A Bad Taste in the Mouth: Gustatory Disgust Influences on Moral Judgement


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ABSTRACT

Researchers analyzed the effect of gustatory disgust on moral judgment. Participants were randomly assigned into three groups: bitter, sweet, and control which corresponded with the beverage they drank. A survey was then given to determine the effects of taste and political affiliation had on judgement of morality. The results showed that gustatory disgust and political affiliation had no significant effect on moral judgement.

INTRODUCTION

This study is a CREP study a research group at BYU-Idaho is replicating that was originally done by Eskine, Kacinik, and Prinz. The original study focused on disgust, moral judgment, and political affiliation (2011). One of the leading reasons behind Eskine’s study was the theory that our senses have an effect on the way we administer morality (Hume, 1772/2004). Eskine identified that tastes such as disgust had not yet been researched as to its effects on morality. Previous research has shown that the same physiological responses are activated when smelling something disgusting as when experiencing something as morally disgusting. (Chapman, Kim, Susskind, & Anderson, 2009) This lead to Eksine’s hypothesis that the oral origins of moral disgust. (Chapman, Kacinik, & Prinz, 2011). Contrary to the findings of this study, the researchers did not find that moral judgments were significantly affected by taste. The mean scores determining moral judgment did not vary greatly between participants in the sweet, bitter, and control conditions.

METHODS

Participants

The researchers collected a convenience sample of 60 psychology students from the psychology volunteer database list by email. These students received course credit or extra credit for their participation. All participants were entered into a drawing for a chance to receive one of three $10 gift cards or one $20 gift card. A random generator was used to assign them to one of the three beverages.

Materials

Sweet: Minute Maid Berry Punch Bitter: Swedish Bitters Control: Water

Procedure

Emails were sent out for volunteers. The volunteering students were randomly assigned one of the three beverages, 25 received the bitter tasting beverage, 25 received the sweet tasting beverage, and 21 received the neutral tasting beverage. Those in the bitter condition received an average score of 78.4, and those in the neutral condition had an average score of 71.9. A one-way between subjects ANOVA showed that the level of moral harshness did not significantly vary by the taste of the beverage the participants consumed (F(2, 61) = 1.601, p > 0.210). A between-subjects two-way ANOVA showed no significant main effect of the taste of the beverage or political affiliation, p > 0.05.

RESULTS

Out of a total of 64 participants, 18 received the bitter tasting beverage, 25 received the sweet tasting beverage, and 21 received the neutral tasting beverage. Those in the bitter condition had an average judgement score of 78.2, those in the sweet condition had an average score of 78.4, and those in the neutral condition had an average score of 71.9. A one-way between subjects ANOVA showed that the level of moral harshness did not significantly vary by the taste of the beverage the participants consumed (F(2, 61) = 1.601, p > 0.210). A between-subjects two-way ANOVA showed no significant main effect of the taste of the beverage or political affiliation, p > 0.05.

DISCUSSION

Eskine’s original study sought to understand the effect taste and political party had on administering moral judgement (Eskine, Kacinik, & Prinz, 2011). Contrary to the findings of this study, the researchers did not find that moral judgments were significantly affected by taste. The mean scores determining moral judgment did not vary greatly between participants in the sweet, bitter, and control conditions.

There were several limitations in this replication. First, the language distractor activity was not included as it was in the original study, but rather the participant’s name and the professor name at the beginning of each session in order for them to receive credit. Each participant was then randomly assigned one of the three beverages. After reading and signing the consent form the researchers told them the study was about the effects of arm/hand movement on cognitive processing. They were then directed to drink the beverage and then proceed to read three vignettes and record their moral judgments accordingly. When finished the researcher had participants drink another dose of the beverage and continue reading the last three vignettes and finish recording their judgments. A sheet for participants to provide demographic and political information was then filled out by the participant. The researcher would then conclude the session by explaining to them the real purpose of the study (how taste would affect moral judgement) and excuse the participant.

REFERENCES


No significant main effect of the presence or absence of the language distractor task, p > 0.05.