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Wharton Risk Management and Decision Processes Center

I am applying for the Ackoff Doctoral Student Fellowship for my proposed study, "Behavioral Responses to Contemptuous Expressions," in the amount of \$4,000. I am a third-year doctoral student in the Wharton Ethics & Legal Studies Doctoral Program. This study is under the guidance of Maurice Schweitzer. Below is an estimated budget for this study. No other funding is expected for this study.

Project Budget:

Subject payments	\$2,000
Research assistants (coding, help running studies)	\$1,100
Travel	\$900
Total	\$4,000

I appreciate your consideration of my application for this fellowship.

Sincerely,

Livia Levine

Research Proposal
for
Behavioral Responses to Contemptuous Expressions

We plan to study the role of contempt in decision making processes. Our hypothesis is that an individual who expresses contempt invites those who interact with her to feel more distant and to cooperate less. We propose a series of experimental studies on this topic with support from the Russell Ackoff Doctoral Students Fellowship. This opportunity will help us contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of contempt in negotiations, perceptions of ethicality, and in encouraging cooperation.

Rozin, Lowery, Imada and Haidt (1999) describe three moral emotions – contempt, anger, and disgust – which often have long-term effects on social relationships between violators and third parties. The influence of anger on these relationships has been studied in a behavioral framework, (for example, by Dunn & Schweitzer (2005) and Van Kleef, De Dreu, Pietroni & Manstead (2006)). We propose to study the effect of contempt in a similar framework, by looking at the effect of this emotion on specific behavioral measures.

Phase one of this study, already completed, relies on the work of Ekman and Friesan (1986) who identified contempt as an emotion recognizable by a specific facial expression. Ekman and Heider (1988) replicated this study to show that this expression is universally recognizable. In phase one we elicited and photographed expressions of contempt, using emotionally-laden prompts from the work of Rozin et al (1999). We then had other participants decide which emotion was shown in each picture. We used the photographs which were overwhelmingly contemptuous, as well as neutral photographs of the same participants, in the next phase of the study.

In a pilot study, we gave participants either a neutral photo or one expressing contempt, and asked them to rate the people photographed on warmth and cooperativeness scales (from Fiske (2002) and Shapiro & Bies (1994)). Perceived warmth and perceived cooperativeness of the photographed individual were significantly lower when the photograph exhibited contempt.

The next stage of the study, for which we are requesting assistance from the Wharton Risk Management and Decision Processes Center, involves looking at how this perception of lower warmth and cooperativeness for contemptuous individuals affects behavior. Melwani and Barsade (2011) examined the effects of contempt in work scenarios, showing that the recipients of contempt had better task performance, higher aggressiveness, and lower levels of self-esteem. Following this line of research, we propose to investigate the effect of contempt on the recipients' willingness to cooperate and perceptions of ethicality through a number of studies. Our proposed studies include but are not limited to the following:

Study 1 is based on Kuang, Weber & Dana's (2007) coordination game where the participants give each other advice. Participants play a pure coordination game via computer. We manipulate the IV by showing participants photographs of their counterparts in the game, from the photographs we took

in phase one. We hypothesize that the same advice will be less effective if it's thought to be given by someone who appears contemptuous.

In study 2, participants read about ethically ambiguous behavior associated with a photograph of the protagonist, (from phase one). Participants then judge their counterparts on their likelihood of acting unethically. We expect to find that people showing contempt in their photographs will be judged more harshly.

This research will be a global effort to study the effects of contempt as a universal emotion. To that end, we are eliciting the support of Israeli researcher Simone Moran in conducting these studies. Together, and with the help of the Ackoff Fellowship, we expect to contribute to the understanding of the role of emotions in decision making.

Sample contempt/neutral photos:



References:

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