Emotions can be viewed as syndromes with emotion-specific response components (e.g., behaviors; emotivational goals). Prior research supports anger as an attack emotion, and contempt a rejection emotion. Dislike has also been proposed as a distinct emotion, manifest in distancing. However, research is needed to test this hypothesis and replicate prior findings. This research examined behaviors and goals proposed as distinct to anger, contempt, and dislike. Online questionnaires measured response components. ANOVAs with linear contrasts tested hypotheses.

Results

One-way ANOVAs examined differences between manipulated emotion groups. Linear contrasts specified predicted goals. For example, linear contrasts for hypothesized anger responses predicted higher scores among participants describing anger experiences than participants describing dislike or contempt experiences. Directional t-tests evaluated the significance of all predicted differences.

Discussion

Anger: Our results support attack behaviors and goals being characteristic of anger. Compared to experiences of contempt and dislike, anger experiences involved behaviors of yelling at someone, making a negative remark to someone about their behavior, and confronting someone. In contrast to verbal attacks, physical attacks might more likely cause lasting or serious harm.

Contempt: Results support rejection behaviors and goals as characteristic of contempt. Of the eight items predicted to be significantly highest in looking down on someone, and telling a third party about someone’s shortcomings. Both of these could be indicative of disparaging. For example, looking down on someone might involve thinking about someone’s shortcomings, and such cognitions could be antecedents of telling a third party about these shortcomings. All four goals proposed as distinct to contempt were also rated significantly highest in contempt experiences, although “wanting to have nothing to do with someone” was only marginally supported. These results offer overall support for contempt as a rejection emotion. Contemptible others are looked down on; disparaging could serve the goals of excluding, rejecting, and keeping someone from coming into contact with you.

Dislike: Limited support was found for distancing behaviors and goals as distinct to dislike. Of the eight items predicted to be differentially characteristic of dislike, only the behavior of “avoiding interactions with someone” was significantly higher in dislike. “Keeping your distance from someone” was also non-significantly higher in dislike. This offers some support for dislike being centered around interpersonal avoidance. However, five hypothesized dislike items were highest in contempt, and, additionally, acting coldly was rated higher in contempt and anger. This suggests that distancing might be characteristic of contempt.

Future research should include questions to separate potential distinctions between these emotions. For example, a bipolar scale contrasting keeping your distance from someone vs. keeping someone away from you might distinguish distancing in dislike vs. rejection in contempt. To test the byproduct hypothesis, studies could ask about byproduct vs. primary goals.

References