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FACULTY OF EDUCATION AND PSYCHOLOGY

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**Fighting against injustice: Motivations of ally collective action**

**Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation Summary**

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Budapest, 2019

*„Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.“ (Margaret Mead)*

## **Introduction to collective action research**

In my PhD dissertation I investigate the motivations of ally collective action among advantaged group members, who are not activists. What makes advantaged group members care about grievances of a disadvantaged group? What makes them even eager to act on behalf of outgroups, who are marginalized in society and targets of high prejudice and hostility? Paradoxically, these groups are in the biggest need for support and rely on the resources, political decisions and policies of the majority the most.

Collective action is any action that is taken in order to change the status of a group in society (Wright, Taylor, & Moghaddam, 1990). Ally collective action occurs when a majority group member acts on behalf of a disadvantaged outgroup related to perceived injustices suffered by members of the outgroup. Ally action can also be defined as any action that is conducted in political solidarity (Becker, 2012).

Allies from privileged groups are important for multiple reasons: they increase the support base of the movement and possess resources and power in society that they can mobilize for social change. Social change occurs when the status hierarchy between advantaged and disadvantaged groups is challenged, that can be most efficiently realized when members of the minority and the majority unite in putting pressure on the authority to change the status quo and implement structural changes in policies and institutions (Subasic Reynolds, & Turner, 2008).

The classic understanding of collective action refers to activism in the form of political protests, that directly challenges the status quo by means of signing petitions or participating in street demonstrations. In contrast, there is a debate whether intergroup helping, volunteerism, and donation can also be regarded as forms of collective actions. They are collective action in the sense that they reflect an intention to improve the situation of an entire group (Thomas, Rathmann, & McGarty, 2017). At the same time, these forms of engagements have been criticized that they do not directly strive for social change in the sense that most political actions do. The two types of action are also categorized as giving versus acting- kind of support (Thomas & McGarty, 2018).

In the first place, I investigate two aspects: (1) how different cognitive framings of intergroup injustice influence different forms of collective action (2) how injustice-related intergroup emotions shape different forms of collective action.

### Motivators of collective action

In my PHD thesis I focus on one important motivational basis of collective action, affective injustice. It means that people engage in collective action based on injustice appraisals and related emotions (van Zomeren, Postmes & Spears, 2008). Injustice awareness implies that the situation of the disadvantaged group is compared to the situation of the advantaged group, and status differences are perceived as illegitimate (Leach, Snider, & Iyer, 2002).

Intergroup emotion theory (IET) builds on the appraisal theories of emotion, stating that appraisals, emotions and actions are means of coping with events in intergroup contexts (Halperin, 2014; Lazarus, 1991; Scherer, Schorr, & Johnstone, 2001; Smith, 1993). Political action is generally motivated by outrage or anger, as emotions related to the perception of group-based injustice. Although, only anger and outrage are considered in prominent models of collective action (like the SIMCA, van Zomeren et al., 2008; Becker & Tausch, 2015), there is evidence that there are other moral emotions in response to injustice that can be potential predictors of ally action, such as pity, sympathy, and empathy. People experience prosocial emotions when they witness the suffering of others (Wispé, 1986). It is therefore connected to an increased arousal that people aim to reduce by helping to alleviate the suffering (Dijker, 2001).

Both sympathy and outrage were characterized as moral emotions in response to injustice (Montada & Schneider, 1989). Still, prosocial emotions such as sympathy were more related to “giving” type of collective action (e.g. donation), whereas outrage was more related to “activist” type of action among advantaged group members (Thomas & McGarty, 2018). At the same time, there is also evidence that the co-occurrence of prosocial emotions and outrage is a stronger predictor of collective action than prosocial emotions or outrage alone (Fernando, Kashima, & Laham, 2014). Empathy (Batson, Chang, Orr, & Rowland, 2002) and sympathy (Leach et al., 2002; Saab, Tausch, Spears, & Cheung, 2015), standing together with anger, have been identified as important predictors of intergroup helping and collective action by the advantaged. It was also suggested that empathy and anger motivate collective action in a sequential process: empathy toward the disadvantaged facilitated outrage

on behalf of the disadvantaged, and outrage was a more proximal predictor of ally collective action (Selvanathan, Techakesari, Tropp, & Barlow, 2017).

Based on this, prosocial emotions (i.e., feeling sorry) have a less central role in political mobilization compared to outrage. However, we investigate that in some intergroup contexts, where economic and political disadvantages, and also the need for material helping and political action co-exist, feeling sorry can have a distinguished role in mobilization for ally collective action.

### Barriers of collective action

Several factors can veil the recognition of the unjust intergroup relations in society in the eye of advantaged group members. Such barriers can be (1) the lack of positive contact with the outgroup, (2) the lack of recognition of own privileges and outgroup disadvantages, (3) the presence of open and subtle prejudice toward outgroups, (4) the difficulties of the development of a new, non-racist identity, and (5) a non-egalitarian societal context that is not supportive of solidarity toward disadvantaged outgroups.

Positive intergroup contact has a sedative effect on minorities' collective action intentions, but a mobilizing effect on the majority members, as they can face the disadvantaged state of the outgroup (Reimer et al., 2017). This pattern is true to egalitarian contexts where there is an illusion of harmony between groups, and more subtle forms of injustice. However, in hostile contexts, where the ideal conditions of intergroup contact is less guaranteed, positive contact between groups is rare, and less efficient in prejudice-reduction and mobilization.

Privilege means certain advantages in different fields of life that majority members possess in society merely based on their group membership (McIntosh, 1988). The denial of privilege can be considered a strategic response by the advantaged to maintain their advantaged and uphold their positive moral stand at the same time (Leach et al, 2002). Still, the acknowledgement of privilege has positive influence on both attitudes toward outgroups and collective action on behalf of them. Privilege awareness helps gaining new insights about unjust intergroup relations, and the ingroup's responsibility in changing the status quo. Confrontation with privilege could also be risky and cause backlash effects when prejudice and denial of disadvantage is high (Lantos, Macher & Kende, 2018; Lantos, Nagy & Kende, 2017; Shnabel, Dovidio & Levin, 2016).

Positive attitudes toward the outgroup are essential in the involvement in ally action on behalf of the disadvantaged. Not only explicit but subtle forms of bias, such as modern

racism is an obstacle for prosocial action intentions on behalf of the disadvantaged as it blurs injustice awareness (Ellemers & Barreto, 2009). Interventions that aim to raise awareness among the advantaged group members can be efficient only if people can honestly deal with their own resistance and frustration over challenging their own prejudice (Tatum, 1992).

Some social contexts encourage and value ally collective action for example by emphasizing egalitarian norms, the norm of non-prejudice, and the norm of solidarity with disadvantaged people. However, in social contexts in which such norms are weaker, like in the case of Eastern European countries, being non-prejudiced toward some outgroups, such as Roma people, is a minority opinion (Kende, Hadarics, & Láštiová, 2017). Therefore, engagement in ally action is counter-normative. Considering that most social psychological studies on collective action tendencies were conducted in Western contexts with supportive social norms, we know little about the motivations to engage in ally collective action in less supportive (non-Western) contexts.

### **Injustice (privilege and disadvantage) framings and allyship in hostile intergroup contexts**

In this line of research, I study how different injustice appraisals influence ally collective action intentions on behalf of different disadvantaged groups. I used an experimental paradigm from a previous research contrasting privilege versus disadvantage focus (in other words, self-focus versus other-focus). The original study was conducted in connection to the intergroup relation between Whites and Blacks in the US context, and investigated how injustice framings influence the acknowledgement of Black's disadvantage, measured by modern prejudice. Privilege focus raised guilt and decreased modern racism compared to the disadvantage-focus, which demonstrated that the confrontation with privilege and its self-focus made participants open to have new insights about the unjust intergroup status relations (Powell, Branscombe, & Smith, 2005). As this recognition is the basis of mobilization for collective action, I expected that findings of the original study can be extended to collective action intentions, therefore I worked with the hypothesis that privilege awareness is a motivator of collective action. However, as privilege awareness can be threatening to advantaged group members, it can also lead to a demobilization effect among participants. Therefore, I also raised some concerns, whether the original findings can be applied to a more hostile intergroup context (toward the Roma in Hungary), in a more hostile societal context (where egalitarian norms are not emphasized). Yet, as normative contexts are

changeable, it is important to note that the US is a less egalitarian and supportive context for diversity at the moment, compared to the time when the original study was conducted. There are studies demonstrating that hostile political rhetoric of the Trump era has a measurable effect on the acceptability of prejudice expression directly after the US elections (Crandall, Miller, & White, 2018).

To test our hypotheses, we conducted two experiments (Study 1 and Study 2) and a survey study (Study 3). For information on target groups and samples, see Table 1.

Table 1

*A summary on studies investigating the relationship between privilege versus disadvantage framings and collective action intention*

Study 1	Study 2	Study 3
experiment	experiment	survey
the Roma	disadvantaged outgroups	the Roma
student sample	student sample	representative sample
N = 132	N = 169	N = 1007

In Study 1, I tested if the manipulations function similarly to the original study among majority members in connection with Roma people in Hungary. We used a university sample (N = 132) and tested two types of privilege and disadvantage manipulation. We confronted participants with a list of examples of either ingroup privilege or outgroup disadvantage in one case, and asked participant to generate examples for privilege and disadvantage in the other. We expected that privilege conditions raised higher privilege awareness and guilt, while disadvantage awareness raised higher sympathy. We found no effects of either of the manipulations because of the high hostility toward the Roma group. Furthermore, some participants even reacted with backlash: they became emotional, criticized the study and expressed open prejudice toward the Roma.

To avoid resistance, in Study 2, we offered participants to choose an outgroup that they perceive as unjustly disadvantaged, or toward that they feel unjustly privileged. Possible outgroups were poor people, poorly educated people, village inhabitants, and the Roma. Then, we asked participants to think of these groups and generate examples of either outgroup disadvantage or ingroup privilege. We also added a control group who only chose an outgroup but did not generate examples of their disadvantage. Again, we used a university sample (N = 169).

We expected that privilege condition would decrease modern prejudice, increase guilt, ingroup responsibility and collective action intention, while disadvantage condition would increase sympathy and helping intention compared to the control condition. We also expected that both treatment conditions decrease outgroup responsibility.

When we considered the effect of group choice, we found higher hostility toward the Roma than toward other outgroups. We also found a backlash effect: participants were less willing to help Roma compared to the control condition. Our hypotheses were not supported. After the exclusion of the Roma group choice, the only effect we found was that disadvantage condition decreased perceived responsibility of the outgroup compared to the control condition. As we did not get the expected results, we speculated on the different interpretation of privilege in Western versus Eastern European contexts. We raised the concern that privilege is a less known and accepted concept in Hungary than in the United States, where it is more part of public discourse. We did not have a chance to make an international comparison, but we could analyze Hungarian survey data with a representative sample (N = 1007) to test the connection between privilege versus disadvantage awareness and behavioral intentions, like donation and collective action intention. Our assumption that disadvantage awareness had a stronger connection to behavioral intentions than privilege awareness, was supported. This confirmed that privilege was a marginal concept for participants, and not an important predictor for collective action.

### **Intergroup emotions and their relation to different forms of allyship**

I turned from appraisals to intergroup emotions, and tested if sorry, that is, a prosocial emotion usually criticized as a system-maintaining, and not a system-challenging emotion, motivates collective action intention on behalf of economically marginalized outgroups. I compared the role of sorry to outrage in motivating collective action and expected that sorry

has a special relevance when it comes to marginalized groups who face not only political, but also economic disadvantage.

In Study 4., 5., and 6., I studied the connections between intergroup emotion and collective action in different intergroup contexts (toward the Roma, refugees and gay people), in a Hungarian and a German context. We hypothesized that sorry is able to motivate collective action intention just as strongly or even more strongly than outrage, but only on behalf of groups that suffer from both economic and political disadvantages. In contrast, sorry is a less efficient predictor compared to outrage in case of groups that face more political disadvantages (such as violation of their rights and discrimination) but not severe economic disadvantage. Finally, in Study 7 we tested sorry as a motivator for collective action by creating an experimental design, where we manipulated the type of disadvantage of a fictitious group (economic and political versus only political), and also the emotional response to that (sorry versus outrage). For information on the target groups and samples of Study 4-7, see Table 2.

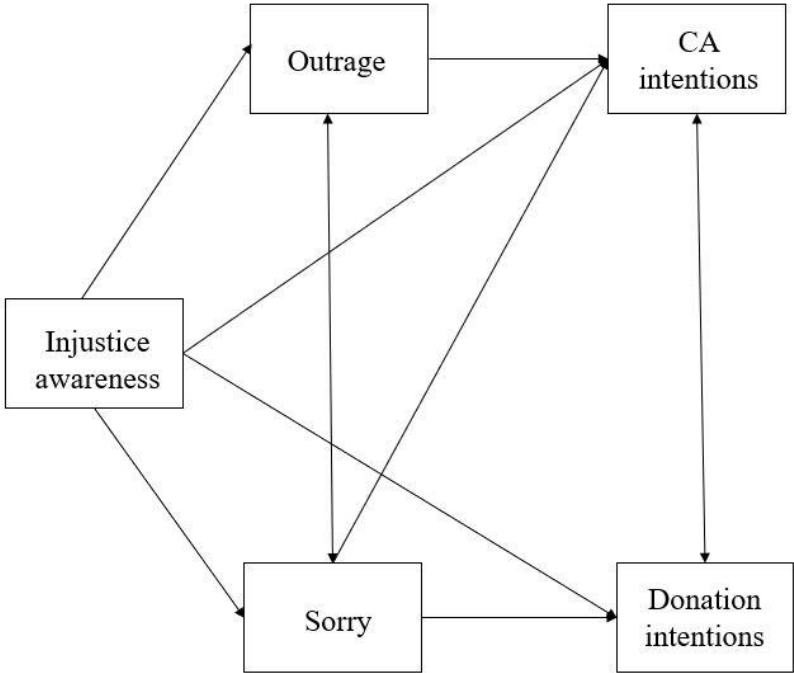
Table 2

*Summary of Study 4-7 about the connection between intergroup emotions and collective action intention*

<b>Study 4</b>	<b>Study 5a</b>	<b>Study 5b</b>	<b>Study 6</b>	<b>Study 7</b>
the Roma	refugees	refugees	gay people	economically vs. politically disadvantaged group
survey	survey	survey	survey	experiment
Hungarian, representative sample	German, convenience sample	Hungarian, representative sample	Hungarian, student sample	Hungarian, convenience and student sample
N = 1007	N = 191	N = 556	N = 475	N = 447



In Study 4, I tested a path model to predict collective action intention and donation intention by injustice awareness, and emotions of outrage and sorry among the majority people on behalf of the Roma in Hungary (N =1007). For a visual demonstration of the expected connections between variables, see *Figure 1*.



*Figure.1* Hypothesized mediation model predicting donation and collective action intentions toward economically marginalized groups.

Our findings supported our hypothesis that sorry was a stronger predictor of collective action compared to outrage in case of a marginalized outgroup, the Roma. In Study 5, we conducted the same analysis in connection with refugees as a target group, both in a representative sample in Hungary (N = 556) and a convenience sample in Germany (N = 191). We received the same results about the connection between sorry and collective action intention. In Study 6, we tested whether the role of sorry in collective action intention decreases in connection with a not economically, but politically disadvantaged outgroup, gay people, on a university sample (N = 475). Our results supported our expectation that outrage was a stronger predictor this time, than sorry.

Finally, to replicate the pattern that was found with different outgroups in cross-sectional data, we designed an experiment in Study 7 to test the role of sorry toward an economically versus a politically disadvantaged outgroup in a university sample (N = 603).

We used a fictitious scenario in a vignette, where outgroups only differed in the type of disadvantage they faced: economic and political disadvantage versus only political disadvantage. We also manipulated emotions, therefore we could also test causal relationships between sorry and behavioral intentions. In line with our findings in the survey studies, we found that in case of economically disadvantaged groups, sorry is just as strong motivator for collective action and donation as outrage, but when it comes to disadvantaged groups that are not economically deprived, sorry is a much weaker predictor than outrage.

## **Discussion**

Our studies demonstrated some hurdles, why cognitive framings of injustice were not enough to influence emotions and action intentions but even led to backlash. One hurdle is open prejudice toward the Roma and the high perceived responsibility of the Roma in their own status. Backlash effects in Study 1 and in Study 2 highlighted participants' frustration and justification efforts of their prejudiced attitudes and non-action. Secondly, even if participants are ready to acknowledge unjust privilege, low perceived efficacy about changes prevent them from action intentions. Thirdly, participants were less willing to react positively to the self-focus of privilege, and more willing to rethink outgroup responsibility as a response to other-focus disadvantage. This suggests that in a hostile context, the first step for mobilization is changing the perception of the outgroup, by acknowledging its unjust disadvantage and decreasing their perceived responsibility in their situation. Confrontation with own responsibility and privilege should be a next step. This is just the opposite pattern that Powell's original study suggested, where the self-focus of privilege made participants more willing to recognize the unfair intergroup situation, compared to the other focus of disadvantage.

We can interpret these different findings by the different contexts. In contrast to the Western context, where there is consensus on being supportive with the disadvantaged, and the goal is to raise more awareness on intergroup injustice and ingroup responsibility (with the motto: "*Be not just a friend, but a just friend*") (Becker, Wright, Lubensky & Zhou, 2013), in the Hungarian context, open prejudice is still an issue, and there is no consensual norm of supporting the disadvantaged. Therefore, the recognition of unjust outgroup disadvantage is the first step, and reconsidering ingroup responsibility can follow.

Our findings suggested that on behalf of marginalized groups, sorry is not necessarily a less useful intergroup emotion than outrage in terms of social change orientation, and

donation intention is not necessarily more patronizing than collective action intention when groups are in need of material help. Instead, both actions can be adequate forms of ally behavior. Emotions of sorry and outrage, and donation and collective action intentions are intertwined in these contexts, as different types of disadvantage, like economic and political disadvantage are related among these groups. For example, intergroup helping and activism were hand in hand among volunteers in the refugee crisis, where the distinction was not between “only benevolent” help or higher valued collective action, but supportive behavior versus non- action or hostility (Kende, Lantos, Belinszky, Csaba, Lukács, 2016). In a hostile context where open prejudice expression toward minorities is still an issue, prosocial emotions toward these groups should be viewed as an important stepping stone toward solidarity.

Context matters: both the level of hostility in the intergroup situation, and the supportive versus non-supportive context where ally action takes place. Forms and predictors of collective action will be specific when it comes to marginalized groups in hostile intergroup contexts.

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