



Trait contempt, anger, disgust, and moral foundation values[☆]



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ABSTRACT

Moral emotion researchers have suggested that violations of different moral values may differentially elicit state contempt, anger, and disgust. However, research investigating trait emotions and their associations with moral values has largely focused on trait disgust; in this context, few studies have examined trait anger, and none have examined trait contempt. Across two studies, we examined trait contempt, anger, and disgust and their associations with six moral values: harm/care, fairness, loyalty, authority, purity, and reciprocity/equity. Participants completed trait contempt, anger, and disgust instruments and a measure of moral values. Multiple regressions were used to examine the unique associations between trait emotions and endorsement of each moral value. Across the two studies, trait contempt was negatively associated with multiple moral values (consistently with harm/care and loyalty), whereas trait disgust was positively associated with multiple moral values (consistently with harm/care and reciprocity/equity). Trait anger was weakly associated with harm/care and fairness values in Study 2, but not Study 1. Our results highlight an important new link between a contemptuous personality and diminished moral values, and suggest that trait disgust is strongly associated with moral values outside the purity domain.

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1. Trait contempt, anger, disgust, and moral foundation values

Emotion and morality are strongly linked. Although most research in the 20th century proposed that deliberative reasoning directly causes moral judgments, later work demonstrated that moral judgments are often strongly influenced by affective processes (e.g., for review see Haidt, 2003). The other-condemning emotions of contempt, anger, and disgust have been found to be especially related to negative moral judgments (Haidt, 2003; Hutcherson & Gross, 2011). Some researchers have proposed that contempt, anger, and/or disgust may be “domain-specific,” such that they are differentially elicited by violations of specific moral domains (Horberg, Oveis, Keltner, & Cohen, 2009; Rozin, Lowery, Imada, & Haidt, 1999; Russell, Piazza, & Giner-Sorolla, 2013).

The “CAD Hypothesis,” a landmark study by Rozin et al. (1999), found that violations of three different moral domains (community, autonomy, and divinity; Shweder, Much, Mahapatra, & Park, 1997) tended to differentially elicit contempt, anger, and disgust in their participants. They found that violations of *community* values (in-group loyalty and respect for authority) predominately elicited *contempt*; violations of *autonomy* values (issues of harm/care and fairness/reciprocity) predominately elicited *anger*; and violations of *divinity* values (purity of body and spirit) predominately elicited *disgust*. Although subsequent

research has criticized the CAD study on methodological grounds and found somewhat differing patterns of results (e.g., Hutcherson & Gross, 2011; Russell et al., 2013), other research has replicated both the disgust-divinity and anger-autonomy associations (Horberg et al., 2009; Russell et al., 2013).

1.1. Trait emotions and moral judgments

Trait emotions (i.e., a propensity towards experiencing a given emotion frequently and intensely; Spielberger, 1996) and their corresponding state emotions (i.e., a temporarily induced emotional state) may affect judgments in similar ways (Malatesta, 1990). The relation between divinity/purity *violations* and the elicitation of *state* disgust inspired research into the relation between *trait* disgust and the endorsement of divinity/purity *values*. This association proved robust. Trait disgust predicts praise of purity virtues (e.g., maintaining health, abstaining from smoking or drinking) and condemnations of purity violations, such as drug abuse and sexual promiscuity (Horberg et al., 2009), homosexuality (e.g., Terrizzi, Shook, & Ventis, 2010), and suicide “to the extent that it is considered impure” (Rottman, Kelemen, & Young, 2014, p. 217). However, the potential relations between trait disgust and moral domains outside of purity/divinity have not been fully explored.

Conversely, little research has examined how other trait emotions might influence individual differences in moral values. Contempt and anger—alongside disgust—have been described as “moral” emotions that belong to the same hostile or “other-critical” family (Haidt, 2003).

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Although CAD-related studies have examined whether *state* contempt and anger are uniquely elicited by violations of different moral domains (e.g. Russell et al., 2013), few studies have investigated *trait* anger's relation to different moral domains, and no studies at all have explored *trait* contempt's relation to moral values. Across two studies, we address these gaps in the literature by examining how *trait* contempt, anger, and disgust relate to the broader array of moral domains described in Moral Foundations Theory (Haidt & Joseph, 2007).

1.2. Moral foundations theory

Most CAD-related research on the links between moral domains and *state* emotions has used the framework of Shweder et al.'s (1997) three ethics: autonomy, community, and divinity. However, most research on *trait* disgust's relation to moral values has pertained to the “purity” domain from Moral Foundations Theory (MFT), which is conceptually similar to the divinity ethic (Haidt & Joseph, 2007). MFT is essentially a five-factor version of Shweder's three ethics that explains additional variance in moral values (Graham et al., 2011). Thus, we chose the more contemporary MFT framework to explore *trait* contempt, anger, and disgust's influence on the valuation of multiple moral domains. MFT proposes there are five major moral domains: purity/sanctity, harm/care, fairness/reciprocity, loyalty/subversion, and authority/respect (Haidt & Joseph, 2007).

1.2.1. Purity

The purity foundation corresponds to the “divinity” ethic. Purity virtues include wholesomeness, cleanliness, spiritual and bodily purity, and self-control over “base” desires. Purity violations include drug use, profaning the sacred, and sexual taboos/promiscuity (Haidt & Joseph, 2007; Horberg et al., 2009).

1.2.2. Harm/care

Harm/care corresponds to the “autonomy” ethic. Harm/care virtues include empathy and compassion. Harm/care violations include inflicting physical or emotional suffering on others (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009; Graham et al., 2011; Haidt, Graham, & Joseph, 2009; Haidt & Joseph, 2007).

1.2.3. Fairness/reciprocity

The fairness/reciprocity foundation also corresponds with the “autonomy” ethic, and involves two different conceptions of justice: social equality (i.e. fairness) and proportionality (i.e. reciprocity/equity; Haidt, 2012). Fairness values pertain to equal treatment, such as social justice and human rights (e.g., Haidt et al., 2009). Reciprocity/equity values involve persons receiving rewards and punishments in proportion to their deeds. Reciprocity/equity violations include cheating and free-riding (Haidt, 2012).

Although fairness and reciprocity have typically been considered a single moral domain by MFT researchers (e.g. Haidt & Joseph, 2007), there are ideological differences in these conceptions of moral justice. Liberals tend to define justice more in terms of social equality/egalitarianism, whereas conservatives tend to define justice more in terms of reciprocity/equity (e.g., Reyna, Henry, Korfmacher, & Tucker, 2006; Skitka & Tetlock, 1993). Since MFT instruments predominately assess the fairness foundation in terms of social equality/egalitarianism, we examined reciprocity/equity as a separate “foundation” in our studies, to examine whether any *trait* emotion related uniquely to one conception of moral justice, but not the other.

1.2.4. Loyalty/subversion

The loyalty/subversion foundation corresponds to the “community” ethic. Loyalty/subversion virtues include loyalty and service to in-groups (e.g., family, community, or country) and patriotism/nationalism. Loyalty/subversion violations include betrayal and undermining

group solidarity or social harmony (Haidt & Joseph, 2007; Haidt et al., 2009).

1.2.5. Authority/respect

The authority/respect foundation also corresponds with the “community” ethic. Authority virtues include obedience, respect, fulfilling the obligations of one's social roles, and protecting subordinates (Haidt et al., 2009). Authority violations include disrespecting social conventions, tradition, the law, and/or culturally esteemed persons (Haidt et al., 2009).

1.3. Trait anger, trait disgust, and moral foundation values

There are several gaps in the literature regarding *trait* anger and disgust's relation to moral foundation values. While multiple studies have examined *trait* disgust's relation to purity values, few have incorporated *trait* anger and/or examined moral domains outside of purity in this context, with several exceptions. Horberg et al. (2009) examined both *trait* disgust and *trait* anger as predictors of moral judgments and values pertaining to purity, justice (i.e. fairness), and harm/care virtues. They found that *trait* disgust predicted moral judgments of purity, but not justice or harm/care, and that *trait* anger did not predict purity, harm, or justice values. Rottman et al. (2014) found that *trait* disgust predicted purity values, but not harm/care values, and that *trait* anger did not predict harm/care or purity values. Neither study examined *trait* disgust or anger's associations with loyalty or authority values.

Chapman and Anderson (2014) examined *trait* anger and disgust as predictors of judgment towards domain theory's “moral” (school-children causing harm) and “conventional” violations (school-children ignoring rules and dress codes); they found *trait* disgust, but not *trait* anger, predicted stronger judgments of both moral and convention violations, whereas *trait* anger predicted neither. Their study's convention violations had some conceptual similarity to authority (but not loyalty) violations. However, because these violations narrowly pertained to children violating school rules and dress codes, the degree to which these violations correspond with MFT's authority foundation is unclear.

The abovementioned studies indicate that *trait* anger might not associate with harm/care and fairness values in the same fashion as harm/care and fairness violations elicit *state* anger. This may be because elicited *state* emotions can be morally functional, whereas their corresponding *trait* emotions can be morally dysfunctional. Elicited *state* anger can motivate action to redress moral injustice, and its expression can prompt a moral transgressor to change their behavior (Haidt, 2003). In contrast, *trait* anger can lead to potentially morally dysfunctional cognition and judgment, such as hostile attributional biases, irrational thinking, and distorted appraisals of events (Tafarot, Kassonove, & Dundin, 2002). This might lead anger-prone people to be highly other-condemning, but it is less clear how this would lead to the endorsement of moral values per se. This might apply to *trait* contempt as well.

1.4. Trait contempt

The American Heritage Dictionary defines contempt as “the feeling with which a person regards anything considered mean, vile, or worthless; disdain; scorn” (Contempt, 2013). It seems reasonable that contemptuousness could influence moral values, given its other-condemning nature. However, no published studies have examined *trait* contempt's association with moral values, and indeed *trait* contempt has received little research attention relative to *trait* anger and disgust. Literature searches yielded three papers that defined and measured *trait* contempt. Izard, Libero, Putnam, and Haynes (1993) operationalized *trait* contempt as frequently feeling superior over others and making negative judgments about others' worth/value. Crowley (2013) created a *trait* contempt *expression* instrument that assessed a personality tendency towards coldness and a behavioral tendency to

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