

Research Statement, Social Sciences (Political Science)

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Research Statement

Groups matter in politics. A burgeoning literature in political psychology suggests that emotions also matter in public opinion and political decision-making. Indeed, pundits often describe the emotions of the public in terms of groups: women are upset with new legislation surrounding reproductive rights; Republicans are anxious about the upcoming election; African-Americans are proud of the candidacy of Barack Obama and angry about photo identification to vote laws. These descriptions are often tied to discussions surrounding how the experience of emotions as a group member results in changes in public opinion or political participation. Against this backdrop, my work broadly investigates how the experience of emotions as members of groups in the political arena can lead not only to tension and conflict, but also to change and accommodation in the political attitudes and behaviors of ordinary citizens. By fusing insights from public opinion, political psychology, psychology, and racial and ethnic politics, I strive to deepen our understanding of American politics by fusing our discipline's richest qualitative and quantitative traditions.

DISSERTATION RESEARCH

My dissertation explores how experiencing emotions as a member of a group shapes public opinion and political participation. I argue that the current emphasis on individually experienced emotions in the political arena provides us with an incomplete picture of the political ramifications of emotions because ordinary politics are so far removed from our individual lives. Since groups matter in politics, it would behoove us to understand how the experience of emotions as group members shapes public opinion and political decision-making.

We should care about emotions from the perspective of groups for three primary reasons. First, this line of research can contribute to our understanding of inter- and intra-group dynamics. That is, experiencing emotions from the perspective of groups might shape how one feels about one's own and other groups along with policies designed to help one's own and other groups. Second, experiencing emotions from the perspective of groups might affect one's propensity to participate in the political arena. Third, if political entrepreneurs can manipulate the emotions of groups, then they can mobilize coalitions of support or opposition for a particular candidate, policy, or issue, thereby transforming how we understand campaign dynamics.

I use a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods to explore pride, shame, and anger in African-Americans' politics. By interweaving research from psychology and political science, I generate hypotheses about how experiencing pride, shame, and anger as an African-American manifests in public opinion and political participation. Accordingly, my first empirical chapter uses focus groups to understand how members of the African-American community experience emotions in politics. While I find that the experience of pride and anger as an African-American is associated with various types of political participation, the experiences of all three emotions lead to changes in intra-and-intergroup attitudes. In my second empirical chapter, I analyze data from the 2004 ANES and 2008 CCAP to further validate the claims made by focus group study participants. When compared to the 2004 ANES, I find that group-based pride and intergroup anger are stronger predictors of attitudes toward political elites, racial policy opinion, and various forms of political participation in the 2008 CCAP. In the third empirical chapter, I use a survey experiment to isolate the cause-the experience of group-based or intergroup emotions, and observe its effect on racial and redistributive policy opinions, group attitudes, political participation, and Black Nationalist ideology. The survey was fielded in August 2013 and I am currently analyzing the results.

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CURRENT ARTICLES IN PROGRESS

Currently, I am engaged in two research projects beyond the dissertation. The first paper is titled, "Rally Around Group Identity: Group Response to External Threats," and is co-authored with Name, Assistant Professor of Government at ABC College. In this paper, we expand the concept of "rallying" to black and white racial identity. As black women, we were motivated to embark on this project in the aftermath of the Trayvon Martin shooting in February 2012. We wondered why there seemed to be continuous patterns of "rallying" around racial identity among blacks when a black person was murdered by a white person and why those same behaviors did not occur in response to black-on-black crimes. We explored this phenomenon among black and white respondents with an experiment that varied the race of the victim and perpetrator in a fictitious article about a murder and subsequent arrest. Based on positive feedback from our discussant and other conference participants at the 2013 Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, we have submitted a revised proposal designed to elicit a greater threat among respondents to "Time-Sharing Experiments for the Social Sciences Special Competition for Young Investigators to collect new data.

The second paper, co-authored with Name, is titled, "The Meaning and Implications of Racial Resentment Across the Racial Divide." Since the 1986 ANES every respondent, even Black Americans, has been administered the racial resentment battery. Thus, we ask the following questions: can African-Americans be racially resentful? Using data from the 2008 ANES, we demonstrate that increases in racial resentment decrease support for racial policies among Black and White respondents, we also find that increases in racial resentment decrease support for "race-coded" policies among White but not Black respondents. To gauge what racial resentment means among Blacks and Whites, we used an online survey panel to ask the racial resentment battery followed by open-ended questions. We created a coding scheme and are currently in the process of analyzing these open-ended responses. We plan to submit this paper for review.

FUTURE RESEARCH GOALS

Beyond my current work, I plan to embark on three new projects surrounding my substantive interests. The first project will expand the scope of my dissertation research as it assesses the role of group-based and intergroup emotions in the context of partisanship. The second project will explore the rhetoric political entrepreneurs use to elicit emotions from members of groups in speeches and campaign advertisements. I will combine literature from political theory, communication, social psychology and political psychology to identify the words and persuasive appeals political entrepreneurs utilize to mobilize not just individuals but members of groups. I will then take what I learn from that analysis to create an experiment that mimics the rhetoric of political entrepreneurs in a fictitious election to observe whether and how appealing to emotions among members of groups changes intra- and intergroup attitudes, policy opinions, and political participation. Armed with this research, I will put together a book manuscript with findings from my dissertation, the paper on partisanship, and research on rhetoric. It is my hope that this line of research will provide a more nuanced understanding of emotions in politics. The third project will contain a meta-analysis of literature using the linked face construct along with an analysis of open-ended responses to the linked face measure. It is my hope that the linked face paper advances the literature by providing conceptual and theoretical clarity to those using the linked face construct to assess group identification and consciousness.

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