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Incidental anger and the desire to evaluate

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ABSTRACT

Our results indicate that people experiencing incidental anger are more likely than people in neutral and other emotional states to prefer to perform evaluative tasks, even though their anger may bias the evaluations they make. Induced anger increased participants' desire to evaluate others' ideas (Experiment 1) and made the evaluations of those ideas more negative in valence (Experiment 2). Anger increased the appeal of evaluating ideas when evaluations were expected to be largely negative but not when evaluations were expected to be positive (Experiments 3 and 4). Mediation analyses revealed that this willingness to evaluate when angry stems from a belief that evaluating others can leave angry people in a positive mood. Because people are often free to decide when to perform the tasks required of them, this tendency may have implications for how and when ideas are evaluated.

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Introduction

Many jobs include the task of evaluating others' ideas. Since people often have the freedom to decide when to perform each of the many tasks required of them, they could choose to evaluate ideas when they are most capable of doing so objectively and thoroughly. For example, an executive who is angry about receiving a speeding ticket could decide to wait to review proposals for new business plans until his anger has subsided and he could approach the task more objectively. But would he wait for his anger to subside, or would he instead evaluate the plans while angry?

Emotions can be differentiated from one another by their "cognitive appraisals" (Smith & Ellsworth, 1985, 1988; Roseman, 1991). For example, whereas some emotions, like anger, co-occur with a sense of certainty and blaming others, other emotions are associated with a sense of uncertainty (e.g. fear) or blaming the self (e.g. guilt). The appraisals associated with an emotion can sometimes seep from an initial emotional state into a target of judgment that has nothing to do with the initial emotion (Keltner, Ellsworth, & Edwards, 1993; Lerner & Keltner, 2000, 2001; Lerner & Tiedens, 2006). In one of the earliest demonstrations of this phenomenon, Keltner et al. (1993) showed that when people were induced to feel angry, an emotion associated with blame, they were more blaming

of another person who made a social faux pas, than when they were sad, an emotion associated with the sense that no one is to blame. Similarly, Lerner and Keltner (2001) found that emotions associated with a lack of control (such as fear) resulted in higher risk assessments of unrelated events than did emotions associated with a greater sense of control and certainty (e.g. anger). Thus, the seeping of appraisals associated with emotions into unrelated judgments is one way in which emotions dramatically affect how people perceive and evaluate the world around them. Emotions and their associated appraisal can also influence how deeply people process information, such that people generally think more systematically when experiencing sadness and rely more on heuristics when experiencing happiness or anger (Bodenhausen, Sheppard, & Kramer, 1994; Tiedens & Linton, 2001, but see Moons & Mackie, 2007; for an exception). Moreover, emotions can affect how willing people are to listen to and heed advice (Gino & Schweitzer, 2008) and how much they trust other people, even people not responsible for their anger (Dunn & Schweitzer, 2005). As such, emotions color how positively and thoroughly people evaluate stimuli, even if the stimuli are unrelated to the source of the underlying emotion (e.g., Bower, 1991; Lerner & Tiedens, 2006).

Although prior work has documented the effects of discrete emotional states on how people evaluate stimuli, it has not examined the impact of those emotional states on the decision to evaluate those stimuli. This paper investigates whether people are most likely to evaluate others' ideas when in neutral emotional

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states or if they systematically choose to evaluate ideas under emotional conditions that may not always result in the most thorough or objective of evaluations.

We propose that people experiencing anger, even incidental anger triggered by an experience unrelated to the current environment (Bodenhausen et al., 1994), are more likely than those in neutral and even other negative emotional states to choose to evaluate others' ideas. We focus on the emotion of anger for two reasons. First, anger has an oppositional component (Lerner & Tiedens, 2006; Roseman, Wiest, & Swartz, 1994). It is associated with an action tendency associated with "moving against" other people or obstacles (Frijda, Kuipers, & ter Schure, 1989) and is often displaced, such that people often act aggressively toward someone other than the person who initially instigated anger (Fenigstein & Buss, 1974; Holmes, 1972). To the extent that evaluating others' ideas constitutes an oppositional behavior, anger should influence the propensity to evaluate others' ideas. The second reason that we focus on anger is that it is likely to have particularly strong effects on judgments of others' ideas. People in angry moods evaluate stimuli more negatively than do people in neutral emotion conditions (Bower, 1991) and they process information more heuristically than do people experiencing neutral emotions or people experiencing sadness (Bodenhausen et al., 1994; Lerner, Goldberg, & Tetlock, 1998; Tiedens & Linton, 2001). We therefore focus on anger because prior research suggests both that it should affect people's tendency to evaluate others and that evaluations made while experiencing anger should differ systematically from evaluations made in other emotional states.

We focus our analysis on incidental emotions because doing so makes for a conservative test of the relationship between anger and the desire to evaluate others' ideas. As Gino and Schweitzer (2008) point out, integral emotions are likely to have stronger effects on decisions and are less likely to decay over time than are incidental emotions. Integral emotions may also lead people to seek out opportunities very consciously to evaluate another person's ideas if that person caused them to experience anger. The influence of incidental emotions is therefore more subtle and more surprising.

In testing our hypotheses, we contribute to the broader literature on emotion by exploring whether incidental emotion may lead people to be more likely to perform some types of activities (e.g., evaluating others' ideas) in which their performance is likely to be affected by incidental emotions. We also contribute to the decision-making literature by proposing that emotions can not only directly affect how people make decisions but also that emotions influence when people engage in a particular kind of decision making or evaluation.

Anger and the willingness to strike out against others

Considerable research has shown that anger is often a precursor to aggression (e.g., Berkowitz, 1989, 1990, 2000), which Berkowitz (1993) defines as "behavior, either physical or symbolic, that is carried out with the intention to harm someone" (p. 11). Most often, this aggression is directed at the source of the anger. However, anger can also lead people to move against people or obstacles, even if the people or obstacles are not responsible for their anger (Fenigstein & Buss, 1974; Frijda et al., 1989; Holmes, 1972). People induced to feel anger have been shown to be more punitive toward those violating social conventions (Goldberg, Lerner, & Tetlock, 1999; Lerner et al., 1998), more blaming of others in situations unrelated to the source of their anger (Keltner et al., 1993), and more seeking of opportunities to argue and fight with others (Young, Tiedens, Jung, & Tsai, 2011).

To the extent that evaluating others' ideas entails striking out at others by providing negative feedback, people in angry moods

should find more appeal in evaluating others' ideas than should other people. They may see judging others negatively as an outlet for their anger and, therefore, a way to alleviate their angry feelings (Bushman, Baumeister, & Phillips, 2001). Anger may therefore remove people's inhibitions about evaluating others because it reduces people's aversion to making negative judgments.

Hypothesis 1. Individuals who experience incidental anger find more appeal in evaluating others than do individuals in neutral emotional states.

Because we seek to determine if anger specifically or negative affect more generally increases the appeal of evaluating others' ideas, we also compare the effect of anger to the effect of sadness on the desire to evaluate others' ideas. Like anger, sadness is a negatively-valenced emotion. People in sad moods might also wish to alleviate their emotional states. However, anger differs from sadness in that anger is associated with the belief that another person harmed or offended the self or someone close to the self, whereas sadness is characterized by a belief that the situation rather than another person harmed the self or someone close to the self (Smith & Ellsworth, 1985). This distinction on the cognitive dimension of responsibility is critical because it leads the two emotions to have different behavioral consequences. For instance, previous research has demonstrated that people in sad moods show less aggressive tendencies and strike out less (against people in out-groups) than do people in angry moods (Kenworthy, Canales, Weaver, & Miller, 2003) and that they are less likely to seek out arguments with others (Young et al., 2011). Striking out does not alleviate the kinds of negative feelings associated with sadness, which tend to be more concerned with loss than with blame (Lazarus, 1991). Based on these findings and the differences in the appraisal tendencies between anger and sadness, we would expect incidental anger to increase the appeal of evaluating others' ideas more strongly than would incidental sadness, even though sadness is also a negative emotion. We offer:

Hypothesis 2. Individuals who experience incidental anger find more appeal in evaluating others than do individuals who experience incidental sadness.

Anticipated mood benefits of striking out while angry

Researchers have suggested that one reason that emotion influences judgment and behavior is because people attempt to regulate their moods and emotions (e.g., Gross, 1998; Wegener & Petty, 1994). Most commonly, people seek out positive states and attempt to reduce negative feelings. In the case of anger, striking out at others may alleviate some of the negative feelings associated with the angering event (Berkowitz, 1989; Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, & Sears, 1939; Yates, 2007). Although the hypothesis that engaging in cathartic activities designed to "let off steam" reduces subsequent aggression has been routinely rejected (see Geen and Quanty (1977) for a review), and those who do strike out when angry do not show physiological responses indicative of alleviation (Verona & Sullivan, 2008); people nonetheless report that they enjoy the act of striking out at those responsible for their anger (Bushman, Baumeister, & Stack, 1999). Importantly, people appear to believe that aggression will alleviate their negative feelings, and when they believe this, they become more likely to strike out (Bushman et al., 2001).

A lay belief that venting against people not responsible for one's anger or even inanimate objects will improve one's moods persists (Bushman, 2002; Bushman et al., 1999, 2001; Geen, 1977; Verona & Sullivan, 2008; Warren & Kurlychek, 1981). Moreover, this belief in the cathartic value of venting is perpetuated by the popular

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