



## Articles

# "If You are My Friend, Please Show Your Anger...": Differences Between Friends and Colleagues in Faking Emotions

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## Abstract

Social norms govern what is considered an acceptable show of emotions as a function of social circumstances. Yet, very little empirical work has been done on how the nature of a relationship influences reactions to faked emotions. Faking emotions has primarily been discussed in the context of service encounters. Popular theories encourage authenticity in a relationship. Our purpose was to examine the possibility that under certain conditions, people prefer their relationship partners to fake their emotions. We studied partners' preferences with best friends and with colleagues as regards their counterparts' expression of authentic anger. Our results showed that people preferred their colleagues not to express their anger, and to fake their emotions to a significantly greater extent than their best friends. In exchanges between colleagues, individuals preferred their partners to fake their emotions more in situations of high intensity anger than in situations of low intensity anger.

*Keywords:* anger, faking emotions, relationships, best friends, colleagues, communal, exchange

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## Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

### Emotional Faking

Faking emotions is often necessary for both communicating partners. Van Kleef (2009) argued that emotional regulation is affected by social norms in society. People regulate their positive or negative emotions instinctively by decreasing or escalating them, as well by managing them or using controlled processes (Grandey, 2000). Therefore, faking is a possible alternative. It is thought that people fake their emotions to mask their genuine feelings (Salmela, 2005), to avoid a painful truth, or in response to social influence such as peer pressure or expectations and to follow social norms. Such influences may cause individuals to fake their emotions simply to make life more comfortable by pleasing others or avoiding social disapproval (Sloan, 2007).

In the literature, emotional faking has been studied almost exclusively in the context of work relationships, where it is known as emotional labor (Pugh, Groth, & Hennig-Thurau, 2011). Hochschild (1983, p. 7) defined the concept of emotional labor as "the management of feelings to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display". In the context of emotional labor, Hochschild (1983) differentiated deep acting from surface acting. In surface acting, employees display emotions not actually felt. In deep acting, employees adapt behaviors through internal adjustment so that an authentic emotional display may follow (Grandey, Dickter, & Sin, 2004).

Here, **faking emotions** is defined as *any actively expressed emotion other than the authentic one, done intentionally and consciously*. Although the latter definition of faking is very similar to that of surface acting, the former is used and studied in the context of service encounters. We refer to the same process; however, we expand this notion to the context of close vs. distant human relationships.

### Faking Emotions in Two Types of Relationships

Emotions expressed in an interaction may transmit important information to the observer which may be essential for the relationship (Keltner & Haidt, 1999). Relationships can be classified in terms of their expected benefits. Clark and Mills (1993) distinguished between two types of relationships. In the *communal* type of relationship (between close friends or family members), the interacting partners experience concern for their partner's wellbeing. Emotional authenticity is important and crucial for the fulfillment of the emotional needs of both parties in the interaction; it reflects the meaning and the depth of the relationship (Yoo, Clark, Lemay, Salovey, & Monin, 2011). On the other hand, *exchange* relations are those that take place between associates who are together for the purpose of doing business or working (e.g., colleagues) (Clark & Mills, 1993). In these cases the other's emotional wellbeing may be irrelevant or even a burden (Yoo et al., 2011). Thus, in exchange relationships people may prefer others to fake emotions rather than display authentic ones.

### Anger and its Expression in Relationships

Our study investigates anger because anger is the most common negative emotion (Cox, Stabb, & Bruckner, 1999).

Anger is described as an emotional state that is provoked as an outcome of unfair treatment (Lazarus, 2001). Expressions of anger reflect feelings of hostility and the angry person may take unpleasant actions (Shaver, Schwartz, Kirson, & O'Connor, 1987). People expressing anger may be considered intimidating and antisocial (Tiedens, 2001). Studies consistently show that the experience of anger directed toward one of the partners results in his/her negative feeling towards the angry other (Van Kleef, De Dreu, & Manstead, 2004), and in turn he or she also becomes angry (Friedman et al., 2004; Van Kleef et al., 2004), and do not want to cooperate any further (Kopelman, Rosette, & Thompson, 2006).

Expressing anger also provides partners with information concerning the angry partner's desires (Clark & Brissette, 2003). Anger may communicate the experience of unfairness that needs refinement (Yoo et al., 2011).

Yoo et al. (2011) found that individuals who are low in communal motivation showed negative reactions toward their angry partners, whereas individuals high in communal motivation provided their angry partners with social support. Thus, in exchange relations, we posited that partners would tend to avoid emotional turmoil by keeping the relationship superficial, namely by preferring faked emotions. In contrast, in communal relationships people may want to know and face their partner's authentic anger because it is an important piece of information. Being exposed to the anger of an intimate friend or relative may not be pleasant, but may be highly valued when the relationship is close. Yet, expressing high intensity anger between best friends may inject lasting bad feelings into otherwise harmonious relationship, but more importantly it may threaten the existence of the relationship or its nature (Tiedens, 2001).

Hence we formulated the following hypothesis:

*H1: Individuals will prefer less faking of emotions in communal relationships than in exchange relationships (for both levels of anger: high and low).*

Van Kleef (2009) suggested three factors that define the appropriateness of an expression of negative emotions: the type of the relationship, the common norms in a specific society and the target of the expressed emotion (whether the emotion is directed at the interaction partner or whether it is directed at a situation). Similarly, Yoo et al. (2011) suggested that expressing low intensity anger toward colleagues (an exchange relationship) is likely to be as appropriate as expressing high intensity anger toward a best friend in the communal type of relations.

Here we tested two levels of anger, to examine the preferences of targets regarding faking emotions at each level of anger intensity as a function of the type of relationship. This led us to the second hypothesis:

*H2: In exchange relationships, individuals will prefer their colleagues to display fake emotions in situations of high intensity anger more than in situations of low intensity anger.*

Women found to have a tendency to focus on processes rather than on the results (Mattila, Grandey, & Fisk, 2003). In addition, women tend to take full advantage of the interpersonal aspects of their relations (Gilligan, 1982).

High empathy individuals tend to center their attention on their partner's needs in a generous way. Women were found to be highly empathic; they usually show great concern for their interaction partners' emotional needs (Klein, & Hodges, 2001; Macaskill, Maltby, & Day, 2002). This suggests that women are more capable of recognizing, dealing with and containing others' negative emotions (Hall & Schmid Mast, 2008; Cox et al., 1999). Thus, we predict that in exchange relationships, women will prefer to experience faked emotions less than men.

*H3: In exchange and in communal relationships, women will prefer their partners to fake their emotions (in cases of high and low intensity anger) less than men.*

## Method

### Sample and Data Collection

One hundred and ninety-nine Israeli Jewish adults of various professions took part in the study. The participants were collected in a snowball fashion starting with university students, their colleges, friends, family members etc. Fifty-six percent of the participants were males; their average age was 33 (range 18-68 years). Information provided to all the participants suggested that the study was about "attitudes related to emotions in the workplace". The participants were guaranteed confidentiality.

### Procedure

Drawing on existing theory (Clark & Brissette, 2003) and qualitative studies (Yoo et al., 2011), we developed a measure of preferences for display of faked emotions in two stages. First, a group of 30 respondents were asked to compose based on their experience, scenarios in which one interacting partner is confronted with the other's anger. They were asked to write four types of scenarios on two dimensions: 1. Anger- high /low in intensity. 2. Type of relationship- best friend/colleague. Then each of the present study's authors separately chose the most common 12 scenarios of these four basic types, all depicting interactions in which one person in the interaction is obviously angry at his partner's anger. The depicting partners were either friend or a colleague (we kept constant

in all “colleague” scenarios, the equal standing of the interacting colleagues) and the anger described as either high or low in intensity. The authors then discussed the scenarios and made modifications. This effort generated a questionnaire of 24 scenarios, six for each situation (friend/colleague, low/high intensity anger). In order to test the questioner’s content validity it was given to a group of 10 judges. The judges were asked to classify the 24 scenarios into one of the four categories. Using the criterion of 80% agreement among the judges resulted in a questionnaire of 16 scenarios divided as follows:

(1) Five scenarios of High Intensity Anger expressed by a Colleague (HIA-C): 1. *“Your colleague is furious at you when he found out that you were badmouthing him/her to his/her boss”*; 2. *“Your colleague is furious at you for applying for a position that you found out about from him/her and knew that he/she wanted very much”*; 3. *“Your colleague is furious at you because he blames you for being put on probation at work”*; 4. *“Your colleague is furious at you for divulging his/her intention to leave his/her job”*; 5. *“Your colleague is furious at you for belittling him/her and his/her suggestions”*.

(2) Four scenarios of High Intensity Anger expressed by a Friend (HIA-F): 1. *“Your best friend is furious at you because he found out that you were badmouthing him/her behind his/her back”*; 2. *“Your best friend is furious at you because you promised once again to help him/her when he/she was in serious trouble and you did not”*; 3. *“Your best friend is furious at you because he/she found out that you were flirting with his/her partner”*; 4. *“Your best friend is furious at you because he/she saw you with other friends when you declined his/her offer to go out”*.

(3) Four Low Intensity Anger scenarios expressed by a Colleague (LIA-C): 1. *“Your colleague is angry at you for not supporting him/her in a meeting”*; 2. *“Your colleague is angry at you for being very late in turning in a report he was waiting for”*; 3. *“Your colleague is angry at you for repeatedly interrupting him/her during the last staff meeting”*; 4. *“Your colleague is angry at you for not promptly responding to his/her mail”*.

(4) Three items measured Low Intensity Anger manifested by a Friend (LIA-F): 1. *“Your best friend is angry at you because you were very late meeting him/her in a coffee shop”*; 2. *“Your best friend is angry at you for embarrassing him/her at a social gathering”*; 3. *“Your best friend is angry at you because you left him/her alone in a bar”*.

In the second stage, we constructed a questionnaire based on the 16 scenarios. In the instructions, we emphasized that in real life there are situations in which we prefer our relationship partners to manifest their authentic emotions and there are situations in which we prefer them to fake their emotions. Both are legitimate. We asked the participants to state whether they would prefer their relationship partner (colleague/friend) to fake his/her negative emotion in the scenario (marked as “1”) or to display authentic emotion (marked as “0”). To create an overall score for each of the four situations, we counted all the “1” values across all scenarios. Thus, the range of scores for the HIA-C was 0-5, for the HIA-F, 0-4; for the LIA-C, 0-4 and for the LIA-F, 0-3.

This within subject design enabled us to compare each participant respond to the 4 types of scenarios.

## Results

The findings (see [Table 1](#)) confirm Hypothesis 1, and show that individuals prefer their colleagues to display faked emotions in situations of low intensity anger (LIA-C) significantly more ( $M = 2.05$ ,  $SD = 1.48$ ) than their friends (LIA-F) ( $M = 1.64$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ). A T-test of the difference between exchange and communal relationships for high

intensity anger indicated that individuals prefer their colleagues to display faked emotions significantly more ( $M = 2.60$ ,  $SD = 1.97$ ) than their friends ( $M = 2.00$ ,  $SD = 1.71$ ).

Table 1

Summary of Study Results

Anger Situation	Sample Size	Mean	Standard Deviation	T Test Value
<b>Low Intensity</b>				
Colleague	199	2.05	1.48	T(198) = 4.67***
Friend		1.64	1.13	
<b>High Intensity</b>				
Colleague	199	2.60	1.97	T(198) = 5.90***
Friend		2.00	1.71	
<b>Low Intensity</b>				
Colleague				
Male	111	2.13	1.48	T(191) = .845
Female	82	1.95	1.51	
Friend				
Male	111	1.72	1.09	T(191) = .825
Female	82	1.58	1.16	
<b>High Intensity</b>				
Colleague				
Male	111	2.72	1.99	T(191) = .850
Female	82	2.48	1.96	
Friend				
Male	111	2.19	1.68	T(191) = 1.384
Female	82	1.85	1.74	

\*p < 0.05. \*\*p < 0.01. \*\*\*p < 0.001.

Hypothesis 2 was also confirmed. In exchange relationships participants prefer their partners to fake their emotions in situations of high intensity anger (HIA-C) ( $M = 2.60$ ,  $SD = 1.97$ ) more than in low intensity anger situations (LIA-C) ( $M = 2.05$ ,  $SD = 1.48$ ); the t-test for high intensity vs. low intensity anger ( $t(198) = 4.966$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) was significant.

The third hypothesis suggested that women would prefer their colleagues to fake anger (high and low intensity) less than men. T-tests for gender differences confirmed this prediction (for high intensity;  $M_{women} = 2.48$ ,  $SD = 1.96$ ,  $M_{men} = 2.72$ ,  $SD = 1.99$ ; for low intensity;  $M_{women} = 1.95$ ,  $SD = 1.51$ ,  $M_{men} = 2.13$ ,  $SD = 1.48$ ). Second, it was hypothesized that women would prefer their friends to display faked emotions in situations of low/high intensity anger toward them less than men (for high intensity;  $M_{women} = 1.85$ ,  $SD = 1.74$ ,  $M_{men} = 2.19$ ,  $SD = 1.68$ ; for low intensity;  $M_{women} = 1.58$ ,  $SD = 1.16$ ,  $M_{men} = 1.72$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ). The differences were not significant, disconfirming Hypothesis 3.

## Discussion

We examined individuals' preferences to have their relationship partners fake their emotions rather than express their authentic levels of anger. Our results fully supported our first hypothesis; namely that in exchange relationships more than in communal ones people prefer their partner in the relationship to fake his/her emotions whether they feel high intensity or low intensity anger. These findings are consistent with results reported in [Graham, Huang,](#)

Clark, & Helgeson (2008), showed that in exchange relationships participants are less willing to deal with others' personal needs. Since anger conveys a need for support and sympathy, it has no place in exchange relationships.

The current results also support our second hypothesis. We found differences in preferences for faked emotions in exchange relationships between displays of high and low intensity anger directed at the person and not at the situation. Van Kleef (2009) also stated that the impact of emotional expressions depends on the perceived appropriateness of the expression. For instance, high intensity anger is not appropriate in exchange relationships. Our results show strong support for this idea; we found that in situations of high intensity anger, participants prefer their angry partners to fake their emotion more than in situations of low intensity anger.

The contribution of this study stems from its framework rather than from the findings. Many studies have been carried out on emotional authenticity, which is not identical to faking emotions. Lack of authenticity implies concealing authentic emotions. Faking emotions implies actively manifesting emotions other than the authentic ones. The present study sheds light on individuals' preferences regarding emotions faked by their partners, and may imply that the purpose of faking emotions in exchange relationships is similar to the objective of emotional authenticity in communal relationships: in both cases, the goal is to maintain the relationship.

The importance of emotional authenticity has prompted researchers to focus on authenticity and devote less attention to faking emotions in different contexts. Pugmire (1998) claimed that fake emotions are a potentially dangerous point of departure for social interaction, in that by interpreting a fake emotion as a genuine one, people deceive themselves.

However, we argue that faking emotions does not necessarily complicate relations, and might be preferred in specific circumstances or relationships by the dialogue partners.

Our third hypothesis suggested that in both types of relationships (exchange and communal), men and women would have different preferences for their partners' expressions of authentic (low and high intensity) anger. The male participants in this study did prefer their colleagues to fake their authentic anger toward them more than the female participants did. This finding is not surprising, since women are more communicative and empathic to others (Macaskill et al., 2002). This finding may also convey a message as to the emotional efforts women are willing to invest in their relationships with their (communal or exchange) partners, as compared to men.

### Research Limitations

Our research design assumed different motivations for the colleague condition as compared to the best friend condition. Thus, colleagues could have also been close friends.

Secondly, we only studied one side of the dyad; by examining both sides of the interaction, we could have obtained a larger picture of emotion faking preferences.

Third, using within subject design enabled us to compare respondent's preferences between different situations; however, it prevents us from analyzing the main effects and the interactions between variables. Future research should create a research design of factorial 2 (communal vs. exchange) x 2 (high vs. low intensity anger) x 2 (gender) which enlarges our understanding.

## Future Research

Future studies could examine specific variables that characterize the relationship and the interaction partners. Yoo et al. (2011) found that expressing negative emotions in close communal relationships contributes to these relationships. Future research should investigate the preferences for negative emotional authenticity/emotional faking in other communal relations (i.e. with parents or children).

## Summary

Research in the area of faking emotions rarely focuses on its consequences in day-to-day life. The present study examined whether targets of high/low anger preferred their colleagues vs. best friends to fake their emotions. The widely held view that faking emotions creates undesirable results is not supported here since the findings show that faking emotions in exchange relationships are preferred by the target, and may prevent unnecessary emotional turmoil. Thus, remaining emotionally detached may contribute to effective working processes in a relationship.

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