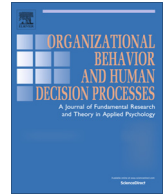




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Mad and misleading: Incidental anger promotes deception

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ABSTRACT

Emotions influence ethical behavior. Across four studies, we demonstrate that incidental anger, anger triggered by an unrelated situation, promotes the use of deception. In Study 1, participants who felt incidental anger were more likely to deceive their counterpart than those who felt neutral emotion. In Study 2, we demonstrate that empathy mediates the relationship between anger and deception. In Study 3, we contrast anger with another negative-valence emotion, sadness. We find that participants who felt incidental anger were more likely to use deception than were participants who felt incidental sadness or neutral emotion. In Study 4, we show that incentives moderate the relationship between anger and deception. Collectively, our work reveals that incidental anger promotes unethical behavior because angry people become less empathetic when pursuing their self-interest.

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1. Introduction

Deception pervades organizational life and represents a significant challenge in domains ranging from negotiations to job interviews to expense reporting. In one study, the Coalition Against Insurance Fraud (2012) found that individuals file nearly \$80 billion in fraudulent insurance claims in the United States. Financial incentives explain some deceptive behavior (Tenbrunsel, 1998), but recent research suggests that deception is also influenced by a number of psychological factors including perceptions of inequity (Gino & Pierce, 2010), ego-depletion (Gino, Schweitzer, Mead, & Ariely, 2011), power (Pitesa & Thau, 2013), and trust (Yip & Schweitzer, 2015).

One psychological factor that may be particularly relevant to the deception decision process is emotion (Gaspar & Schweitzer, 2013; Gino & Shea, 2012; Moran & Schweitzer, 2008; Zhong, 2011). In this work, we consider the potential influence of anger on deception. Prior work has linked anger with a number of thoughts and behaviors that are related to deception (Barry & Oliver, 1996; Olekalns & Smith, 2009). For example, anger curtails cooperation (Lount, Zhong, Sivanathan, & Murnighan, 2008), and increases the rejection of ultimatum game offers (Pillutla & Murnighan, 1996). In an investigation of expressed anger, Van

Dijk, Van Kleef, Steinel, and Van Beest (2008) found that when a counterpart sent a message that expressed anger instead of happiness, people were more likely to send that counterpart incorrect information about the resources available in an ultimatum game.

Surprisingly, no prior research has directly linked feeling angry with deception. This is a surprising omission, because anger is frequently experienced in the workplace in general (Glomb, 2002; Pearson & Porath, 2005) and in negotiations in particular (Van Kleef, De Dreu, & Manstead, 2004; Yip & Schweinsberg, 2016). In our investigation, we establish a link between feeling angry and deception.

By investigating how anger promotes deception, we substantially develop our understanding of both emotion and ethical decision-making. Across four experiments, we demonstrate that incidental anger, anger triggered by an unrelated source, promotes deception. We also find that feelings of empathy mediate the relationship between anger and deception. We find that anger reduces empathy, which in turn, increases self-serving deception. We also find that incentives moderate the relationship between anger and deception. Collectively, our studies advance our understanding of anger and the psychology of deception.

1.1. Deception

We focus our investigation on self-serving deception, lies that advantage the deceiver at the expense of the target (Erat & Gneezy, 2012; Levine & Schweitzer, 2014). Self-serving lies

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represent a quintessential form of unethical behavior (Gino et al., 2011; Tenbrunsel & Smith-Crowe, 2008), and a growing literature has identified key factors that influence self-serving deception (e.g., O'Connor & Carnevale, 1997; Schweitzer, DeChurch, & Gibson, 2005).

When telling a self-serving lie, deceivers navigate the tension between pursuing their self-interest and harming others. To do this, individuals weigh the potential costs and benefits for themselves (Lewicki, 1983; Loewenstein, Cain, & Sah, 2011) and their counterparts (Gneezy, 2005). Emotions may influence these calculations (Fulmer & Barry, 2009).

In fact, anger promotes a focus on rewards (Aarts et al., 2010). Within the context of self-serving deception, rewards reflect self-interested behavior, and as a result, anger may shift attention toward self-interest. Other research suggests that anger may shift attention away from caring about others. For example, anger promotes punishment (Fox & Spector, 1999; Wang, Liao, Zhan, & Shi, 2011), retaliation (Bushman, 2002), and a tendency to rely on stereotypes (Bodenhausen, Sheppard, & Kramer, 1994). In negotiations, people who feel angry are less cooperative and less interested in interacting with their counterparts in the future (Allred, Mallozzi, Matsui, & Raia, 1997). Angry people may be particularly less concerned about harming others. Taken together, we expect anger to lower empathy, and we expect this shift in focus to promote self-serving deception.

1.2. Emotion and deception

Early work conceptualized ethical decision-making as a cognitive process (Kohlberg, 1969). More recent work, however, has begun to consider the role that emotions play in ethical decision-making (Haidt, 2001; Huebner, Dwyer, & Hauser, 2009; Pizarro, 2000; Rozin, Lowery, Imada, & Haidt, 1999). This work has begun to establish a link between emotions and ethical behavior, but scholars have explicitly called for additional research to explore how emotions influence ethical judgment and behavior (Avramova & Inbar, 2013).

Extant work identifies emotions as a consequence of ethical decision-making (Hutcherson & Gross, 2011; Mullen & Skitka, 2006; Rozin et al., 1999). For example, unfair ultimatum game offers heightened activity in brain regions associated with emotion (Sanfey, Rilling, Aronson, Nystrom, & Cohen, 2003) and violations of community standards of fairness elicit anger (Schweitzer & Gibson, 2008). Similarly, when people's moral convictions are threatened, people feel angry (Mullen & Skitka, 2006). Importantly, these feelings can also influence subsequent judgments (Mullen & Skitka, 2006; Schweitzer & Gibson, 2008).

Although several scholars have postulated that emotions are capable of shifting beliefs and behavior (Avramova & Inbar, 2013; Gaspar & Schweitzer, 2013; Huebner et al., 2009; Wheatley & Haidt, 2005), surprisingly few empirical studies have directly examined the effects of emotion on ethical behavior (Avramova & Inbar, 2013). Much of the existing work has focused on envy, guilt, and shame (see Gaspar & Schweitzer (2013) and Moore & Gino (2013) for a review). For example, envy promotes deception (Gino & Pierce, 2009; Moran & Schweitzer, 2008). In prior investigations, when individuals envied their counterparts, they were more likely to deceive them than when they did not envy them. Similarly, shame may promote deception by exacerbating malevolent intentions (Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007) rather than rectifying an underlying problem (Tangney, 1991). Anxiety also increases deception because anxiety makes individuals feel threatened (Kouchaki & Desai, 2015). In contrast to envy and shame, feelings of guilt can curtail deception (Zhong, 2011). Surprisingly, prior work has overlooked the potential link between feeling anger and ethical decision-making. There is limited empirical evidence

demonstrating how emotions determine whether an action is right or wrong. Our investigation fills this gap, and more importantly builds our understanding of how emotions influence ethical judgment and behavior.

1.3. Anger

Anger is a negative-valence emotion that is typically triggered by another person (Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, & Sears, 1939; Pillutla & Murnighan, 1996; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985). When individuals blame another person for an injustice, an unfair outcome, or their inability to reach a desired objective, they often feel anger (Lazarus, 1991; Porath & Erez, 2009). Consistent with this conceptualization of anger, prior work has found that people feel angry when they receive an unfair offer (Pillutla & Murnighan, 1996), are interrupted (Mauss, Evers, Wilhelm, & Gross, 2006), read about immoral verdicts (Mullen & Skitka, 2006), and experience incivility (Pearson & Porath, 2005; Porath & Erez, 2007).

When individuals direct their anger at the offender who treated them unfairly or blocked their goal, they experience *directed anger*. This anger can prompt individuals to confront, fight or punish the offender (Bushman, 2002; Rozin et al., 1999). For example, an employee who is insulted by a co-worker may feel anger toward his or her co-worker, and this anger would inform how the employee interacts with that co-worker. Directed anger reflects the functional nature of emotion (Damasio, 1994).

Anger triggered by one interaction, however, may influence cognition and behavior in an unrelated interaction (Andrade & Ariely, 2009). For example, the anger an employee feels after a co-worker's insult may influence that employee's interactions with his or her spouse in a completely unrelated setting. This influence of anger is incidental and normatively irrelevant to the decision at hand (Dunn & Schweitzer, 2005). Individuals who feel anger may carry their feelings from one interaction to a separate, unrelated interaction (Berkowitz, 1989). With incidental emotions, cognitive appraisals may persist beyond the initial emotion-eliciting event (Lerner & Tiedens, 2006; Yip & Côté, 2013). Anger can shape the perceptions of subsequent, unrelated situations (Dollard et al., 1939; Lerner & Keltner, 2001; Schwarz & Clore, 1983; Wiltermuth & Tiedens, 2011).

The study of incidental anger affords both a conservative and a direct test of the influence of emotion on deception. Unlike incidental anger, directed anger confounds emotion with experience. More specifically, individuals who experience directed anger are likely to be motivated by retribution and not just by the emotional experience. In our investigation, we focus on incidental anger and examine whether incidental anger influences deception.

1.4. Incidental anger increases self-serving deception

We advance the following thesis: incidental anger promotes the use of self-serving deception. The decision to engage in self-serving deception balances concern for oneself (i.e. self-interest) and concern for others (i.e. empathy) (Gneezy, 2005; Levine & Schweitzer, 2014). The greater concern individuals exhibit for themselves and the lower concern for others, the more deceitful they are likely to be. Conversely, if people exhibit lower concern for themselves and they have higher concern for others, they are more likely to tell the truth. We expect anger to diminish concern for others and disinhibit self-interest, which ultimately promotes self-serving deception.

Extant work suggests that empathy influences unethical behavior. Empathy is the capacity to feel emotional concern about the welfare of another party (Davis, 1983). Pizarro (2000) theorized that empathy sensitizes people about the distress that another person is experiencing, and that a morally-relevant event may be occurring. We reason that when individuals lack empathy, they

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