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Author Reply: Why Hate Is Unique and Requires Others for Its Maintenance

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Abstract

In this reply, I discuss some important issues raised in two commentaries. One relates to the distinction between hate and revenge, which also touches upon the more general problem of the usefulness of distinguishing between various related emotions. I argue that emotion researchers need to define specific emotions carefully in order to be able to examine such emotions without necessarily using emotion words. A second comment focusses on the factors influencing the development of hate over time. The question is whether there is an intrapersonal mechanism leading to an increase or decrease of hate over time. I think it is the social environment that is essential in the maintenance of hate.

Keywords
development, hate, sentiments, uniqueness

In their thoughtful comments, Ben Ze'ev (2018) and van Doorn (2018) touch upon a set of crucial issues that we discussed in our review on hate. I am happy they raised these issues so that we can further explore them. I am also pleased that both commentators seem to agree on the basic approach we took when trying to analyze hate from a multidisciplinary perspective.

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The first is about hate's uniqueness as a discrete emotion and its distinction or overlap with other related emotions (van Doorn, 2018). Van Doorn especially mentions revenge, which is, I agree, an important emotion that shows overlap with hate. Van Doorn asks whether revenge is an act of hate, or simply a different emotion. She considers similarities between the two states, but argues that the focus of revenge is on a restoration of the self, whereas the focus of hate is on the other person (Elshout, Nelissen, & van Beest, 2015), which would suggest revenge to be different from hate. I agree with this distinction, as we also argue that the crucial motive for feelings of revenge is to restore equity in suffering (Frijda, 1994). The goals of hate and revenge are also different. The goal of hate is more abstract, that is, to eliminate or destroy the other, whereas the goal of revenge is more associated with a specific event that one suffered and the wish for vengeance is directly related to this event and the individual(s) acting in it. Thus, I agree with van Doorn's observation and would argue that revenge is more directly related to a person's behavior causing one's suffering, which is not necessarily the case for hate. Hate, thus, not necessarily contains revenge, but revenge very likely contains hate.

This brings us to the usefulness of trying to understand the differences and similarities between such related emotions. As we argue in our article (Fischer, Halperin, Canetti, & Jasini, 2018), we should keep in mind that these theoretical distinctions do not directly mirror what people experience, express, or act upon. Distinctions between hate, revenge, humiliation, and so on, are fine distinctions in the meaning of emotion words that do not necessarily provide insight into people's states of mind. To make life for emotion researchers even more complex, individuals are likely to use these emotion words in a poor and intuitive way in daily life. Yet, it is important that researchers define the meaning of emotion words carefully in order to be able to track down components of these feelings that may give us insight into potential predictors of emotional behavior. When examining the differences between related emotions, it therefore makes sense to ask participants to report on specific thoughts, motives, feelings rather than whether they felt hate, revenge, or contempt. The nature of the differences between emotions also varies. Some distinctions in the meaning of emotion words refer to different action tendencies, such as for contempt and anger. Other emotion words, such as humiliation and anger, may show overlap in action tendencies, but relate to different categories of antecedents, for example being put down versus experiencing unfairness (Mann, Feddes, Doosje, & Fischer, 2016; Mann, Feddes, Leiser, Doosje, & Fischer, 2017). Another example is the word "irritation," which is used for social transgressions that are not considered critical, but still make one angry, such as a housemate making too much noise or not cleaning the table. Anger and irritation overlap in action tendencies and appraisals, and may have similar consequences in the end, but are used in different situations. This also seems to be the case for revenge, which often focusses on a specific act of another person, whom one wants to repay, whereas the word "hate" is used for a broader category of events.

In sum, it is important to know when specific words are used and what they mean. However, to understand emotional expressions and behaviors, it is most crucial how feelings affect actions and relations between people: do they lead to distancing, ignoring, getting even, attacking, or destroying others? The origins of such action tendencies and their relational consequences is what needs to be explained.

Ben Ze'ev (2018), first of all, points to our reasoning about the enduring nature of emotions. Whereas we distinguish between emotions and sentiments, other authors (Ben Ze'ev & Krebs, 2018; Frijda, 1993) have proposed a distinction between three rather than two different emotional states, based on their duration. Frijda, Mesquita, Sonnemans, van Goozen (1991) referred to them as emotions, emotional episodes, and sentiments; Ben Ze'ev and Krebs (2018) distinguished acute emotions, extended emotions, and enduring emotions. Both Frijda's and Ben Ze'ev's second category thus seems to refer to an emotional episode that is seen as *one* emotional event, rather than a series of events. I think the idea of adding another category of emotions is interesting, but it also raises a number of problems.

This carving up of emotions implies that the categorization of the stimulus event occurs at three different levels of abstractness: an actual stimulus (e.g., a remark or act), an event (e.g., a series of remarks or acts), and an episode (a period of time containing certain events). In the second and third emotion categories, the definition of the emotional stimulus is more difficult. For example, the evaluation of a conversation with my boss may be seen as condescending to me, and as fruitful by him. In the midst of this conversation, one remark may have been sufficient for my negative evaluation and the subsequent interpretation of his other remarks. It may be unclear to me, however, what remark exactly made me feel this way, as I remember the whole conversation as patronizing. Although I acknowledge that the addition of a second emotion category is intuitive, I think it will be difficult to consistently distinguish between an emotional episode and an extended emotion, and between an extended emotion and an acute emotion.

Ben Ze'ev (2018) raises another interesting issue regarding the development of emotions, which is indeed crucial if we talk about sentiments. While the (intrinsic) development of positive emotions implies something better and deeper, the development of negative emotions may also imply deeper, but not better emotions, obviously. I do not believe that there is an intrinsic development in hate, in the sense of an intrapersonal mechanism that leads to the development of more or less intense hate over time. Hate needs to be fed, either by direct or indirect interactions related to the object of hate. As Ben Ze'ev rightly remarks, hate may dissolve and even disappear from memory when there is no interaction with the hated object anymore. However, the role of indirect interactions, for example, when one's hate is supported and stimulated by ingroup members, should be emphasized here. We argued that lack of direct interaction with the hate object amplifies hate, especially if the hate is shared with others. This typically occurs in regions with intractable conflicts (see e.g., Halperin, 2008), such as in Israel or in the Balkan region, where people often do not encounter the enemy on a daily basis, but they do talk about them with their friends or ingroup members.

The absence of direct interactions with individual members of the enemy outgroup implies that the representation of the outgroup as enemy remains fixed, as there is no new information that will change the existing scheme on which the hate is based. Under these circumstances, the development especially of intergroup hate may become more profound and less likely to change. It could be that hate may feel worse when it is fresh, that is, right after the act that initially evoked it, but old hate may leave deep traces and may therefore be worse.

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