

## Mad and Misleading: Incidental anger promotes deception.



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 and Schweitzer, 2013, Gino and Shea, 2012, Moran and 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 and Oliver, 1996, Olekalns and 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 and Porath, 2005) and in negotiations in particular (Van Kleef et al., 2004, Yip and 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.

We focus our investigation on self-serving deception, lies that advantage the deceiver at the expense of the target (Erat and Gneezy, 2012, Levine and Schweitzer, 2014). Self-serving lies represent a quintessential form of unethical behavior (Gino et al., 2011, Tenbrunsel and Smith-Crowe, 2008), and a growing literature has identified key factors that influence self-serving deception (e.g., O'Connor and Carnevale, 1997, Schweitzer et al., 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 et al., 2011) and their counterparts (Gneezy, 2005). Emotions may influence these calculations (Fulmer & Barry, 2009).

We conducted four laboratory studies to explore the relationship between incidental anger and deception. In Study 1, we induced incidental anger with an essay feedback task and we demonstrate that incidental anger promotes deception. In Study 2, we use a different incidental anger induction, a recall task, and we replicate our findings in Study 1. In this study, we also identify empathy as a mediator. In Study 3, we compare the influence of incidental anger on deception with incidental sadness and neutral emotion. We find that anger increases the use of deception, but sadness, another negative-valence emotion does not. In Study 4, we identify incentives as a moderator of the relationship between anger and deception. Across all four studies, we find that incidental anger promotes self-interested deception – even when the target of deception is unrelated to why they are angry. Compared to when people feel neutral emotion, when people feel angry, they are more likely to engage in deception to pursue self-interested goals, because they care less about how their actions affect others.

## General Discussion

Anger promotes deception. Across four studies, we find that individuals who experience incidental anger are more likely to deceive a counterpart than those in a neutral state. We find that empathy mediates the relationship between incidental anger and deception. Angry individuals are less empathetic, and as a result, angry individuals care less than neutral individuals about the harmful consequences of their self-interested actions.

## Conclusion

Anger promotes deception. When individuals feel angry, they are more likely to deceive others. We find that angry individuals are less concerned about the welfare of others, and consequently more likely to exhibit self-interested unethical behavior. Across our studies, we link incidental anger to self-serving deception. By focusing on incidental anger, we isolate how feeling anger influences deception from seeking retribution.

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