

From Unethical to Prosocial Behavior: The Role of Guilt, Positive Affect, and System Processing

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Research Question: How and when does unethical behavior lead to prosocial behavior?

Unethical Behavior

Ex: Calling in sick to get out of work

Once people engage in unethical behavior, are they likely to engage in prosocial behavior? (Tetlock, Kristel, Elson, Green, & Lerner, 2000)

Prosocial Behavior

Ex: Coming into work early or donating to charity

Existing Findings: People engage in prosocial behaviors after unethical behaviors to morally cleanse

Moral Cleansing

Engaging in prosocial behavior to make up for unethical behavior

But **how** does unethical behavior lead to prosocial behavior?

Argument: Guilt is a mediator between unethical behavior and prosocial behavior

Acting unethically makes a people feel guilty because the unethical behaviors goes against their moral identity (i.e., I am a good person)

Prosocial behaviors help to restore a person's moral identity and get rid of felt guilt

Conflicting Evidence

Ruedy, Moore, Gino, and Schweitzer (2013)
Unethical Behaviors lead to positive affect

Why would some people feel more guilt when acting unethically while others feel more positive affect?

Possible Explanation: Dual Processing Theory

Two systems for decision making: System 1 and System 2

System 1: Fast, automatic, and closely associated with emotions

System 2: Analytical-rational system that makes logical decisions at high levels of abstraction

System 2 processing helps people rationalize unethical behavior (Zhong, 2011)

System 1 - more guilt and more moral cleansing

System 2 - more PA and less moral cleansing

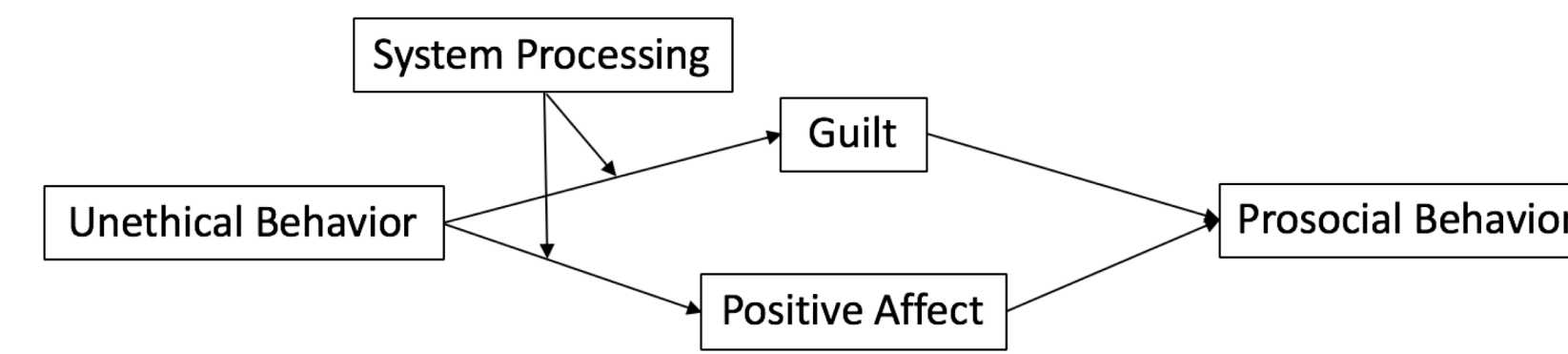
Hypothesis 1

The indirect effect of unethical behavior on prosocial behavior through guilt will be moderated by cognitive processing style. System 1 will increase this relationship while System 2 will decrease it.

Hypothesis 2

The indirect effect of unethical behavior on prosocial behavior through positive affect will be moderated by cognitive processing style. System 2 will increase this relationship while System 1 will decrease it.

Model



Method:

Sample: 194 Participants (48-50 observations per condition)

2 X 2 Factorial Design

- Unethical Behavior: Yes or No
- Processing: System 1 or System 2

Word Jumble: only 7 out of 10 can be answered (Wiltermuth, 2011)

System Processing Manipulation (Hsee & Rottenstreich, 2011):

System 1: Emotional responses (e.g., when you hear the name Donald J. Trump...)

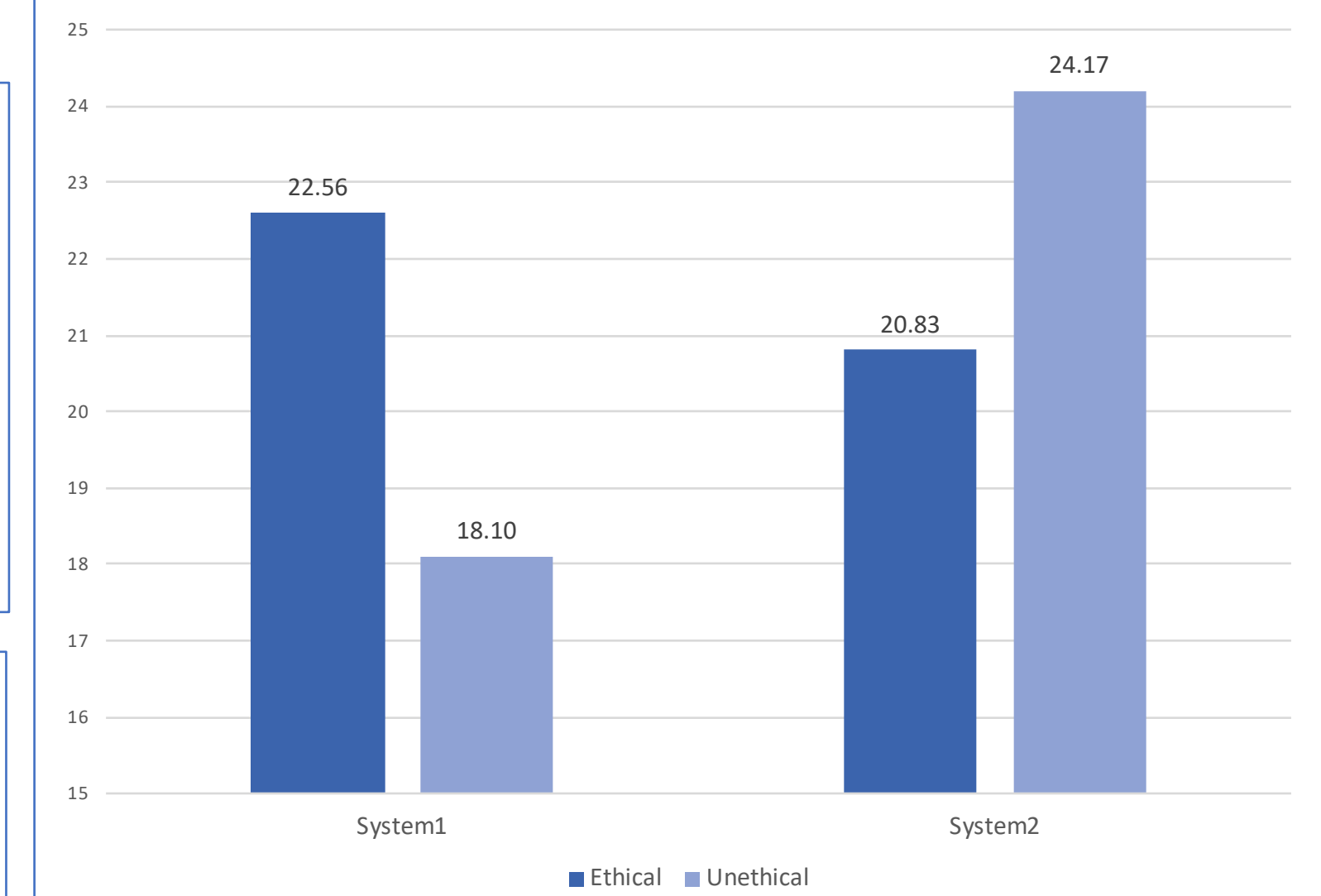
System 2: Math questions

Unethical Behavior Manipulation: Confederate helped the participants cheat to win \$10

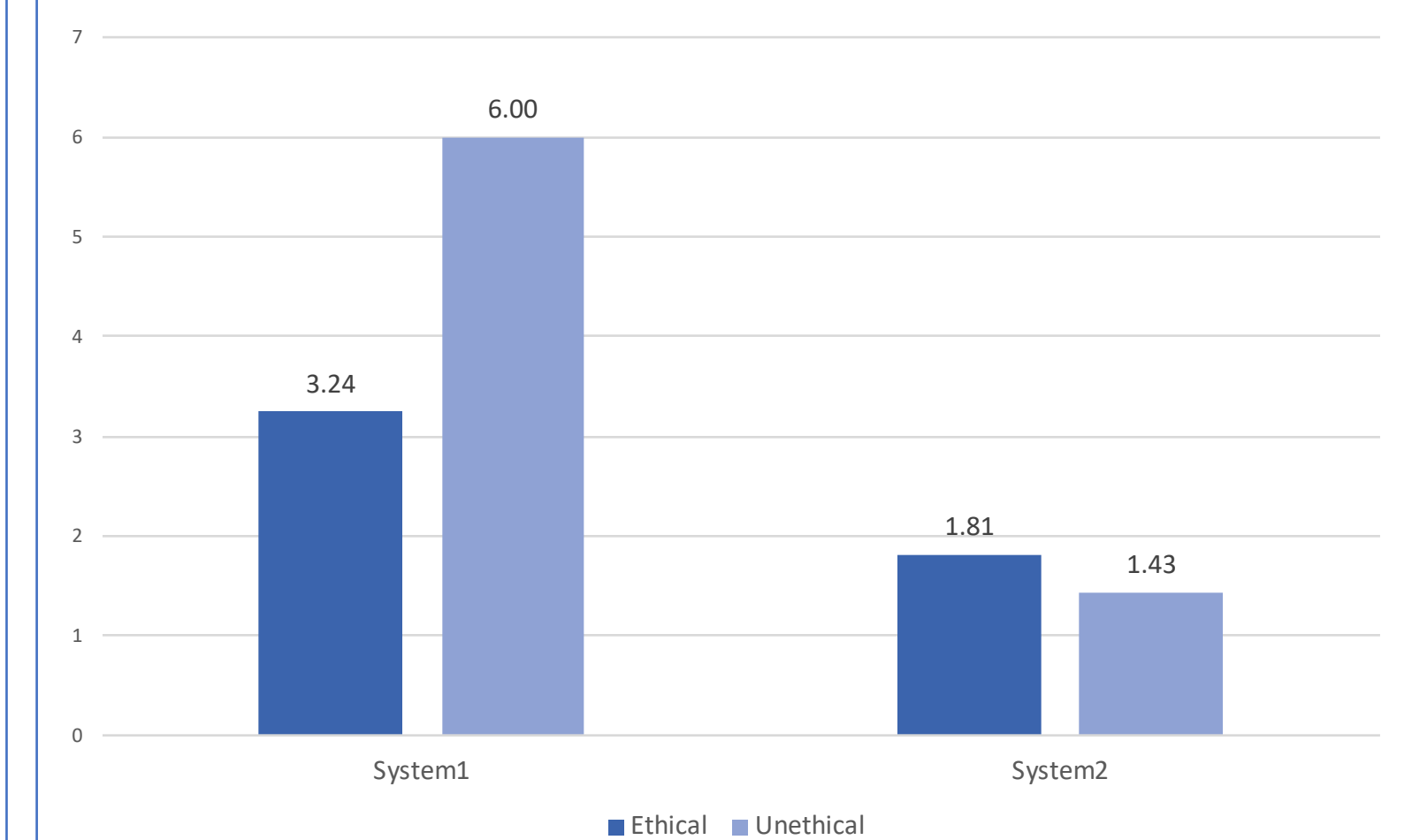
Emotion Measure: Modified PANAS-X

Prosocial Behavior: Donation to charity

Positive Affect



Prosocial Behavior



Unethical System 1: more guilt -> more donations

Unethical System 2: less guilt -> fewer donations

Hypothesis 1 Supported

Unethical System 2: more PA -> fewer donations

Unethical System 1: less PA -> more donations

Hypothesis 2 Supported

Conclusion

Dual processes theory plays a roll in moral cleansing:

- Provides an explanation for contradictory results in the ethics literature
- How and when unethical behavior will lead to future prosocial behavior