined that they would be more aggressive with negative disconfirmation in two hypothetical scenarios, supporting Hypothesis A. However, in Study 2, when participants were offered an opportunity to express behavioral aggression, participants displayed more aggression with confirmation, supporting Hypothesis B. Study 3 replicated this finding using a different measure of behavioral aggression. To confirm the differences between imagined responses in Study 1 and objective behaviors in Studies 2 and 3, Study 4 asked participants to imagine how they would respond to the scenario that participants experienced in Study 3. Similar to Study 1, participants imagined that they would be more aggressive with negative disconfirmation. Together, the studies reveal that, when it comes to expectations, people objectively behave differently than how they intend to behave. These findings revealed novel conclusions that extend the understanding of interpersonal expectation management.

Keywords: expectations; expectation management; expectation disconfirmation; aggression; uncertainty

On an early October day, a worker returned to his construction site after losing his job, shot and killed his boss, then turned the gun on himself (Rana & Strahan, 2017). Unfortunately, violent incidents in the workplace are uncomfortably common (Hershcovis et al., 2007). Media outlets and human resource professionals often note that these violent episodes may result from a mismatch between the perpetrator's expectations and professional outcomes (e.g., Ennico, 2016). For example, the worker was presumably led to expect that he would retain

Author info: Correspondence should be sent to: Dr. Ho Huynh, Department of Science and Mathematics, One University Drive, San Antonio, TX 78224
Email: hhuynh@tamusa.edu
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his job, and when he learned that he was instead terminated, he responded aggressively. Although this explanation has intuitive appeal, research has yet to address how people respond to others who are responsible for anchoring their expectations, either through formal feedback or informal predictions about what the future holds. Through four studies, the current paper addressed this gap in research by examining how people respond to others who manipulate their expectations. Specifically, this paper examines when people would be most aggressive toward a person who manipulates their expectations: when the objective outcome meets those expectations or when the objective outcome falls short of those expectations.

Expectation Disconfirmation

The relationship between expectations, outcomes, and corresponding affective reactions has been viewed through different lenses. Assimilation theories and dissonance theory (Park, Jeewon, & Jaghav, 2015) suggested that satisfaction with an outcome primarily depended on an individual's own expectations (Davidenko et al., 2015). These theories predicted that one's own expectations alone might serve as an accurate predictor of satisfaction, perhaps because people adjust their perceptions of outcomes to align with their initial expectations.

Though the initial evidence supported assimilation theory, closer examination found these findings to be counterintuitive (Sweeny & Dillard, 2014). In particular, people who received a better than expected outcome rated a product lower than when they received an expected outcome, and people who received a worse than expected outcome rated a product higher than those who received an expected outcome. Thus, as research on the consequences of expectations progressed, the findings began to support the view that expectation disconfirmation (the degree to which objective outcomes misalign with initial expectations, regardless of objective outcomes) served as a better predictor of responses than expectations alone (Qazi et al., 2017). Specifically, the expectation disconfirmation framework concedes that expectations are in fact an integral part of the equation; however, expectations only serve as a comparison point for the actual outcome. On the other hand, the degree to which an outcome exceeds, meets, or falls short of that comparison point (i.e., positive disconfirmation, confirmation, and negative disconfirmation, respectively) serves as a superior predictor of post-outcome ratings (Sweeny & Dillard, 2014).

Decision affect theory extended the disconfirmation framework by establishing the role of expectations in post-decisional emotional reactions to outcomes (Mellers, Schwartz, Ho, & Ritov, 1997). Decision affect theory posits that emotional reactions to outcomes depend on

several factors: the outcome itself, the subjective probability of that outcome occurring (i.e., previous expectations), and a comparison of the outcome with other possible outcomes that could have occurred (Mellers, 2000). The theory further suggests that people's choices in part reflect efforts to avoid the negative affective experiences associated with outcomes falling short of desirable expectations. Moreover, decision affect theory states that unexpected outcomes carry a heavier weight than expected ones. For instance, researchers found that people are more satisfied with positive outcomes when they are unexpected versus expected, and people tended to feel worse about a negative outcome if that outcome came as a surprise as opposed to meeting expectations (Shepperd & McNulty, 2002; Verbrguggen, Chambers, Lawrence, & McLaren, 2017).

Thus, the literature points to expectation disconfirmation (the gap between expectations and outcomes) as a better predictor of people's intrapersonal reactions to outcomes than either objective outcomes or expectations alone. In particular, studies find that people are more satisfied and happier with outcomes that are unexpected and exceed expectations. Conversely, people are less satisfied and less happy with outcomes that are unexpected and fail to meet expectations.

However, research on expectation disconfirmation has mainly focused on intrapersonal consequences, most notably satisfaction and affective reactions. This pattern of emphasis is probably not a coincidence given that research on expectations largely derives from business, marketing, and advertising. In these fields, intrapersonal outcomes lead to favorable future intentions and behaviors such as re-patronizing an establishment or purchasing similar products or brands (e.g., Lin, Wei, & Lekhawipat, 2017).

Expectation Management

Popular expressions like "don't get your hopes up" shed light on the fact that people already understand and apply the effects of expectation disconfirmation to their advantage. For example, people sometimes lower their expectations as an outcome approaches to avoid the disappointment that arises when outcomes are worse than their expectations (Taylor & Shepperd, 1998). This bracing phenomenon is especially likely to occur for outcomes that people consider self-relevant, important, and rare (Sweeny & Andrews, 2017).

This bracing strategy demonstrates the notion that people understand how expectations can guide their own post-experience affect. However, little research examines how people might use the expectation disconfirmation framework to their advantage by manipulating *others'* expectations. The few exceptions explore situations in which actors

might attempt to lower audience expectations of the actor's ability in order to reduce performance pressure. For example, in some competitive environments, people attempt to lower the audience's perception of their ability level in order to prompt their opponents to exert less effort (Gibson, Sachau, Doll, & Shumate, 2002). Additionally, customer service industries (e.g., phone companies and restaurants) systematically and purposefully over-estimate waiting time to increase satisfaction ratings from clients who inevitably receive a positive unexpected surprise (Shepperd, Sweeny, & Cherry, 2007). Thus, these few studies explored how the expectation disconfirmation framework can be applied to various settings by manipulating other's expectations, largely by helping lower others' expectations.

However, a large gap in the study of expectation disconfirmation remains. Although promoting satisfaction and positive affect are important goals, negative interpersonal outcomes such as anger and aggression also warrant attention. Individuals can benefit from understanding how to decrease negative interpersonal consequences rather than simply increasing positive intrapersonal outcomes. For example, the proper management of negative interpersonal consequences in the realm of bad news delivery, particularly in the context of professional arenas (e.g., termination, poor performance reviews, etc.), should be of critical concern. Specifically, avoiding direct retaliation (e.g., physical violence) or indirect retaliation (e.g., lawsuits) toward the person or organization giving the news is arguably as, if not more, important than promoting positive intrapersonal reactions for the person receiving the news. The present studies extend research on expectation disconfirmation and expectation management by focusing on negative interpersonal consequences, such as anger and aggression.

Overview and Hypotheses

Four studies examined the consequences of interpersonal expectation management, with a focus on anger and aggression toward the expectation manager (i.e., the person who set the other party's expectations). Study 1 presented hypothetical scenarios in which a service provider either underestimated or accurately estimated the participant's outcomes (wait time at a restaurant and a car repair bill) and asked participants to indicate how angry they would feel. Studies 2 and 3 employed experimental paradigms, in which the experimenter manipulated the expectations of the participant and the participant had a subtle opportunity to aggress (or not) toward the experimenter. In Study 4, participants responded to another hypothetical scenario that closely resembles what other participants experienced in the lab during Study 3. All four studies compared consequences that result from outcomes that

either met or fell short of people's expectations. The studies do not theoretically address outcomes that exceed people's expectations (i.e., positive disconfirmation) because anger and aggression are unlikely to result from receiving an outcome that exceeds one's expectations. For example, an employee is unlikely to aggress against an employer because of an unexpected promotion or raise.

All four studies examined two competing hypotheses. One viable hypothesis would be that these studies would uncover a pattern of aggression that matched that of satisfaction and affect in response to expectation disconfirmation. Perhaps satisfaction drives people's responses toward someone who manipulates their expectations, such that they would be most aggressive toward someone who underestimates the unpleasantness of the outcome and least aggressive toward someone who accurately estimates the unpleasantness of the outcome. Accordingly, Hypothesis A predicted that participants would be more aggressive when outcomes fell short of their expectations (negative disconfirmation) than when outcomes met their expectations (confirmation).

However, this hypothesis entirely ignores the "interpersonal" aspect of interpersonal expectation management. Perhaps people appreciate others' efforts to regulate their expectations (i.e., interpersonal bracing; Sweeny, Shepperd, & Carroll, 2009), even if those efforts ultimately translate to an unexpectedly unpleasant outcome. To illustrate, imagine a supervisor who provides the unvarnished truth to employees who fear upcoming lay-offs by telling them that they are likely to be let go. Although this news may be truthful, the employees may prefer that the supervisor soften the blow by providing a modicum of optimism until the decisive moment. This alternative hypothesis would predict that people would be most aggressive toward someone who accurately estimates their outcomes, and less aggressive toward someone who underestimates their outcomes. Accordingly, Hypothesis B predicted that participants would be more aggressive when outcomes met their expectations (confirmation) than when outcomes fell short of their expectations (negative disconfirmation).

STUDY 1

Study 1 examined hypothetical anger toward an individual who manipulated participants' expectations in two vignettes. Participants were 34 undergraduate volunteers (80% female; 23% Asian, 46% Hispanic/Latino, 26% White/Caucasian, 3% African American, 3% mixed) assigned randomly to one of two conditions in a between-subjects design. All participants read a description of an experience at a restaurant and an experience at a car repair shop. Each participant read a pair of vignettes that were each in the same experimental condition. In the

restaurant vignette, participants imagined that they arrived at a busy restaurant only to find several parties waiting ahead of them. The host tells them that the wait is 10 (negative disconfirmation condition) or 30 minutes (confirmation condition). All participants then read that they were seated after waiting 30 minutes. In the car repair vignette, participants imagined that they received a car repair estimate of $100 (negative disconfirmation condition) or $200 (confirmation condition). All participants then read that the actual repair bill was $200. Following each description, participants reported how angry (1 = *not at all angry*, 9 = *very angry*) they would feel toward the hostess and repair shop manager.

Independent samples *t*-tests revealed significant effects of condition in both the restaurant and the car repair scenarios. Consistent with *Hypothesis A*, although the objective outcome was the same in all conditions of the restaurant scenario (a 30 minute wait), participants imagined that they would be angrier about the wait in the negative disconfirmation condition ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 1.80$) than in the confirmation condition ($M = 1.36$, $SD = 0.7$), $t(32) = 3.20$, $p = .005$, $r_{es} = .49$. Similarly, participants reported that they would be angrier about the car repair bill in the negative disconfirmation condition ($M = 5.92$, $SD = 2.6$) than in the confirmation condition ($M = 1.0$, $SD = 0.0$), $t(32) = 6.62$, $p < .0001$, $r_{es} = .76$. These findings are consistent with previous research examining satisfaction and affect in response to personal expectation violations.

STUDY 2

A clear limitation of Study 1 is that participants' self-reported accounts to hypothetical situations may not align with their behavior in a "real" encounter. The follow-up studies remedy that limitation. In Study 2, a researcher manipulated participants' expectations in an effort to examine participants' anger and aggression. This strategy enabled the measurement of participants' behavioral responses through a surreptitious aggression measure, to a first-hand experience with interpersonal expectation management.

Method

Undergraduate participants ($N = 91$, 55% female, 45% Asian American, 32% Hispanic/Latino, 8% White/Caucasian, 3% Black/African American, 12% multiple or other) were recruited for a study about pain and reaction time. Upon arrival at the lab, an experimenter explained to the participant that the study ostensibly examined how reaction time is affected by pain. As part of the cover story, the experimenter explained to participants that prior research indicates that people do not necessarily have to experience the pain

themselves, but that the experience of watching someone else experience pain may also affect reaction time; the current study would examine the additive effect of experiencing pain *and* watching someone experience pain on reaction time. The experimenter told participants that the study would involve a procedure that is intended to cause moderate discomfort to mild pain.

After participants provided consent, the experimenter proceeded by placing clothespins on the index and pinky fingers of each of the participant's hands. After placing the clothespins, the experimenter started a stopwatch and informed the participant that the experimenter would take off the pins when the time is up or the participant could take them off at any time if it became too uncomfortable. At this point, the experimenter introduced the expectation manipulation by stating that the pins would be removed in 1 (negative disconfirmation condition) or 3 (confirmation condition) minutes. The experimenter then left ostensibly to gather paperwork from the adjoining room. A large clock with a prominent second hand sat on the experiment table during the wait. In both conditions, the experimenter returned after 3 minutes and took off the clothespins.

At this time, the experimenter explained that the participant must now place the clothespins on to the experimenter's hand. Participants were instructed to place as many or as few clothespins as they chose and to leave them on as long as they wished, allegedly because the degree and time necessary to induce empathic pain varies. Participants were instructed to start the stopwatch after the final clothespin was placed on the experimenter's finger and then to stop the stopwatch to signal to the experimenter to remove the pins. Once the participant stopped the stopwatch, the participants completed a brief questionnaire and were fully debriefed. No participants guessed the true nature of the procedures.

The study was approved by the primary investigator's (the author) Institutional Review Board (IRB). In addition, due to the potential influence of power dynamics between student participants and the primary investigator, all data collection was conducted by student research assistants. The primary investigator never interacted with any participants and all data collected were free of any identifying information. These steps were important to the study because the primary investigator also taught classes at the institution where data collection occurred. These procedures ensured that participants' involvement in the study was not in any way related to their grade, if they happened to be enrolled as a student in the primary researcher's course.

Measures. **S**tandardized (*z*-scored) scores of the number of pins that participants placed on the experimenter's hands and the total time (in seconds) that the pins remained on the experimenter's fingers were

created. The sum of the two standardized scores served as the measure of aggression. Participants also rated how angry they were at the experimenter ("I feel angry toward the research assistant"; 1= *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

Results and Discussion

In contrast to participants' hypothetical responses in Study 1 and supporting *Hypothesis B*, participants in the confirmation condition (M = 0.43, SD = 1.57) showed more aggression than participants in the negative disconfirmation condition (M = -0.48, SD = 1.75) as assessed by the subtle behavioral measure, $t(89) = 2.63$, $p = .01$, $r_{es} = .29$. However, participants did not differ in their self-reported anger at the experimenter (negative disconfirmation: M = 1.21, SD = 0.7; confirmation: M = 1.21, SD = 0.9), $t(89) = .01$, $p = .99$, $r_{es} = .001$.

Although these findings differ sharply from the results of Study 1, this seeming contradiction is somewhat unsurprising. Regarding the self-reported measure, anger typically is a socially undesirable response (Tamir, 2016) and thus expressing anger even on a questionnaire is far more complicated when the target of the anger is present rather than hypothetical. In contrast, the subtle behavioral measure provided an opportunity for participants to act out their anger without incurring any social consequences.

However, the pattern of aggression in Study 2 demands further consideration. *Hypothesis B* accounted for the possibility that people might appreciate any effort to regulate their experience of an unpleasant event, even if these efforts left them flat-footed in the face of an unexpected unpleasant outcome. Study 2 provides initial support for this alternative hypothesis and explanation, but this novel finding warrants replication.

STUDY 3

The primary purpose of Study 3 was to replicate the findings from Study 2, which contradicted the findings of Study 1, and to provide an additional test of the two competing hypotheses regarding interpersonal expectation management. To ensure that findings from Study 2 were not idiosyncratic to the manipulation and measure, Study 3 employed a different manipulation and a validated behavioral measure of aggression (Lieberman, Solomon, Greenberg, & McGregor, 1999). Additionally, although the goal of these studies did not include the theoretical impact of expectations that exceed expectations (i.e., positive disconfirmation), it was included as a condition in this study to rule out a potential conflation between the expectation anchor and expectation management generally. Because the stated time in the confirmation condition (3 minutes) was higher than the stated time in the negative disconfirmation

condition (1 minute) in Study 2, the stated time itself could have accounted for participants' aggression. However, if this was the case, participants in the positive disconfirmation condition should display more aggression compared to participants in the confirmation condition.

Method

Undergraduate participants (N = 108, 74% female, 47% Asian American, 29% Hispanic/Latino, 12% White/Caucasian, 7% Black/African American, 3% other) were recruited for a study examining visual acuity and taste preferences. An experimenter greeted the participants upon arrival and, after a few minutes, informed the participant that a (supposed) second participant was late. The experimenter then explained that the study had two parts and that the participant could begin the first part while waiting for the other participant to arrive. The participant then began a series of visual acuity exercises (counting the number of blades of grass in a series of photographs; participants confirmed that this was a tedious and vexing task). The experimenter told the participant to complete as many of the photos as possible and to stop the exercise only upon the return of the experimenter. At this point, the experimenter introduced the expectation manipulation by adding that s/he would return in about 5 (*negative disconfirmation*), 15 (*confirmation*), or 25 (*positive disconfirmation*) minutes. As in Study 2, a clock was clearly visible on the participant's desk. In all conditions, the experimenter returned after 15 minutes to end the visual task.

After stopping the visual acuity task, the experimenter told the participant that the other (supposed) participant had not shown up and that the experimenter would have to fill in for that participant in the second part of the study, which was a taste test. The experimenter then explained that the participant had been randomly assigned to the role of the test-giver, which meant the experimenter had been assigned to the role of taste-tester. The experimenter retrieved a tray with an empty cup and a container of hot sauce with a label indicating that the sauce was "extremely spicy." The experimenter off-handedly stated that s/he did not like spicy foods. The participant was then instructed to pour the hot sauce into the small cup (with no instruction as to how much sauce they should pour) while the experimenter waited in another room. After a few minutes, the experimenter returned to the room, took the tray of hot sauce, and placed it on another table. The participant then completed a final questionnaire prior to being fully debriefed.

Similar to Study 2, this study was approved by the IRB prior to data collection. Student research assistants interacted with all participants and

conducted all data collection. Moreover, the data did not contain identifying information.

Measures. The amount of hot sauce the participant doled out in grams served as the measure of aggression (i.e., more hot sauce indicated more aggression; Lieberman et al., 1999). As a manipulation check, participants indicated how much they thought the experimenter would like the hot sauce (1 = *strongly dislike*, 7 = *strongly like*). Identical to Study 2, participants also rated their anger at the experimenter.

Results and Discussion

The manipulation check confirmed that participants understood that the experimenter would not like the hot sauce very much (M = 1.83 out of 7, SD = 1.65); these ratings did not differ by condition, Fs < 2.00, p > .15, η^2 < .01. Reassured as to the validity of the aggression measure, differences in hot sauce quantity between conditions were examined.

Planned contrasts revealed that, similar to Study 2 and supporting Hypothesis B, participants in the confirmation condition (M = 9.56, SD = 14.83) gave more hot sauce than participants in the negative disconfirmation condition (M = 3.47, SD = 3.59), $t(73) = 2.74$, p = .007, r_{es} = .31. Also consistent with Study 2, participants' self-reported anger at the experimenter did not differ by condition (negative disconfirmation: M = 1.39, SD = 1.15; confirmation: M = 1.64, SD = 1.16), $t(73) = .75$, p = .46, r_{es} = .09.

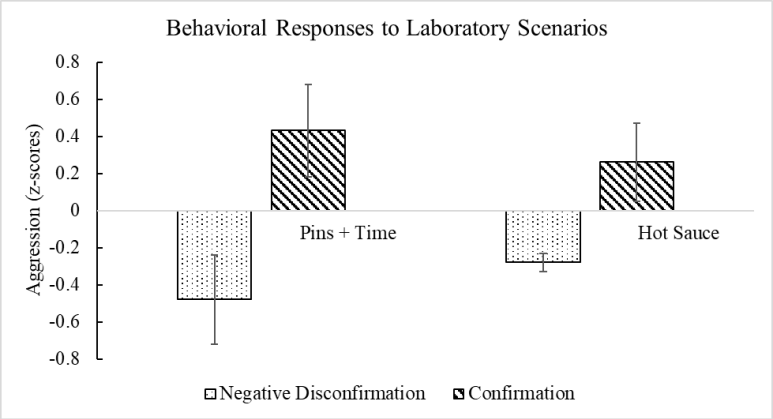

FIGURE 1. Participants' objective behavioral responses from Studies 2 and 3. When provided with veiled opportunities to aggress, participants displayed more aggression in the confirmation condition compared to the negative disconfirmation condition. Hot sauce scores were standardized to display alongside the total number of pins and time from Study 2. Error bars are standard errors.

To test the potential conflation between the anchor time and general expectation management, this study compared the amount of hot sauce poured in the positive disconfirmation condition with the confirmation and negative disconfirmation conditions. Keep in mind that if the anchor time was a confound, then participants in the positive disconfirmation (25 minutes) condition would have doled out more hot sauce compared to participants in the confirmation (15 minutes) and negative disconfirmation (5 minutes) conditions. The results showed that this was not the case. Participants in the positive disconfirmation condition (M = 5.45, SD = 4.84) doled out marginally *less* hot sauce than those in the confirmation condition, $t(70) = 1.78$, $p = .08$, $r_{es} = .21$, and about the same amount of hot sauce as participants in the negative disconfirmation condition, $t(67) = .84$, $p = .40$, $r_{es} = .10$. See Figure 1 for a summary of the results for Studies 2 and 3.

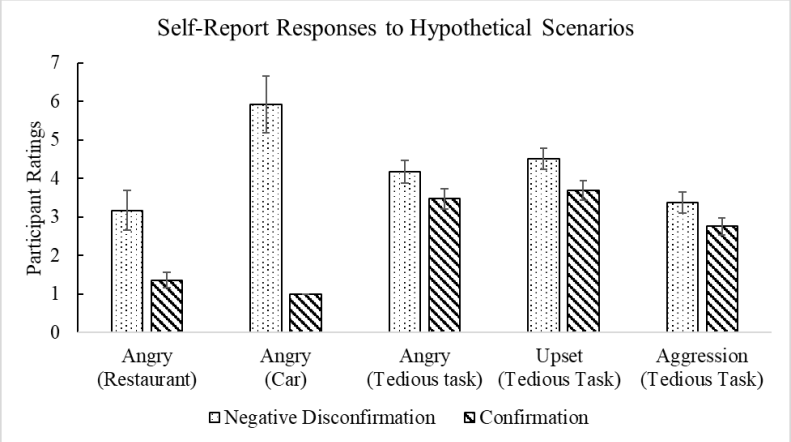

FIGURE 2. Participants' self-reported responses to hypothetical scenarios from Study 1 and Study 4. Participants imagined that they would be angrier, more upset, and more aggressive in the negative disconfirmation condition compared to the confirmation condition. Error bars are standard errors.

Taken together, results from Study 2 and Study 3 support *Hypothesis B*. Participants did not differ in their self-report ratings of anger; however, when provided with a surreptitious opportunity to aggress against an expectation manager, participants displayed more aggression when their expectations were met.

STUDY 4

Studies 2 and 3 demonstrated discrepancies between objective behavioral responses and hypothetical responses to expectation management in Study 1. Although the studies all examined interpersonal expectation management, a reasonable criticism of these findings is that Study 1 does not represent the scenarios in Studies 2 and 3. In addition, Study 1 only examined anger, which is arguably different from aggression measured in Studies 2 and 3. Therefore, Study 4 examined a hypothetical scenario that more closely represents what participants experience in the lab and asked participants to rate their aggression.

Method

Participants (N = 80, 51% female, 74% White, 11% Black or African American, 7.5% Asian or other Pacific Islander, 5% American Indian/Alaska Native, Other/Unknown 2.6%) completed an online study that asked them to respond to the following vignette:

> Imagine that you are a participant in a psychology study. When you arrive, the experimenter gets you started on an extremely tedious task of counting blades of grass in a series of photographs. The experimenter instructs you to count blades of grass until he/she returns in about __ minutes. The experimenter leaves the room. After 15 minutes, the experimenter returns to end the grass-counting task.

Participants were randomly assigned to the confirmation condition (*15 minutes*) or to the negative disconfirmation condition (*5 minutes*). After reading the vignette, participants rated how upset, angry, and aggressive they would feel toward the experimenter (*1 = not at all; 7 = extremely)*. Participants were also asked that if they discovered that the experimenter did not like hot sauce and they had an opportunity to give the experimenter hot sauce to taste, how much hot sauce they would dole out (sliding scale, *0 = no hot sauce; 100 = a lot of hot sauce*).

Results and Discussion

In a similar trend with Study 1 and supporting Hypothesis A, participants expressed that they would be marginally more angry in the negative disconfirmation (M = 4.17, SD = 1.72) than the confirmation condition (M = 3.47, SD = 1.75), $t(70) = 1.80$, p =.076, r_{es} = .20. They also imagined being more upset in the negative disconfirmation (M = 4.51, SD = 1.62) than the confirmation condition (M = 3.69, SD = 1.67), $t(78) = 2.22$, p =.03, r_{es} = .24. Additionally, participants envisioned being marginally more aggressive in the negative disconfirmation (M = 3.37, SD = 1.59) than the confirmation condition (M = 2.76, SD = 1.48), $t(78) = 1.79$, p =.078, r_{es} = .20. However, participants did not differ in their

hypothetical hot sauce allotment (negative disconfirmation: M = 23.06, SD = 26.80; confirmation: M = 29.49, SD = 33.03), $t(78) = .96$, $p = .34$, $r_{es} = .11$. See Figure 2 for a summary of the results for Study 1 and Study 4.

The results surrounding feeling angry, upset, and aggressive at the expectation manager highlighted a trend in which underestimation of a potential outcome would be met with a harsher response than an accurate estimation of an outcome. Study 1 also demonstrated this trend, albeit at a broader level. Additionally, the result of the hypothetical hot sauce test strengthens the notion that veiled behavioral measures may be more effective at recording socially undesirable behaviors such as aggression.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The four studies examined anger and aggression in response to interpersonal expectation management, in which one person sets another person's expectations regarding a particular outcome. The studies demonstrated that people's responses toward others who manipulated their expectations are quite nuanced. In Study 1 and in Study 4, people imagined that they would be angrier, more upset, and more aggressive when an outcome fell short of their expectations compared to when it met their expectations. Yet through veiled tasks designed to measure subtle but objective behavioral responses in Studies 2 and 3, people aggressed with greater intensity when an outcome met the expectations set by a researcher, compared to when the outcome fell short of those expectations.

Previous research on expectation disconfirmation has focused on self-generated expectations, and has established that unpleasant outcomes are all the more unpleasant when unexpected (Mellers, 2000; Verbruggen et al., 2017). The little research on interpersonal expectation management has found that people often manipulate others' expectations when they have some control over the other person's outcome, as in the case of a restaurant host managing guests' expectations for wait times (Shepperd et al., 2007). However, these studies stopped short of examining the consequences of interpersonal expectation management (how people respond to the person setting the expectations). The current studies revealed several novel conclusions that significantly extend the understanding of manipulated expectations.

Studies 1 and 4 assessed intuitions about responses to interpersonal expectation management. Results from these studies suggest that people's intuitions are consistent with *Hypothesis A*, which predicted that people would be angrier and more likely to aggress if someone manipulated their expectations in a way that left them off-guard by underestimating the degree of a forthcoming negative outcome.

However, people tend to be poor at introspection (Gantman et al., 2017) and intentions often do not predict behavior (Sheran, & Webb, 2016).

The pattern of objective behavior found in Studies 2 and 3 counter people's intuitions and previous findings regarding the consequences of self-generated expectations. People may be less satisfied with outcomes that are worse than expected, but they appear to consider different factors in their behavior toward the person responsible for setting their unreasonably high expectations. To frame this in an example, imagine employees whose supervisors assure them that their upcoming performance review will be positive. If these employees later receive an unfavorable review, previous research would suggest that they would be particularly unhappy about the negative review because it was unexpected (Mellers, 2000). However, these findings suggest that they might feel differently about the supervisor, perhaps appreciating that the supervisor made an effort to reassure them while they awaited the review. This explanation is sensible in light of recent research on uncertainty navigation (Sweeny & Cavanaugh, 2012). The current findings suggest that people may appreciate efforts to ease the unpleasantness of waiting by encouraging an optimistic outlook, even if that optimism leaves them unprepared for bad news (Segerstrom, Tyalor, Kemeny, & Fahey, 1998; Sweeny & Andrews, 2017).

Interestingly, although the studies captured the benefits of interpersonal expectation management (and perhaps more importantly, the liabilities of conveying realistic expectations) with subtle behavioral measures, methods that were more prone to self-presentational and social desirability concerns were ineffective for detecting this pattern. In both studies, people reported equivalent (and only mild) anger toward the experimenter across conditions, even though their aggressive behavior gave away their true response to the experimenter's manipulation of their expectations. The expression of anger is often undesirable in social interactions, particularly toward people in higher power positions (Tamir, 2016). It is easy to imagine that an undergraduate participant in a research study, in an unfamiliar setting and at the mercy of an authoritative experimenter, might be reluctant to report outright anger on a survey. However, they could readily express their frustration with the experimenter by leaving the clothespins on for a few extra seconds or by tipping a few extra drops of hot sauce into the cup without fear of retaliation. To return to the example of the employees' performance review, one could just as easily imagine that employees might publicly deny anger toward their supervisor while simultaneously taking glee in subtle opportunities to ruin the supervisor's day.

Implications

The findings point toward several real-world and methodological implications. First, the findings suggest that people who regularly deliver bad news (e.g., managers, doctors, professors) may do well to exert some effort toward managing the expectations of the news-recipients (e.g., employees, patients, students). For example, doctors might promote hope and optimism in patients who are awaiting diagnostic or prognostic information (Richman et al., 2005). However, the current findings provide more nuanced advice to news-givers. Although providing hope might protect the news-giver from retaliation if the news is bad, news-givers face a dilemma if they also wish to protect the feelings of the news-recipient, as others advocate (Fallowfield & Jenkins, 2004). If they promote optimism, they may avoid lawsuits, emotional outbursts, and perhaps even violence, but they may subsequently leave the news-recipient vulnerable to disappointment and dissatisfaction (Bougie, Pieters & Zeelenber, 2003).

On a methodological note, the current findings suggest that negative interpersonal outcomes, such as anger and aggression, may be best assessed through subtle behavioral measures (Lieberman et al., 1999). In light of social norms restricting the expression of anger (Tamir, 2016), such subtle measures are preferable to reliance on self-reported anger and other negative interpersonal emotions. Furthermore, behavioral measures avoid the limitations of hypothetical scenarios, which are subject to people's inaccurate intuitions about how they would respond to emotionally charged situations (Gantman et al., 2017).

Unanswered Questions and Future Directions

The four studies reported here indicated that interpersonal responses to expectation disconfirmation differ from the well-established pattern of intrapersonal responses. However, due to the focus on behavioral measures to avoid the limitations of self-report, the studies did not directly assess the mechanisms underlying this relationship (e.g., the experimenter's intentions). The studies' main purpose was to establish the predominant pattern of aggression in response to interpersonal expectation management, but future studies should delve into both mediators and moderators of this relationship.

Future studies can also extend the generalizability of the current findings. Both laboratory experiments manipulated the length of time people anticipated enduring a tedious or painful task. Although participants confirmed that the grass counting task was indeed tedious and the clothespin task unpleasant, people typically respond more pronouncedly to unexpected outcomes that are self-relevant, important, and rare (Sweeny & Andrews, 2017). Studies that attempt to replicate

and extend these findings can examine interpersonal expectation management for outcomes that are more personally relevant and consequential. Furthermore, the current studies examined responses to interpersonal expectation management immediately following an outcome. Delayed and prolonged responses (e.g., lawsuits) may be particularly important to address in future studies.

Conclusion

How do people respond when their expectations are manipulated? Findings from the current studies demonstrate that the answer may differ based on which outcome most interests the question asker. If the primary concern is the expectation target's satisfaction or liking, previous research suggests that it is best to provide the unvarnished truth however harsh it may be. However, if the primary concern is the expectation manager's well-being, it may be best for the expectation manager to lead others to hold an optimistic view, even when they will ultimately be let down.

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