



Costly third-party interventions: The role of incidental anger and attention focus in punishment of the perpetrator and compensation of the victim



Michaela Gummerum^{a,*}, Lotte F. Van Dillen^b, Eric Van Dijk^b, Belén López-Pérez^a

^a School of Psychology, Cognition Institute, University of Plymouth, UK

^b Social and Organizational Psychology Unit, Institute for Psychological Research, Leiden University, Netherlands

HIGHLIGHTS

- Costly third-party interventions are unlikely to be motivated by self-interest.
- Effects of incidental anger and attention focus on third-party interventions were investigated.
- Participants induced to anger punished significantly more and compensated less.
- However, third parties induced to empathic anger compensated significantly more.
- Incidental anger only affected punishment or compensation when attention was sustained.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 18 June 2015

Revised 24 March 2016

Accepted 20 April 2016

Available online 27 April 2016

Keywords:

Third-party punishment
Third-party compensation
Anger
Attention

ABSTRACT

Costly third-party interventions have been regarded as hallmarks of moral behavior, because they are unlikely to be motivated by self-interest. This research investigated the cognitive and emotional processes underlying two types of costly third-party interventions by manipulating incidental emotions and attention focus. In Study 1, we investigated the effect of incidental anger on third-party punishment decisions. Study 2 addressed the effect of incidental anger on third-party compensation decisions. In both studies, participants were induced to either an angry or neutral emotion and then had to wait or were distracted before engaging in third-party interventions. In Study 1, angry participants punished highly unequal distributions significantly more than those in the neutral emotion condition. In Study 2, angry participants compensated highly unfair distributions significantly less than those in a neutral emotion. In both studies, the effect of incidental anger was only significant in the wait, not the distraction condition. Study 3 again focused on third-party compensation decisions. Participants were induced to either a self-focused anger or an other-focused anger emotion, and attention focus (wait, distraction) was manipulated experimentally. Those in the other-focused anger condition compensated significantly more than participants in the self-focused anger condition. These results indicate that (self-focused) incidental anger led to antagonistic responses. Incidental anger was only associated with higher third-party compensation when it included a focus on a suffering other. For incidental emotions to bias subsequent decisions requires attentional resources.

© 2016 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

What characterizes a moral person? One central quality of highly moral people is their selflessness or orientation towards others (e.g., Walker & Hennig, 2004). Thus, one trait common to moral exemplars, such as Martin Luther King Jr., Oskar Schindler, or Mother Teresa, is their willingness to act on behalf of others affected by an injustice,

harm, or (moral) violation, even when these actions entail significant costs. Such costly third-party interventions have been regarded as a hallmark of moral behavior, because they are unlikely to be motivated by self-interest (Vaish, Missana, & Tomasello, 2011).

Third parties' observations of injustices or moral violations can lead to two types of interventions that help people address the psychological need that "justice has been done" (see Darley & Pittman, 2003; Van Prooijen, 2010): punishing the violator (i.e., retributive justice) and restoring the harm done by compensating the victim (i.e., compensatory justice). The aim of the present research was to assess the role of incidental anger and attention focus in costly third-party punishment

* Corresponding author at: School of Psychology, Cognition Institute, Plymouth University, Drake Circus, Plymouth, Devon PL4 8AA, UK.

E-mail address: Michaela.gummerum@plymouth.ac.uk (M. Gummerum).

and compensation. This allowed us to investigate the cognitive and emotional processes underlying costly third-party interventions.

2. Costly third-party punishment and compensation

One experimental procedure developed to measure whether unaffected third parties engage in actual costly punishment towards those who violated the norm of fair sharing is the third-party punishment game (TPP; Fehr & Fischbacher, 2004). In the TPP, Person A first decides whether to allocate money to Person B who can only accept the proposed allocation. After observing A's transfer to B, Person C, the third-party punisher, can decide to punish A by spending some of his/her own endowment. For every monetary unit the punisher spends (e.g., 1 coin), A loses two monetary units (e.g., 2 coins), but the payoff of B is not affected. Thus, punishers spend some of their own endowment to take away resources from A, even though they are not affected by the violation. Punishment is costly as the punishers' returns are lower than if they had not punished. Empirical research with the TPP in diverse societies (e.g., Fehr & Fischbacher, 2004; Henrich et al., 2006; Nelissen & Zeelenberg, 2009; see Jensen, 2010, for a review) revealed that about 60% of punishers sanctioned A's unequal offers to B. The more unequal the offer by A, the more punishment was administered, suggesting that perceptions of (un)fairness were an important motivator for punishment.

Fewer studies have assessed whether third parties also invest resources to compensate the victims of unfairness. Theoretically, both punishment of violators and compensation of victims might be motivated by the psychological need to "do justice". Whereas punishment is based on a motive for "just deserts" and aimed at having violators pay for what they did, compensating the victims' endeavors to restore their situation as closely as possible to the pre-violation state (Darley & Pittman, 2003; Van Prooijen, 2010).

Most studies on third-party compensation gave participants the chance to choose between punishing the violator, compensating the victim, or to engage in both types of interventions. Van Prooijen (2010) reported that third parties generally preferred (hypothetical) punishment over compensation. However, participants who felt emotionally close to the victim were more likely to compensate. Lotz, Okimoto, Schlösser, and Fetchenhauer (2011) found that participants favored compensation over punishment, but the majority engaged in both types of interventions. Leliveld, Van Beest, & Van Dijk (2012) showed that empathic concern towards the victim moderated costly third-party compensation or punishment. Those low in empathic concern were more likely to punish than to compensate, while participants high in empathic concern chose compensation over punishment.

3. Why engage in costly third-party interventions? The role of (negative) emotions

Why do people engage in costly third-party punishment? In repeated interactions, third parties were more likely to punish, when the victim had the possibility to return the favor and reciprocally engage in third-party punishment in the future (Carpenter & Matthews, 2012). Third parties who felt an obligation to reciprocate a violator's dishonest behavior increased their hypothetical and actual punishment (Whitson, Wang, See, Baker, & Murnighan, 2015). Yet, in one-shot situations where neither victims nor violators can reciprocate, anger was an important driver of costly third-party punishment, more so than other emotions, such as guilt or self-focused feelings of threat (Fehr & Fischbacher, 2004; Lotz et al., 2011; Nelissen & Zeelenberg, 2009). The relationship between costly third-party punishment and anger is not surprising, given that anger has been defined as an other-condemning moral emotion in response to unjustified insults, unfair treatment and betrayal (Haidt, 2003; Mikula, Scherer, & Athenstaedt, 1998; van den Bos, 2003). Furthermore, anger has been linked to the motivation to

take revenge or punish a person who is perceived to have acted unfairly (Darley & Pittman, 2003; Montada & Schneider, 1989).

At first glance, the effect of anger on third-party compensation seems to be less straightforward. Emotion research has typically conceptualized anger as a negative emotion that leads to antagonistic interpersonal behavior and a decrease in prosocial actions towards others (e.g., Roseman, Wiest, & Swartz, 1994). This runs counter to the idea that third-party compensation is based on focusing on, feeling close to, and experiencing empathic concern for the victim of a violation (e.g., Leliveld et al., 2012; Van Prooijen, 2010). Yet, Van Doorn, Zeelenberg, and Breugelmans (2014) proposed that anger is experienced as a reaction to violations of moral standards, fairness, or equality. This type of reaction, also called moral outrage (Batson et al., 2007) or indignation (Carpenter & Matthews, 2012), motivates third parties to restore equality either through punishment or compensation. Indeed, Lotz et al. (2011) showed that self-reported feelings of moral outrage positively predicted both third-party punishment and compensation.

Previous research on the effect of anger on third-party interventions has mainly studied anger as an *integral* emotion (Lerner, Li, Valdesolo, & Kassam, 2015) that arises as part of the decision-making situation (e.g., as a reaction to the unfair treatment of others). The current studies examined the effect of *incidental* anger on third-party interventions. Incidental emotions, triggered in one situation, have been shown to "carry over" and bias behaviors or decisions in other, unrelated situations (see Lerner et al., 2015). Focusing on incidental (rather than integral) anger can not only reveal whether anger influences third-party interventions, but can also shed light on the emotional and cognitive processes underlying third parties' decisions. According to appraisal theories of emotions (e.g., Frijda, 1986; Lerner et al., 2015; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985) different emotions can be distinguished according to a range of cognitive dimensions (or appraisals). The appraisal-tendency hypothesis (e.g., Lerner et al., 2015; Lerner & Keltner, 2000; Tiedens & Linton, 2001) proposes that incidental emotions trigger emotion-specific appraisal dimensions which activate a cognitive predisposition to evaluate future situations or events in line with the emotion's underlying appraisal patterns. A number of studies (e.g., Lerner & Keltner, 2000; Keltner, Ellsworth, & Edwards, 1993; Tiedens & Linton, 2001) investigated the effect that incidental emotions characterized by different appraisal patterns have on subsequent judgments and choices. Most pertinent to the current research, incidental anger affected the severity of people's moral judgments (Seidel & Prinz, 2013), led to higher punitive attributions (Lerner, Goldberg, & Tetlock, 1998), and higher second-party punishment when the punisher was the victim of unfairness (Seip, Van Dijk, & Rotteveel, 2014). Thus, the first aim of our research was to assess whether the appraisal dimensions triggered by incidental anger do carry over and activate appraisal-consistent tendencies in third parties' punishment and compensation.

4. Incidental emotions and attention

The second aim of our studies was to examine under what conditions incidental anger might bias third-party interventions. Research suggests that the subjective experience of emotions requires mental resources (Kron, Schul, Cohen, & Hassin, 2010; Van Dillen, Heslenfeld, & Koole, 2009; Van Dillen & Koole, 2007). Cognitive, and particularly attentional, resources might be especially critical when understanding the effect of incidental emotions on subsequent judgments and behaviors. Van Dillen, van der Wal, and van den Bos (2012) argued that the incidental emotional response only carries over and biases subsequent cognitions and behaviors when it is sustained through attentional processes. As illustrated in Fig. 1, an incidental emotional response (box 1) triggers sustained emotion processing (box 3), and emotion-congruent cognitions and behaviors (box 4), only if the initial emotion has captured attention (box 2). These attentional processes vary based on situational demands or individual dispositions. Van Dillen et al. (2012, Studies 1, 2) found that participants with weak attentional

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/947668>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/947668>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)