# PhD Theses defended in 2017

# January

On January 19, 2017 **Welmer E. Molenmaker** successfully defended the PhD thesis entitled "The (un)willingness to reward cooperation and punish non-cooperation. " at Leiden University.

**Promotor**
Prof. dr. Eric van Dijk

**Co-promotor**
dr. Erik W. de Kwaadsteniet

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## Summary

The central theme of this dissertation is the (un)willingness to reward cooperation and punish non-cooperation. Whereas rewards and punishments can be effective means to enhance cooperation in social dilemmas, a prerequisite for any effect of sanctions is that people are willing to administer them. In the present work, I shed more light on this important – yet long neglected – topic. The aim is twofold: (1) identifying determinants of the use of sanctions in social dilemmas, and (2) testing the central proposition that people are not as willing to punish non-cooperative choice behavior as they are willing to reward cooperative choice behavior. The results of this dissertation show that the type of sanction people have at their disposal – either reward or punishment – is as primary determinant of the willingness to sanction. In addition to sanction type, I argue and demonstrate that the type of social dilemma people face (Public good dilemma versus Common resource dilemma), the extent of personal responsibility people have for the sanction (Individual responsibility versus Joint responsibility), and the timing of the sanctioning decision (Beforehand versus Afterwards) are also important determinants of the (un)willingness to sanction in social dilemmas. These findings reveal that there are not only psychological processes at play that foster sanctioning, but also psychological processes that hamper sanctioning. By taking a closer look at people's (un)willingness to incur the costs of rewarding cooperative choice behavior and punishing non-cooperative choice behavior, this work thus provides a more comprehensive view of the potential that sanctions can have to solve social dilemmas in the real world.

On January 25, 2017 **Tim W. Faber** successfully defended the PhD thesis entitled "When Imitation Falls Short: The Case of Complementary Actions." at Aula, University of Amsterdam.

**Promotor**
Prof. Dr. Agneta Fischer

**Co-promotor**
Dr. Kai Jonas

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## Summary

Imitation is seen by many researchers as the driving force of human evolution and as a primary factor controlling the development of culture (Legare & Nielsen, 2015). The ontogeny of imitative behavior has been heavenly debated and has inspired a host of theoretical accounts. While an inborn mechanism that translates observed in performed behavior is losing evidential support, a more flexible associative learning mechanism has been proposed that not only explains imitation but also more complex (non-similar) types of behavior such as complementary actions. Complementary actions can be defined as behavioral responses towards an observed action (shaking hands or catching a ball) that can be dissimilar to the observed action. In my thesis I try to find evidence for principles of associative learning specifically applied to complementary actions. I found that complementary actions direct attention to response-relevant objects, that complementary actions are activated irrespective of perceived personal space and that complementary actions modulate perspective taking. Also, I have found that (neural) motor regions are inherently predictive which might facilitate the preparation of complementary actions. The results partly support the associative learning view and provide novel questions for the literature discussing the limits on imitation behavior. We suggest that while imitation is abundant, it is one of outcomes of associative learning and does not inherently provide the positive characteristics that many have attributed it to.

On January 27, 2017 **Liesbeth Mann** successfully defended the PhD thesis entitled "On Feeling Humiliated. The Experience of Humiliation in Interpersonal, Intragroup, and Intergroup Contexts" at University of Amsterdam.

**Promotor**
Prof. dr. Bertjan Doosje (UvA), Prof. dr. Agneta Fischer (UvA)

**Co-promotor**
Dr. Allard Feddes (UvA)

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## Summary

Humiliation is an intensely negative and complex emotion, familiar to many people. This dissertation focused on the determinants, strength, emotion relations, and consequences of feelings of humiliation in different contexts.

In an interpersonal context (Chapter 2), we found that negative audience behaviour (laughter) during a humiliating episode increased reported humiliation. At the same time, positive audience behaviour (social support) did not decrease humiliation. Possibly, the public nature of such support enhances the salience of a humiliating act which leads the victim to perceive him- or herself as more, rather than less, victimized.

In Chapter 3 we studied humiliation during initiation rituals in student fraternities. Contrary to the often assumed affiliative function of degrading practices (i.e., hazing) during such rituals, we found evidence that humiliation during initiations leads to more distance between group members. However, we found that feelings of humiliation and a tendency to withdraw from others in such contexts are less strong when people are hazed together with other group members rather than alone, in front of the group. This effect could be explained by expected social support from the group.

In Chapter 4 we studied group-based humiliation and its relation with intergroup aggression. We found that reported humiliation caused by a defeat of the in-group predicted aggressive action tendencies towards an out-group that was unrelated to the defeat. We also found that glorification of, but not attachment to, the in-group, predicted humiliation about the defeat and aggressive tendencies towards the out-group. The relation between in-group glorification and aggression could be partially explained by humiliation and out-group hate. It thus seems that people who strongly glorify their group are more prone to feel humiliated about a past defeat of their group, which, in turn, predicts out-group hate and an inclination to respond aggressively towards the out-group, even though the out-group was not involved in the humiliating defeat.

Taken together the studies in this dissertation show that humiliation is an emotion that is particularly prone to reinforcement by other people's negative behaviour and, at the same time, has great potential to evoke antisocial behaviour in the victim toward others. Thus, unlike other negative emotions, humiliation is clearly dysfunctional when it comes to the formation and maintenance of good relationships, whether this is between individuals, within a group or between groups.

# February

On February 13, 2017 **Zoi Manesi** successfully defended the PhD thesis entitled "Prosocial Behavior Under Surveillance: Understanding the Eye-Images Effect" at VU Amsterdam, 11.45 uur.

**Promotor**
Prof. Dr. Paul A.M. van Lange

**Co-promotor**
Dr. Thomas V. Pollet

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## Summary

The objective of this dissertation was to contribute to the scientific understanding of the eye-images effect. According to this effect, minimal cues to being watched in the form of eyes or eye-like shapes can enhance prosociality. After some seminal studies, the eye-images effect inspired considerable theorizing and research. And in recent years, it elicited several questions, such as: When does it occur? Why does it exactly occur? And there was the critical question: What is the scope of the effect?

This dissertation helps to clarify this phenomenon by pointing to the following tentative conclusions. First, eyes need to be watching you to enhance prosociality: Only when eyes are paying attention they can make people act in socially desirable ways. This finding suggests that only when eyes are paying attention they may elicit concerns about one's own reputation and promote prosocial reputation management. Second, next to the psychology of reputation, eyes are likely to activate alternative mechanisms, such as liking: Under certain circumstances, liking of eye-like patterns can explain the eye-images effect on prosociality. Third, eye images are potentially a powerful intervention for promoting forms of prosociality that are relatively normative or entail a low cost (e.g., conservation and environmental concern or helping behavior). Yet, eye images may be less powerful in promoting certain other forms of prosociality that are relatively less normative or entail a higher cost (e.g., disaster donations). Fourth, for high-cost prosocial acts (such as helping an outgroup far away), eye images may matter less than other key variables, such as prosocial personality tendencies.

Taken all together, the findings in this dissertation highlight various critical aspects of the eye-images effect that have been underexplored or less understood. These findings help unravel the circumstances in which eye images do (or do not) matter and stimulate further exploration of this controversial, yet fascinating phenomenon.

On February 14, 2017 **Daniela Becker** successfully defended the PhD thesis entitled "Self-control conflict in the eating domain: A cognitive, affective and behavioral perspective" at Agenietenkapel in Amsterdam

**Promotor**
Prof. Dr. Rob W. Holland

**Co-promotor**
Dr. Nils B. Jostmann

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## Summary

We all know those moments in which we are tempted to do one thing (e.g., order the burger) but know we should do another (e.g., choose the healthy meal). Such self-control conflicts, moments in which an impulse and a higher order goal are in conflict, are pervasive in everyday life, and at the heart of the self-control process, given that without such a conflict, there would be no need to engage in effortful self-control. Knowing how people experience and deal with conflict might, therefore, help improve self-control. In my thesis I address those questions through combining theory and methodology from cognitive, social and health psychology.

In one line of research I used a response conflict (i.e., Flanker) task to investigate the interplay between cognitive control and motivational processes. I found that cognitive control processes are weakened when in direct competition with the processing of motivationally salient information. In the second line of research I was interested in how people feel about making conflicted self-control choices (i.e., giving in vs. resisting temptation). Interestingly, the more conflict people experienced during decision making the less satisfied and more negative they felt about their choices – even if they had made the 'healthy' choice. Only if people were reminded that their healthy choice was a successful act of self-control did conflict strength predict increased feelings of pride. Finally, I tested whether reducing impulse strength by means of the approach avoidance training could be one way of increasing self-control in the eating domain. Three lab studies (and preliminary results from an online study) produced null results, suggesting that more research is needed before the approach avoidance training can be used in the applied setting.

Together, those findings help understand why self-control often fails, and generate several interesting ideas for how to improve self-control.

On February 16, 2017 **Maja Kutlaca** successfully defended the PhD thesis entitled "The Role of Values and Value-Identity Fit in Motivating Collective Action " at University of Groningen.

**Promotors**
Prof. Dr. Martijn van Zomeren
Prof. Dr. Tom Postmes

**Co-promotor**
Dr. Kai Epstude

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## Summary

Values like freedom and equality may have become buzz-words used by politicians and activists as an argument for any cause. Nevertheless, they still continue to be an essential part of the social psychology of social change because values can both motivate and mobilize. This thesis proposes that the motivational potential of values often arises from their perceived violation by others. Furthermore, it investigates how the fit between violated values and group identities motivates collective action (Chapter 1). Chapter 2 demonstrates that perceived value violations can provide meaning to vague group identities and fuel collective action in the contexts of incidental disadvantages which lack clear solutions and common goals. Furthermore, Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 investigate the effects of communicating values to those in and outside of the core activists group and show that values can bind, but also blind members of the disadvantaged group. In other words, values can help define who we are and what we stand for. However, values can also isolate those who share them and make them intolerant even to those who share their disadvantage, but not the ideological background. As a whole, the main theoretical contributions of this thesis lie in illuminating and specifying the role of values in the process of politicization, and in addressing the consistently overlooked question of politicization of those members of a disadvantaged group who fall outside of the movement's core support group (Chapter 5).

On February 16, 2017 **Felicity M. Turner-Zwinkels** successfully defended the PhD thesis entitled "A New Psychological Perspective on Identity content Its Conceptualization, Measurement, and Application"

## Summary

Identity content is central to the way that identity researchers think out identities: Identity content is the carrier of an identity's meanings, which the individual uses to understand who they are. However, the literature so far (e.g., gender studies, group norm research and identity complexity) uses diverse theory and methods to study identity content. In response, this dissertation introduces a new, integrative approach to identity content which seeks to unify lessons learnt from these literatures into a novel conceptualization of identity content and associated methods (chapter 2). This dissertation then showcases different applications of this integrative identity content approach in politicization research (chapters 4-7), to investigate how individuals change as they come to see themselves as activists. In this research we explore what political identities mean (chapter 7), why meaningful identities are necessary (chapter 3), and how political identities not only become part of the self (Chapter 6), but also can become central in defining how an individual sees themselves (chapter 4 & 5). In doing so we gain an insight into the 'black box' of politicized identities, highlighting both what they are, and how they come about. We conclude that this integrative approach facilitates important advances in politicization research, allowing the confirmation of phenomena long assumed to be present when individuals politicize: Our research confirms that politicization truly is a long-term process of qualitative change in the self-concept, in which multiple identities within the self-concept are gradually adjusted and tessellated together to make a coherent and politically oriented whole.

On February 23, 2017 **Femke Hilverda** successfully defended the PhD thesis entitled "Making sense of food risk information: The case of organic food." at University of Twente.

**Promotor**
Prof. dr. Ellen Giebels

**Co-promotor**
Dr. Margot Kuttschreuter

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## Summary

When individuals encounter new information about food issues, such as organic food risks, they have to make sense of this information. Sense-making is the process by which individuals give meaning to the world around them. How the process of sense-making is influenced by the online social environment, and social media interaction in particular, is as yet largely unknown. This dissertation therefore examines the research question: How do individuals make sense of (online) risk information about (organic) food issues? Special focus is placed on the influence of the social environment and on online information exchange. Based on the new opportunities that social media offer to (risk) communication, a distinction in three types of online information exchange is made: information exchange via social networking sites (Facebook), direct online interaction via a chat, and actively sharing encountered information with others via online media such as (micro)blogs. A total of six empirical studies are performed to provide insight in sense-making regarding organic food risks in an online context.

# May

On May 12, 2017 **Tracy Cheung** successfully defended the PhD thesis entitled "Turning vice into virtue - when low self-control states facilitate goal-oriented behaviours" at Utrecht University.

**Promotor**
Prof. Dr. Denise de Ridder

**Co-promotors**
Dr. Floor Kroese
Dr. Marieke Adriaanse

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## Summary

Despite having good intentions, people often fail to exercise self-control to act in line with their long-term goals. This is not surprising seeing that even mundane circumstances such as ego-depletion, being mentally distracted, and hunger could all hamper self-control performance. Considering these circumstances are inevitably part of daily life, the current dissertation aimed to gain a deeper understanding of low self-control states and how they affect performance. Critically, we worked with, rather than against, states of low self-control by exploring strategies that capitalized on decision-making processes prominent in these situations to promote goal-oriented behaviours.
The first part of the dissertation assessed the role of motivation underlying self-control performance. We found that people in high self-control states exhibited greater approach motivation towards goal-oriented (e.g., healthy food) than reward-oriented stimuli (e.g., unhealthy food), whereas those in low self-control due to ego-depletion or high cognitive load had similar approach motivation towards both options. We inferred the lack of distinction in motivation towards a virtue vs. vice in low self-control states might contribute to individuals´ increased susceptibility to environmental influences.
Correspondingly, the second part of the dissertation investigated the influence of environmental cues to promote goal-oriented behaviours for individuals in low self-control states. Based on the premise that low self-control states increase the propensity to rely on System I processing that is quick, automatic, and highly susceptible to environmental influences, we predicted that these circumstances would predispose individuals to following heuristics to expedite decision-making. We tested the hypothesis that individuals in states of low self-control due to ego-depletion or hunger would favour more goal-oriented outcomes if they were promoted by suitable heuristics installed in the environment. In line with predictions, our findings demonstrated that ego-depleted people benefitted from following scarcity heuristics, namely the demand (vs. supply) scarcity, to favour more virtuous (e.g., healthy food, utilitarian products) than vice options (unhealthy food, hedonic products). We generalized these results by showing that hungry people selected more healthy food choices when there was a social proof heuristic promoting them.
The last part of the dissertation tested the applicability of heuristics as a type of nudging intervention in real-life contexts where people were not inclined to exert self-control. In a field study conducted at a take-away food vendor, we found that an accessibility nudge

increased the sales of fruits, whereas the social proof nudge and salience nudge had limited effectiveness in promoting their respective healthy products assumedly due to strong existing consumer preferences. Moreover, we found that presenting a disclosure message to increase the transparency of the nudge´s intended purpose did not influence its effectiveness. Finally, semi-structured interviews revealed that consumers are generally receptive to nudging interventions, especially when oriented towards promoting healthy eating, given that they are designed and implemented by knowledgeable experts and trustworthy authority that upheld consumer and societal interests.

# June

On June 6, 2017 **Pum Kommattam** successfully defended the PhD thesis entitled "Feeling the Other: Emotion Interpretation in Intercultural Settings" at Universiteit van Amsterdam.

**Promotor**
Prof. Dr. A. H. Fischer

**Co-promotor**
Dr. Kai J. Jonas

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## Summary

As earlier research suggests, individuals are worse at reading facial expressions of emotions in outgroup members than in ingroup members. This finding was primarily established by showing participants different emotional expressions and asking them to make a choice based on different emotional labels. Here, participants make more mistakes if they see emotional expressions of ethnic outgroup members compared to ethnic ingroup members, which was the starting point of this dissertation. The goal of the current research was to study misinterpretations of emotional expressions across groups further. First, we wanted to find out whether people also show biases in perceived intensity of emotions in ethnic ingroup and outgroup members. This intensity bias is subtle and could say something about how we perceive the emotional lives of members of other ethnic groups. Furthermore, we studied misinterpretation of emotions that communicate opposing social intentions. This could say something about different social signals that are perceived in interethnic communication.
In chapter two, we report findings of 16 studies in which we tested whether people perceive less intense emotions in members of other groups compared to members of their own groups based on a meta-analysis over 13 studies and 3 cross cultural studies (Ntotal = 3517).We found evidence for the idea that people perceive outgroup members to feel less intense emotions than ingroup members. This was particularly the case if the context did not provide additional information on how a person may feel and when using low intensity expressions that leave room for biases. Furthermore the intensity bias was more likely to occur for expressions that share similar physical features, such as fear and surprise, and for emotions that are considered to be secondary, such as embarrassment and pride, compared to more prototypical expressions such as anger. Intensity difference were mostly found in contexts where white European or European-American perceivers judged emotional expressions of Arabs and less so vice versa, or in other intergroup contexts, such as Dutch people judging Polish people. One of the explanations for this pattern is that intensity differences across groups are related to decreased empathy towards outgroup members since reduced empathy towards outgroup members may be rooted in perceptions of less intense emotions in others. Another explanation that is supported by our data is that Europeans in particular tend to dehumanize non-Europeans, meaning that they see others as less human and more animal like and primitive. This could result in Europeans attributing less complex emotions to non-Europeans. Specifically, European participants perceived less intense pride, embarrassment, surprise and fear in Arabs.
In chapter three we report how expressions of embarrassment can be perceived as disinterest in intergroup contexts, since both expressions share similar physical feature. This line of

research shows that people perceived posed expressions of embarrassment as such in ingroup members, but perceived the same expression as disinterest in outgroup members (Ntotal = 1607). The affiliative function of embarrassment as restoring social relationships can thus have the opposite social function in intergroup contexts based on misinterpretations of the perceiver.

Overall, the current research shows that particularly low intensity expressions or ambiguous emotions can be misinterpreted in intergroup contexts. We discussed these findings in relation to different explanations that have slightly different foci. Perceiving less intense emotions in outgroup members can be the result of the empathy gap, but also of more general biases, such as dehumanization. We could not replicate earlier findings of people attributing more intense emotions in outgroup members (e.g., more anger in black people). More research on intergroup emotion interpretation is needed in

On June 19, 2017 **Jolien van Breen** successfully defended the PhD thesis entitled "The path of most Resistance: How groups cope with implicit social identity threat" at University of Groningen.

**Promotor**
Prof. dr. Russell Spears

**Co-promotors**
Dr. Toon Kuppens
Dr. Soledad de Lemus

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## Summary

The central purpose of this dissertation was to study whether members of disadvantaged social groups are able to resist implicit threats to their social identity. During the last decades it has become increasingly clear that many social processes have important implicit components (Bargh et al., 2001; Blair, 2002; Devine, 1989). Nevertheless, only recently have theorists begun to study whether and how existing theories of intergroup relations might be extended to the implicit level (Lemus et al., 2013; Kray et al., 2001; Ramos et al., 2015). Of central importance to this dissertation is the fact that, until recently, it seemed that when threats to social identity occur implicitly, members of disadvantaged groups were unable to resist. In fact, previous research showed that, as threatening cues become more subtle, members of disadvantaged groups are increasingly like to accept and conform to such cues (Barreto et al., 2010; Kray et al., 2001).
Conversely, the work that makes up this dissertation shows, across 5 empirical chapters, that resistance to implicit forms of identity threat is possible, and can take a variety of different forms. For instance, exposure to implicit in-group stereotypes can trigger counter-stereotypical behaviour (Chapter 3), implicit in-group bias (Chapters 3 and 5) and out-group derogation (Chapters 3 and 4). As such, this dissertation forms an important step in the application of Social Identity Theory to the implicit realm. Moreover, by showing that members of socially disadvantaged groups can resist implicit identity threat, this dissertation underscores that members of disadvantaged groups are more resilient than previously thought.

# September

On September 12, 2017 **Yujie Cheng** successfully defended the PhD thesis entitled "Creativity Under the Gun: How Threat Features and Personal Characteristics Motivate Creative Responding."

**Promotor**
Prof. Dr. Carsten K.W. de Dreu

**Co-promotor**
Dr. Matthijs Baas

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## Summary

The goal of the present dissertation is to examine how threats influence creativity. Past work has shown threats and concomitant fear and anxiety can both increase and decrease creativity, without providing convincing reasons (Byron & Khazanchi, 2011; Mehta & Zhu, 2009; De Dreu & Nijstad, 2008). In this dissertation, it is proposed that creativity is about being motivated to realize goals that matter. People are motivated to avoid danger, and these security-related goals may lead to enhanced creativity, but only in domains that are relevant to deal with the threat at hand, and not in domains that are irrelevant to the threat (the motivated focus account, De Dreu & Nijstad, 2008). Furthermore, theories on human threat responding state that human threat management systems are functionally distinct and flexible. They are sensitive to different cues signaling particular threats, are more likely to be engaged when the threatened person is especially vulnerable to the threat, and lead to highly specific cognitions and behaviors that are attuned to the threat (Cosmides & Tooby, 1994; Neuberg et al., 2011; Schaller et al., 2007). Integrating both theoretical perspectives, I predict that people facing threats can be creative in threat ;relevant domains through threat;induced motivated focus, and that creativity under threats is highly specific and responsive to the particular features of threats (e.g. the direction of threat), situational resources (e.g., available time to react), and dispositional variables (e.g., dispositional threat sensitivity).

Four empirical studies tested hypotheses that are derived from this general principle using both intrapersonal (e.g., health threats) and interpersonal threats (e.g., violent assaults) with regards to the full cycle of creative problem solving, from the inclusive processing of information, through the generation of defense tactics, to the evaluation and selection of threat responses for implementation. Results showed that threats do not have a generalized impact on creativity. Rather, they selectively enhance creativity that is relevant and functional in managing the specific threat at hand. Moreover, more original responses and greater preference for creative tactics occurs when threats were more personally relevant, and for people that were especially
vulnerable to threats. These findings thus attest to the crucial role of motivation for the domain-specific threat-relevant creativity to occur. Lastly, this motivated focus account of threat;relevant creativity applies not only to creative idea generation but also to inclusive information processing and idea selection process of creativity cycle.

On September 28, 2017 **Anne Marthe van der Bles** successfully defended the PhD thesis entitled "Societal Discontent -- Deciphering the Zeitgeist" at Groningen

**Promotors**
Prof. Tom Postmes

**Co-promotor**
Prof. Rob R. Meijer

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# Summary

This dissertation examines a phenomenon that has become increasingly common in many countries in recent years: a deep-seated collective discontent with the state of society. When we started this research, there were no concepts or measurement instruments available in the social psychological literature that we believed fully captured this vague yet consequential phenomenon. We proposed a new conceptualization of societal discontent, based on the assumption that it is an aspect of the "Zeitgeist": a collectively shared, tacit, generalized perception of the state of society. The aim of this dissertation was twofold. First, based on our proposed conceptualization, we developed an operationalization of societal discontent as a general factor Z. This method also led to the development of a scale to measure Z (Chapter 2). We assessed the validity of this Z-scale for use in research in various countries, and developed an international Z-scale that could be used to compare societal discontent across countries (Chapters 2 and 4). Second, we aimed to gain insight into the phenomenon of societal discontent itself. In Chapter 2, we found that societal discontent measured as Z influenced the impromptu interpretation of news headlines and attribution of news stories about society. Chapter 3 showed that it predicted voting for extreme right- and left-wing political parties, more so than personal-level discontent did. In Chapter 3, we investigated the relationship of education level and media use with societal discontent, and found that people who more frequently used tabloid-style media and people with lower education levels had more negative Zeitgeist-perceptions. In Chapter 4, we studied the incidence of societal discontent across countries and conducted preliminary analyses of the relationship of societal discontent with indicators of country-level welfare. In Chapter 5, we examined the influence of micro-level communication processes on the development of collective discontent over time, albeit discontent with a different kind of society (a scientific discipline). The main academic contribution of our work is that we designed a novel theoretical and methodological approach to studying societal discontent. Our results so far have been consistent with this approach, implying that we seem to have found a way to measure this vague sense of doom and gloom about the state of society; but our results also open up questions for future research. The main societal contribution that we hope to make is a better understanding of societal discontent, one of the major driving forces of this political era.

On September 29, 2017 **Willem Sleegers** successfully defended the PhD thesis entitled "Meaning and Pupillometry: The Role of Physiological Arousal in Meaning Maintenance"

**Promotor**
prof. dr. Ilja van Beest

**Co-promotor**
dr. Travis Proulx

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## Summary

The goal of the present dissertation is to examine the role of physiological arousal in meaning maintenance, using the Meaning Maintenance Model (MMM) as the guiding theoretical framework.

The MMM is an integrative model in the existential psychology literature to explain both what meaning is and how people respond to lost meaning. The central idea is that people adopt sets of beliefs that allow them to make sense of the world. Through the adoption of these beliefs, people structure their experiences and come to expect specific relationships, whether it is the color of objects, the behavior of people, or the unfolding of world events. According to the MMM, meaning is found in these expected relationships.

However, people's beliefs are imperfect, causing them to regularly face events that violate their expectations. This violates their sense of meaning. The MMM states that the loss of meaning results in a state of aversive physiological arousal, which motivates people to perform compensatory behavior to reduce the arousal. This compensatory behavior can consist of reinterpreting the event to be consistent with one's prior beliefs, by changing one's beliefs, or by affirming unrelated, yet meaningful, beliefs from a different domain.

In this dissertation we review the literature on potential physiological mechanisms for the arousal-behavior link that is predicted by the MMM. Additionally, we performed experimental studies in which we assessed arousal through the use of pupillometry. Pupillometry is the technique of measuring the size and reactivity of the pupil. The pupil displays small fluctuations that do not serve any visual function. Instead, these small fluctuations reflect a state of physiological arousal. We assessed participant's pupil reactivity while presenting them with a variety of meaning violations, such as misconceptions, social exclusion, and perceptual anomalies in order to demonstrate that people display heightened arousal after experiencing meaning violations, and that this arousal predicts subsequent compensatory behavior. Together, our findings offer support for the MMM's tenet that arousal plays a significant role in the maintenance of meaning.

# October

On October 6, 2017 **Lotte Veenstra** successfully defended the PhD thesis entitled "Taming Tempers: A situated motivational approach to anger management. " at Aula, VU University Amsterdam.

**Promotor**
Prof.Dr. Sander L. Koole

**Co-promotor**
Dr. Iris K. Schneider

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## Summary

How likely is it that you will respond with anger when someone provokes you? The traditional answer to this question is that it depends on your level of trait anger. When you are high on trait anger, you are likely to experience angry feelings more often, more intensely, and for longer durations, than when you are low on trait anger. However, this dissertation suggests that behaviors and emotions related to personality are not necessarily consistent across situations. More specifically, this dissertation proposes that we can better understand trait anger as a situated personality disposition, which translates into anger only when it is accompanied by an increase in approach motivation. When approach motivation gets blocked, you are less likely to become angry, even when you are high on trait anger. All in all, this dissertation offers a nuanced view of the way in which our impulses to become angry or aggressive evolve and subside dynamically.

On October 9, 2017 **Coby van Niejenhuis** successfully defended the PhD thesis entitled "I speak, thus I belong? The role of second language proficiency in immigrants' integration in the host society" at Rijksuniversiteit Groningen.

**Promotor**
Prof. Dr. Sabine Otten

**Co-promotors**
Prof. Dr. Andreas Flache
Prof. Dr. Greetje van der Werf

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## Summary

The overarching aim of this dissertation was to provide new insights regarding the question: How and to what extent is second language learning related to cultural integration and which factors facilitate or hinder this?
More specifically, we addressed three questions: Firstly, which factors facilitate or hinder immigrants' second language proficiency? Secondly, to what extent does second language learning actually go together with an increasing cultural integration? And finally, are there other factors that are relevant in this relation between second language learning and cultural integration such as multicultural personality traits or interethnic friendships? By examining our questions among various groups of immigrants we aimed to provide insight into the extent to which findings from both earlier research and the current dissertation can be generalized to different groups of immigrants.

# November

On November 2, 2017 **Julia Sasse** successfully defended the PhD thesis entitled "More Than a Feeling: Strategic Emotion Expression in Intergroup Conflicts" at Rijksuniversiteit Groningen.

**Promotor**
Prof. Dr. Russell Spears

**Co-promotor**
Prof. Dr. Ernestine Gordijn

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## Summary

There are many different causes and courses of conflicts but an aspect that virtually all conflicts have in common is that they bring about various – mostly negative – emotions. Importantly, recent research could demonstrate that emotions expressed in a conflict can strongly impact its course as expressed emotions can influence how members of other groups feel and act in response (de Vos et al., 2013; Kamans et al., 2014). The purpose of this dissertation was to investigate whether this in turn means that emotions can be expressed strategically, that is, with the intention to influence others in a desired way. The notion of strategy extends the proposition of the SIDE-model that the presence of a specific audience triggers strategic tailoring from behavioral actions (Reicher et al., 1995; Klein et al., 2007) to emotions as a subtler – but not necessarily less powerful - way of communication. Emotion expression as a way to communicate goals to audiences should be particularly interesting for groups that have been treated unjustly or unfairly and thus have an interest in changing the status quo but cannot or do not want to rely on more explicit ways of communication (such as behavioral action). Hence, in this dissertation we focused on whether members of disadvantaged groups express emotions strategically to different audiences, namely antagonist out-groups and third parties (that is, potential allies).
In a first step, we tested two components of strategic emotion expression and could show that emotion expression does not necessarily reflect emotion experience and that expression is more strongly associated with in-group relevant goals than is experience. In particular, we found that members of disadvantaged groups express support-seeking emotions and sometimes anger towards third parties with the intention to enlist support. Factors that influence the likelihood of the disadvantaged group to successfully change the status quo had rather minimal effects on emotion expression: Most notably, the expression of anger could benefit from perceiving some willingness from third parties or fellow in-group members to support one's cause. By shifting the focus from perceivers to expressers of emotions this dissertation contributes to our understanding of the social functions of emotions: What is expressed does not necessarily reflect what people feel but can be a way to communicate what they want or need.

On November 16, 2017 **Tim de Wilde** successfully defended the PhD thesis entitled "Struggling to decide. Competition in group decision-making" at University of Amsterdam.

**Promotor**
Prof.dr. C.K.W. de Dreu

**Co-promotor**
Dr. F.S. ten Velden

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## Summary

This dissertation underlines the critical and damaging role of competition within groups on group decision-making. Competition promotes advocacy of one's own preferences, biased exchange of information and less use of relevant information coming from outsiders. Such negative effects of competition can be reduced or made undone by addressing individual group members instead of whole groups, or by facilitating competition between groups. Most importantly however, this dissertation demonstrated the effectiveness of using cooperative, instead of competitive, incentives. Cooperation facilitates the unbiased exchange and use of all available information. When such information is irrelevant, cooperative groups are likely to flounder, yet in most cases cooperation increases groups' chances of reaching high quality decisions. Thus, under cooperation, groups show their unique potential in reaching outcomes that none of its individual members could have achieved with the same level of certainty.
Making good decisions as a group is almost always a struggle. Such struggles are often a prelude for success when groups are cooperative or a prelude for misfortune when groups are competitive.