

The Effect of Motive for a Transgression on Anger and Disgust

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INTRODUCTION

- Moral judgments can be made about an act or a person committing an act. These person judgments allow us to make inferences about the moral character of the actor.
- There can be a separation of the judgments of the act from the person, known as act-person dissociation (Tannenbaum et al. , 2011)
- Anger tends to be stronger in response to act judgments, Disgust tends to be stronger in response to character judgments. Bad actions and bad character usually go together, but not always (Giner- Sorrola & Chapman, 2016)
 - This would allow anger to function as a mechanism to determine an act’s rightness or wrongness. Conversely, this would allow disgust to function as a mechanism in which to make inferences about the moral character of the person performing the action.
- The goal of the current research was to see if act judgments and character judgments would track anger and disgust respectively.
- In order to manipulate act judgments independently from character judgments, we manipulated the motive of a driver speeding home who causes an accident. By keeping the consequence the same, the character ratings should be dependent on the motive of the driver.
- Hypotheses**
- Character and Moral Judgment
 - Motive should have a stronger effect on character than moral act.
- The effect of motive on disgust (controlling for anger) should be mediated by character judgments
- Disgust and Anger
 - Motive should have a stronger effect on disgust than on anger.
- Forced choice of disgust should be picked more for Negative motive than for positive motive or neutral motive.
- Character ratings should be correlated with disgust ratings (controlling for anger) to a greater extent than anger ratings (controlling for disgust)
- Act ratings (wrong/blame/punishment items) should be correlated with anger ratings (controlling for disgust) to a greater extent than disgust ratings (controlling for anger)
- Replication of Alicke 1992, Study 1
 - Bad motive should be more causally linked to accident compared to neutral and good motive.
- The effect of motive on causality ratings should be mediated by disgust (controlling for anger)

METHOD

- Participants
 - Recruited via Amazon Mechanical Turk
 - Participants excluded who failed attention check or completed the study in less than half the median time.
 - Male: 92
 - Female: 91
 - Other 1
- Participants were randomly assigned to a motive condition (neutral, bad, good):
 - John was driving over the speed limit (about 40mph in a 30mph zone) in order to get home [for dinner/in time to hide a vial of cocaine/ in time to hide an anniversary present]. As John came to an intersection, he failed to see a stop sign that was covered by a large tree branch. As a result, John hit a car that was coming from the other direction. John hit the driver on the driver's side, causing him multiple lacerations, a broken collarbone, and a fractured arm. John was uninjured in the accident.
- Dependent variables:
- Act Judgment
 - How morally wrong was it for John to speed while driving home?
 - How much blame does John deserve for what happened?
 - Should John be punished for what happened?
- Character Judgment
 - Do you think John is mainly a good or bad person?
 - Do you think John has good moral standards?
 - How trustworthy is John?
- Disgust/Anger felt by participant
 - Forced Choice/Separate Ratings

The people below are all feeling the same emotion:



How strongly do you feel this emotion toward John?

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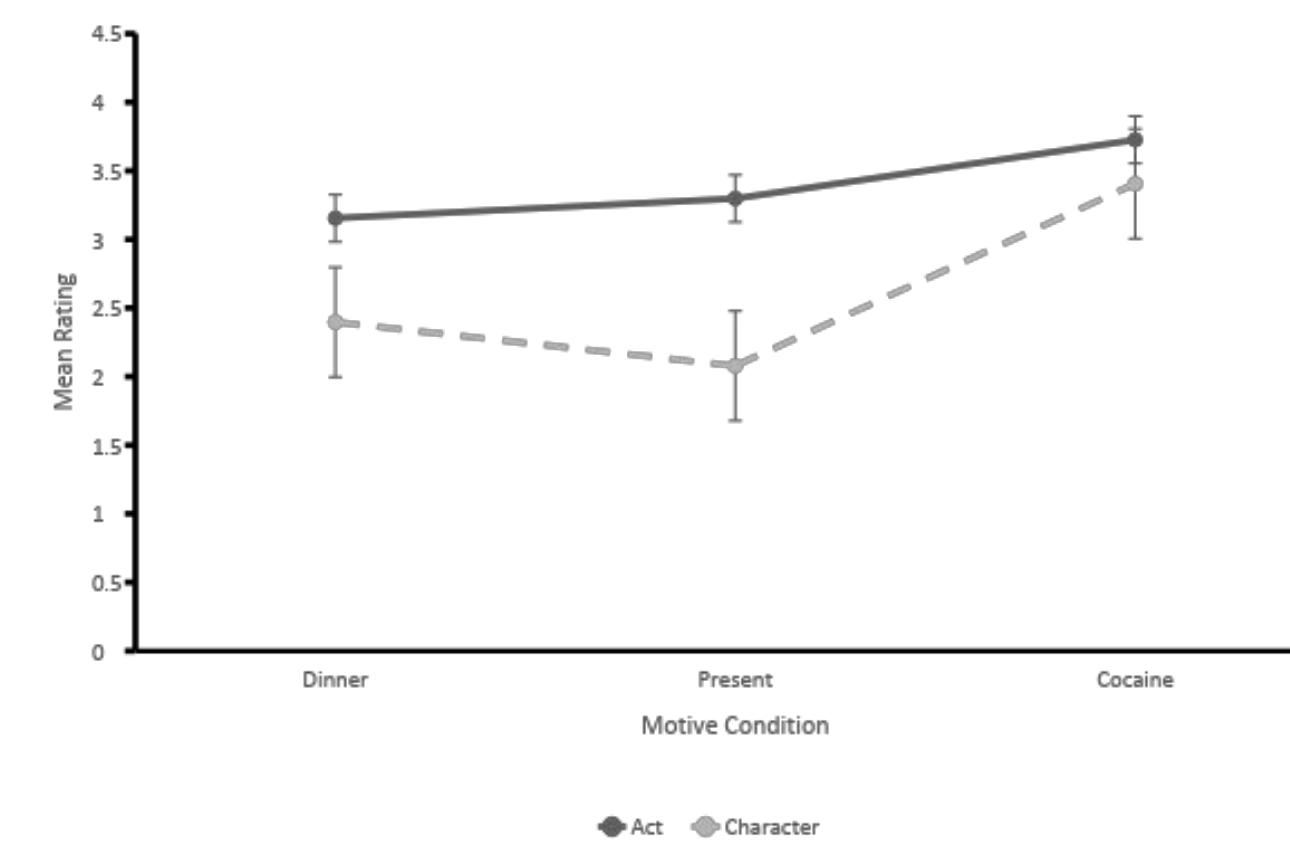


How strongly do you feel this emotion toward John?

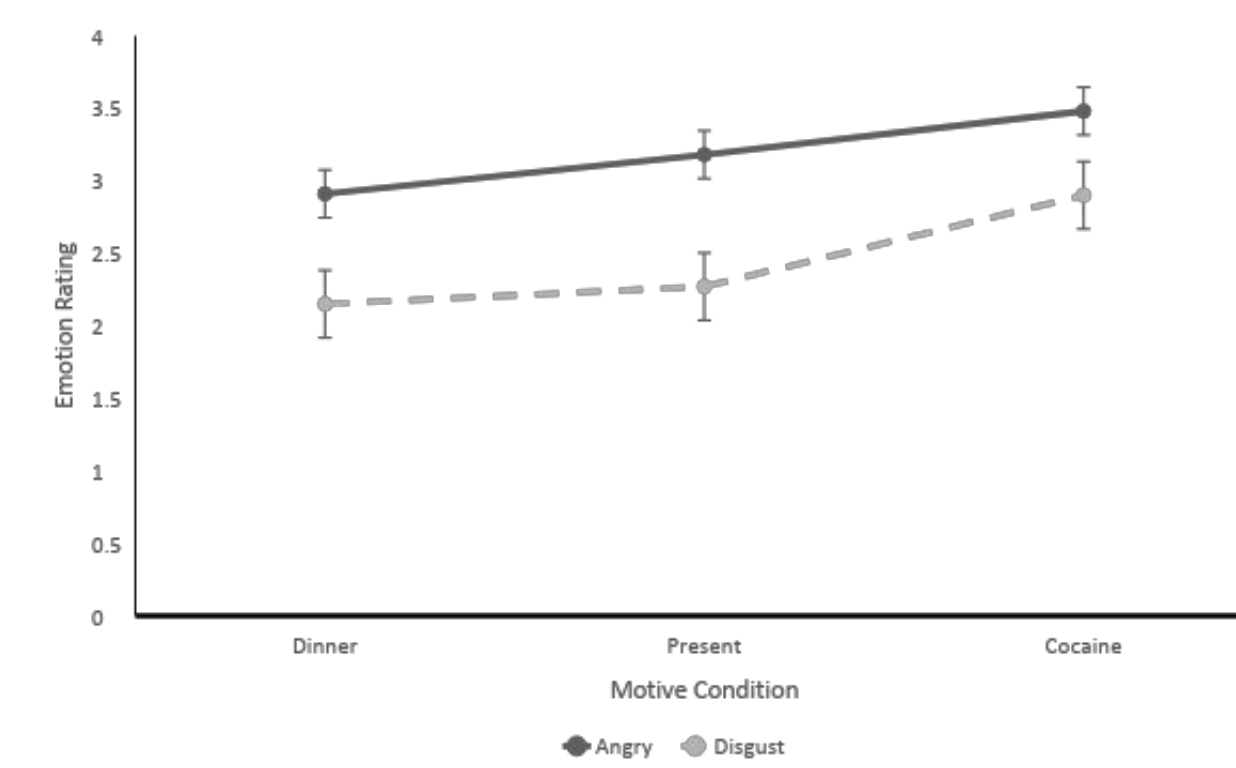
- Who/ what was the primary cause of the accident?

RESULTS

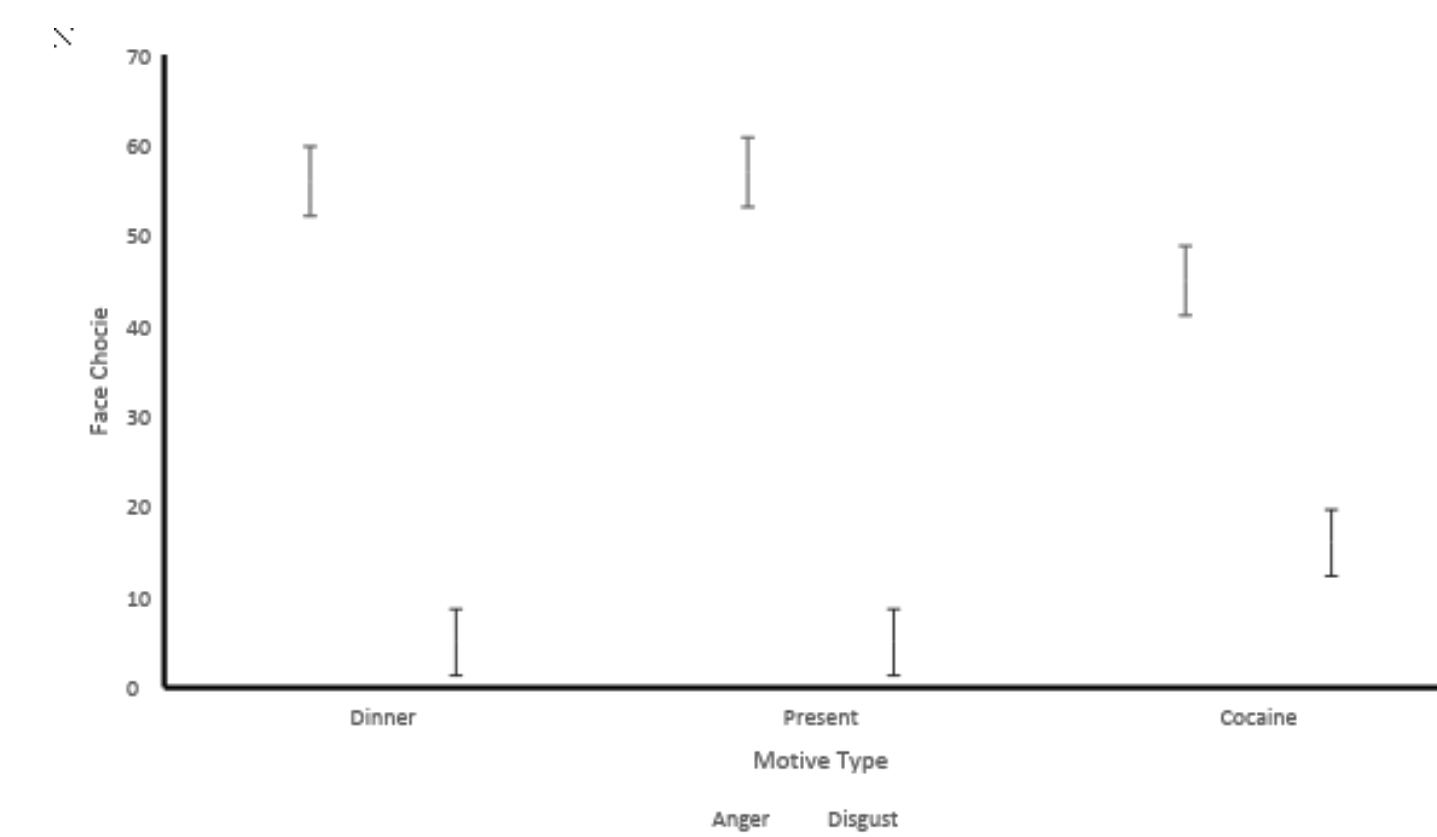
- Motive had a stronger effect on character than act $F(1,182) = 29.060, p = .000$



- Contrary to our predictions, motive did not have a stronger effect on disgust than anger. $F(1, 182) = 1.344, p = .263$



- More participants picked the disgust face in the forced choice paradigm for the bad motive than for the good or neutral motive. $\chi^2(11.01)=.616, p = .004$



- Both disgust and anger predicted act ratings
- Disgust did not predict character ratings better than anger; $t(181) = .849, p = .39$
- Disgust did not predict causality ratings better than anger; $t(181) = 1.33, p = .183$

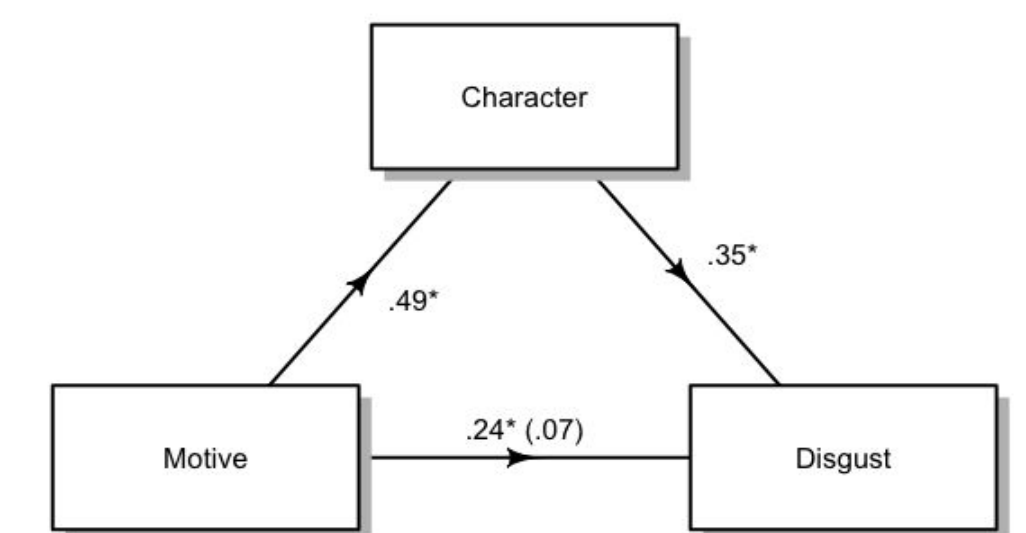
Coefficients Character					
Model	B	Std. Error	β	t	p
Angry Face	0.124	0.066	0.148	1.883	0.061
Disgust Face	0.294	0.062	0.372	4.730	< .001

Coefficients Act					
Model	B	Std. Error	β	t	p
Angry Face	0.355	0.054	0.441	6.627	< .001
Disgust Face	0.236	0.051	0.309	4.646	< .001

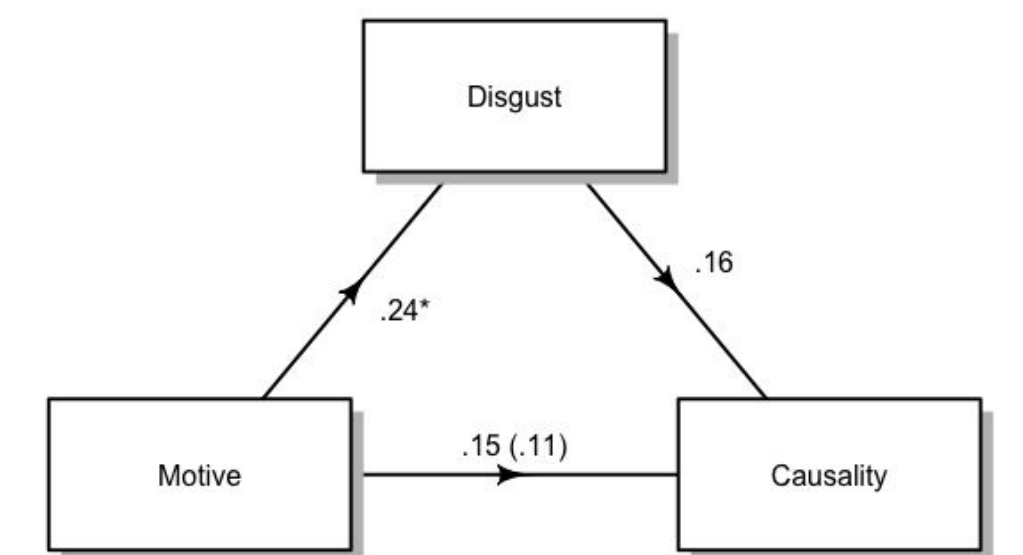
Coefficients Cause					
Model	B	Std. Error	β	t	p
Angry Face	0.366	0.078	0.361	4.667	< .001
Disgust Face	0.184	0.074	0.192	2.474	0.014

MEDIATION

- The effect of motive condition on disgust was significantly mediated by character, controlling for anger.



- The effect of motive condition on causality was significantly mediated by disgust, controlling for anger.



DISCUSSION

- Past research has shown that disgust is linked to character while anger is linked to act.
- There was no evidence to support this claim. This may be due to the nature of the transgression. The present study examined situations in which an accident occurred causing minimal injury. Even though there are motives aimed to act as an inference of bad character, the fact that it is an ‘accident’ alone may not be enough to achieve this.
- These results do show, however, that by keeping the transgression (act) constant, and manipulating motive (character), the act-person dissociation was found.
- Past research has found evidence for this difference using the *thought* of inflicting injury. It may be the case that the motive itself is not strong enough. If the driver speeding home to hide cocaine was at that time under the influence of cocaine, would a different result arise?

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- Tannenbaum, D., Uhlmann, E. L., & Diermeier, D. (2011). Moral signals, public outrage, and immaterial harms. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 47(6), 1249-1254.

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