



Examining Morality Dominance in Spontaneous Impressions via a Trait Generation Task

Tai'Mir Mitchell, Paige Landreneau, Irmak Olcaysoy Okten

Florida State University



Abstract

Previous research suggests that morality-related information we gather about other people dominates our global impressions of them. This study sought to examine this morality dominance perspective on impressions via a spontaneous trait generation task. In an online Qualtrics survey, we asked participants (N=151) to generate three positive and three negative traits that make them want to or not want to know someone. Our analysis was guided by coding the different traits that participants listed in the survey, then composed them into three subcategories (morality/warmth, competence, and emotion). The results confirmed the findings of previous research, that people tend to consider morality-related information (both positive and negative) more than competency and emotionality when formulating first impressions. Positive traits of competence were listed more frequently than negative traits of competence, also confirming past findings on the higher perceived diagnosticity of the former. This pattern was independent of participants' general trust in their first impressions. Further research can examine whether people rely on their morality perceptions when they act toward other people and explore the boundary conditions of morality dominance in first impressions such as potential gender differences.

Methods

Participants

- Age: $M = 39.79$, $SD = 14.20$
- Gender: 106 female participants, 42 male participants, 3 non-binary/other participants
- A total of 151 participants

Procedure

- Using Qualtrics, constructed a survey with various measures and then distributed it using Prolific Academic; a platform that helps researchers recruit participants for their online research.
- Participants received \$8/hourly in relation to the time they spent taking the survey.
- Before taking the survey, participants were asked to complete an informed consent form for the project to confirm their consent.
- Participants' demographic data (i.e., age, gender, nationality) were also collected.

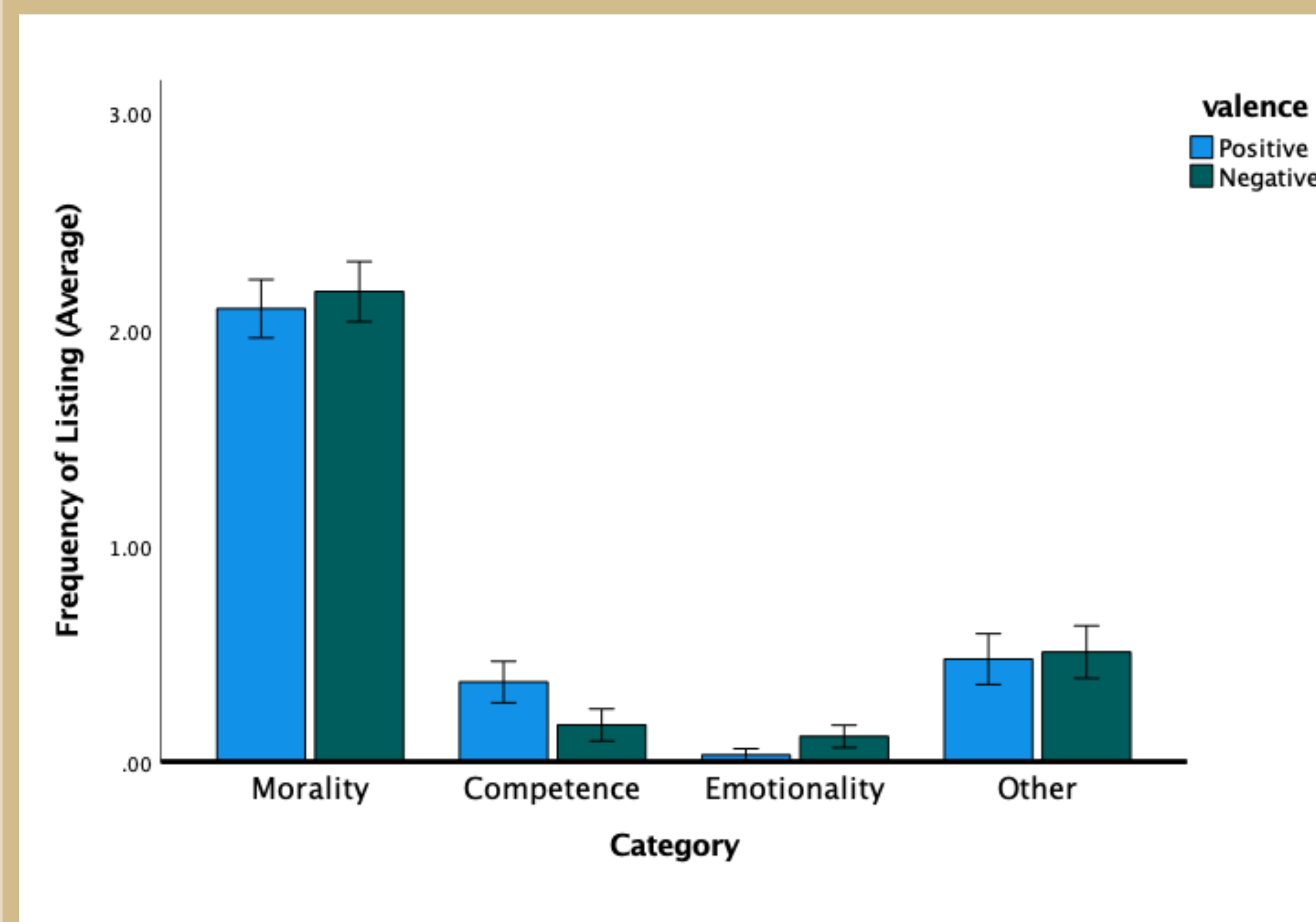
Materials

- To measure trust in first impressions we utilize a seven-point Likert scale (1 - strongly disagree; 7- strongly agree) ¹
- I trust my first impression, My impressions are accurate, My impressions are trustworthy, I believe in my impressions, My impressions are inaccurate (reversed), My impressions aren't trustworthy (reversed)
- Open-response questions were used to encourage participants to come up with different traits they deem important
- What are traits that make you want to not get to know someone?
- What are traits that make you want to get to know someone more?

Results

•Analysis:

- Literature reviews used to identify sub-categories of traits that participants came up with.
- Goodwin, G. P., Piazza, J., & Rozin, P. (2014)
- Utilized Excel software to code data and SPSS to run analyses.
- Identified and sub-categorized participants' traits
- positive (morality/warmth, competence, emotion) and negative (morality/warmth, competence, emotion) also coded for other positive and other negative.



NOTE. Frequency of Listing (Average) refers to the average number of traits that participants come up with for each category.

• A 2 (valence) x 4 (category) repeated measures ANOVA

- A strong main effect of category: $F(3, 450) = 390.54$, $p < .001$. Morality > Other > Competence > Emotionality
- A significant interaction between category and valence: $F(3, 450) = 3.58$, $p = .014$. positive competence > negative competence; negative emotionality > positive emotionality. No valence difference for morality or other.

•Correlations:

- A significant correlation between positive morality and negative morality, $r(150) = .33$, $p < .001$.
- Participants' level of trust in first impressions did not relate to the type of category they listed.

Discussion

Implication:

- Consistent with past findings on morality dominance ², people listed morality-related traits the most when formulating first impressions.
- When forming a first impression it can be perceived that we often only seek out one trait in particular, or that we view various traits in relation to each other. ³
- However, results did show a significant difference in morality traits (positive and negative) compared to all other types of traits.
- Also consistent with past literature, people listed more positive than negative competence traits as being important when formulating first impressions. ^{4, 5}

Limitation:

- The challenges of categorizing traits ("other" category)
- Researcher bias in categorizing traits (inter-coder reliability was achieved but can be improved)

Future Research:

- People report that they value morality traits the most. Future research can check whether they pay attention to and rely on morality-related traits the most in actuality when they form first impressions and during their continued interactions with others .

References

1. Vorauer, J. D. (2011). Do You See What I See? Antecedents, Consequences, and Remedies for Biased Metacognition in Close Relationships. In *Social Metacognition* (pp. 263–283). Taylor & Francis Group.
2. Goodwin, G. P., Piazza, J., & Rozin, P. (2014). Moral character predominates in person perception and evaluation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology.*, *106*(1), 148–168. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0034726>
3. Asch, S. E. (1946). Forming impressions of personality. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology.*, *41*(3), 258–290. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0055756>
4. Quinn, K. (2009). Review Of First Impressions. *Canadian Psychology : Psychologie Canadienne.*, *50*(4), 299–301. <https://doi.org/10.1037/A0016982>
5. Skowronski, J. J., & Carlston, D. E. (1989). Negativity and extremity biases in impression formation: A review of explanations. *Psychological Bulletin.*, *105*(1), 131–142. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.105.1.131>