

## INTRODUCTION

Signaling theory makes predictions about how individuals use signals, such as facial expressions, to reliably convey hidden traits that lead to mutually beneficial outcomes.<sup>1</sup> Certain facial expressions elicit prosocial emotions. For example, perceiving an individual with a smile may evoke feelings of trust.<sup>2</sup> Violations of facial expression expectations, such as betrayal by a smiling individual, may result in greater negative perceptions than when expressions align with expectations.<sup>3</sup>

## CURRENT RESEARCH

We sought to investigate whether facial expressions impacted one's perception of trustworthiness in addition to whether violations of facial expression expectations lead to increased negative responses.

**H1.** Individuals who perceive a smiling facial expression will elicit greater amounts of trust than those perceiving a neutral facial expression.

**H2.** Individuals betrayed by a partner with a smiling expression will increase negative responses.

## METHODS

**Participants:** N=500, Prolific workers, percent female/male, add standard deviation for age

### Procedures

Randomly assigned to 1 of 2 conditions: partner with smiling face or partner with neutral face.

**Trust Game<sup>4</sup>:** Participants could send money to their partners; transfers would grow by 4x; partners could return any amount to the participant. **Partners (confederates) returned nothing.**

**Pay to Punish Game<sup>5</sup>:** Participants could spend money to remove money from their partner's account.

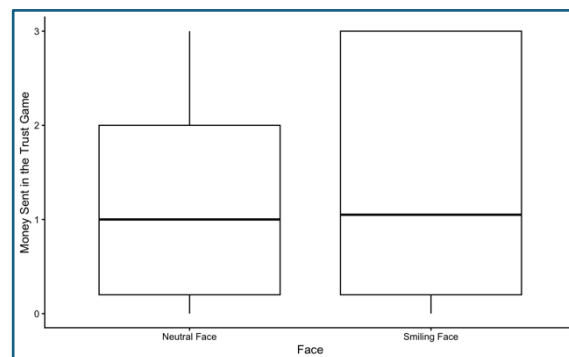
**Survey Measures:** self-reported trustworthiness, propensity to trust<sup>6</sup>, and perceived trustworthiness<sup>7</sup>.

# The Impact of Facial Expressions on Perceived Trustworthiness

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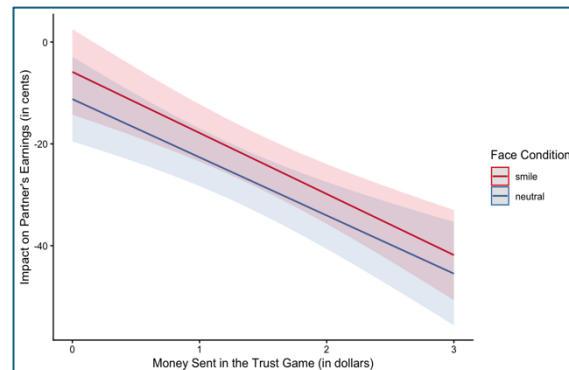
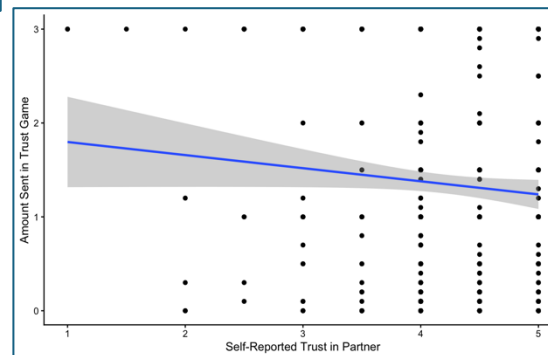
## Results



Facial expression did not impact the amount of money sent in the trust game.



No correlation between self-reported trust and amount of money sent to partner.



Participants inflicted greater punishment as a function of how much money they sent (and lost) in the trust game. Facial expressions did not impact severity of punishment.



## DISCUSSION

Our results reveal that **smiles do not influence responses to unfair behavior.** Although we did not find evidence in support of our hypothesis, results revealed the unsurprising result that **people punish more when they lose more in the Trust Game (for every \$1 lost, they remove \$0.11)**, showing that individuals want to punish unfair treatment even if it comes with a cost to themselves. Considering that Trust Game transfers did not correspond with perceived trustworthiness, it is possible that self-report measures and monetary transfers do not reflect interpersonal trust.

## FUTURE ENDEAVORS

Future research should focus on (1) alternative tasks/games that reveal trust without the involvement of money and (2) identifying confounding variables that influence perceptions of trust.

## REFERENCES

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