

Proud to be Guilty

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Abstract

We examine emotional implications of altruistic dishonesty (benefits others) vs. egoistic dishonesty (benefits the self), with a primary focus on distinct positive emotions. We find that following altruistic (vs. egoistic) dishonesty, people expect (Experiment 1) and experience (Experiment 2) not only less intense negative self-conscious emotion (guilt and shame) but also more intense positive self-conscious emotion (pride).

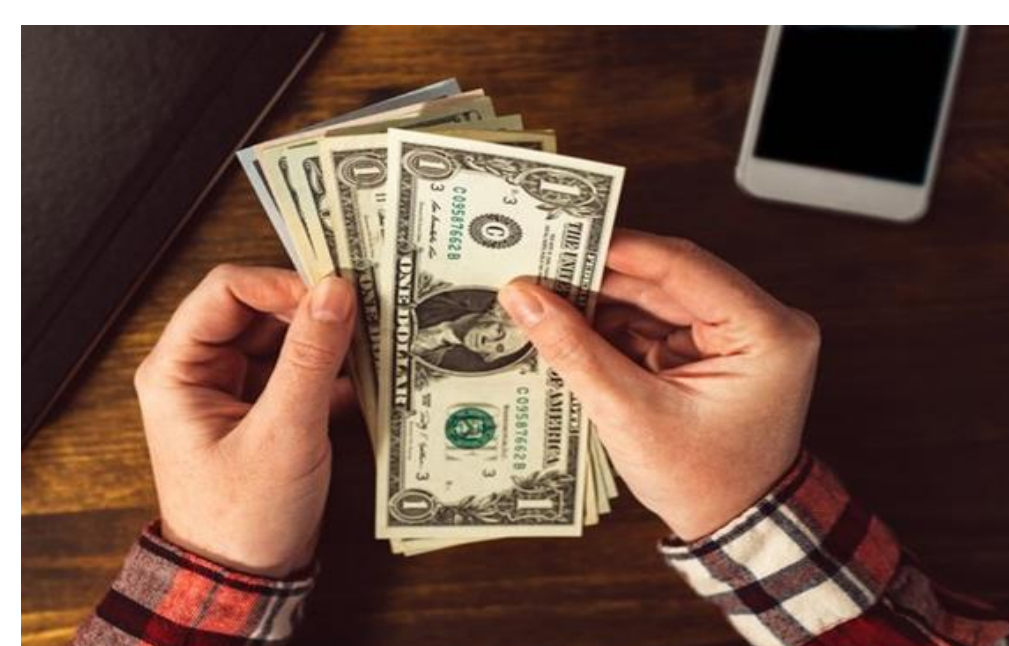
Altruistic-dishonesty

dishonesty for the benefit of **others**



Egoistic-dishonesty

dishonesty for the benefit of **self**



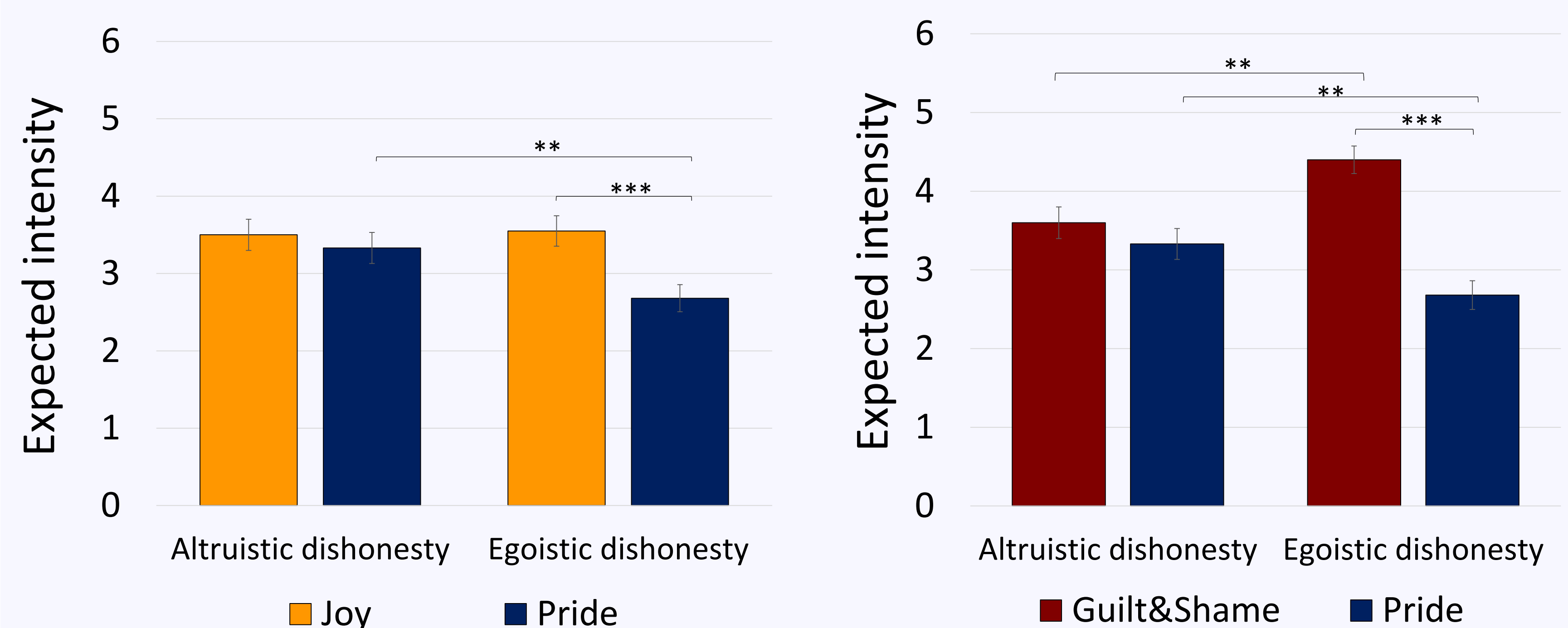
Introduction

We extend work on ethical dissonance¹ and on the differentiation between egoistic and altruistic dishonesty² by exploring the emotions that underlie these two types of unethical behavior.

With regard to positive emotions, we hypothesize that while both types of dishonesty may induce hedonic positive emotions such as joy (due to obtaining gains³), altruistic-dishonesty is likely to additionally induce the self-conscious positive emotion pride (due to behaving in a way that promotes concern for others⁴). We further hypothesize that the increase in positive self-conscious emotion pride following altruistic (but not egoistic) dishonesty potentially outweighs the negative self-conscious emotions - guilt and shame, that are typically associated with dishonesty. This, we suggest, may help resolve ethical dissonance and thus increase the probability of being dishonest.

Experiment 1. A scenario study (N=233 MTurkers)

Participants imagined having the opportunity to cheat to benefit others (vs. self) and then reported their expected emotions

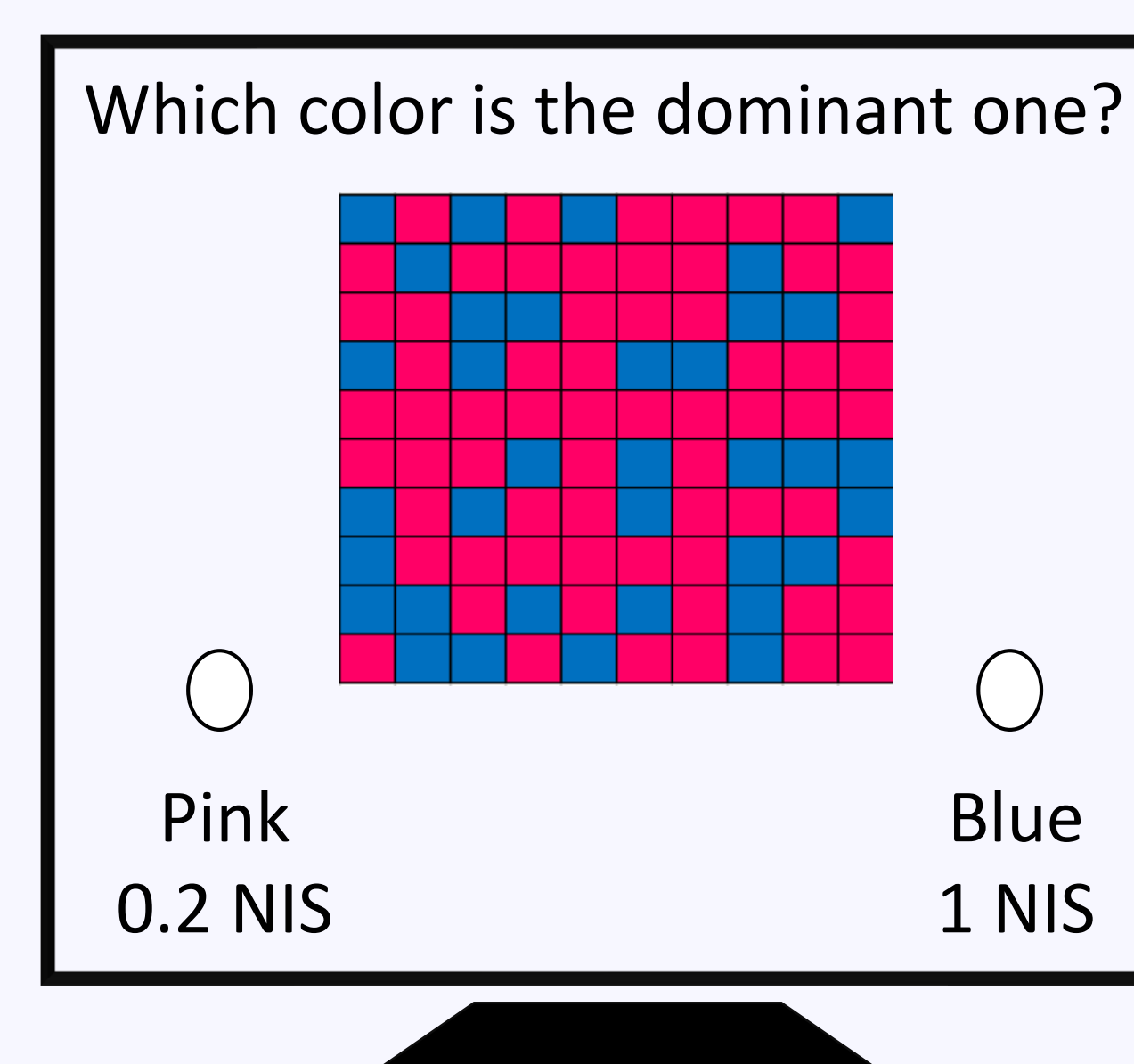


Self-conscious negative versus positive emotions as a function of dishonesty type, $F(1,231)=10.96, p=.001, \eta^2_p=.045$

Type of positive emotion as a function of dishonesty type, $F(1,231)=12.39, p=.001, \eta^2_p=.051$

Experiment 2. A behavioral study (N=258 Israeli citizens)

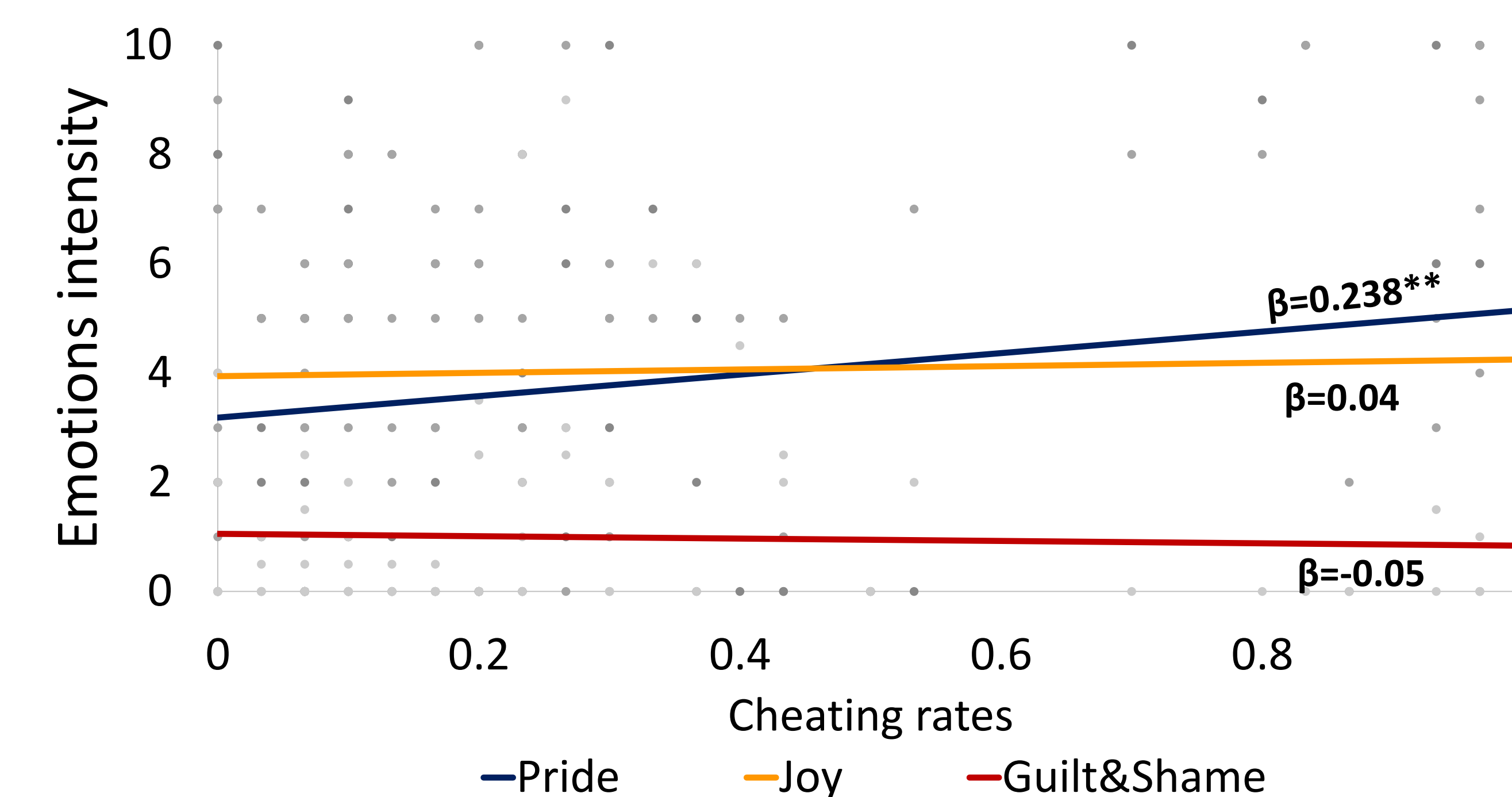
Participants completed a computerized task and were paid based on performance. The task encompasses a temptation to be dishonest for increasing monetary payoff to benefit a Holocaust survivor (altruistic dishonesty) or oneself (egoistic dishonesty). Following the task, participants reported their emotions.



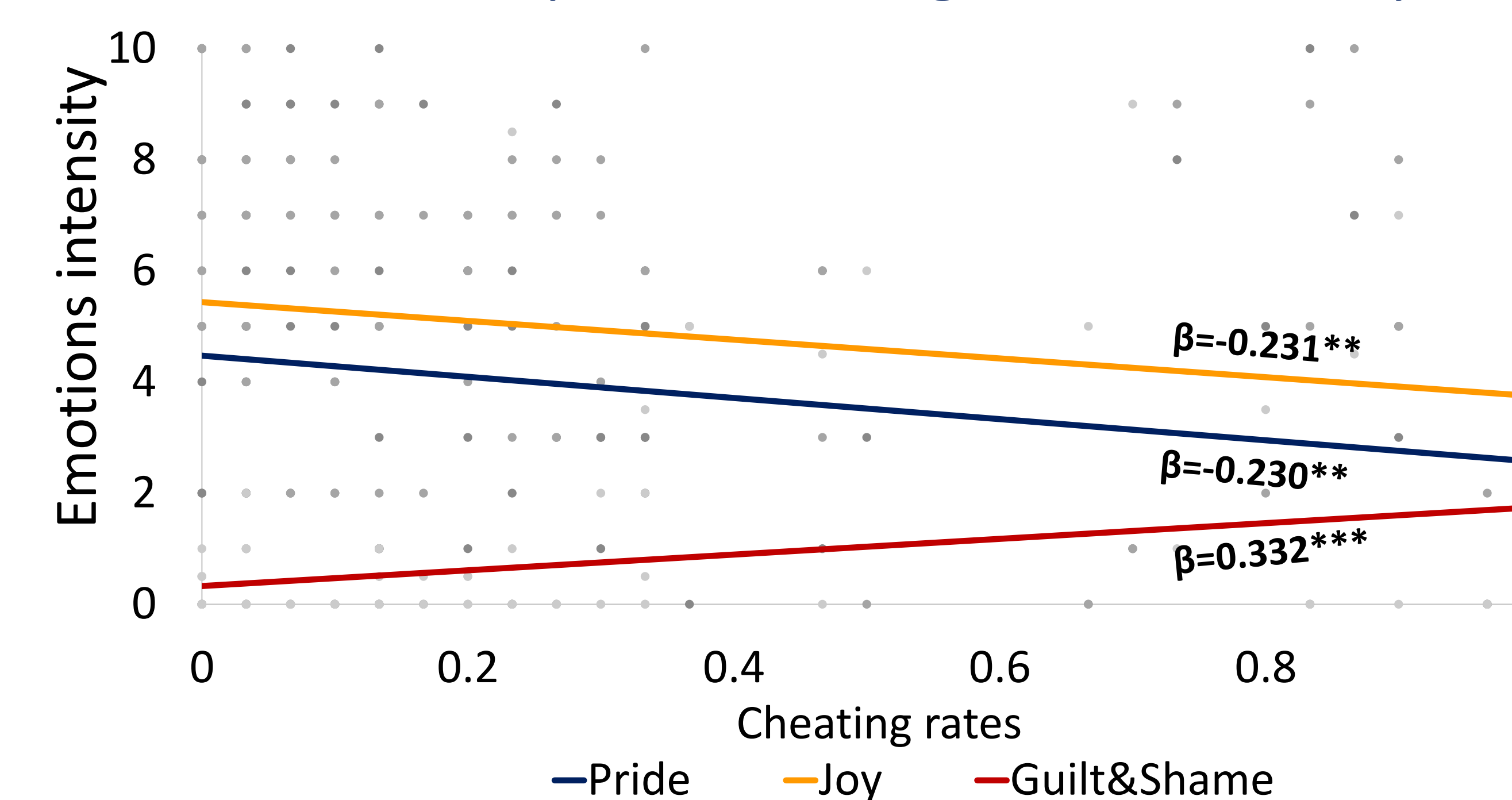
References:

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Emotional implications of altruistic dishonesty



Emotional implications of egoistic dishonesty



Discussion

These findings contribute to the behavioral ethics literature by extending our understanding of the emotional implications following different types of dishonest behavior (altruistic vs. egoistic), and by highlighting the understudied role of distinct positive emotions in dishonest behavior. The significant relation between altruistic dishonesty and pride, an emotion associated with pursuing broad social goals even when they conflict with self-interest, provides a possible explanation for the high rates of altruistic dishonest behaviors while maintaining a clear conscience.

Zoom meeting link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88577156616>