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## A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing? : Perceptions of Moral Exemplars Who Commit Moral Violations

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A WOLF IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING? PERCEPTIONS OF MORAL EXEMPLARS  
WHO COMMIT MORAL VIOLATIONS

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## **ABSTRACT**

Do people grant moral exemplars the benefit of the doubt for bad behavior, or hold them to a higher standard than morally average targets? Across 5 studies, we compared evaluations of moral character between exemplars and ‘average Joes’ who either succeeded or failed to act prescriptively or proscriptively. In Studies 1, 2a, and 2b, moral exemplars received similar moral evaluations relative to average Joes after prescriptive failures, indicating that participants do not hold exemplars to higher standards for prosocial acts. In Study 3, participants evaluated exemplars more positively than average targets for proscriptive failures, suggesting that exemplars receive a reputational buffer when they engage in immoral behaviors; however, Study 4 did not replicate this effect. Study 5 further clarified the conflicting findings from Studies 3 and 4, showing that participants evaluate exemplars similarly to average targets for committing immoral acts even when the overall immorality of the act is ambiguous. Interestingly, we also found that participants make distinctions between positive, non-moral evaluations and morally relevant evaluations.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

*“Brett is a brilliant jurist who has faithfully applied the Constitution and laws throughout his 12 years on the D.C. Circuit. He is a fine husband, father, and friend — and a man of the highest integrity.”*

— Former President George W. Bush (Associated Press, 2018, July 9)

*“We all saw something about Judge Kavanaugh’s temperament and character that day that should disqualify him from serving on the Supreme Court of the United States... He was angry. He was belligerent. He was partisan... These are not qualities we look for in a Supreme Court justice, or a judge for that matter.”*

— Senator Mazie Hirono (Stolberg, S. G., 2018, October 1)

Over two years after the Senate confirmed Judge Brett Kavanaugh’s appointment to the Supreme Court, Americans still strongly disagreed on whether the Senate made the right choice (e.g., Jones, 2018, October 3). On the one hand, Kavanaugh spent eight years serving as a judge on the Washington D.C. Court of Appeals—and lay people typically view judges as one variant of moral exemplar, insofar as they seem wise, conscientious, open to experience, honest, fair, and principled (Walker & Hennig, 2004). On the other hand, Kavanaugh stands accused of sexually assaulting multiple women throughout his high school and college career (Jones, 2018, October 3), an allegation that calls into question both his moral character and his fitness as a judge. Lawmakers and citizens alike disagreed on how to interpret Kavanaugh’s behavior during the confirmation hearing—including angry, pugnacious responses to Democratic senators’

questions. Is Kavanaugh a good man and a good judge expressing righteous fury against unfair accusations, or is he a bad man with an explosive temper who lacks the necessary disposition to sit on the Supreme Court? The answer may lie in the eye of the beholder. Accordingly, this work examines how lay people perceive moral exemplars who engage in condemnatory versus laudatory behavior.

People typically perceive moral exemplars as agreeable, warm, conscientious people who embody the moral foundations of fairness, care, and purity above all else (Frimer et al., 2013; Walker, 1999). People who encounter moral exemplars frequently experience *moral elevation*, a warm feeling of awe, that encourages them to behave more morally (Han, Kim, Jeong, & Cohen, 2017; Oliver, Ash, and Woolley, 2012; Pohling & Diessner, 2016; Thomson & Siegel, 2013).<sup>1</sup> However, sometimes unethical behavior overturns morally exceptional status. For example, Bill Cosby was widely considered ‘America’s Dad’ before allegations of his sexual misconduct became widely known, and now the public regards him as a pariah (Francescani, & Fisher, 2019, August 19). Similarly, Lance Armstrong was widely respected for winning the Tour de France after his courageous comeback from cancer, until it was revealed that he heavily utilized illegal stimulants to win (e.g., Fotheringham, 2015, March 8).

In the case of Kavanaugh, his alleged misconduct appears important enough to persuade many people (e.g., Senator Mazie Hirono) that he was never an exemplar after all. Yet, for others, such as George W. Bush, reports of Kavanaugh’s ethically questionable behavior lacked credibility when weighed against prior character information, leaving Kavanaugh’s status as an

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<sup>1</sup>Unless there is a direct comparison between the exemplar and their own behavior, which can be threatening (Bolderdijk, Brouwer, & Cornelissen, 2018; Cramwinckel, van Dijk, Scheepers, & van den Bos, 2013).

exemplar intact. Thus, it seems important to clarify when and why new information about an exemplar's moral failings alters perceptions of their exceptionality.

At the outset, people can easily establish an initial impression of someone based on their history of morally exceptional or mundane behavior. In fact, prior research shows that moral character dominates when it comes to formulating overall perceptions of others (Goodwin, Piazza, and Rozin, 2014). However, relevant information about others' moral character is not static; people may at times act inconsistently with their own character or past behavior (Fleeson, Furr, Jayawickreme, Meindl, & Helzer, 2014; Meindl, Jayawickreme, Furr, & Fleeson, 2015). Therefore, whereas initial impression formation may be as straightforward as using past behavior to label someone sinner, saint, or somewhere in between, it remains less clear how lay people integrate new information with the original impression. On the one hand, it would be unwise to abandon a longtime trustworthy ally and friend over a small infraction; indeed lay people often appear reluctant to reduce their opinion of exemplars following infractions (e.g., Miller & Effron, 2010).

Yet, it would be unwise to never update an initial positive impression even as an actor becomes increasingly exploitative. Consider someone like Cosby or Kavanaugh: what kind of moral failings are sufficiently powerful or persuasive enough to change perceptions of someone from an exemplar to a pariah? We suggest that people may be motivated to excuse or explain away occasional minor infractions by exemplars—i.e., offer them moral credentials—but this tendency may have limits: perceptions of a moral exemplar may change if the exemplar consistently fails to act prosocially, engages in morally hypocritical behavior, or commits extreme moral violations. We present five studies examining this possibility.

## 1.1 Moral Exemplars

Some of the earliest systematic efforts to define a moral exemplar can be traced back to the philosophers of ancient Greece. Plato proposed the philosopher king, an ideal leader who is both highly virtuous and well-educated in politics, as an exemplar that could be trusted to rule with wisdom and love (*Republic*, V, 473c). Aristotle's ideal of the truly virtuous person, an individual whose passions and reason have harmonized, and who has thereby developed the habit of behaving in accordance with all the virtues, provides a classic virtue ethics framework for moral exceptionality (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 2).

Philosophers still argue about how to define a moral exemplar, although now psychologists have joined the fray. Kohlberg (1981, 1984) argued that moral excellence stems from moral reasoning, an assertion consistent with the rationalistic traditions popularized by post-Enlightenment moral philosophers such as Mill and Kant. However, subsequent work suggests that moral reasoning alone cannot account for moral behavior (Blasi, 1980), pointing the way towards a host of work suggesting that people's moral self-concepts motivate them to engage in prosocial and refrain for antisocial behavior (e.g., Blasi, 1993; Bergman, 2002; Reed & Aquino, 2003; Hardy & Carlo, 2005; Conway, 2018).

Modern work on moral exceptionality has primarily focused on one of two personality-based approaches: domain-general and domain-specific moral exceptionality (Matsuba & Walker, 2005; Walker & Hennig, 2004). The domain-general approach stems from Aristotelian virtue ethics and focuses on the traits and motivational structure unique to moral exemplars as a monolithic group. In this case, researchers often designate a participant as an exemplar if they have received prestigious awards (e.g., The Caring Canadian Award, Medal of Bravery) for heroic or compassionate behaviors (Frimer et al., 2011; Walker & Frimer, 2007). Research in

this vein indicates that, in general, moral exemplars are individuals whose moral behaviors result from enlightened self-interest, wherein self-focused agentic motivations (e.g., generating fame for themselves) act in service of other-oriented communion motivations (e.g., drawing attention to an important cause, Frimer et al., 2011; Frimer, Walker, Lee, Riches, & Dunlop, 2012; Walker, 2013).

However, moral exceptionality can often be domain-specific, such that the motivational structure and personality traits of a moral exemplar differ based on whether they exemplify compassion, fairness, or bravery (Dunlop & Walker, 2013; Dunlop, Walker, & Matsuba, 2012; Walker & Hennig, 2004). Moreover, lay conceptions of moral exceptionality often make meaningful distinctions between different kinds of moral exemplars, even to point of identifying disparate prototypical personality profiles for just, brave, and caring exemplars (Walker & Hennig, 2004). As such, the second approach focuses on identifying the unique pattern of traits that emerge for different kinds of exemplars.

For the purposes of the current work, we define moral exemplars as individuals with a record of consistently engaging in supererogatory moral behaviors and no clear prior record of moral infractions—in other words, people with a track record of consistent excellence in aiding and supporting others and avoiding harm. With this definition in mind, we used the types of behaviors cited in modern moral exceptionality research to construct vignettes for our studies.

## **1.2 Perceptions of Moral Exemplars**

In both the domain-general and domain-specific approaches, researchers have explored lay perceptions of moral exemplars. When examining moral exceptionality through the lens of lay perceptions, moral exemplars are defined as individuals that laypeople themselves identify as morally exceptional. This approach has utilized both laypeople and expert nominations of real-

life morally exceptional actors, as well as participant-generated profiles of what they think moral exemplars are like (Colby & Damon, 1992; Matsuba & Walker, 2005; Walker & Hennig, 2004; Walker, 1999). When defining moral exemplars this way, participants' perceptions of exemplars largely align with work from other moral exceptionality research.

Consistent with work demonstrating that moral exemplars report both high agency and communion motives relative to the average person, Walker and Pitts (1998) found that laypeople's conceptualization of the prototypical moral exemplar also heavily incorporates perceptions of heightened agency and communion motives (Walker & Frimer, 2007; Walker & Matsuba, 2005). Additionally, laypeople generally perceive moral exemplars as highly conscientious and agreeable, though they make distinctions between just, brave, and caring exemplars with respect to their average levels of these traits.

### **1.3 The Role of Moral Traits in Person Perception**

People typically appeal to dispositional rather than situational factors to explain others' behaviors (Bassili, 1989; Gawronski, 2003; Gilbert, 1989; Lammers, Gast, Unkelbach, & Galinsky, 2018; Ross, 1977; Winter & Uleman, 1984). That said, compared to other kinds of dispositional information, moral character information plays the most pivotal role in global evaluations both for the purposes of initial assessment and reassessment (Goodwin, 2015; Goodwin & Piazza, 2014). People pay more attention to moral character information, identify moral character as more important than other characteristics for accurate impression formation, and actively seek out moral character information when asked to form impressions of others (Brambilla, Rusconi, Sacchi, & Cherubini, 2011; De Bruin & Van Lange, 2000; Goodwin, Piazza, & Rozin, 2014; Hartley et al., 2016; Judd, James-Hawkins, Yzerbyt, & Kashima, 2005).

As such, people's evaluations of others—both negative and positive—originate in large part from perceptions of the targets' moral character.

#### **1.4 Moral Character Information May Provide Moral Credentials**

Moral character is paramount in person perception (e.g., Strohminger & Nichols, 2014; Brambilla & Leech, 2014; Goodwin et al, 2014). Hence, people appear to care deeply about others' moral character in part because others' moral character provides a guide toward how well that person will treat them and others in the future (Tannenbaum & Pizarro, 2012). From an evolutionary perspective, trusting others can be adaptive because it allows for maximizing collaborative potential in social relationships, which enables both parties to benefit from treating one another well. Social dilemma work models this principle elegantly; in the trust game, for example, players can be vulnerable to exploitation by unscrupulous partners, but stand to gain considerably from faithful ones (e.g., Gintis et al., 2003; Krebs, 2008). Hence, attending to moral character information enables people to wisely select interaction partners worth trusting.

Given the utility of trusting morally exceptional social partners, people may license exemplars for moral transgressions based on their otherwise exceptional moral credentials. *Moral credentials*—evidence of moral motives—can be accrued by engaging in prosocial behavior, or by simply being considered a moral exemplar. In either case, moral credentials provide a psychological license to behave in a morally ambiguous manner, as perceivers assume moral motives underlie otherwise morally questionable behavior (Miller & Effron, 2010; Effron & Conway, 2015).

These credentials act as a preponderance of evidence for moral exemplars' character, potentially leading people to interpret an exemplar's bad behavior through the lens of their moral credentials. After all, the motivation behind others' prosocial behavior can be ambiguous. People



can engage in prosociality out of genuine concern for others (Batson & Powell, 2003; Colby & Damon, 1992, 1995), but people also have myriad other motives, such as reaping the benefits of a moral reputation (e.g., Alexander, 1989; Aquino & Reed, 2002; Gintis et al., 2003; Sperber & Baumard, 2012). Therefore, identifying someone as a moral exemplar provides invaluable information about their likely motives while also giving them a buffer against condemnation for questionable behavior. In other words, moral deeds appear to buy one some benefit of the doubt in the face of subsequent misdeeds.

Presumably, then, the scope of deeds and misdeeds matters—a single instance of jaywalking should not wipe out the credentials from a lifetime of ethical action, nor should donating a single dollar wipe out the approbation of grand larceny. Accordingly, when considering typical moral exemplars—people who support their community and treat others with kindness—we predict that rare, mild to moderate moral failings may provide insufficient evidence to contradict the moral character information revealed by the exemplar’s history of prosociality. In other words, moral exemplars may ‘get away’ with minor misdeeds in the eyes of perceivers, as people assume the actor must have a reasonable motive for such out of character behavior. Such a bias would be helpful in maintaining trust and fruitful alliances even in the face of occasionally questionable behavior from a social partner.

### **1.5 Egregious Violations May Reveal a Supposed-Exemplar as a Hypocrite**

However, trusting someone requires vulnerability, which puts one at high risk of exploitation if a social partner turns out to be untrustworthy. This may explain why people react negatively to secretly selfish people masquerading as moral exemplars: such people may lull unsuspecting social partners into a false sense of security, only to exploit them at their most vulnerable. Avoiding such costly situations requires sensitivity to moral hypocrisy. Moral

hypocrites either verbally or behaviorally claim to be moral people, but do so for non-moral and disingenuous reasons, thereby gaining the social benefits of behaving morally while circumventing the costs of moral behavior. Moral hypocrisy often includes behavioral inconsistency (e.g., preaching charity while never donating goods or money to the needy), but does not require it (e.g., claiming to donate to charity purely for moral reasons, even if the donation was entirely motivated by reputational benefit) (Batson, Thompson, Seuferling, Whitney, & Strongman, 1999; Batson, Thompson, & Chen, 2002; Graham, Meindl, Koleva, Iyer, & Johnson, 2015; Monin & Merritt, 2012).<sup>2</sup> Consequently, moral hypocrisy cannot always be easily discriminated from morally motivated behaviors, leading people to trust untrustworthy social partners and leaving themselves open to exploitation.

Sufficiently egregious or repeated infractions may overturn perceived exemplarity if such moral failings are sufficiently powerful or important enough to warrant reinterpretation of the person's motives. In a reversal of moral credentials, information about an exemplar's immoral actions may lead people to reinterpret the exemplars' past moral strivings as motivated by selfish factors instead of genuine concern for others. In other words, a revelation of past moral failings may suggest the ostensible exemplar, was in fact, *never an exemplar to begin with*. If so, attempts to present themselves as a moral exemplar appear disingenuous and Machiavellian—i.e., evidence of moral hypocrisy, where a person violates the moral standards they preach (Miller & Effron, 2010).

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<sup>2</sup> Moral hypocrisy here specifically refers to moral duplicity, the most common operationalization of moral hypocrisy, and excludes less common operationalizations such as a moral double-standard or moral weakness (Graham et al., 2015). Moral duplicity is inherently interpersonal and does not require reference to the self, unlike the moral double-standard and moral weakness perspectives. Given that this project focuses on perceptions of a target without reference to the judge's moral character, moral duplicity is the most appropriate form of moral hypocrisy for use in these studies.

We theorize at least three different ways such information could become powerful enough to overturn previous status as an exemplar: evidence of repeated moderate moral infractions, suggesting ongoing motivations inconsistent with moral exemplarity (e.g., cheating on one's partner repeatedly), a single powerful infraction suggesting motivations grossly at odds with exemplarity (e.g., murder), or engagement in moral hypocrisy where they violate the exact moral rules they publicly preach that others practice (Monin & Merrit, 2012), suggesting their moral piety is nothing but an empty, selfish front. Each of these factors may be sufficiently powerful to overturn perceived exemplarity, leading to particular approbation of exemplars (versus ordinary actors) who engage in moral infractions.

Research indicates that people strongly dislike those they perceive to be hypocrites, perceiving them as deserving of punishment, experiencing *schadenfreude* toward them, and doling out worse punishments for hypocrites than for non-hypocrites who committed similar transgressions (Barden, Rucker, & Petty, 2005; Laurent, Clark, Walker, & Wiseman, 2014; Smith, Powell, Combs, & Schurtz, 2009; Tedeschi, Schlenkier, & Bonoma, 1971). Consequently, the introduction of moral hypocrisy into an otherwise positive set of moral character traits may have a meaningful impact on people's perceptions of a target's character. Perceptions of moral hypocrisy depend upon two factors: domain-specificity and perceived ambiguity of a moral transgression (Effron & Monin, 2010). Engaging in a domain-general transgression (e.g., stealing while publicly upholding the virtue of compassion) is less likely to result in perceptions of hypocrisy than engaging in a domain-specific transgression (e.g., lying while publicly upholding the virtue of honesty).

Similarly, clear moral transgressions, such as stealing from a homeless person or kicking a puppy, are more likely to elicit perceptions of hypocrisy than ambiguous transgressions. Judges

are more willing to morally license ambiguous transgressions for targets with moral credentials, such as moral exemplars (Effron & Monin, 2010; Merritt, Effron, & Monin, 2010). Moral credentials demonstrate that the target has proven their moral character, and consequently any ambiguous transgression is perceived through the lens of those credentials. For example, if a moral exemplar engages in price-gouging in the aftermath of a hurricane, then the perceiver may reinterpret this behavior as the result of benign motivations—perhaps the exemplar is conforming to a social norm or is simply ignorant of the illegality of price-gouging.

The second mechanism potentially driving changes in character evaluation, transgression severity, can be simply defined as the extremity of an immoral behavior. For example, most people would agree that murdering a choir boy is morally worse than stealing from the offering plate. Transgression severity should cause changes in perceptions of moral exemplars by eliminating ambiguity, prompting participants to judge the target's character in the context of their behavior rather than judging the behavior in the context of the target's moral credentials. An exemplar may have an excuse for stealing from the offering plate, such as feeding a hungry child on the church stoop, but is unlikely to produce a reasonable explanation for murdering the choir boy.

Finally, an emerging pattern of repeated transgressions may gradually chip away at a moral exemplar's reputation by calling their motives into question. Parking illegally in a handicapped spot once may be interpreted as an error, an uncharacteristic lapse in judgment, or perhaps even a justified course of action, depending on the circumstances. However, making a habit of illegally using handicapped spots strains credulity. After all, why would a morally exceptional person consistently engage in behavior that deprives others of necessary resources?

In sum, people may view ostensible exemplars as morally superior to ordinary people even after occasional modest moral infractions. Occasional minor infractions do not outweigh an exemplar's cumulative good deeds or the inference that a well-intentioned person must have had an acceptable reason for their moral shortcoming. However, when a supposed exemplar engages in repeated infractions, major infractions, or hypocrisy, they may not only lose perceived moral status but end up appearing morally inferior to ordinary people (Effron, 2012). Importantly, people may disagree over interpretation of how powerful or persuasive a given set of new information is when they have motivations to continue viewing the exemplar as morally exceptional or not, though this point requires further empirical clarification (Bruckmüller & Methner, 2018). Hence, partisan beliefs in the case of Kavanaugh may influence how credible or persuasive the evidence against him is, thereby leading to disagreement over whether he remains an exemplar or not.

In addition to testing the impact of different kinds of moral failures on people's perceptions of moral exemplars, we opted to test two of these mechanisms—major infractions and hypocrisy—over the course of five experimental studies.

### **1.6 Current Work**

We expected that, in the absence of an extreme transgression or domain-specific moral hypocrisy, moral exemplars would receive a reputational buffer whenever they act immorally. These results would align well with prior work on moral credentials, which suggests that morally average people can engage in immoral behavior with little reputational blowback once they have successfully established their positive moral character (Effron & Monin, 2010; Merritt, Effron, & Monin, 2010). For prosocial behaviors, we hypothesized that moral exemplars may be judged more harshly than average targets; given the supererogatory nature of prosocial behaviors, they

tend to carry less weight in people's character evaluations (Janoff-Bulman, Sheikh, Hepp, 2009). However, considering moral exemplars' unique status, participation in prosocial behaviors may be expected of them rather than truly optional, resulting in negative evaluations for exemplars that violate that expectation.

In Study 1, we examined how participants' evaluations of moral exemplars changed depending on the exemplars' success or failure to act prosocially. We manipulated whether participants evaluated a morally average or morally exceptional target, and whether that target failed or succeeded acting prosocially; afterward, we measured participants' evaluations of the targets' morality and freedom of action. We hypothesized that participants would evaluate exemplars more harshly than morally average targets for failing to act prosocially. Whereas people typically judge others less harshly for failing to act prosocially (Janoff-Bulman et al., 2009), we expected that exemplars may be an exception to that rule as a result of their unique moral status; people *expect* that exemplars will act prosocially, and may therefore judge them more harshly when they fall short of these expectations.

In Studies 2a and 2b, we expanded upon this work by examining domain-general moral hypocrisy as a potential underlying mechanism driving participants' judgments. We measured people's perceptions of moral exemplars' morality, freedom of action, and moral hypocrisy in the face of prosocial failure using a sample of Florida State University psychology students and a broader sample of Florida State University undergraduates from across a variety of majors, respectively. As in Study 1, Studies 2a and 2b manipulated whether participants evaluated a morally average or morally exceptional target, and whether that target succeeded or failed to act prosocially. We hypothesized that participants would rate moral exemplars as more hypocritical than average targets after failing to act prosocially. Again, we anticipated that exemplars may be

treated as an exception to the rule, such that participants would perceive a failure to act prosocially as hypocritical given the exemplars' unique moral status.

In Study 3, we expanded by exploring how both immoral behavior and prosocial failures impact participants' perceptions of moral exemplars. We ran a  $2 \times 2 \times 2$  design, wherein we manipulated whether participants evaluated amorally average or morally exceptional target, whether the target encountered an opportunity to behave prosocially or abstain from immoral behavior, and finally, whether the targets succeeded or failed morally. We measured participants' evaluations of the targets' perceived morality and freedom of action. Based on the moral credentials literature, we hypothesized that moral exemplars would receive more lenient evaluations compared to control targets after committing a moral violation.

Study 4 focused on how extremity of immoral behavior impacted participants' perceptions of moral exemplars. In this study, we manipulated whether participants evaluated a morally average or morally exceptional target, and whether the target committed a moderate or extreme moral violation. We measured participants' perceptions of targets' perceived morality, freedom of action, and moral hypocrisy. We hypothesized that participants would judge exemplars more harshly than average targets for an extreme moral violation. An extreme violation makes it more difficult for participants to reasonably grant exemplars the benefit of the doubt, thereby recontextualizing the longstanding exemplars' character information in the context of a heinous act.

Finally, Study 5 examined the role of ambiguity in altering participants' perceptions of moral exemplars. More specifically, we hypothesized that participants would evaluate moral exemplars more charitably than the average person when the circumstances surrounding their moral transgression were murkier. We manipulated whether participants evaluated a morally

average or morally exceptional target in the midst of committing a moral transgression. In addition, we also manipulated violation ambiguity by describing some violations in the context of external social pressures (i.e., high ambiguity).



## CHAPTER 2

### STUDY 1

In Study 1, we examined whether participants judged moral exemplars more harshly than the average person for neglecting an opportunity to behave prosocially—i.e., failing to uphold moral prescriptions. Prescriptions entail rising above inaction to actively help others and facilitating positive moral outcomes, also described as supererogatory moral behaviors (e.g., donating money to charity, volunteering). In contrast, proscriptions entail failing to remain neutral, and actively interceding to inflict harm or suffering on another person, producing negative moral outcomes (e.g., avoid stealing, kicking puppies, lying; Janoff-Bulman & Carnes, 2013; Janoff-Bulman, 2011; Janoff-Bulman et al., 2009).

People typically identify proscriptions as more obligatory and informative about a person's character than prescriptions. For example, prior research has demonstrated that the average person suffers little reputational damage after failing to act in line with moral prescriptions; this contrasts sharply with moral proscriptions, which result in severe reputational damage when people fail to adhere to them (Janoff-Bulman et al., 2009). However, given moral exemplars' unique status, people may hold them to higher moral standards than morally ordinary actors. If so, then perceptions of exemplars may essentially transform supererogatory behaviors into requirements for the morally exceptional. We hypothesized that participants would judge exemplars as less moral than average targets for prescriptive failures because people hold moral exemplars to higher moral standards.

## 2.1 Method

### 2.1.1 Participants

An a priori power analysis for the hypothesized interaction between target type and moral outcome indicated that we would have power = .80 to detect a  $\Delta R^2 = .03$  if we collected data from 220 participants. Based on this analysis, we recruited 250 American participants via Amazon Mechanical Turk. We excluded eight participants for failing the attention check and two participants who failed to complete the dependent measures, resulting in a final sample of  $N = 244$  (104 women, 133 men, 7 unspecified;  $M_{\text{age}} = 34.19$ ; 79.8% white, 7.0% Black or African American, 2.1% Hispanic or Latinx, 10.3% Asian American, 1.6% American Indian or Native American)<sup>3</sup>. The study took approximately five minutes to complete, and participants received \$0.40.

### 2.1.2 Procedure

We presented participants with vignettes of an ostensible news story and asked them to rate the characters in the story. The vignette described the Thompsons, a married couple running a successful motel, and their response to an influx of hurricane refugees. Using a 2×2 between-subjects design, we randomly assigned participants to a target type condition, in which the Thompsons were described as morally average (control group) or exceptional (experimental group). We also manipulated the outcome, in which the Thompsons either offered refugees a discount on their rooms (prescriptive moral success) or charged refugees the normal room rate, despite having the opportunity to provide a discount (prescriptive moral failure, see Appendix A). After reading the vignette, participants completed a series of questions assessing their

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<sup>3</sup> Participants could choose multiple racial and ethnic denominations. As such, the percentages for each racial and ethnic group exceeds 100% when totaled.

perceptions of the Thompsons' character, free will, behaviors, as well as an attention check and a demographic questionnaire.

### **2.1.3 Measures**

We anchored all measurements of participants' attitudes toward the Thompsons at 1 (*Strongly agree*) and 7 (*Strongly disagree*). We reverse-scored all attitude measures such that higher scores indicate greater agreement. Participants rated the blameworthiness and praiseworthiness of the Thompsons' actions (*The Thompsons deserve to be praised/blamed for their actions*), their morality (*The Thompsons are moral people*), their behavioral intentionality (*The Thompsons did this on purpose*), and their behavioral control (*The Thompsons had complete control over their actions*). We presented these items on a single page in a set order (see Appendix A).

## **2.2 Results**

Based on high correlations between the praiseworthiness, blameworthiness, and morality measures, we reverse-scored blameworthiness and averaged these items as a composite measure of participants' attitudes toward the Thompsons (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .86$ , see Table 1). Using the composite moral attitudes variable as the dependent variable, we ran a hierarchical regression entering age and gender as predictors in step 1, target type and moral outcome at step 2, and their interaction at step 3 (see Table 2). We found a main effect of outcome, such that participants rated all targets more positively when they prescriptively succeeded, that is, offered a generous hotel discount to hurricane refugees, rather than the usual price. However, we did not find the predicted main effect of target morality or significant interaction.

We ran an additional hierarchical regression examining whether target morality, moral outcome, and their interaction term predicted controllability or intentionality ratings. Given the

**Table 1***Correlations Between All Dependent Variables, Age, and Gender in Study 1*

Dependent Variables	N	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Praiseworthiness	244						
2. Blameworthiness	244	-.59**					
3. Morality	244	.80**	-.65**				
4. Controllability	243	.28**	-.47**	.47**			
5. Intentionality	244	.30**	-.39**	.48**	.81**		
6. Age	237	.06	-.04	.12	.14*	.12	
7. Gender	237	-.06	.02	-.01	-.05	-.02	-.13*

*Note.* All listed p-values are for two-tailed significance tests. \*p < .05, \*\* p < .001

**Table 2***Regression Predicting Perceptions of Target Morality and Free Will Depending on Moral Status and Moral Outcome*

Predictor Variables	Perceptions of Target Morality				Perceptions of Target Free Will			
	$\beta$ 95% CI: [UB, LB]	$\Delta F$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$ 95% CI: [UB, LB]	$\Delta F$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
<b>Step 1</b>		.83	.01			2.33	.02	
Age	.08 [-.01, .04]				.14 [.00, .06]			
Gender	-.02 [-.56, .39]				-.02 [-.67, .48]			
<b>Step 2</b>		5.93**	.06	.05		3.08*	.05	.03
Target Type 0 = Control 1 = Exceptional	-.11 [-.87, .05]				-.16 [-1.3, -.14]			
Moral Outcome 0 = No Discount 1 = Discount	.19 [.22, 1.14]				.01 [-.52, .60]			
<b>Step 3</b>		2.15	.06	.01		.04	.05	.00
Interaction	-.16 [-1.61, .24]				.02 [-1.02, 1.25]			

*Note.* All listed p-values are for two-tailed significance tests. \*p < .05, \*\* p < .001.

strong correlation between controllability and intentionality ( $r = .81, p < .001$ ), we created a composite a measure of perceived free will (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .89$ , see Table 1). Participants perceived control targets as higher in free will than morally exceptional actors (see Table 2). We found no interaction between target type and moral outcome.

### **2.3 Discussion**

This study suggests that people rated all targets who offered a discount to hurricane victims higher in morality than targets who did not, regardless of previous moral actions. Hence, the reputations of morally exceptional targets remained intact even in the face of prescriptive failure to help victims, and moral exemplars did not receive markedly higher moral ratings for prescriptive successes than the average person. However, participants also rated moral exemplars as less intentional and less in control of morally relevant behaviors than the average person, suggesting that people may view moral exemplars' character as an inherent, immutable characteristic rather than an attribute that can be developed over time. Hence, people may view exemplars as beholden to moral actions more than ordinary people, at least when it comes to offering assistance to victims. In other words, they may have rated morally exceptional and control targets who helped similarly, but held higher expectations for exceptional than control targets to act in prosocial ways.

These findings align with prior work showing that people treat moral prescriptions as supererogatory rather than compulsory, and it appears that moral exemplars are no exception (Janoff-Bulman et al., 2009). Hence, people may view helping hurricane victims as optional, such that a mundane failure to help victims may seem less informative than actively causing harm, engaging in hypocrisy, or conducting an egregious moral violation that would challenge the moral standing of the exemplars who failed to act prosocially. That said, prescriptive failures

may result in different kinds of perceptual changes toward exemplars than the ones we measured in this study, such as changes in perceived hypocrisy in the face of domain-general prescriptive failures. In order to replicate and expand upon the findings of Study 1, we tested whether perceptions of exemplar hypocrisy mimic perceptions of their overall morality by manipulating whether exemplars prescriptively succeeded or failed.

## CHAPTER 3

### STUDIES 2A AND 2B

Hypocrisy typically involves a disjunction between one's words and actions in the moral domain—of 'failing to practice what you preach' (e.g., condemning extramarital sex while having an affair, Monin & Merit, 2012). It may be that special status of moral exemplars makes them more susceptible to hypocrisy judgments. People may hold exemplars to higher moral standards than ordinary people, resulting in harsher hypocrisy perceptions even when engaging in domain-general prescriptive failures. If so, then the morally exceptional Thompsons risk looking hypocritical if they fail to engage in morally relevant behavior. Alternatively, a single moral failure may not be sufficiently powerful enough to erase the legacy of moral behavior in the exceptional Thompsons' past. Therefore, Study 2 replicated and expanded upon Study 1 by including a measure of moral hypocrisy.

#### 3.1 Study 2a: Methods

Studies 2a and 2b used identical materials, manipulations, and dependent measures, differing only in sample recruitment.

##### 3.1.1 Participants

A sensitivity analysis for the interaction term predicting moral hypocrisy indicated that we would have power = .80 to detect a  $\Delta R^2 = .07$  if we collected data from 100 participants<sup>4</sup>. We recruited an undergraduate student sample using Florida State University's SONA system. To be eligible for participation, participants needed to be between the ages of 18-65, currently enrolled in a psychology course at FSU, and eligible to receive research credit through SONA. We excluded 39 participants for failing the attention check, resulting in a final sample of  $N = 61$  (47

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<sup>4</sup> Sample size limited by length of semester and availability of SONA credits.



women, 14 men;  $M_{\text{age}} = 19.93$ ; 83.6% white, 8.2% Black or African American, 3.2% Hispanic or Latinx, 6.6% Asian American, and 1.63% Unspecified)<sup>5</sup>. Using G\*Power, a power analysis suggested we achieved power = .97 ( $\alpha = .05$ ) to detect whether each condition, the interaction term, and control variables significantly predicted the outcome variables. The study took approximately five minutes to complete and participants received half a research credit toward an eligible undergraduate psychology course.

### 3.1.2 Procedure

We presented participants with the same vignettes used in Study 1, and again randomly assigned participants into a target type (morally average targets or morally exceptional targets) and moral outcome (moral success or moral failure) condition (see Appendix A). After reading the vignette, participants completed measures assessing their perceptions of the Thompsons' character, free will, behaviors, and moral hypocrisy. Additionally, participants completed an attention check and a demographic questionnaire.

### 3.1.3 Measures

In this and all the following studies, we anchored all measurements of participants' attitudes toward the Thompsons at 1 (*Strongly disagree*) and 7 (*Strongly agree*). As in Study 1, participants rated the blameworthiness and praiseworthiness of the Thompsons' actions (*The Thompsons deserve to be praised/blamed for their actions*), their morality (*The Thompsons are moral people*), their behavioral intentionality (*The Thompsons did this on purpose*), their behavioral control (*The Thompsons had complete control over their actions*). In addition, participants rated the degree to which they perceived the Thompsons to be hypocrites (*The Thompsons are hypocrites*), and the degree to which they perceived the Thompsons' actions to

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<sup>5</sup> Participants could choose multiple racial and ethnic denominations. As such, the percentages for each racial and ethnic group exceeds 100% when totaled.

be hypocritical (*The Thompsons acted hypocritically*) on the same scales. We randomized the order in which participants saw these items (see Appendix A).

## **3.2 Study 2b: Methods**

### **3.2.1 Participants**

An a priori power analysis for the interaction term predicting moral hypocrisy indicated that we would have power = .80 to detect a  $\Delta R^2 = .03$  if we collected data from 220 participants. Based on the power analysis, we aimed to sample 240 participants. Research assistants recruited participants in high foot-traffic areas on Florida State University's campus. Participants could either scan a QR code or use a tablet provided by the research assistant to complete the study. To be eligible for participation, participants needed to be between the ages of 18-65. We excluded 134 participants for either failing the attention check ( $n = 97$ ) or failing to complete at least 80% of the dependent measures ( $n = 37$ ), resulting in a final sample of  $N = 105$  (63 women, 31 men, 2 nonbinary, 9 unspecified;  $M_{\text{age}} = 21.03$ ; 68.6% white, 10.5% Black or African American, 23.8% Hispanic or Latinx, 8.6% Asian American, 1.0% Native American or Alaska Native, and 1.0% Unspecified)<sup>6</sup>. The study took approximately five minutes to complete and participants received a piece of candy as compensation.

## **3.3 Results**

### **3.3.1 Target Morality**

We computed a composite measure of morality using praiseworthiness, reverse-scored blameworthiness, and morality for each sample, as in Study 1.<sup>7</sup> We ran a hierarchical regression

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<sup>6</sup> Participants could choose multiple racial and ethnic denominations. As such, the percentages for each racial and ethnic group exceeds 100% when totaled.

<sup>7</sup> Although blameworthiness correlated less with praiseworthiness and morality in Studies 2a and 2b than in Study 1, the composite measure still exhibited high reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha_a = .81$  and  $\alpha_b = .81$ , see Table 3). We also computed a composite moral hypocrisy measure (Cronbach's  $\alpha_a = .84$  and  $\alpha_b = .90$ ). Given the weak correlations between perceived controllability and intentionality, and the free will composite's low reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha_a = .53$  and  $\alpha_b = .49$ ), we opted to treat intentionality and controllability as separate dependent variables.

on target morality ratings, entering control variables at step 1, target type and moral outcome as predictors at step 2, and their interaction at step 3. As in Study 1, we found a main effect of moral outcome in both Studies 2a and 2b: participants rated targets who offered a discount to refugees as more moral than targets who did not (see Tables 4 and 5). Target type did not significantly predict perceptions of morality, although there was a trend in the expected direction in Study 2a,  $p = .051$ . There was no significant interaction in either study.

### **3.3.2 Target Controllability and Intentionality**

We ran a hierarchical regression on targets' perceived ability to control their actions and the intentionality of their behavior, respectively, entering control variables at step 1, target type and moral outcome as predictors at step 2, and their interaction at step 3. In both Studies 2a and 2b, we found no significant effect of target type, moral outcome, or the interaction term on either controllability or intentionality (see Tables 4 and 5).

### **3.3.3 Target Hypocrisy**

We ran a similar hierarchical regression on moral hypocrisy. There was a significant main effect of moral outcome: Participants rated targets who offered a discount to refugees as less hypocritical than targets who did not (see Table 4). However, we found no main effect of target type, and no significant interaction. Inconsistent with hypotheses, these findings suggest no effect of moral character manipulations on perceptions of hypocrisy or moral expectations. It may be that people do not have higher expectations for exemplars than lay people. However, it remains unclear whether we might obtain evidence of higher expectations when exemplars fail proscriptively rather than prescriptively, as proscriptive failures negatively impact moral reputation because they can be more informative about underlying motivations (Janoff-Bulman et al., 2009). We ran Study 3 to examine this possibility.

**Table 3***Correlations Between All Dependent Variables, Age, and Gender in Studies 2a and 2b*

Dependent Variables	N	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Praiseworthiness									
Study 2a	61								
Study 2b	104								
2. Blameworthiness									
Study 2a	61	-.26*							
Study 2b	103	-.24*							
3. Morality									
Study 2a	61	.81**	-.25*						
Study 2b	103	.73***	-.23*						
4. Controllability									
Study 2a	61	.04	.02	.06					
Study 2b	103	.17	-.04	.30**					
5. Intentionality									
Study 2a	61	.21	-.08	.15	.37**				
Study 2b	103	.02	.03	-.03	.33**				
6. Hypocritical Person									
Study 2a	61	-.71**	.20	-.80**	-.13	-.13			
Study 2b	104	-.65**	.18	-.65**	-.06	.18			
7. Hypocritical Act									
Study 2a	61	-.56**	.26*	-.60**	-.20	-.16	.72**		
Study 2b	104	-.61**	.23*	-.64**	-.11	.05	.82**		
8. Age									
Study 2a	61	-.05	-.03	.01	-.23	.16	.01	.10	
Study 2b	98	.07	-.03	-.04	.03	.11	-.03	-.08	
9. Gender									
Study 2a	61	.11	-.07	.09	-.01	.22	-.12	.03	-.07
Study 2b	98	.01	.01	.02	-.14	-.03	-.06	-.12	.04

*Note.* All listed p-values are for two-tailed significance tests. \*p < .05, \*\*p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001

**Table 4**

*Study 2a Regression Predicting Perceptions of Target Morality, Free Will, and Hypocrisy Depending on Moral Status and Moral Outcome*

Predictor Variables	Perceptions of Targets' Morality				Perceptions of Targets' Ability to Control Their Actions			
	$\beta$ 95% CI: [UB, LB]	$\Delta F$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$ 95% CI: [UB, LB]	$\Delta F$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
<b>Step 1</b>		.14	.01	.01		1.70	.06	.06
Age	-.06 [-.38, .24]				-.24 [-.53, .02]			
Gender	.03 [-.76, .97]				-.03 [-.86, .69]			
<b>Step 2</b>		14.08**	.34	.33		.06	.06	.00
Target Type 0 = Control 1 = Exemplar	.23 [.00, 1.28]				.03 [-.64, .76]			
Moral Outcome 0 = No Discount 1 = Discount	.47 [.66, 1.94]				-.05 [-.82, .59]			
<b>Step 3</b>		.98	.35	.01		1.68	.09	.03
Interaction	-.22 [-1.94, .66]				-.35 [-2.33, .50]			

*Note.* All listed p-values are for two-tailed significance tests. \*p < .05, \*\*p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001.

**Table 4 continued**

Predictor Variables	Perceptions of Targets' Intentionality				Perceptions of Targets' Hypocrisy			
	$\beta$ 95% CI: [UB, LB]	$\Delta F$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$ 95% CI: [UB, LB]	$\Delta F$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
<b>Step 1</b>		2.59	.08	.08		.16	.01	.01
Age	.18 [-.11, .63]				.06 [-.29, .44]			
Gender	.24 [-.07, 2.01]				-.04 [-1.19, .86]			
<b>Step 2</b>		.51	.10	.02		15.69**	.32	.36
Target Type 0 = Control 1 = Exemplar	-.14 [-1.40, .46]				-.13 [-1.17, .31]			
Moral Outcome 0 = No Discount 1 = Discount	.04 [-.81, 1.07]				-.55 [-2.55, -1.06]			
<b>Step 3</b>		.04	.10	.00		.18	.37	.00
Interaction	-.05 [-2.11, 1.72]				.10 [-1.20, 1.85]			

Note. All listed p-values are for two-tailed significance tests. \*p < .05, \*\*p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001.

**Table 5**

*Study 2b Regression Predicting Perceptions of Target Morality, Free Will, and Hypocrisy Depending on Moral Status and Moral Outcome*

Predictor Variables	Perceptions of Targets' Morality				Perceptions of Targets' Ability to Control Their Actions			
	$\beta$ 95% CI: [UB, LB]	$\Delta F$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$ 95% CI: [UB, LB]	$\Delta F$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
<b>Step 1</b>		.09	.00	.00		1.01	.02	.02
Age	.03 [-.06, .08]				.04 [-.06, .09]			
Gender	.03 [-.40, .53]				-.14 [-.88, .16]			
<b>Step 2</b>		12.77**	.22	.22		.10	.02	.00
Target Type 0 = Control 1 = Exemplar	.10 [-.23, .78]				.03 [-.56, .72]			
Moral Outcome 0 = No Discount 1 = Discount	.45 [.74, 1.75]				.04 [-.51, .75]			
<b>Step 3</b>		.39	.22	.00		.01	.02	.00
Interaction	-.10 [-1.33, .69]				-.02 [-1.33, 1.21]			

Note. All listed p-values are for two-tailed significance tests. \*p < .05, \*\*p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001.

**Table 5 continued**

Predictor Variables	Perceptions of Targets' Intentionality				Perceptions of Targets' Hypocrisy			
	$\beta$ 95% CI: [UB, LB]	$\Delta F$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$ 95% CI: [UB, LB]	$\Delta F$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
<b>Step 1</b>		.60	.01	.01		.56	.01	.01
Age	.11 [-.04, .14]				-.05 [-.11, .06]			
Gender	-.04 [-.69, .49]				-.09 [-.80, .30]			
<b>Step 2</b>		.10	.02	.00		17.22**	.28	.27
Target Type 0 = Control 1 = Exemplar	.03 [-.62, .82]				.05 [-.42, .75]			
Moral Outcome 0 = No Discount 1 = Discount	.04 [-.59, .84]				-.52 [-2.27, -1.12]			
<b>Step 3</b>		.91	.02	.01		1.70	.29	.01
Interaction	.17 [-.75, 2.12]				.20 [-.39, 1.91]			

*Note.* All listed p-values are for two-tailed significance tests. \*p < .05, \*\*p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001.



### 3.4 Discussion

Overall, Studies 2a and 2b replicated the main findings from Study 1. Participants evaluated moral exemplars similarly to morally average targets across, regardless of whether they prescriptively failed or succeeded. Moreover, contrary to the results of Study 1, people's perceptions of target free will did not differ as a function of target moral status. In addition to replicating Study 1, we also found that participants evaluated exemplars and average targets similarly with respect to moral hypocrisy.

These results suggest that people do not hold moral exemplars to different standards when it comes to supererogatory moral behaviors. Simply failing to offer a discount to hurricane evacuees, on its own, was not sufficient to shift people's evaluations of the Thompsons' moral character, nor was it enough to consistently change perceptions of targets' free will. These results align well with prior work showing that people are less sensitive to prescriptive than proscriptive failures when evaluating moral character (Janoff-Bulman et al., 2009). Instead, past work suggests that proscriptive failures—such as lying, cheating, or scamming evacuees out of their already-scarce resources—more powerfully influence negative character evaluations than prescriptions. However, given the unique moral credentials of moral exemplars, we suspected that people would evaluate moral exemplars less harshly for proscriptive failures compared to average targets. Study 3 tests this hypothesis.

## CHAPTER 4

### STUDY 3

Studies 1, 2a, and 2b suggest that people evaluate exemplars and average actors similarly in the face of prescriptive failure, such as failing to offer a discount to hurricane evacuees. In contrast, Study 3 tests whether exemplars' moral credentials spare them from heightened scrutiny compared to the average actor when they commit moral violations. Study 3 was similar to Studies 1, 2a, & 2b, except that our design and hypotheses focused on proscriptive failures—engaging in morally forbidden acts, such as intentionally scamming evacuees—rather than prescriptive failures. We ran a 2 (Act type: prescriptive or proscriptive)  $\times$  2 (Target type: control or moral exemplar)  $\times$  2 (Moral outcome: success or failure) design, with a particular interest in how participants would differentially evaluate control versus exemplar targets after proscriptive failure. Based on the moral credentials literature, we hypothesized that participants would evaluate exemplars more leniently than average targets for proscriptive but not prescriptive failures.

#### 4.1 Methods

##### 4.1.1 Participants

An a priori power analysis for the three-way interaction term predicting perceived morality indicated that we would have power = .80 to detect a  $\Delta R^2 = .03$  if we collected data from 221 participants. We recruited participants residing in the United States via Amazon Mechanical Turk. We excluded 15 participants for failing the attention check and five participants who failed to complete the dependent measures, resulting in a final sample of  $N = 400$  (188 women, 198 men, 1 transgender man, 1 transgender person (unspecified), 1 agender person, 2 nonbinary people, and 9 unspecified;  $M_{\text{age}} = 35.72$ ; 78.5% White or Caucasian, 8.8%

Black or African American, 5.30% Hispanic or Latinx, 10.8% Asian American, 2.0% American Indian or Native American, .8% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander)<sup>8</sup>. The study took approximately five minutes to complete and participants received \$0.40.

#### **4.1.2 Procedure**

As in previous studies, we presented participants with vignettes mimicking a news story and asked them to rate the characters in the story. Using a 2 (Act type: prescriptive or proscriptive) x 2 (Target type: control or moral exemplar) x 2 (Moral outcome: success or failure) between-subjects design, we randomly assigned participants to a condition. The base of each vignette—the Thompsons opening up their motel to hurricane evacuees—remained largely unchanged. However, in addition to the previously used vignettes describing prescriptive failure and prescriptive success, we introduced new morally relevant outcomes associated with both proscriptive failure and success.

In the proscription failure conditions, we described the Thompsons as price-gouging the hurricane evacuees (*Given high demand for rooms, the Thompsons have hiked their prices by 75%, charging \$166.25 per night instead of their normal \$95 rate*). In the proscription success conditions, the Thompsons charge their normal room rate rather than choosing to price-gouge the evacuees (*Rather than hiking the price of their rooms, they're charging their regular rate of \$95 per night for evacuees*; see Appendix A). After reading the vignette, participants answered questions assessing their perceptions of the Thompsons' character and free will, as well as an attention check and a demographic questionnaire.

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<sup>8</sup> Participants could choose multiple racial and ethnic denominations. As such, the percentages for each racial and ethnic group exceeds 100% when totaled.

### 4.1.3 Measures

As in Studies 2a and 2b, we anchored participants' judgments of the Thompsons at 1 (*Strongly disagree*) and 7 (*Strongly agree*). Participants rated the blameworthiness and praiseworthiness of the Thompsons' actions (*The Thompsons deserve to be praised/blamed for their actions*), their morality (*The Thompsons are moral people*), their behavioral intentionality (*The Thompsons did this on purpose*), and their behavioral control (*The Thompsons had complete control over their actions*). We presented these items on a single page in a randomized order (see Appendix A).

## 4.2 Results

### 4.2.1 Target Morality

As in the previous studies, we combined praiseworthiness, reverse-scored blameworthiness, and morality items into a composite measure of perceived morality ( $\alpha = .85$ ).<sup>9</sup> Using this morality composite as the dependent variable, we ran a hierarchical regression, entering control variables at step 1, target type, act type, and moral outcome as predictors in step 2, all two-way interaction terms at step 3, and the three-way interaction term at step 4.

We found significant main effects for target type, act type, and moral outcome in step 2 (see Table 7). These findings indicate that participants evaluated (1) exemplars as more moral than controls overall, (2) all targets as more moral in the prescriptive than proscriptive condition, and (3) all targets as more moral in the success than failure conditions. At step 3, we found a significant interaction between target type and outcome. Examination of the estimated marginal means showed that moral exemplars who failed,  $M = 3.88$ ,  $SE = .14$ , received higher moral

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<sup>9</sup>Though controllability and intentionality correlated more highly in Study 3 than in Studies 2a and 2b, these measures still exhibited unacceptably low reliability for a free will composite measure ( $\alpha = .63$ ; see Table 6). As such, we treated intentionality and controllability as separate dependent variables.

**Table 6***Correlations Between All Dependent Variables, Age, and Gender in Study 3*

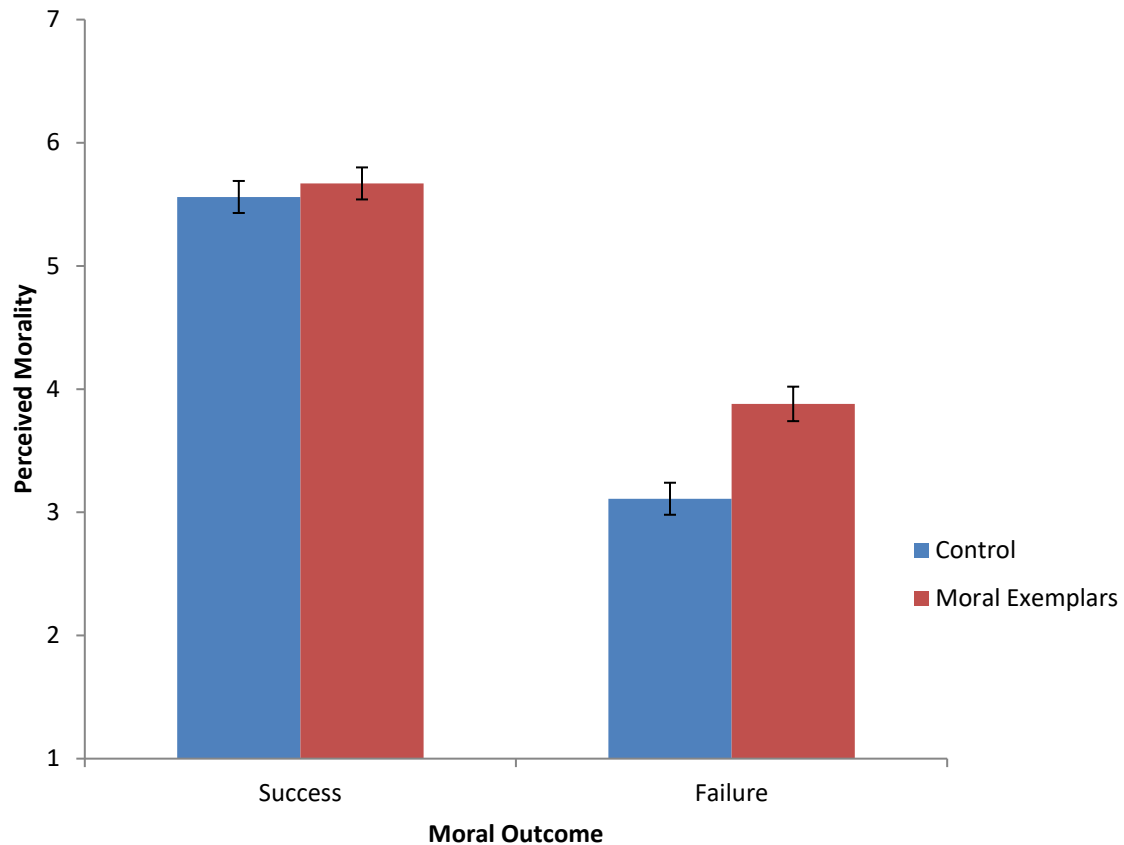
Dependent Variables	N	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Praiseworthiness	400						
2. Blameworthiness	400	-.35**					
3. Morality	400	.82**	-.42**				
4. Controllability	400	.00	-.03	.06			
5. Intentionality	400	-.04	.02	-.09	.50**		
6. Age	394	.04	-.09	.03	.15**	.16**	
7. Gender	386	-.01	.07	-.07	-.13*	.04	-.14**

*Note.* All listed p-values are for two-tailed significance tests. \*p < .05, \*\* p < .01, \*\*\*p < .001.

**Table 7***Perceptions of Target Morality, Controllability, and Intentionality Depending on Moral Status, Act Type, and Moral Outcome*

Predictor Variables	Perceptions of Target Morality				Perceptions of Target Controllability				Perceptions of Target Intentionality			
	$\beta$ 95% CI: [UB, LB]	$\Delta F$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$ 95% CI: [UB, LB]	$\Delta F$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$ 95% CI: [UB, LB]	$\Delta F$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
<b>Step 1</b>		.81	.00			6.66**	.03			6.64**	.03	
Age	.04 [-.01, .02]				.13** [.00, .02]				.18*** [.01, .04]			
Gender 0 = Women 1 = Men	-.05 [-.51, .19]				-.11* [-.42, -.02]				.06 [-.11, .48]			
<b>Step 2</b>		96.16***	.43	.43		1.80	.04	.01		.15	.02	.00
Target Type 0 = Control 1 = Exemplar	.14 [.24, .76]				-.03 [-.25, .15]				.02 [-.25, .34]			
Act Type 0 = Proscriptive 1 = Prescriptive	.15 [.27, .80]				.08 [-.04, .36]				.02 [-.23, .36]			
Moral Outcome 0 = Failure 1 = Success	.62 [1.90, 2.42]				.09 [-.03, .37]				-.02 [-.35, .24]			
<b>Step 3</b>		2.91*	.44	.01		1.99	.04	.02		2.25	.03	.02
Act × Outcome	.10 [-.12, .93]				-.10 [-.62, .17]				.13 [-.15, 1.03]			
Target × Outcome	-.17 [-1.20, -.16]				.01 [-.37, .41]				.15 [-.09, 1.08]			
Target × Act	-.02 [-.60, .45]				-.18* [-.82, -.03]				-.11 [-.97, .21]			
<b>Step 4</b>		2.27	.44	.00		.60	.04	.00		.73	.03	.00
Act × Target × Outcome	-.15 [-1.84, .25]				.10 [-.48, 1.10]				-.11 [-1.69, .66]			

Note. All listed p-values are for two-tailed significance tests. \*p < .05, \*\* p < .01, \*\*\*p < .001.



*Note.* Error bars represent standard errors of the estimated marginal means.

**Figure 1**

Interaction between Moral Outcome and Target Type when Predicting Perceived Morality of Target

evaluations than morally average targets who failed,  $M = 3.10$ ,  $SE = .13$ ,  $F(1, 392) = 17.39$ ,  $p < .05$   $\eta_p^2 = .042$ ,<sup>10</sup> whereas perceptions did not differ between exemplars,  $M = 5.67$ ,  $SE = .13$ , and morally average targets,  $M = 5.56$ ,  $SE = .13$ , in the moral success condition (see Figure 1). The interaction between act type and target type, as well as the interaction between act type and

<sup>10</sup>We used a Bonferroni correction on all reported pairwise comparisons, which adjusts the p-value to account for the family-wise error rate.

outcome, were non-significant. Finally, at step 4, the three-way interaction term between act type, target type, and outcome was non-significant.

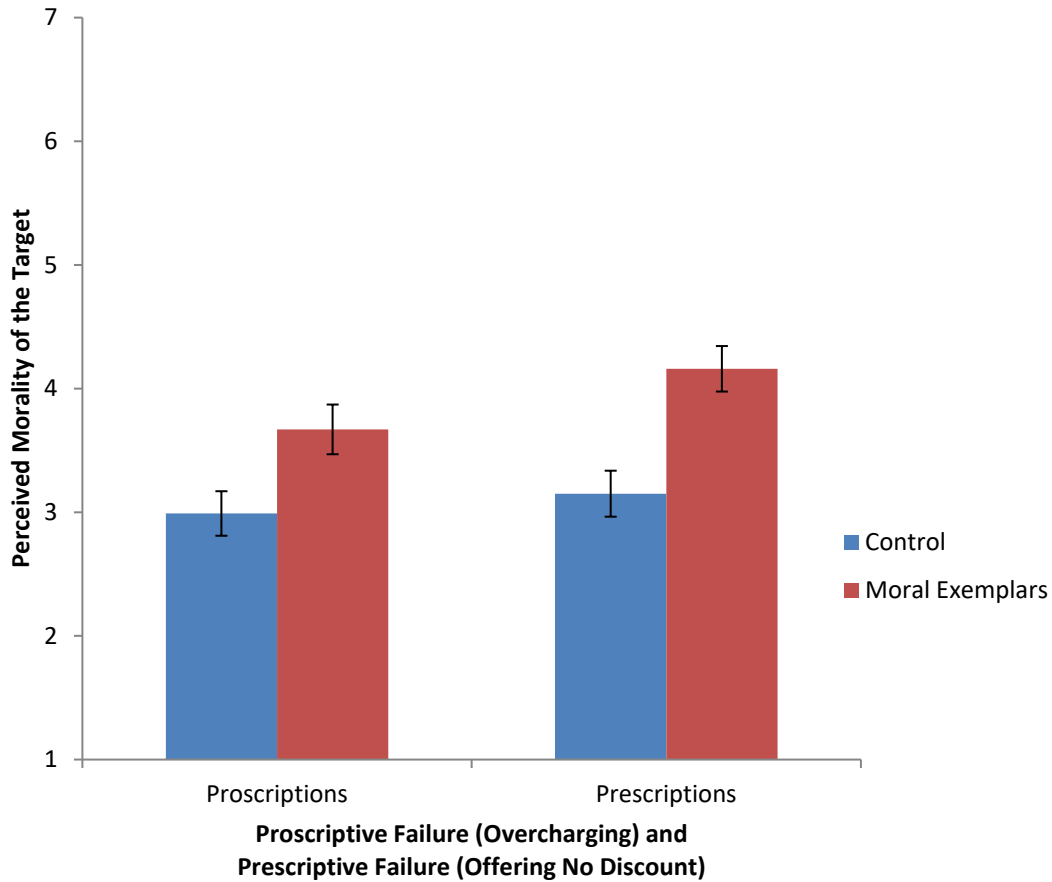
To test the hypothesis that participants would judge moral exemplars less harshly than morally average targets after a proscriptive failure, we examined the estimated marginal means and pairwise comparisons for target type in the proscriptive and failure conditions. Bonferroni-adjusted post hoc comparisons indicated that moral exemplars received significantly higher moral evaluations than morally average controls after a proscriptive failure,  $F(1, 376) = 6.32, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .017$  (see Figure 2). Consistent with our hypothesis, this finding suggests that moral exemplars receive more reputational leeway than ordinary targets after committing moral violations.

#### **4.2.2 Target Controllability and Intentionality**

As in Studies 2a and 2b, we ran separate hierarchical regression analyses on targets' perceived ability to control their actions and the intentionality of their behavior, similar to the main analysis. For controllability, we found a significant effect of age and gender at step 1; older participants perceived targets as having more control over their actions than younger participants, and women perceived targets as more in control of their actions than men. We found a non-significant trend in the outcome condition,  $p = .087$ , such that participants rated targets as more in control of their actions after moral successes compared to moral failures.

We found no significant main effects for target type or act type in step 2. However, this relationship was qualified by an unpredicted significant interaction between target type and act type at step 3 (see Table 7). Examination of the estimated marginal means and pairwise comparison revealed that participants perceived average targets as significantly more in control of their actions in prescriptive scenarios,  $M = 6.52, SE = .10$ , than proscriptive scenarios,  $M =$





*Note.* Error bars represent standard errors of the estimated marginal means.

**Figure 2**

Simple Effects of Target Type within the Moral Failure Condition across Act Type

6.15,  $SE = .10$ ,  $F(1, 376) = 6.83$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .018$ , whereas participants perceived exemplars as approximately equally in control of themselves in prescriptive,  $M = 6.25$ ,  $SE = .10$ , and proscriptive scenarios,  $M = 6.31$ ,  $SE = .10$ ,  $F(1, 376) = .17$ ,  $p = .677$ . In step 3, the three-way interaction failed to reach significance.

For the intentionality analysis, age significantly predicted the perceived intentionality of targets' behaviors, such that older participants perceived targets as more intentional than younger participants (see Table 7). We found no other significant effects.

### 4.3 Discussion

Together, these findings suggest that people evaluate exemplars' moral character differently from regular targets in the context of moral violations. Consistent with our hypothesis and the moral credentials literature, participants granted exemplars who failed at avoiding a proscription a reputational reprieve compared to ordinary targets. In other words, rather than judging exemplars harshly for price-gouging hurricane evacuees, participants still afforded exemplars some increased moral status above ordinary targets, even though they rated ordinary targets as less able to control themselves in the face of temptation to overcharge.

This pattern could reflect participants' gestalt evaluation of the exemplars' moral character, including the appraisal that the next benefit of their many good deeds outweighs any harm done in this instance. In other words, even though the moral exemplars ripped off the evacuees, participants may have viewed them as overall still a net force for good, more so than morally ordinary targets. Alternatively, participants may have surmised that such good people would only do bad things for a good reason, and hence inferred that the exemplar Thompsons may have an understandable or even laudable reason for their action (such as donating the overcharged amounts to other refugees). This interpretation seems especially likely given the ambiguous characterization of the overcharging behavior (*Given high demand for rooms, the Thompsons have hiked their prices by 75%, charging \$166.25 per night instead of their normal \$95 rate*). Finally, it could be that participants' preconceptions about the morally exceptional targets altered their perceptions of the moral violation's severity—in other words, learning that good people chose an action may have led people to downgrade perceived severity of that action—if a morally good person chose it, how bad can it be? To clarify which of these mechanisms may be responsible for our results, we ran an additional study testing whether moral

exemplars continue to receive a reputational reprieve even in the case of extreme, unambiguous moral violations.

## CHAPTER 5

### STUDY 4

Study 3 suggested that moral exemplars who overcharge hurricane refugees nonetheless are rated morally superior to ordinary people who do the same thing, whereas no differences emerge for prosocial acts like undercharging refugees. This finding could reflect participants' tendency to grant moral exemplars the benefit of the doubt, assuming that individuals of demonstrably exceptional character would only do bad things for a good reason. We believe this effect emerges because participants weigh the long history of good moral character more heavily than isolated instances of immoral behavior. In effect, participants interpret exemplars' bad behavior in the context of their moral character.

However, we expect that manipulating certain boundary conditions—such as domain-specific moral hypocrisy and extreme, unambiguous moral violations that cannot easily be explained away—may cause this effect to flip, recontextualizing longstanding character information in the context of the violation. Study 4 examined whether a single extreme moral transgression could cause participants to evaluate moral exemplars more harshly than the average person. Specifically, we hypothesized that moral exemplars would be judged more harshly than the average person for an extreme moral failure.

### 5.1 Methods

#### 5.1.1 Participants

A sensitivity analysis for the two-way interaction term predicting perceived morality indicated that we would have power = .80 to detect a  $\Delta R^2 = .05$  if we collected data from 150 participants, which represents the number of participants were reasonably expected to maintain

after excluding participants for attention check failures<sup>11</sup>. We recruited Florida State University students using the SONA system. To be eligible, participants needed to be between the ages of 18 and 65, currently attending Florida State University, and eligible to receive research credit for a psychology course. We excluded 97 participants for failing the attention check, resulting in a final sample of  $N = 132$  (101 women, 31 men;  $M_{\text{age}} = 19.50$ ; 73.5% White or Caucasian, 12.9% Black or African American, 28.0% Hispanic or Latinx, 6.1% Asian American)<sup>12</sup>. The study took approximately five minutes to complete and participants received half a research credit toward an eligible psychology course.

### 5.1.2 Procedure

As in previous studies, we presented participants with vignettes and asked them to rate the characters in the story. We used the base vignette from Studies 1-3, but in this case, all the scenarios ended with the Thompsons committing a moral violation. In addition to manipulating target type, we manipulated whether the targets would commit a moderate moral violation or an extreme moral violation. We utilized the proscriptive failure vignette from Study 3, in which the Thompsons overcharged the evacuees, as the moderate violation condition; however, we modified the vignette to clarify that overcharging constituted a violation rather than normal business behavior (*However, shortly after the hurricane passed, local authorities discovered that the Thompsons had in fact illegally price-gouged all evacuees staying at the Crossroads Motel, increasing the cost of their rooms by an additional \$100*). This change allows us to test the impact of violation extremity on moral perceptions without the confound of violation ambiguity.

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<sup>11</sup> Sample size limited by use of SONA pool. We aimed to recruit 200 participants to compensate for attention check failure rates in prior studies, and ultimately collected data from 29 participants more than originally expected.

<sup>12</sup>Participants could choose multiple racial and ethnic denominations. As such, the percentages for each racial and ethnic group exceeds 100% when totaled.

In the extreme violation condition, we described the Thompsons as “sexually exploiting the children of evacuees” during the storm (see Appendix A)<sup>13</sup>. Using a between-subjects design, we randomly assigned participants into a target type and extremity condition. After reading the vignette, participants answered questions assessing their perceptions of the Thompsons’ character, the controllability and intentionality of the Thompsons’ actions, an attention check, and a demographic questionnaire.

### 5.1.3 Measures

We anchored participants’ judgments of the Thompsons at 1 (*Strongly disagree*) and 7 (*Strongly agree*). As in Study 3, participants rated the blameworthiness and praiseworthiness of the Thompsons’ actions, their morality, their behavioral intentionality, and their behavioral control. We presented these items on a single page in a randomized order (see Appendix A).

## 5.2 Results

As in prior work, the praiseworthiness, blameworthiness, and morality measures were significantly correlated with one another and exhibited acceptable reliability when averaged into a composite measure of perceived morality,  $\alpha = .77$  (see Table 8). The controllability and intentionality measures, though significantly positively correlated, continued to exhibit unacceptably low reliability,  $\alpha = .64$ . As such, we considered these dependent variables separately in our analyses. An examination of perceived morality revealed a strongly positively skewed distribution and a non-normal distribution of prediction error in the extreme moral violation cells. To alleviate this issue, we used a natural log transformation on perceived morality and used the transformed data as the dependent variable for this analysis<sup>14</sup>. We ran a hierarchical

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<sup>13</sup>The wording for this vignette was changed slightly to make the moral violation less ambiguous.

<sup>14</sup> We back-transformed all standardized betas, estimated marginal means, and 95% confidence intervals for the perceived morality composite reported both in-text and in Table 9.

**Table 8***Correlations Between All Dependent Variables, Age, and Gender in Study 4*

Dependent Variables	N	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Praiseworthiness	132						
2. Blameworthiness	132	-.43***					
3. Morality	132	.62**	-.52***				
4. Controllability	132	-.26**	.42***	-.35***			
5. Intentionality	132	-.22*	.31***	-.17	.48***		
6. Age	132	.05	-.01	-.03	-.09	-.03	
7. Gender	132	-.11	.00	-.05	-.05	-.08	-.02

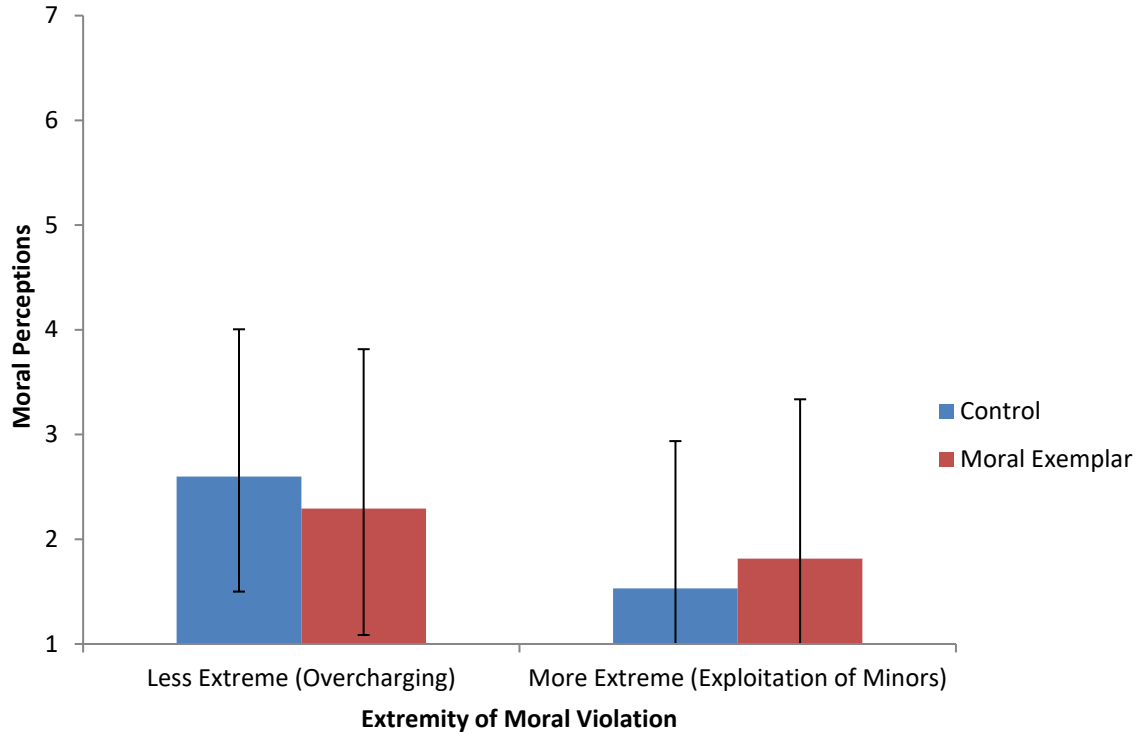
*Note.* All listed p-values are for two-tailed significance tests. \*p < .05, \*\* p < .01, \*\*\*p < .001.

**Table 9***Perceptions of Target Morality, Controllability, and Intentionality Depending on Moral Status and Violation Extremity*

Predictor Variables	Perceptions of Target Morality				Perceptions of Target Controllability				Perceptions of Target Intentionality			
	$\beta$ 95% CI: [UB, LB]	$\Delta F$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	B 95% CI: [UB, LB]	$\Delta F$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$ 95% CI: [UB, LB]	$\Delta F$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
<b>Step 1</b>		.08	.00	.00		.98	.02	.02		.50	.01	.01
Age	1.01 [-.26, 3.89]				1.05 [-.98, 1.12]				-.04 [-.24, .16]			
Gender 0 = Women 1 = Men	-.97 [-.79, 1.18]				1.06 [-.85, 1.31]				-.29 [-.90, .32]			
<b>Step 2</b>		10.06***	.14	.14		2.54	.05	.04		.58	.02	.01
Target Type 0 = Control 1 = Exemplar	1.02 [-.86, 1.20]				-1.07 [-.89, 1.29]				-.29 [-.81, .24]			
Extremity 0 = Overcharging 1 = Sex offense	-1.44 [-.96, -.50]				-1.21 [-1.45, -1.01]				-.01 [-.53, .52]			
<b>Step 3</b>		3.21	.16	.02		.13	.05	.00		.60	.02	.01
Target $\times$ Extremity	1.34 [-.97, 1.86]				-1.07 [-.74, 1.54]				.41 [-.64, 1.47]			

*Note.* All listed p-values are for two-tailed significance tests. \*p < .05, \*\* p < .01, \*\*\*p < .001. Perceptions of target morality and controllability betas and confidence intervals have both been back-transformed to their original units for easier interpretation. Controllability values have been reflected to account for negative skew.





*Note.* Error bars represent non-symmetrical standard errors. The standard error values are non-symmetric because they are derived from log-transformed units. Standard error lower bounds do not include 0.

**Figure 3**

Interaction between Target Type and Extremity of Moral Violation

regression analysis entering control variables at step 1, target type and extremity conditions at step 2, and the two-way interaction term at step 3.

At step 2, we found a significant negative effect of extremity on moral perceptions, such that more extreme moral violations resulted in worse character evaluations (see Table 9). In step 3, we found a non-significant trend toward a two-way interaction,  $p = .076$  (see Figure 3).

Examination of estimated marginal means and pairwise comparisons indicated that participants perceived both morally average targets,  $F(1, 121) = 19.68, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .140$ , and exemplars,  $F(1, 121) = 4.57, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .036$ , as significantly less moral in the extreme violation condition,  $M_{\text{control}} = 1.53, 95\% \text{ CI}_{\text{control}} [1.20, 1.95], M_{\text{exemplar}} = 1.81, 95\% \text{ CI}_{\text{exemplar}} [1.45, 2.28]$ , than the

moderate violation condition,  $M_{\text{control}} = 2.60$ , 95% CI<sub>control</sub>[2.09, 3.23],  $M_{\text{exemplar}} = 2.29$ , 95% CI<sub>exemplar</sub>[1.81, 2.90]. These findings were consistent with the main effect of extremity in step 2.

Further examination of the two-way interaction showed that participants did not rate average targets differently from morally exceptional targets in either the moderate,  $F(1, 121) = 1.41$ ,  $p = .238$ , or extreme violation conditions,  $F(1, 121) = 2.07$ ,  $p = .153$ . These results illustrate that, contrary to our hypothesis, participants did not rate exemplars differently from controls in the extreme moral violation condition.

Next, we examined whether target type and extremity predicted differences in the perceived controllability and intentionality of the Thompsons' actions. As in prior work, we ran a hierarchical regression analysis predicting controllability and intentionality, in turn, entering age and gender in step 1, target type and extremity at step 2, and their interaction term at step 3. Like the perceptions of targets' moral character, controllability exhibited substantial skew and a non-normal distribution of prediction error. Given controllability's negative skew, we reflected the variable then used a natural log transformation; we used the reflected transformation of controllability as the dependent variable for the controllability analysis. Extremity significantly predicted controllability in step 2, such that participants perceived targets as more in control of their actions in the extreme violation condition compared to the moderate violation condition (see Table 9)<sup>15</sup>. We found no other significant effects in the controllability analysis. We also found no significant effects in the intentionality analysis.

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<sup>15</sup>Given that we used the reflected transformation of controllability as the dependent variable in this case, a negative standardized beta indicates that perceived controllability increased from the less extreme condition (coded as 0) to the more extreme condition (coded as 1).

### 5.3 Discussion

Contrary to our hypothesis, participants did not evaluate moral exemplars more harshly than average targets for sexually exploiting minors. In fact, participants did not evaluate exemplars differently from average targets in either extremity condition. This could mean that we failed to effectively manipulate perceptions of the Thompsons across the target type condition. However, given that we found significant effects for target type in several of our prior studies using the same vignette stem, it seems more likely that target type has a weaker effect than other manipulations, such as act type and violation extremity, and that we simply lacked the power to detect this effect. We can address this in future studies by oversampling to compensate for the high number of participants failing the attention check.

Alternatively, perhaps participants evaluated exemplars and control targets similarly because we provided enough character information to recontextualize their evaluation of the exemplars' character in light of their immoral behavior. Whereas the proscriptive violation described in Study 3 left room for ambiguity in interpretation of the Thompsons' intent—resulting in more lenient evaluations of exemplars compared to control targets—the same behavior (i.e., overcharging evacuees) described in less ambiguous terms produced a different result. This suggests that violation ambiguity, rather than violation extremity, acts as a boundary condition determining whether people contextualize immoral behavior in light of prior character information or vice versa.

Taken in concert with the results of Study 3, these findings clarify which mechanisms may be driving differential perceptions of exemplars' character after committing a moral violation. For example, these results rule out an interpretation based on participants' gestalt evaluation of the exemplar Thompsons' character. If peoples' evaluations stemmed from the

assessment that, on balance, exemplars represented a morally positive force, then participants would have rated exemplars more highly than controls in the overcharging condition, as was the case in Study 3. It also seems unlikely that participants' preconceptions about the Thompsons' exceptional character impacted their perceptions of the moral violations' severity. Otherwise, participants would have rated exemplar targets as more moral in one or both extremity conditions, reflecting a tendency to downplay violation extremity and consequently shield exemplars' moral character from further scrutiny.

The findings from Studies 3 and 4 support an interpretation focused on granting exemplars the benefit of the doubt in the case of ambiguous moral violations. Although people seem to judge exemplars more leniently when a moral violation can be reasonably interpreted in the context of existing character information, that leniency diminishes whenever the violation becomes more clearly defined. Perhaps participants only give exemplars reputational latitude when the ambiguity of a violation leaves room for such positive interpretation.

## CHAPTER 6

### STUDY 5

In Study 5, we examined the role of violation ambiguity—the degree to which participants perceived that a moral violation actually occurred—in people’s changing evaluations of moral exemplars. Study 3 suggested that people may grant moral exemplars a reputational reprieve when they commit ambiguous moral violations, despite rating exemplars similarly to morally average targets in all other conditions. In Study 4, participants perceived both exemplars and morally average targets as more moral after price-gouging compared to sexually exploiting children. This suggests that, given the severity of the transgression, people cannot reasonably give exemplars the benefit of the doubt for their bad behavior. However, given that participants rated exemplars similarly to average targets in Study 4 across both extremity conditions, we may instead conclude that, in general, participants did not make a meaningful distinction between the exemplar targets and the morally average targets.

On the one hand, perhaps participants simply fail to make a distinction because the introduction of a moral violation—any violation at all—negates the moral exceptionality of an exemplar, reducing them to the level of a normal person. On the other hand, these results run counter to the findings from Study 3, wherein exemplars received more positive moral evaluations than average targets after committing a moral violation. These differences may have resulted from the slight wording difference between the Study 3 price-gouging vignette, which described the price-gouging behavior more ambiguously, and the Study 4 price-gouging vignette, which described the price-gouging using less ambiguous language. However, it remains unclear exactly what role the ambiguity of violations play in setting apart exemplar evaluations from morally average ones; the current evidence for violation ambiguity is indirect and partially

dependent upon a planned contrast that, while significant, emerged from a non-significant interaction.

In an effort to more conclusively evaluate the role of violation ambiguity in the evaluation of moral exemplars, we ran an additional experiment that directly manipulated both target type and violation ambiguity. We hypothesized that participants would evaluate exemplars as more moral than controls in the high ambiguity condition, but equally as moral as controls in the low ambiguity condition. Along the same lines, we anticipated a significant interaction predicting perceptions that the targets had a good reason for their behavior; using a new item measuring perceptions of good motivations, we expected that exemplars would receive higher scores relative to controls in the high ambiguity condition, but lower scores relative to controls in the low ambiguity condition. Together, these results would indicate that exemplars receive a reputational buffer against negative character evaluations so long as participants can reasonably attribute their bad behavior to good intentions.

## **6.1 Methods**

### **6.1.1 Participants**

An a priori power analysis indicated that we needed 342 participants to detect a two-way interaction,  $\Delta R^2 = .03$ , with 90% power. To achieve greater power and to overcome prior issues with attention check failures, we opted to collect data until we achieved a sample of 400 participants who successfully passed the attention check. Using Amazon Mechanical Turk, we collected data from 934 participants. We excluded participants who failed the attention check, took the survey multiple times, failed to complete the dependent measures, or exhibited strong indicators of bot-like behavior, resulting in a final sample of  $N = 404$  (190 women, 214 men;  $M_{\text{age}} = 40.71$ ; 73.0% White or Caucasian, 10.9% Black or African American, 11.4% Asian

American, 1.5% Native American or Alaska Native, < 1% unspecified multiracial identity, and <1% chose no response)<sup>16</sup>. Participation took approximately 5-7 minutes, and participants received \$0.50 for completing the study.

### **6.1.2 Procedure and Measures**

Similar to Studies 1-4, we utilized a vignette-based paradigm manipulating whether participants read about a morally exceptional or morally average target. We also manipulated whether the target engaged in a moral violation characterized by either low or high ambiguity. However, in contrast to prior studies, we randomly assigned participants to read two vignettes with different storylines and moral targets, including one hurricane vignette in which the Thompsons price-gouge evacuees, as in prior work, and a new vignette focused on Dr. Grange, who stands accused of sexually assaulting his female patients under the guise of providing medical care (see Appendix B).

We randomized condition separately for each vignette, such that participants could be assigned to different target type and ambiguity conditions for the hurricane and doctor vignettes. All participants read the hurricane vignette first, followed by the doctor vignette. After each vignette, participants rated the targets on perceived morality, blameworthiness, praiseworthiness, controllability, and intentionality using a Likert-scale anchored at 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) and 7 (*Strongly Agree*). Additionally, we included three new items to determine whether participants make distinctions between moral evaluations and non-moral, positively-valenced evaluations. These items tap participants' non-moral perceptions of the targets' competence, including an evaluation of target's intelligence, career excellence, and personal success (see Appendix B). We randomized the order of presentation for these items.

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<sup>16</sup>Participants could choose multiple racial and ethnic denominations. As such, the percentages for each racial and ethnic group exceeds 100% when totaled.

After reading the hurricane vignette and completing the hurricane vignette items, participants completed an attention check. In addition to identifying inattentive participants, the attention check served to lessen the impact of order effects by prompting participants to complete a cognitively challenging task in between vignettes. Lastly, after reading both vignettes and completing both sets of target evaluation questions, participants completed a brief demographic questionnaire.

## **6.2 Results**

The praiseworthiness, blameworthiness, and morality measures correlated highly and exhibited high reliability in both the hurricane,  $\alpha = .84$ , and doctor vignettes,  $\alpha = .85$  (see Table 10). Thus, as in previous studies, we averaged across these three items to obtain a composite measure of perceived morality for both types of vignettes. The controllability and intentionality measures correlated moderately and exhibited adequate reliability in the hurricane vignette,  $\alpha = .75$ , but not in the doctor vignette,  $\alpha = .52$ . However, given the pattern of results we ultimately found for the free will outcome variables, we opted to compute free will composite measures for both vignette types. We also examined correlations and reliability for the three items tapping intelligence, career excellence, and personal success. Given their strong correlations and high reliability in both the hurricane,  $\alpha = .78$ , and doctor vignettes,  $\alpha = .88$ , we calculated a composite measure of perceived competence.

If we are correct that people change their evaluations of exemplars in response to violation ambiguity, then we expect that they will evaluate exemplars as more moral than average targets in the context of an ambiguous violation, but will rate exemplars similarly to average targets in the context of a clear violation. Consistent with this prediction, we anticipated a significant two-way interaction between target type and ambiguity. To test this hypothesis, we



**Table 10***Correlations Between All Dependent Variables, Age, and Gender for the Hurricane and Doctor Vignettes in Study 5*

Dependent Variables	N	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Praiseworthiness	404									
Hurricane										
Doctor										
2. Blameworthiness	404									
Hurricane		-.44***								
Doctor		-.42***								
3. Morality	404									
Hurricane		.82***	-.46***							
Doctor		.80***	-.50**							
4. Controllability	404									
Hurricane		-.38***	.23***	-.33***						
Doctor		-.35***	.30***	-.38***						
5. Intentionality	404									
Hurricane		-.46***	.31***	-.42***	.60***					
Doctor		-.56***	.52***	-.64***	.37***					
6. Intelligence	404									
Hurricane		.37***	-.18***	.42***	.06	-.01				
Doctor		.16**	-.10	.18***	.27***	-.12*				
7. Career Excellence	404									
Hurricane		.18***	-.17**	.27***	.12*	.05	.48***			
Doctor		.15**	-.08	.19***	.23***	-.13*	.68***			
8. Success	404									
Hurricane		.21***	-.16**	.31***	.21***	.13*	.52***	.63***		
Doctor		.13*	-.11*	.17**	.29***	-.08	.65***	.79***		
9. Age	404									
Hurricane		-.12*	.03	.01	.24***	.16**	.06	.11*	.13*	
Doctor		-.05	.03	-.06	.23***	.02	.14**	.23***	.24***	
10. Gender	404									
Hurricane		.13**	-.03	.06	-.13*	-.13**	-.03	-.03	-.04	-.13**
Doctor		.11*	-.06	.09	-.09	-.08	.00	.01	-.06	-.13**

*Note.* All listed p-values are for two-tailed significance tests. \*p < .05, \*\* p < .01, \*\*\*p < .001. All correlations had the same number of participants.

ran a hierarchical regression analysis for both the hurricane and doctor vignettes, entering control variables at step 1, dummy-coded target type and ambiguity conditions at step 2, and the two-way interaction term at step 3. Similarly, we ran hierarchical regressions using the same procedure to predict perceived free will and competence for both types of vignettes. For the perceived competence measure, we expected that target type would fail to predict perceived competence, which would indicate that participants made a distinction between moral versus positive non-moral information.

### **6.2.1 Perceived Morality**

We found the same pattern of results for both the hurricane and doctor vignettes. At step 2, we found a significant positive effect of both target type and ambiguity on moral perceptions, such that moral exemplars received higher moral evaluations than controls and all targets received higher evaluations when they committed more ambiguous moral violations (see Table 11 and Table 12). Step 3 indicated no interaction between target type and ambiguity.

### **6.2.2 Free Will**

In both the hurricane and doctor vignettes, we found the same pattern of results regardless of whether we predicted the free will composite or the individual controllability and intentionality items. As such, we report the analysis for both the hurricane and doctor vignettes using the composite free will variable. In step 2, we found a main effect of ambiguity, such that participants perceived targets as having less free will when the moral violation seemed more ambiguous (see Table 11 and Table 12). Neither target type nor the two-way interaction between ambiguity and target type predicted perceived free will.

**Table 11**

*Perceptions of Target Morality, Free Will, and Competence Depending on Moral Status and Ambiguity in the Hurricane Vignette*

Predictor Variables	Perceptions of Target Morality				Perceptions of Target Free Will				Perceptions of Target Competence			
	$\beta$ 95% CI: [UB, LB]	$\Delta F$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$ 95% CI: [UB, LB]	$\Delta F$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$ 95% CI: [UB, LB]	$\Delta F$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
<b>Step 1</b>		2.98	.02	.00		12.93***	.06	.06		3.02	.02	.02
Age	.10 [-.26, 3.89]				-.12 [-.49, -.05]				-.02 [-.27, .16]			
Gender 0 = Women 1 = Men	-.06 [-.79, 1.18]				.20 [.01, .03]				.12 [.00, .02]			
<b>Step 2</b>		53.76***	.22	.21		11.89***	.11	.05		7.21**	.05	.03
Target Type 0 = Control 1 = Exemplar	.14 [.08, .37]				-.04 [-.15, .06]				.02 [-.08, .13]			
Ambiguity 0 = Low 1 = High	.43 [.56, .85]				-.22 [-.36, -.15]				.18 [.10, .31]			
<b>Step 3</b>		.72	.23	.00		.36	.11	.00		3.85	.06	.01
Target × Ambiguity	-.04 [-.21, .08]				-.03 [-.07, .14]				-.10 [-.21, .00]			

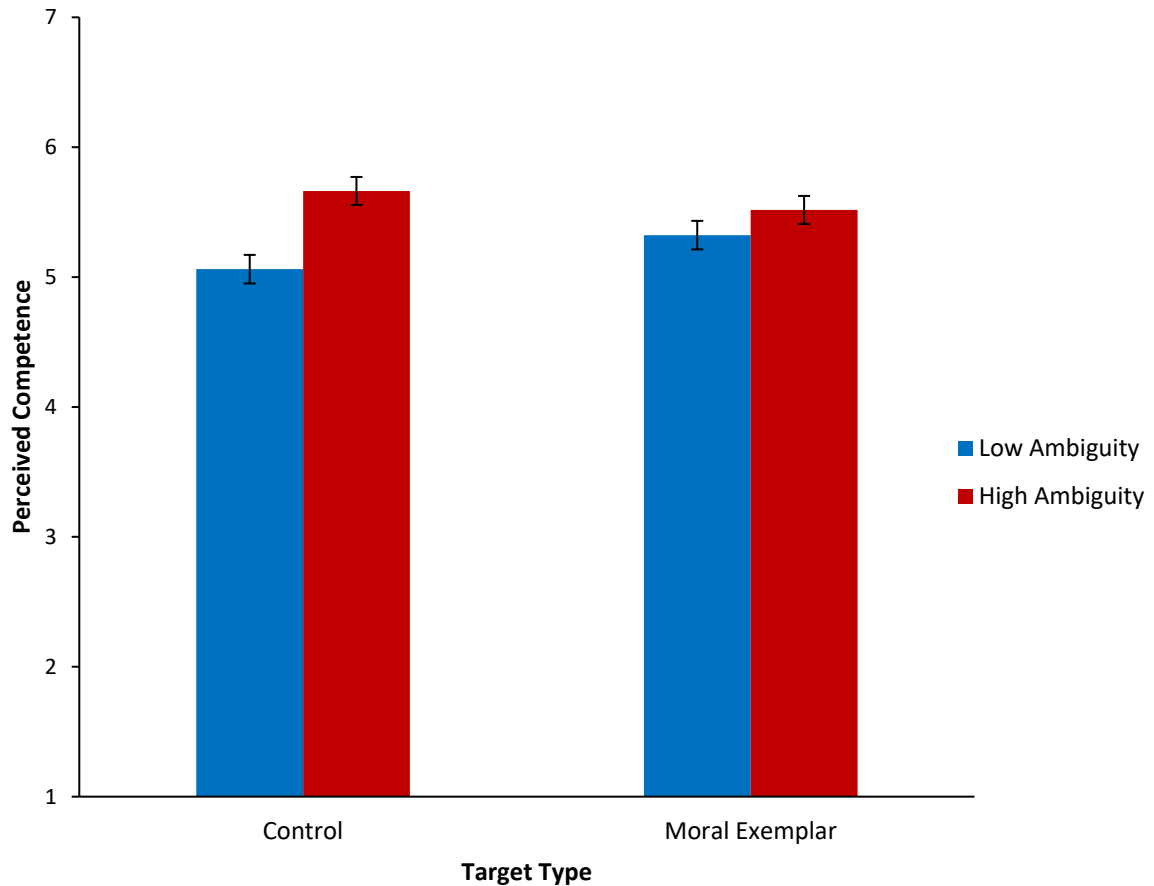
*Note.* All listed p-values are for two-tailed significance tests. \*p < .05, \*\* p < .01, \*\*\*p < .001.

**Table 12**

*Perceptions of Target Morality, Free Will, and Competence Depending on Moral Status and Ambiguity in the Doctor Vignette*

Predictor Variables	Perceptions of Target Morality				Perceptions of Target Free Will				Perceptions of Target Competence			
	$\beta$ 95% CI: [UB, LB]	$\Delta F$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	B 95% CI: [UB, LB]	$\Delta F$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$ 95% CI: [UB, LB]	$\Delta F$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
<b>Step 1</b>		3.30*	.02	.02		4.92**	.02	.02		10.85***	.05	.05
Age	.12 [.06, .73]				-.09 [-.45, -.02]				-.01 [-.21, .27]			
Gender 0 = Women 1 = Men	-.04 [-.02, .01]				.12 [.00, .02]				.23 [.01, .03]			
<b>Step 2</b>		78.85***	.30	.28		43.05***	.20	.17		10.20***	.10	.05
Target Type 0 = Control 1 = Exemplar	.09 [.01, .29]				-.05 [-.17, .05]				.06 [-.05, .19]			
Ambiguity 0 = Low 1 = High	.52 [.74, 1.02]				-.41 [-.61, -.39]				.20 [.14, .37]			
<b>Step 3</b>		.03	.30	.00		.34	.20	.00		.04	.10	.00
Target × Ambiguity	-.01 [-.15, .13]				-.03 [-.14, .08]				-.01 [-.13, .11]			

*Note.* All listed p-values are for two-tailed significance tests. \*p < .05, \*\* p < .01, \*\*\*p < .001.



*Note.* Error bars represent standard errors of the estimated marginal means.

**Figure 4**

Interaction between Ambiguity and Target Type in the Hurricane Vignette

### 6.2.3 Competence

For both the hurricane and doctor vignettes, we found a main effect of ambiguity in step 2, such that participants perceived targets as higher in competence when the moral violation was more ambiguous. As hypothesized, target type failed to predict perceived competence in either vignette. However, we did find a non-significant trend toward a two-way interaction in the hurricane vignette,  $p = .051$  (see Figure 4). Examination of the estimated marginal means and pairwise comparisons indicated that participants perceived morally average targets as

significantly more competent in the high ambiguity condition,  $M_{\text{control}} = 5.66$ , 95%  $CI_{\text{control}}[5.44, 5.88]$ , than in the low ambiguity condition,  $M_{\text{control}} = 5.06$ , 95%  $CI_{\text{control}}[4.86, 5.26]$ ,  $F(1, 400) = 16.20$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .039$ , whereas participants failed to make the same distinction for moral exemplars,  $F(1, 400) = 1.58$ ,  $p = .209$ .

### 6.3 Discussion

These results indicate that participants made a meaningful categorical distinction between moral exemplars and average targets on the basis of perceived morality, as indicated by exemplars' consistently higher moral evaluations relative to average targets. Additionally, these findings suggest participants grant targets more reputational leeway when the circumstances surrounding their moral violation remains highly ambiguous. However, contrary to our hypothesis, we found no evidence that participants granted moral exemplars more reputational leeway than average targets in the high ambiguity condition. Although moral status and ambiguity may independently predict perceived morality, they do not interact to change moral perceptions.

Consistent with the literature on warmth, competence, and moral personality traits, we also proposed that moral character information would drive changes in moral evaluations without impacting other non-moral, positively valenced interpersonal evaluations (Goodwin et al., 2014; Landy, Piazza, & Goodwin, 2016). The current findings support our hypothesis, as ambiguity but not moral status impacted evaluations of targets' competence. Interestingly, we found a non-significant trend in the hurricane vignette wherein morally average targets seemed to receive higher competence evaluations under more ambiguous violation conditions; however, this trend did not reemerge in the doctor vignette, suggesting that we should avoid interpreting this effect without further empirical evidence. Overall, these results reinforce the overarching finding in the

person perception literature that moral traits are distinct from other positive personality traits, and therefore predict different patterns of interpersonal evaluation relative to competence and warmth.

Finally, we found that participants generally perceived targets to be freer under conditions of low violation ambiguity. Based on these results, it seems that engaging in clearly harmful actions in the absence of external pressure, such as social and professional norms, increases the perception that targets could easily have behaved morally and yet intentionally chose the immoral route. On the other hand, the introduction of violation ambiguity results in diminished free will perceptions; this suggests that external pressures make it more difficult to discern the intended consequences of behavior and, consequently, make the target appear less in-control of their actions.

## CHAPTER 7

### GENERAL DISCUSSION

Our data clearly show that people evaluate moral exemplars similarly to average people in prescriptive scenarios. In a similar vein, the evidence for people's differential evaluation of exemplars in proscriptive scenarios remains weak. Given that exemplars receive a reputational reprieve in Study 3 but not in Studies 4 and 5, we suspect that the results of Study 3 represent a Type 1 error and should therefore be interpreted conservatively in the absence of additional empirical evidence. Overall, we found that moral exemplars seem to receive higher moral evaluations than the average target in most cases, as indicated by multiple main effects of target type in the current work, but they are also subject to the same degree of reputational damage as average targets whenever they commit moral violations. In other words, moral exemplars simply benefit from a better starting place with respect to moral evaluations, but their moral status does not diminish the negative reputational impact of moral violations.

Contrary to some modern interpretations of moral exceptionality, the current work strongly implies that lay conceptions of moral exemplars function continuously rather than categorically; rather than placing moral exemplars on an evaluatively stable pedestal based on their moral status, people's evaluations of exemplars seem to fluctuate in much the same way as their evaluations of the average person after the introduction of negative character information. That said, we are unaware of other psychological studies examining how perceptions of exemplars change after the introduction of negative character information. One potential interpretation of our work is that we elicited a specific conceptualization of moral exemplars—namely, a conceptualization in which an exceptionally good person engages in an obviously immoral behavior—that falls well outside participants' default understanding of moral



exceptionality. Consequently, people's response to the Thompsons and Dr. Grange may not represent their response to a "typical" exemplar, even though main effects indicate that participants clearly distinguished morally exceptional targets from morally average ones.

### **7.1 Limitations and Future Directions**

Although these findings provide valuable insight into people's changing evaluations of moral exemplars, several factors limit the generalizability of these studies. To begin with, our samples overwhelmingly represented the WEIRD demographic—white, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic—which means our findings may not generalize to populations with different characteristics. In Studies 1-4, we excluded more participants than expected for attention check failures, despite oversampling in anticipation of this issues, which reduced statistical power and potentially undermined our ability to detect effects. However, we largely addressed this issue in Study 5 by limiting compensation to participants who passed the attention check.

The current work has strong internal validity through the use of experimental design with crafted materials. Although such designs grant high control and the ability to make causal inferences, they come at the cost of ecological validity and generalizability. More specifically, fabricating fake targets rather than using real people reduces confidence in generalizing the current findings to real life examples. In real life, many moral exemplars are public figures, and people likely develop one-sided relationships with exemplars in the same way they do with famous sports stars, actors, and politicians. Psychological investment in a public figure can substantially impact people's feelings and morally relevant evaluations toward that figure, such as their perceptions of the figure's honesty and fairness, their willingness to forgive the figure's

moral transgressions, and their tendency to dismiss the figure's problematic statements (Gabriel et al., 2018; Wen, 2017; Yuan & Lou, 2020).

As such, using fabricated exemplars may have led these studies to underestimate the true effects because participants lacked meaningful pre-existing connection with the characters. Future work may account for this issue by asking participants to evaluate real life exemplars—either public figures who are universally considered to be morally exceptional, or people that participants identify themselves—in the aftermath of a moral violation. This change would make the scenarios more realistic, at risk to internal validity.

The violations we used in the study vignettes may also have limited the generalizability of our results. We examined only a handful of specific moral infractions out of a vast universe of possible infractions. It remains possible that different kinds of violations may more heavily impact people's evaluations. For example, exemplars may receive harsher overall character evaluations and hypocrisy ratings than ordinary targets when engaging in domain-specific moral violations (e.g., an active nursing home volunteer committing violent elder abuse) rather than domain-general violations.

Relatedly, the current work examined how variables external to the participant, such as moral status of the target, act type, and violation severity, affected moral character evaluations. We did not measure any internal factors that could impact participants' evaluations of moral exemplars, such as participants' personality traits, motivations, and attachment styles. To expand on this work, future research should examine how internal and external factors interact to impact people's evaluations of moral exemplars following moral transgression. In line with the Brett Kavanaugh example, another potentially fruitful research direction would be to explore how a moral exemplar's ingroup status affects people's evaluations, particularly in the political sphere.

Political orientation tends to reflect and reinforce deeply held moral values (Federico, Weber, Ergun, & Hunt, 2013; Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009), so public figures within one's political ingroup, such as politicians or politically active celebrities, may receive especially lenient evaluations for moral violations, even in the absence of violation ambiguity.

Finally, our work primarily explored how individual immoral behaviors impacted people's evaluations of moral exemplars. In reality, perhaps updating people's perceptions of exemplars depends upon the quantity of immoral behaviors. The inclusion of the doctor vignette in Study 5, which featured sexual assault allegations from multiple women, partially addressed this issue by offering participants information about an implied pattern of immoral behavior. However, an implied pattern of immoral behavior may ultimately be evaluated differently than the presentation of multiple discreet instances of immoral behavior. Future research should examine how people update their perceptions of moral exemplars in response to greater quantities of moral violations. People may dismiss the occasional transgression as unintentional or well-meaning, but a recurring pattern of bad behavior would likely chip away at an exemplar's reputation. Alternatively, multiple moral violations may lead to a tipping point, wherein people see now-former exemplars as calculating con artists looking to reap the benefits of their moral reputation. Such research may further explain why Bill Cosby now elicits such a visceral negative response from most people.

## **7.2 Conclusion**

We present five studies demonstrating when and how people update their impressions of moral exemplars who engage in less moral behavior. Overall, people seem to evaluate exemplars similarly to morally average targets, albeit with initially higher moral evaluations. As a result, exemplars receive a cushion against reputational harm whenever they commit moral violations,

but this cushion does not diminish the degree of reputational harm incurred in the wake of immoral behavior. In the real world, this may explain how public figures like Bill Cosby and Brett Kavanaugh manage to retain their reputations and positions of social influence for so long; they start off with better reputations and maintain them longer simply because they have further to fall, but they are not immune to the ravages of reputational damage.

## APPENDIX A

### MATERIALS AND MEASURES FROM STUDIES 1-4

#### A.1 Study 1-4 Vignettes

##### A.1.1 Study 1, 2a, and 2b Vignettes

In the wake of the devastating hurricane that struck the coast earlier this week, local motel owners Maria and Mason Thompson have opened the doors of the Crossroads Motel to storm evacuees. [insert conditions from table below]

	Moral Exemplar Condition	Morally Average Condition
Moral Failure	<p>The Thompsons have been exceptionally active in their community for years and are no strangers to helping their neighbors in need. Since they set down roots here 25 years ago, they've organized an annual fundraiser for the Helping Hands homeless shelter each year, donated thousands of dollars annually to the Hope House for battered women and children, and regularly volunteered at local assisted living communities. Over this time, the Crossroad Motel has grown in popularity, becoming a mainstay in the local economy, and earning the Thompsons a reputation for running one of the best motels in the region.</p> <p>Rather than providing a discount, they're charging their regular rate of \$95 per night for evacuees.</p>	<p>The Thompsons have been an active presence in their community for years and are no strangers to the hospitality industry. Since they set down roots here 25 years ago, their name has become a mainstay in the local economy; the Crossroads Motel has grown both in popularity and size over the years, earning the Thompsons a reputation for running one of the best motels in the region.</p> <p>Rather than providing a discount, they're charging their regular rate of \$95 per night for evacuees.</p>
Moral Success	<p>The Thompsons have been exceptionally active in their community for years and are no strangers to helping their neighbors in need. Since they set down roots here 25 years ago, they've organized an annual fundraiser for the Helping Hands homeless shelter each year, donated thousands of dollars annually to the Hope House for battered women and children, and regularly</p>	<p>The Thompsons have been an active presence in their community for years and are no strangers to the hospitality industry. Since they set down roots here 25 years ago, their name has become a mainstay in the local economy; the Crossroads Motel has grown both in popularity and size over the years, earning the Thompsons a</p>

	<p>volunteered at local assisted living communities. Over this time, the Crossroad Motel has grown in popularity, becoming a mainstay in the local economy, and earning the Thompsons a reputation for running one of the best motels in the region.</p> <p>They're offering a 75% discount off of their regular rate of \$95 per night for evacuees, bringing the final price of their rooms to \$23.75 per night.</p>	<p>reputation for running one of the best motels in the region.</p> <p>They're offering a 75% discount off of their regular rate of \$95 per night for evacuees, bringing the final price of their rooms to \$23.75 per night.</p>
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### A.1.2 Study 3 Vignettes

In the wake of the devastating hurricane that struck the coast earlier this week, local motel owners Maria and Mason Thompson have opened the doors of the Crossroads Motel to storm evacuees. [insert conditions from table]

	Moral Exemplar Condition	Morally Average Condition
Prescriptive Failure	<p>The Thompsons have been exceptionally active in their community for years and are no strangers to helping their neighbors in need. Since they set down roots here 25 years ago, they've organized an annual fundraiser for the Helping Hands homeless shelter each year, donated thousands of dollars annually to the Hope House for battered women and children, and regularly volunteered at local assisted living communities. Over this time, the Crossroads Motel has grown in popularity, becoming a mainstay in the local economy, and earning the Thompsons a reputation for running one of the best motels in the region.</p> <p>Rather than providing a discount, they're charging their regular rate of \$95 per night for evacuees.</p>	<p>The Thompsons have been an active presence in their community for years and are no strangers to the hospitality industry. Since they set down roots here 25 years ago, their name has become a mainstay in the local economy; the Crossroads Motel has grown both in popularity and size over the years, earning the Thompsons a reputation for running one of the best motels in the region.</p> <p>Rather than providing a discount, they're charging their regular rate of \$95 per night for evacuees.</p>
Prescriptive Success	The Thompsons have been exceptionally active in their community	The Thompsons have been an active presence in their community for

	<p>for years and are no strangers to helping their neighbors in need. Since they set down roots here 25 years ago, they've organized an annual fundraiser for the Helping Hands homeless shelter each year, donated thousands of dollars annually to the Hope House for battered women and children, and regularly volunteered at local assisted living communities. Over this time, the Crossroads Motel has grown in popularity, becoming a mainstay in the local economy, and earning the Thompsons a reputation for running one of the best motels in the region.</p> <p>They're offering a 75% discount off of their regular rate of \$95 per night for evacuees, bringing the final price of their rooms to \$23.75 per night.</p>	<p>years and are no strangers to the hospitality industry. Since they set down roots here 25 years ago, their name has become a mainstay in the local economy; the Crossroads Motel has grown both in popularity and size over the years, earning the Thompsons a reputation for running one of the best motels in the region.</p> <p>They're offering a 75% discount off of their regular rate of \$95 per night for evacuees, bringing the final price of their rooms to \$23.75 per night.</p>
Proscriptive Failure	<p>The Thompsons have been exceptionally active in their community for years and are no strangers to helping their neighbors in need. Since they set down roots here 25 years ago, they've organized an annual fundraiser for the Helping Hands homeless shelter each year, donated thousands of dollars annually to the Hope House for battered women and children, and regularly volunteered at local assisted living communities. Over this time, the Crossroads Motel has grown in popularity, becoming a mainstay in the local economy, and earning the Thompsons a reputation for running one of the best motels in the region.</p> <p>Given high demand for rooms, the Thompsons have hiked their prices by 75%, charging \$166.25 per night instead of their normal \$95 rate.</p>	<p>The Thompsons have been an active presence in their community for years and are no strangers to the hospitality industry. Since they set down roots here 25 years ago, their name has become a mainstay in the local economy; the Crossroads Motel has grown both in popularity and size over the years, earning the Thompsons a reputation for running one of the best motels in the region.</p> <p>Given high demand for rooms, the Thompsons have hiked their prices by 75%, charging \$166.25 per night instead of their normal \$95 rate.</p>
Proscriptive Success	<p>The Thompsons have been exceptionally active in their community for years and are no strangers to helping their neighbors in need. Since they set</p>	<p>The Thompsons have been an active presence in their community for years and are no strangers to the hospitality industry. Since they set</p>

	<p>down roots here 25 years ago, they’ve organized an annual fundraiser for the Helping Hands homeless shelter each year, donated thousands of dollars annually to the Hope House for battered women and children, and regularly volunteered at local assisted living communities. Over this time, the Crossroads Motel has grown in popularity, becoming a mainstay in the local economy, and earning the Thompsons a reputation for running one of the best motels in the region.</p> <p>Rather than hiking the price of their rooms, they’re charging their regular rate of \$95 per night for evacuees.</p>	<p>down roots here 25 years ago, their name has become a mainstay in the local economy; the Crossroads Motel has grown both in popularity and size over the years, earning the Thompsons a reputation for running one of the best motels in the region.</p> <p>Rather than hiking the price of their rooms, they’re charging their regular rate of \$95 per night for evacuees.</p>
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### A.1.3 Study 4 Vignettes

In the wake of the devastating hurricane that struck the coast earlier this week, local motel owners Maria and Mason Thompson have opened the doors of the Crossroads Motel to storm evacuees. [insert conditions from table below]

	Moral Exemplar Condition	Morally Average Condition
Low Extremity	<p>The Thompsons have been exceptionally active in their community for years and are no strangers to helping their neighbors in need. Since they set down roots here 10 years ago, they’ve organized an annual fundraiser for the Helping Hands homeless shelter each year, donated thousands of dollars annually to the Hope House for battered women and children, and regularly volunteered at local assisted living communities. Over this time, the Crossroads Motel has grown in popularity, becoming a mainstay in the local economy, and earning the Thompsons a reputation for running one of the best motels in the region.</p>	<p>The Thompsons have been an active presence in their community for years and are no strangers to the hospitality industry. Since they set down roots here 10 years ago, their name has become a mainstay in the local economy. The Crossroads Motel has grown in popularity over the years, becoming a mainstay in the local economy, and earning the Thompsons a reputation for running one of the best motels in the region.</p> <p>However, shortly after the hurricane passed, local authorities discovered that the Thompsons had in fact illegally price-gouged all evacuees staying at the Crossroads Motel,</p>



	However, shortly after the hurricane passed, local authorities discovered that the Thompsons had in fact illegally price-gouged all evacuees staying at the Crossroads Motel, increasing the cost of their rooms by an additional \$100 per night.	increasing the cost of their rooms by an additional \$100 per night.
High Extremity	<p>The Thompsons have been exceptionally active in their community for years and are no strangers to helping their neighbors in need. Since they set down roots here 10 years ago, they've organized an annual fundraiser for the Helping Hands homeless shelter each year, donated thousands of dollars annually to the Hope House for battered women and children, and regularly volunteered at local assisted living communities. Over this time, the Crossroads Motel has grown in popularity, becoming a mainstay in the local economy, and earning the Thompsons a reputation for running one of the best motels in the region.</p> <p>However, shortly after the hurricane passed, local authorities discovered that the Thompsons had in fact been sexually exploiting the children of evacuees at the Crossroads Motel during the storm.</p>	<p>The Thompsons have been an active presence in their community for years and are no strangers to the hospitality industry. Since they set down roots here 10 years ago, their name has become a mainstay in the local economy. The Crossroads Motel has grown in popularity over the years, becoming a mainstay in the local economy, and earning the Thompsons a reputation for running one of the best motels in the region.</p> <p>However, shortly after the hurricane passed, local authorities discovered that the Thompsons had in fact been sexually exploiting the children of evacuees at the Crossroads Motel during the storm.</p>

## A.2 Study 1-4 Measures

Instructions: Keeping in mind the story you just read, please answer the following questions.

[participants responded using a 1-7 Likert scale, (1—Strongly agree, 7—Strongly disagree)]

1. The Thompsons deserve to be praised for their actions.
2. The Thompsons deserve to be blamed for their actions.
3. The Thompsons are moral people.
4. The Thompsons did this on purpose.

5. The Thompsons had complete control over their actions.
6. The Thompsons are hypocrites.
7. The Thompsons acted hypocritically.

### **A.3 IRB Consent Forms and Approval Numbers for Studies 1-4**

#### **A.3.1 Study 1 Consent Form and Approval Number**

##### **INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

**Title of Project:** Judgements and Perceptions

**Investigators:** Kassidy Velasquez, M.A., Graduate Student, and Dr. Paul Conway, Assistant Professor of Social Psychology at Florida State University

This research examines how you perceive and judge people. Participation involves reading a short story and answering questions about your perceptions.

This study will take about **5 minutes** to complete. In exchange for your participation, you will receive **\$0.40. Participation is entirely voluntary.** You are free to end participation at any time, without any penalty. Once you begin the survey, you are entitled to compensation. To receive credit, please complete the entire survey, or else contact the experimenters (see below) to request payment in the event that you are unable to complete the study. Participants may abstain from answering any questions which make them uncomfortable, and doing so will not result in loss of the promised research credit. Participants must be between 18-65 years old in order to participate.

The experiment will be explained in more detail at the end of the study. All responses will remain confidential to the extent allowed by law. You will not be asked to provide identifying information, and we will report only group findings. All data will be stored on password-protected computers at the Department of Psychology.

You have the right to ask and have answered any questions concerning the study. You may contact Dr. Paul Conway at \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_, or Kassidy Velasquez at \_\_\_\_\_ for answers to questions about this research, your rights, or results. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this research, or feel you have been placed at risk, you may contact Florida State University's Human Subjects Office (Phone: 850-644-7900, Email: jth5898@fsu.edu).

FSU Human Subjects Committee approved on 10/12/17. Void 10/11/18. HSC  
# 2017.22096

### A.3.2 Study 2a Consent Form and Approval Number

#### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

**Title of Project:** Judgements and Perceptions

**Investigators:** Kassidy Velasquez, M.A., Graduate Student, and Dr. Paul Conway, Assistant Professor of Social Psychology at Florida State University

This is the first of two short studies you will be completing. research examines how you perceive and judge people. Participation involves reading a short story and answering questions about your perceptions.

This first study will take about **5 minutes** to complete. In exchange for your participation in both studies, you will receive **half a research credit for a relevant Florida State University psychology course. Participation is entirely voluntary.** You are free to end participation at any time, without any penalty. Once you begin the survey, you are entitled to compensation. To receive credit, please complete the entire survey, or else contact the experimenters (see below) to request payment in the event that you are unable to complete the study. Participants may abstain from answering any questions which make them uncomfortable, and doing so will not result in loss of the promised research credit. Participants must be between 18-65 years old in order to participate.

The experiment will be explained in more detail at the end of the study. All responses will remain confidential to the extent allowed by law. You will not be asked to provide identifying information, and we will report only group findings. All data will be stored on password-protected computers at the Department of Psychology.

You have the right to ask and have answered any questions concerning the study. You may contact Dr. Paul Conway at \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_, or Kassidy Velasquez at \_\_\_\_\_ for answers to questions about this research, your rights, or results. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this research, or feel you have been placed at risk, you may contact Florida State University's Human Subjects Office (Phone: 850-644-7900, Email: jth5898@fsu.edu).

### A.3.3 Study 2b Consent Form and Approval Number

#### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

**Title of Project:** Judgements and Perceptions

**Investigators:** Kassidy Velasquez, M.A., Graduate Student, and Dr. Paul Conway, Assistant Professor of Social Psychology at Florida State University

This research examines how you perceive and judge people. Participation involves reading a short story and answering questions about your perceptions.

This study will take about **5 minutes** to complete. In exchange for your participation, you will receive **a piece of candy**. **Participation is entirely voluntary**. You are free to end participation at any time, without any penalty. Once you begin the survey, you are entitled to compensation. To receive credit, please complete the entire survey, or else contact the experimenters (see below) to request payment in the event that you are unable to complete the study. Participants may abstain from answering any questions which make them uncomfortable, and doing so will not result in loss of the promised research credit. Participants must be between 18-65 years old in order to participate.

The experiment will be explained in more detail at the end of the study. All responses will remain confidential to the extent allowed by law. You will not be asked to provide identifying information, and we will report only group findings. All data will be stored on password-protected computers at the Department of Psychology.

You have the right to ask and have answered any questions concerning the study. You may contact Dr. Paul Conway at \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_, or Kassidy Velasquez at \_\_\_\_\_ for answers to questions about this research, your rights, or results. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this research, or feel you have been placed at risk, you may contact Florida State University's Human Subjects Office (Phone: 850-644-7900, Email: [jth5898@fsu.edu](mailto:jth5898@fsu.edu)).

Human Subjects Approval No. **2017.2209**

### **A.3.4 Study 3 Consent Form and Approval Number**

#### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

**Title of Project:** Judgements and Perceptions

**Investigators:** Kassidy Velasquez, M.A., Graduate Student, and Dr. Paul Conway, Assistant Professor of Social Psychology at Florida State University

This research examines how you perceive and judge people. Participation involves reading a short story and answering questions about your perceptions.

This study will take about **5 minutes** to complete. In exchange for your participation, you will receive **\$0.40**. **Participation is entirely voluntary**. You are free to end participation at any time, without any penalty. Once you begin the survey, you are entitled to compensation. To receive credit, please complete the entire survey, or else contact the experimenters (see below) to request payment in the event that you are unable to complete the study. Participants may abstain from answering any questions which make them uncomfortable, and doing so will not result in loss of the promised research credit. Participants must be between 18-65 years old in order to participate.

The experiment will be explained in more detail at the end of the study. All responses will remain confidential to the extent allowed by law. You will not be asked to provide

identifying information, and we will report only group findings. All data will be stored on password-protected computers at the Department of Psychology.

You have the right to ask and have answered any questions concerning the study. You may contact Dr. Paul Conway at \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_, or Kassidy Velasquez at \_\_\_\_\_ for answers to questions about this research, your rights, or results. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this research, or feel you have been placed at risk, you may contact Florida State University's Human Subjects Office (Phone: 850-644-7900, Email: jth5898@fsu.edu).

FSU Human Subjects Committee approved on 10/12/17. Void 10/11/18. HSC  
# 2017.22096

### A.3.5 Study 4 Consent Form

#### INFORMED CONSENT

*Title of the Study:* Judgments and Personality I

*Principal Investigator:* Kassidy Knighten, M.A., M.S., FSU doctoral candidate

*Faculty Advisor:* Paul Conway, Ph.D., Assistant Professor

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Please find below information about this research for you to think about before you decide to take part. Ask us if you have any questions about this information or the research before you decide to take part.

#### **Key Information for You to Consider**

- **Statement of the Research Study.** You are being invited to volunteer to take part in our research study. It is up to you whether you choose to take part or not. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits to you if you choose not to take part or decide later not to take part.
- **Purpose.** The reason that we are doing this research is to study people's perceptions of others' decisions and personalities.
- **Duration.** We think that taking part in our study will last about 5 minutes.
- **Research Activities.** You will be asked to read a short story, and then answer some questions about the story. You will also be asked a few questions about yourself.

**Risks:** The risks or discomforts to you of taking part in this study include discomfort, as some of the details in the story you read may make you uncomfortable.

**Benefits:** As a result of taking part in this research, we do not expect you to gain any specific benefit.

### What is this study about?

Researchers at Florida State University are studying participants' perceptions of others' decisions and personalities. Researchers are interested in finding out how people formulate their perceptions of others. You are invited to take part in the study because you are a Florida State University student between the ages of 18-65, and you are eligible to receive research credit via participation on SONA. You are one of 1000 people to take part in this study. Your involvement in the study is expected to last about 5 minutes.

### What will happen during this research?

If you agree to be in this research, your participation will include reading a short story, completing a series of questions about the character in the story, and then completing a short demographic questionnaire.

If you are interested in receiving the results from this study, please email the principal investigator, Kassidy Knighten (\_\_\_\_\_), and you will be placed on a list to receive the results of the study upon publication of the resulting paper.

### What will you do to protect my privacy?

The results of the study may be published or presented, but we collect no identifying information that could be used to identify you as a participant. As such, your participation is anonymous. The data you provide will be kept on password-protected computers accessible only by authorized researchers, and we will keep the data indefinitely.

Individuals and organizations responsible for conducting or monitoring this research may be permitted access to inspect the research records. This includes the Florida State University Institutional Review Board (FSU IRB), which reviewed this study. Additionally, the corresponding faculty advisor, Dr. Paul Conway, may also be permitted access to these research records. Finally, these research records will also be made publicly available on the Open Science Framework (OSF) website. In all of the aforementioned cases, the data you provide us is still anonymous, and consequently none of these people or entities will be able to link your responses to your identity.

The information collected as part of this research will not be used or distributed for future research studies.

### What are the risks of harms or discomforts associated with this research?

The risks of harms or discomforts associated with the research include the possibility that some of the details in the story you read may make you uncomfortable. There is a small probability of this occurring, and the magnitude of harm done would be minimal, comparable to the discomfort you might experience from everyday activities such as watching television or reading a book.

How might I benefit from this research?

There may be no personal benefit from your participation but the knowledge received may be of value to society.

What is the compensation for the research?

You will receive .5 research credits toward an eligible psychology course for participating in this study, to be granted after you have completed your participation.

What will happen if I choose not to participate?

It is your choice to participate or not to participate in this research. Participation is voluntary.

Is my participation voluntary, and can I withdraw?

Taking part in this research study is your decision. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You do not have to take part in this study, but if you do, you can stop at any time. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your relationship with FSU. There are no penalties or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled, if you do not participate.

You have the right to choose not to participate in any study activity or completely withdraw from continued participation at any point in this study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

If you withdraw from the study, the data collected to the point of withdrawal will be kept and used.

Who do I talk to if I have questions?

If you have questions, concerns, or have experienced a research-related injury, contact the research team at:

Kassidy Knighten, doctoral candidate, at \_\_\_\_\_.

The Florida State University Institutional Review Board ("IRB") is overseeing this research. The FSU IRB is a group of people who perform official independent review of research studies before studies begin to ensure that the rights and welfare of participants are protected. If you have questions about your rights or wish to speak with someone other than the research team, you may contact:

Florida State University IRB  
2010 Levy Drive, Suite 276  
Tallahassee, Florida 32306  
850-644-7900  
[humansubjects@fsu.edu](mailto:humansubjects@fsu.edu)

## STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I have read and considered the information presented in this form. I confirm that I understand the purpose of the research and the study procedures. I understand that I may ask questions at any time and can withdraw my participation without prejudice. I have read this consent form. My signature below indicates my willingness to participate in this study.

### **A.4 IRB Approval for Study 4**

The IRB application approval number can be found at the bottom of the consent forms for a Studies 1, 2a, and 2b. Studies 4 and 5 were implemented after Florida State University made an institutional switch to a new IRB structure in which exempt studies received no approval number/expiration date. As such, I have attached the approval form for Study 4 in this section to comply with requirements regarding the inclusion of IRB approval documentation.

## **FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY** *OFFICE of the VICE PRESIDENT for RESEARCH*



### **EXEMPTION DETERMINATION**

October 7, 2020

Kassidy Irvan, 850-644-5260

Dear Kassidy Irvan:

On 10/7/2020, the IRB staff reviewed the following submission:



Type of Review:	Exempt (3)(i)(B) Benign behavioral interventions (low risk)
Title:	Judgments and Personality I
Investigator:	Kassidy Irvan
Submission ID:	STUDY00001743
Study ID:	STUDY00001743
Funding:	None
Grant ID:	None
IND, IDE, or HDE:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Judgments and Personality (I)--Debriefing Form.pdf, Category: Debriefing;</li> <li>• Judgments and Personality (I)--Materials.pdf, Category: Survey/Questionnaire;</li> <li>• Kassidy Velasquez CITI Training Certificate--Behavioral Research.pdf, Category: Other;</li> <li>• Paul's CITI training certificate.pdf, Category: Other;</li> <li>• Judgments and Personality (I)--Consent Form (SONA).pdf, Category: Consent Form;</li> <li>• Protocol--Judgments and Personality, Category: IRB Protocol;</li> <li>• SONA Advertisement (Judgments and Personality I).pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;</li> </ul>

## APPENDIX B

### MATERIALS AND MEASURES FROM STUDY 5

#### B.1 Study 5 Vignettes

	Hurricane Vignette	Doctor Vignette
Stem	In the wake of the devastating hurricane that struck the coast earlier this week, local motel owners Maria and Mason Thompson opened the doors of the Crossroads Motel to evacuees whose homes were destroyed by the storm.	Dr. Tim Grange has a long-standing record of exceptionality.
Morally Exceptional; High Ambiguity	<p>The Thompsons have been exceptionally active in their community for years and are no strangers to helping their neighbors in need. Since they set down roots here 25 years ago, they've organized an annual fundraiser for the Helping Hands homeless shelter, donated thousands of dollars annually to the Hope House for battered women and children, and regularly volunteered at local assisted living communities. The Crossroads Motel has grown in popularity and size over the years, earning the Thompsons a reputation for running one of the best motels in the region.</p> <p>During the week of the hurricane, the Thompsons raised the cost of their rooms by an additional \$100 per night. The increased price meant not everyone could afford a room, but many other hotels and motels across the region also raised their prices in response to the high demand for rooms. With</p>	In his four years at Villanova University, Dr. Tim Grange completed dual degrees in physics and biochemistry, graduating <i>summa cum laude</i> with offers to attend some of the United States' top medical schools. Dr. Grange then accepted an offer to attend Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, where he received a prestigious research fellowship from the National Science Foundation to fund his groundbreaking medical research. He spent his free time developing and organizing the Vaccinations and Community Education (VACE) program, giving free vaccinations to over 3,000 children in low-income communities in Pennsylvania, thereby saving many children from fatal diseases. After graduating from medical school, Dr. Grange volunteered for a dangerous overseas assignment as a physician for Doctors Without Borders, where he provided lifesaving treatment to innocent civilians fleeing violence in Yemen. He was recognized by the United Nations for this humanitarian work. After returning to the U.S., Dr. Grange joined the best hospital in New York City, where he has worked as a surgeon for the past 5 years.

	<p>vacancy rates low and prices higher across the entire region, all of the hotel and motel owners in the area, including the Thompsons, remained very busy</p>	<p>During his time as a surgeon, hundreds of patients sought out Dr. Grange for his surgical skills, including many young female patients. However, nine of these vulnerable young women have now come forward alleging that Dr. Grange sexually abused them, claiming that he used medical care as an excuse to touch them inappropriately. Dr. Grange expressed surprise, stating that he was unaware that this kind of contact would traumatize his patients, even though some were so upset they went public with their allegations. These accusations are not uncommon in Dr. Grange's field of reproductive health, according to two of Dr. Grange's coworkers, a nurse and another surgeon in the same department. They noted that patients often find common medical procedures in this field uncomfortable or invasive, even when those procedures fall within normal medical practice.</p>
<p>Morally Average; High Ambiguity</p>	<p>The Thompsons have been an active presence in their community for years and are no strangers to running a successful small business in the hospitality industry. Since they set down roots here 25 years ago, the Thompsons have become well-known in the town and the industry, making them a mainstay in the local economy. The Crossroads Motel has grown in popularity and size over the years, earning the Thompsons a reputation for running one of the best motels in the region.</p> <p>During the week of the hurricane, the Thompsons raised the cost of their rooms by an additional \$100 per night. The increased price meant not everyone could afford a room, but many other hotels and motels</p>	<p>In his four years at Villanova University, Dr. Tim Grange completed dual degrees in physics and biochemistry, graduating <i>summa cum laude</i> with offers to attend some of the United States' top medical schools. Dr. Grange then accepted an offer to attend Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, where he received a prestigious research fellowship from the National Science Foundation to fund his groundbreaking medical research. He spent his free time developing and organizing the Medical Community Video Games Tournament (MVGT) program, where medical students in various schools competed for cash prizes, thereby promoting video games as a social event. After graduating from medical school, Dr. Grange worked an overseas assignment as an attending physician in Berlin, where he provided medical care for businesspeople traveling internationally and excelled in a course called "Learning German for Medical Professionals." After graduating</p>

	<p>across the region also raised their prices in response to the high demand for rooms. With vacancy rates low and prices higher across the entire region, all of the hotel and motel owners in the area, including the Thompsons, remained very busy</p>	<p>from medical school, Dr. Grange joined the best hospital in New York City, where he has worked as a surgeon for the past 5 years.</p> <p>During his time as a surgeon, hundreds of patients sought out Dr. Grange for his surgical skills, including many young female patients. However, nine of these vulnerable young women have now come forward alleging that Dr. Grange sexually abused them, claiming that he used medical care as an excuse to touch them inappropriately. Dr. Grange expressed surprise, stating that he was unaware that this kind of contact would traumatize his patients, even though some were so upset they went public with their allegations. These accusations are not uncommon in Dr. Grange's field of reproductive health, according to two of Dr. Grange's coworkers, a nurse and another surgeon in the same department. They noted that patients often find common medical procedures in this field uncomfortable or invasive, even when those procedures fall within normal medical practice.</p>
<p>Morally Exceptional; Low Ambiguity</p>	<p>The Thompsons have been exceptionally active in their community for years and are no strangers to helping their neighbors in need. Since they set down roots here 25 years ago, they've organized an annual fundraiser for the Helping Hands homeless shelter, donated thousands of dollars annually to the Hope House for battered women and children, and regularly volunteered at local assisted living communities. The Crossroads Motel has grown in popularity and size over the years, earning the Thompsons a reputation for running one of the best motels in the region.</p>	<p>In his four years at Villanova University, Dr. Tim Grange completed dual degrees in physics and biochemistry, graduating <i>summa cum laude</i> with offers to attend some of the United States' top medical schools. Dr. Grange then accepted an offer to attend Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, where he received a prestigious research fellowship from the National Science Foundation to fund his groundbreaking medical research. He spent his free time developing and organizing the Vaccinations and Community Education (VACE) program, giving free vaccinations to over 3,000 children in low-income communities in Pennsylvania, thereby saving many children from fatal diseases. After graduating from medical school, Dr. Grange volunteered for a dangerous</p>

	<p>As hurricane evacuees desperately sought shelter, the Thompsons raised the cost of their rooms by an additional \$100 per night to squeeze extra profit out of people seeking shelter. The increased price meant their rooms were now unaffordable to many lower-income people who lost their homes to the storm. The Thompsons made a huge profit, but people accused them of price-gouging and exploiting victims who were already suffering from a natural disaster.</p>	<p>overseas assignment as a physician for Doctors Without Borders, where he provided lifesaving treatment to innocent civilians fleeing violence in Yemen. He was recognized by the United Nations for this humanitarian work. After returning to the U.S., Dr. Grange joined the best hospital in New York City, where he has worked as a surgeon for the past 5 years.</p> <p>During his time as a surgeon, hundreds of patients sought out Dr. Grange for his surgical skills, including many young female patients. However, nine of these vulnerable young women have now come forward alleging that Dr. Grange sexually abused them, claiming that he used medical care as an excuse to touch them inappropriately. Dr. Grange admitted that he knew this kind of contact would traumatize his patients, even though some were so upset they went public with their allegations. The accusations against Dr. Grange were corroborated by eye-witness testimony from two of his coworkers, a nurse and another surgeon in the same department. They noted that while patients often find medical procedures in Dr. Grange's field of reproductive health uncomfortable or invasive, Dr. Grange's activity clearly falls outside normal medical practice.</p>
Morally Average; Low Ambiguity	<p>The Thompsons have been an active presence in their community for years and are no strangers to running a successful small business in the hospitality industry. Since they set down roots here 25 years ago, the Thompsons have become well-known in the town and the industry, making them a mainstay in the local economy. The Crossroads Motel has grown in popularity and size over the years, earning the Thompsons a</p>	<p>In his four years at Villanova University, Dr. Tim Grange completed dual degrees in physics and biochemistry, graduating <i>summa cum laude</i> with offers to attend some of the United States' top medical schools. Dr. Grange then accepted an offer to attend Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, where he received a prestigious research fellowship from the National Science Foundation to fund his groundbreaking medical research. He spent his free time developing and organizing the Medical Community Video Games Tournament (MVGT) program, where</p>

	<p>reputation for running one of the best motels in the region.</p> <p>As hurricane evacuees desperately sought shelter, the Thompsons raised the cost of their rooms by an additional \$100 per night to squeeze extra profit out of people seeking shelter. The increased price meant their rooms were now unaffordable to many lower-income people who lost their homes to the storm. The Thompsons made a huge profit, but people accused them of price-gouging and exploiting victims who were already suffering from a natural disaster.</p>	<p>medical students in various schools competed for cash prizes, thereby promoting video games as a social event. After graduating from medical school, Dr. Grange worked an overseas assignment as an attending physician in Berlin, where he provided medical care for businesspeople traveling internationally and excelled in a course called “Learning German for Medical Professionals.” After graduating from medical school, Dr. Grange joined the best hospital in New York City, where he has worked as a surgeon for the past 5 years.</p> <p>During his time as a surgeon, hundreds of patients sought out Dr. Grange for his surgical skills, including many young female patients. However, nine of these vulnerable young women have now come forward alleging that Dr. Grange sexually abused them, claiming that he used medical care as an excuse to touch them inappropriately. Dr. Grange admitted that he knew this kind of contact would traumatize his patients, even though some were so upset they went public with their allegations. The accusations against Dr. Grange were corroborated by eye-witness testimony from two of his coworkers, a nurse and another surgeon in the same department. They noted that while patients often find medical procedures in Dr. Grange’s field of reproductive health uncomfortable or invasive, Dr. Grange’s activity clearly falls outside normal medical practice.</p>
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## B.2 Study 5 Measures

We used the same set of questions for both the hurricane and doctor vignettes, simply replacing “The Thompsons” with “Dr. Grange” and plural pronouns with singular masculine pronouns in the outcome variables.

1. The Thompsons deserve to be praised for their actions. (1-Strongly disagree to 7-Strongly agree)
2. The Thompsons deserve to be blamed for their actions. (1-Strongly disagree to 7-Strongly agree)
3. The Thompsons are moral people. (1-Strongly disagree to 7-Strongly agree)
4. The Thompsons did this on purpose. (1-Strongly disagree to 7-Strongly agree)
5. The Thompsons had complete control over their actions. (1-Strongly disagree to 7-Strongly agree)
6. The Thompsons are hypocrites. (1-Strongly disagree to 7-Strongly agree)
7. The Thompsons actions were hypocritical. (1-Strongly disagree to 7-Strongly agree)
8. The Thompsons are highly intelligent. (1-Strongly disagree to 7-Strongly agree)
9. The Thompsons have excelled in their career. (1-Strongly disagree to 7-Strongly agree)
10. The Thompsons are extremely successful. (1-Strongly disagree to 7-Strongly agree)

Consider the end of the story you just read. Why do you think the Thompsons behaved the way that they did? \_\_\_\_\_

### Demographic Questionnaire

How old are you (in years)? \_\_\_\_\_

What gender do you most identify as?

- Male
- Female
- Neither
  - Feel free to specify: \_\_\_\_\_

How religious are you? (1 – Not religious at all, 7 – Extremely religious)

Please indicate your political orientation. (1 – Very liberal, 7 – Very Conservative, 8 – Other political orientation [please feel free to specify]\_\_\_\_\_)

What racial/ethnic group(s) do you most identify with? (Select as many as you like)

- Asian
- Native American or Alaska Native
- Black or African American
- Hispanic/Latino
- White or Caucasian

- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

### B.3 IRB Consent Form for Study 5

#### INFORMED CONSENT

**Title of the Study:** Judgments and Personality (I)

**Principal Investigator:** Kassidy Knighten, M.A., M.S., FSU doctoral candidate

**Faculty Advisor:** Paul Conway, Ph.D., Assistant Professor

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Please find below information about this research for you to think about before you decide to take part. Ask us if you have any questions about this information or the research before you decide to take part.

#### **Key Information for You to Consider**

- **Statement of the Research Study.** You are being invited to volunteer to take part in our research study. It is up to you whether you choose to take part or not. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits to you if you choose not to take part or decide later not to take part.
- **Purpose.** The reason that we are doing this research is to study people's perceptions of others' decisions and personalities.
- **Duration.** We think that taking part in our study will last about 5-7 minutes.
- **Research Activities.** You will be asked to read a short story, and then answer some questions about the story. You will also be asked a few questions about yourself.

**Risks:** The risks or discomforts to you of taking part in this study include discomfort, as some of the details in the story you read may make you uncomfortable.

**Benefits:** As a result of taking part in this research, we do not expect you to gain any specific benefit.

#### What is this study about?

Researchers at Florida State University are studying participants' perceptions of others' decisions and personalities. Researchers are interested in finding out how people formulate their perceptions of others. You are invited to take part in the study because you are an Amazon Mechanical Turk worker between the ages of 18-65, and you are eligible to receive \$0.50 via participation on Amazon Mechanical Turk. You are one of 1000 people to take part in this study. Your involvement in the study is expected to last about 5-7 minutes.



What will happen during this research?

If you agree to be in this research, your participation will include reading a short story, completing a series of questions about the character in the story, and then completing a short demographic questionnaire.

If you are interested in receiving the results from this study, please email the principal investigator, Kassidy Knighten (\_\_\_\_\_), and you will be placed on a list to receive the results of the study upon publication of the resulting paper.

What will you do to protect my privacy?

The results of the study may be published or presented, but we collect no identifying information that could be used to identify you as a participant. As such, your participation is anonymous. The data you provide will be kept on password-protected computers accessible only by authorized researchers, and we will keep the data indefinitely.

Individuals and organizations responsible for conducting or monitoring this research may be permitted access to inspect the research records. This includes the Florida State University Institutional Review Board (FSU IRB), which reviewed this study. Additionally, the corresponding faculty advisor, Dr. Paul Conway, may also be permitted access to these research records. Finally, these research records will also be made publicly available on the Open Science Framework (OSF) website. In all of the aforementioned cases, the data you provide us is still anonymous, and consequently none of these people or entities will be able to link your responses to your identity.

The information collected as part of this research will not be used or distributed for future research studies.

What are the risks of harms or discomforts associated with this research?

The risks of harms or discomforts associated with the research include the possibility that some of the details in the story you read may make you uncomfortable. There is a small probability of this occurring, and the magnitude of harm done would be minimal, comparable to the discomfort you might experience from everyday activities such as watching television or reading a book.

How might I benefit from this research?

There may be no personal benefit from your participation but the knowledge received may be of value to society.

What is the compensation for the research?

You will receive \$0.50 for participating in this study, to be granted after you have completed your participation. You must correctly answer the attention check in order to receive payment for your participation.

What will happen if I choose not to participate?

It is your choice to participate or not to participate in this research. Participation is voluntary.

Is my participation voluntary, and can I withdraw?

Taking part in this research study is your decision. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You do not have to take part in this study, but if you do, you can stop at any time. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your relationship with FSU. There are no penalties or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled, if you do not participate.

You have the right to choose not to participate in any study activity or completely withdraw from continued participation at any point in this study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

If you withdraw from the study, the data collected to the point of withdrawal will be kept and used.

Who do I talk to if I have questions?

If you have questions, concerns, or have experienced a research-related injury, contact the research team at:

Kassidy Knighten, doctoral candidate

The Florida State University Institutional Review Board (“IRB”) is overseeing this research. The FSU IRB is a group of people who perform official independent review of research studies before studies begin to ensure that the rights and welfare of participants are protected. If you have questions about your rights or wish to speak with someone other than the research team, you may contact:

Florida State University IRB  
2010 Levy Drive, Suite 276  
Tallahassee, Florida 32306  
850-644-7900  
humansubjects@fsu.edu

### STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I have read and considered the information presented in this form. I confirm that I understand the purpose of the research and the study procedures. I understand that I may ask questions at any time and can withdraw my participation without prejudice. I have read this consent form. My signature below indicates my willingness to participate in this study.

### **B.4 IRB Amendment Approval for Study 5**

FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY  
OFFICE of the VICE PRESIDENT for RESEARCH



#### EXEMPTION DETERMINATION

May 3, 2021

Kassidy Irvan, 850-644-5260

Dear Kassidy Irvan:

On 5/3/2021, the IRB staff reviewed the following submission:

Type of Review:	Exempt (3)(i)(B) Benign behavioral interventions (low risk)
Title:	Judgments and Personality I
Investigator:	Kassidy Irvan
Submission ID:	MOD00001251
Study ID:	STUDY00001743
Funding:	None
Grant ID:	None
IND, IDE, or HDE:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Judgments and Personality (1)--Materials (AMENDED).pdf, Category: Data variables list/description/dictionary;</li><li>• Amazon Mechanical Turk Advertisement (Judgments and Personality I).pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;</li><li>• Judgments and Personality (I)--Consent Form (Amazon Mechanical Turk).pdf, Category: Consent Form;</li><li>• Protocol--Judgments and Personality (AMENDED), Category: IRB Protocol;</li></ul>

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Yuan, S., & Lou, C. (2020). How Social Media Influencers Foster Relationships with Followers: The Roles of Source Credibility and Fairness in Parasocial Relationship and Product Interest. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 20(2), 133-147.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

### Kassidy R. Irvan, Ph.D.

Department of Psychology, Florida State University  
1107 W. Call Street, Tallahassee, FL, USA 32306-4301

## EDUCATION

### PhD Student, Social Psychology

Florida State University

Advisor: Paul Conway

Dissertation: *A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing? Perceptions of Moral Exemplars who Commit Moral Violations*

May 2019—June 2021

Tallahassee, FL

### MS, Psychology

Florida State University

Advisor: Paul Conway

Thesis: *When buying milk, do you care about the cow? Developing and validating a measure of Focus on Ethical Considerations*

May 2019

Tallahassee, FL

### MA, Psychology

Wake Forest University

Advisor: William Fleeson

Thesis: *Altruistic behavior and subjective well-being: A meta-analytic perspective*

May 2016

Winston-Salem, NC

### BA, *cum laude*, Psychology and Philosophy

Baylor University

Advisor: Wade Rowatt

May 2014

Waco, TX

## RESEARCH AND PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

### Social and Behavioral Sciences Graduate Fellow, Consultant

Democracy International

Social and Behavioral Sciences Team

Supervisor: Laura Van Berkel, Ph.D.

Apr. 2021-Aug. 2021

Remote Work

### Graduate Researcher

Moral and Social Processing Lab

Department of Psychology, Florida State University

Faculty Mentor: Paul Conway, Ph.D.

Aug. 2016-Present

Tallahassee, FL

### Graduate Researcher

Beacon Project Lab

Department of Psychology, Wake Forest University

Faculty Mentor: William Fleeson, Ph.D.

Aug. 2015-Aug. 2016

Winston-Salem, NC

### Graduate Researcher

Aug. 2014-Aug. 2015

### TECHNICAL AND QUANTITATIVE EXPERIENCE

#### SPSS, Amos, and the Process macro for data analytics

Fall 2013-present

Cleaning and managing datasets  
Running t-tests, correlations, ANOVA, ANCOVA, and MANOVA  
Running multiple, hierarchical, and polynomial regression in addition to hierarchical linear modeling  
Running reliability analysis and exploratory factor analysis  
Running confirmatory factor analysis, path analysis, and structural equation modeling in Amos  
Running moderations and mediations using the Process macro in SPSS

#### R

Fall 2014-present

Running multiple and hierarchical regression  
Running reliability analysis, as well as exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses  
Running meta-analyses and meta-regression  
Running structural equation models  
Data manipulation and visualization

#### Qualtrics

Fall 2013-present

Designing and building online surveys for research projects  
Utilizing display logic and randomization programming for experimental designs  
Programming exclusion criteria to prevent people from participating more than once  
Downloading and managing data collected from Qualtrics surveys

### PUBLICATIONS AND MANUSCRIPTS<sup>17</sup>

**Knighten, K.R.,** & Conway, P. (2020). When buying milk, do you care about the cow? Developing and validating a scale of Focus on Ethical Considerations. (in prep)

Reynolds, C. J., **Knighten, K. R.,** & Conway, P. (2019). Mirror, mirror, on the wall, who is deontological? Completing moral dilemmas in front of mirrors increases deontological but not utilitarian response tendencies. *Cognition*, 192, 103993.

Conway, P., **Knighten, K. R.,** Reynolds, C., Forstmann, M., & Love, E. (2019). Affect, deliberation, rules, and sentiment: Clarifying different orientations towards moral dilemma decision-making. (in prep)

Hartley, A.G., Furr, M., Helzer, E. G., Jayawickreme, E., **Velasquez, K. R.,** & Fleeson, W. (2016). Morality's centrality to liking, respecting, and understanding others. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 7(7), 1-10.

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<sup>17</sup> Last name changed from Velasquez to Knighten in 2018. Last name changed to Irvan in 2020.

## PRESENTATIONS

- Knigheten, K. R., & Conway, P.** (2020, February). *Benefit of the Doubt: Moral Exemplarity Renders Character Judgments Robust Against Moral Failings*. Poster presented at the annual Society for Personality and Social Psychology Conference, New Orleans, LA.
- Velasquez, K. R., & Conway, P.** (2019, March). *Sinning saints are still saints: Differential attributions of praise and blame for moral exemplars and average Joes*. Poster presented at the annual Society for Personality and Social Psychology Conference, Portland, OR.
- Velasquez, K.R., & Conway, P.** (2018, October). *Sinning saints are still saints: Differential attributions of praise and blame for moral exemplars and average Joes*. Talk presented at the annual Southeastern Society for Social Psychologists Conference, Raleigh, NC.
- Velasquez, K. R., & Conway, P.** (2018, March). *When buying milk, do you care about the cow?: Developing and validating a scale of Moralized Perception*. Poster presented at the annual Society for Personality and Social Psychology Conference, Atlanta, GA.
- Velasquez, K.R., & Conway, P.** (2017, November). *When buying milk, do you care about the cow?: Developing and validating a scale of Moralized Perception*. Talk presented at the annual Southeastern Society for Social Psychologists Conference, Atlantic Beach, FL.
- Velasquez, K. R., & Fleenon, W.** (2016-2017). *Altruistic Behavior and Subjective Well-Being: A Meta-Analytic Perspective*.  
Presented at the annual European Association for Social Psychology, Granada, Spain.  
Presented the annual Society for Personality and Social Psychology Conference, San Antonio, TX.  
Presented at the annual Society of Southeastern Social Psychologists Conference, Asheville, NC.
- Velasquez, K. R.** (2016, April 13). *Meta-Analysis: A Not-So-Scary How-To*. Seminar presented at the Wake Forest University Psychology Department's Seminars in Analysis and Measurement series, Winston-Salem, NC.
- Velasquez, K. R., Fleenon, W., Furr, R. M., & Hartley, A.** (2016, January). *Malicious or Careless?: Inattention as a Possible Source of Immoral Action*. Poster presented at the annual Society for Personality and Social Psychology Conference, San Diego, CA.
- Hartley, A.G., Furr, R.M., **Velasquez, K.**, Helzer, E., Fleenon, W., Jayawickreme, E. (2016). *Morality's centrality in interpersonal evaluation*. Talk presented as part of the symposium, Understanding the Power of Moral Perception: Advancing Research on the Social Cognition of Morality. Symposium and talk accepted for presentation at the 17th annual Society for Personality and Social Psychology 2016 Conference, San Diego, CA.
- Hartley, A.G., Furr, R.M., Helzer, E., Jayawickreme, E. **Velasquez, K.**, & Fleenon, W., (2015, October). *The power of morality in interpersonal evaluations of liking, respect, and understanding of others*. Paper presented at the 37<sup>th</sup> annual Society of Southeastern Social Psychologists conference, Winston-Salem, NC.
- Velasquez, K. R., Fleenon, W., Furr, R. M., & Hartley, A.** (2015, April). *Malicious or Careless?*

Exploring the Source of Immoral Actions. Data blitz given at the Carolina Research in Social Psychology Conference at Duke University in Durham, NC.

**Velasquez, K. R.** (2015, April). *Malicious or Careless? Exploring the source of immoral actions*. Poster presented at the annual First Year Graduate Students Colloquium, Winston-Salem, NC.

**Velasquez, K. R.** (2015, March 18). *Malicious or Careless? Exploring the Source of Immoral Actions*. Seminar presented at the Wake Forest University Psychology Department's Seminars in Self-Regulation series, Winston-Salem, NC.

#### OTHER PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

**Instructor of Record**, Psychology of Personality (Distance Learning) Mar. 2020-present  
*Department of Psychology, Florida State University* Tallahassee, FL  
Responsible for designing, preparing, and teaching a course on the psychology of personality.  
Responsible for disseminating course content using an online format, including Zoom lectures and office hours as well as online assessments.  
Utilize Item Response Theory and survey data to implement improvements to the design of assessments and learning materials.

**Instructor of Record**, Psychology of Personality Aug. 2018-Mar. 2020  
*Department of Psychology, Florida State University* Tallahassee, FL  
Responsible for designing, preparing, and teaching a course on the psychology of personality.  
Utilize Item Response Theory and survey data to implement improvements to the design of assessments and learning materials.

**Program Assistant**, FSU Psychology in London Study Abroad Program Jun. 2018-Aug. 2018  
*International Programs, Florida State University* London, England  
Responsible for aiding the instructor of record in conducting classroom activities, including guest lecturing, grading, and serving as a chaperone for regular class field trips. Additional responsibilities included providing academic and emotional support for individual students, as well as arranging for appropriate medical care for students in the event of an emergency.

**Teaching Assistant**, Research Methods Lab Aug. 2017-May 2018  
*Department of Psychology, Florida State University* Tallahassee, FL  
Responsible for providing supplementary lectures for undergraduate research methods class.  
Additional responsibilities included overseeing classroom activities and grading student assignments.

**Department Assistant**, Office of Undergraduate Advising Aug. 2016-Aug. 2017  
*Department of Psychology, Florida State University* Tallahassee, FL  
Provided general advising and material development assistance to undergraduates for the graduate school application process

#### SERVICE AND ORGANIZING EXPERIENCE

**Social Psychology Graduate Recruitment Event**, Graduate Organizer Feb. 2016, 2020  
*Florida State University Department of Psychology, Social Psychology*  
Collaborated with colleagues to organize lab dinners, interview schedules, research presentations, meals, travel, and lodging arrangements for interviewees. Presented research on perceptions of moral exemplars to showcase departmental research initiatives.

**The Beacon Project Conference**, Graduate Organizer May 2016  
*The Beacon Project Lab, Wake Forest University* Winston-Salem, NC  
 Collaborated with the lab manager to ensure that speakers received transportation to and from the conference venue. Additional responsibilities included preparing conference materials and facilitating discussion during conference roundtables.

**Society of Southeastern Social Psychologists**, Volunteer Organizer Oct. 2015  
*The Department of Psychology, Wake Forest University* Winston-Salem, NC  
 Responsible for making sure that speakers made it to the appropriate conference rooms, providing directions to attendees, and offering logistical support for setup of conference food, seating, and information packets

**The Beacon Project Funding Competition**, Graduate Assistant Jul. 2015  
 Aided in the review of grant applications to determine which researchers would receive Templeton Foundation funding for programmatic research examining moral exceptionality.

#### AWARDS AND HONORS

Attended the Wurzburg Summer School for Social Cognition and Neuroscience Jun. 2017  
 Society for Southeastern Social Psychology Graduate Poster Award Winner Oct. 2016  
 Society for Personality and Social Psychology Graduate Student Travel Award Feb. 2016  
 Baylor Chapter of Psi Chi Psychology Honor Society Member Sept. 2012-Present  
 Psi Chi Fundraising Chair Aug. 2013-May 2014  
 Dean's List of College of Arts and Sciences: Five semesters

#### MEMBERSHIPS

Student Member, Society for Personality and Social Psychology Dec. 2016-Present  
 Student Member, Association for Psychological Science, 2016-Present  
 Member, Community of Practice for Social and Behavioral Change in Democracy, Rights, and Governance