

Unethical and Inept? The Influence of Moral Information on Perceptions of Competence

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While moral character heavily influences global evaluations of others (Goodwin, Piazza, & Rozin, 2014), its causal effect on perceptions of others' competence (i.e., one's knowledge, skills, and abilities) is less clear. We found that people readily use information about another's morality when judging their competence, despite holding folk intuitions that these domains are independent. Across 6 studies ($n = 1,567$), including 2 preregistered experiments, participants judged targets who committed hypothetical transgressions (Studies 1 and 3), cheated on lab tasks (Study 2), acted selfishly in economic games (Study 4), and received low morality ratings from coworkers (Study 5 and 6) as less competent than control or moral targets. These findings were specific to morality and were not the result of incidentally manipulating impressions of warmth (Study 4), nor were they fully explained by a general *halo effect* (Studies 2 and 3). We hypothesized that immoral targets are seen as less competent because their immoral actions led them to be viewed as low in social intelligence. Studies 4 and 5 supported this prediction, demonstrating that social intelligence was a more reliable mediator than perceptions of self-control or general intelligence. An experimental test of this mediation argument found that presenting targets as highly socially intelligent eliminated the negative effect of immoral information on judgments of competence (Study 6). These results suggest that information about a person's moral character readily influences perceptions of their competence.

Keywords: morality, competence, social intelligence, social perception

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In 2011, married congressman Anthony Weiner resigned his seat in the House of Representatives after it was discovered that he had texted lewd pictures of himself to various women. This incident, like those that have derailed the professional careers of David Petraeus, John Edwards, and Larry Craig, raises an important question about the perceived relationship between morality and competence, widely discussed in the wake of these scandals. Was Weiner's unethical behavior relevant to his capacity to do his job? Public opinion polls suggest many of Weiner's constituents thought that it was. Seventy-three percent of New Yorkers felt that Weiner's actions were unethical, but not illegal (only 11% felt his actions were illegal). However, in light of the scandal 39% also questioned his professional judgment and 43% felt he could no longer carry out his duties effectively as a congressman (NY1-Marist Poll, 2011). These data suggest that perceptions of Weiner's job competence may have been directly influenced by his personal indiscretions.

To date, no empirical work has systematically examined the causal impact of an individual's moral character on judgments of

their competence. Scholars traditionally regard morality and competence as two fundamental dimensions of social perception, often contrasting them as predictors of global impressions (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007; Bakan, 1966; Dubois & Beauvois, 2005; Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007; Goodwin et al., 2014; Peeters & Czapinski, 1990; Rosenberg, Nelson, & Vivekananthan, 1968; Ybarra et al., 2008). Here, however, we test the capacity for information in one dimension (morality) to causally affect evaluations in the other (competence). We hypothesize that immoral acts lead individuals to be judged as less competent and that this effect is driven by diminished perceptions of social intelligence, which in turn leads to lower perceived competence because social intelligence is seen as a key element of overall competence. Across eight studies we test this hypothesis, comparing it with plausible alternatives.

Morality and Competence: Two Fundamental Dimensions of Social Perception

When evaluating others, most of the variance is explained by perceptions along two dimensions: morality and competence (Rosenberg et al., 1968; Wojciszke, 2005). These fundamental dimensions of social perception have emerged within many research traditions, including those on communion and agency (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007; Bakan, 1966; Ybarra et al., 2008), social desirability and intellectual desirability (Rosenberg et al., 1968), other-profitability and self-

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profitability (Peeters & Czapinski, 1990), warmth and competence (Fiske et al., 2007), and social desirability and social utility (Dubois & Beauvois, 2005).

Theoretical treatments of morality and competence within social perception suggest these dimensions convey distinct information about an individual, which serve different functions (e.g., Judd, James-Hawkins, Yzerbyt, & Kashima, 2005). Impressions formed on the morality dimension are concerned with how a person treats others and provide insight into a person's intentions to enact socially valued or prohibited behaviors; moral traits include trustworthiness, honesty, and kindness (Wojciszke, 2005). Impressions formed on the competence dimension, on the other hand, are concerned with an individual's ability to attain personal goals; it includes traits like intelligence, capability (Abele, Cuddy, Judd, & Yzerbyt, 2008; Peeters & Czapinski, 1990). Behaving morally helps individuals obtain acceptance from and belonging with others, while behaving competently helps individuals display skill or talent (Ybarra et al., 2008).

As fundamental dimensions of social perception, morality and competence are not traditionally examined for their impact on one another, but rather for their capacity to powerfully, and sometimes divergently, predict broader judgments such as global impressions (e.g., Nauts, Langner, Huijsmans, Vonk, & Wigboldus, 2014; Wojciszke, 2005), stereotypes (Glick & Fiske, 1996), and willingness to cooperate (De Bruin & Van Lange, 1999). Past work has revealed that moral information holds a privileged position in influencing these heavily interpersonal judgments (e.g., Goodwin et al., 2014). However, perceptions of competence are grounded in less social, more personal qualities of an individual (e.g., their skills, abilities, and knowledge). As a result, it is unclear whether information about an individual's past moral or immoral behavior would causally influence judgments of their competence and how it may do so.

Three Competing Hypotheses: Inept Sinner, Evil Genius, and Moral Decoupling

We predict that moral information does impact judgments of competence. Indirect support for this claim comes from empirical studies that reveal sizable positive correlations ($r = .43$, $r = .49$) between these two dimensions in individuals' evaluations of others (Rosenberg et al., 1968; Suitner & Maass, 2008). These findings give rise to the *inept sinner hypothesis*, in which immoral behavior is interpreted as an indicator of lower competence. We focus specifically on immoral behavior because, consistent with the general negativity bias (Rozin & Royzman, 2001), it exerts a stronger influence on interpersonal judgments (e.g., DeBruin & Van Lange, 1999; Martijn, Spears, Van Der Pligt, & Jakobs, 1992; Skowronski & Carlston, 1987) and is considered more diagnostic and predictive than moral behavior (Martijn et al., 1992; Reeder & Spores, 1983). Further, social expectations about refraining from immoral actions (e.g., cheating on a spouse) are stronger than those about engaging in moral actions (e.g., being a faithful loving spouse; Janoff-Bulman, Sheikh, & Hepp, 2009).

We propose that individuals who behave immorally are judged as less competent because morally relevant behaviors signal a person's broader interpersonal abilities, or social intelligence. Social intelligence is comprised of a variety of skills including empathy, adaptability, impression management, and adherence to established social norms (Orlik, 1978). Immoral behavior would likely lower

perceptions of a person's social intelligence, which in turn could signal reduced competence because social intelligence is perceived to be an important component of broader competence. As a result, social intelligence may act as a bridge between perceptions of morality and competence, a point to which we return in the following section.

Further complicating interpretations of the inept sinner hypothesis, most researchers have construed correlations between perceived morality and competence as a manifestation of the *halo effect* (e.g., Judd et al., 2005). The halo effect describes the tendency for a perceiver's evaluations of a target's qualities in one valued domain (e.g., perceived likability) to influence ratings of the target's qualities in other valued domains, even when the domains are substantively unrelated (Thorndike, 1920). More important, however, the halo effect and inept sinner hypothesis offer divergent predictions that allow us to garner evidence for one versus the other. For example, according to the inept sinner hypothesis, immoral behavior should have a larger effect on judgments of a target's competence than other traits, and this effect should be driven by an identifiable mechanism. The halo effect, on the other hand, would predict that immoral behavior influences perceptions of all positive traits to roughly the same degree (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977; Thorndike, 1920) and would argue that no intervening mechanism exists between the two (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977; Thorndike, 1920). Therefore, to discern these two accounts in the studies that follow, we examine whether moral information affects judgments of competence more than other traits, and test our hypothesized mechanism—social intelligence.

We compare the inept sinner hypothesis to two plausible alternatives. First, moral information could move judgments of competence in the opposite direction, giving rise to the *evil genius hypothesis*. This hypothesis would predict that an individual who behaves unethically would be attributed greater competence by observers. Immoral individuals may be perceived to more efficiently and single-mindedly pursue their own goals, unfettered by concerns about the potential negative consequences for others. This claim is supported by empirical work on the closely related dimension of warmth, which finds that presenting a target with low warmth led participants to attribute high competence behaviors to that target, and vice versa (Judd et al., 2005). This effect also appears in the perception of groups and is the root of mixed stereotypes, in which group members are perceived to be high on one dimension and low on the other (e.g., the rich are stereotyped as cold and competent; Fiske et al., 2007; Glick & Fiske, 1996). However, many of these results focus specifically on warmth, which has notable differences from morality, potentially limiting its generalizability (Goodwin et al., 2014).

Second, moral information could be perceived as irrelevant to judgments of competence. This claim gives rise to the *decoupling hypothesis*, which posits that moral transgressions have no impact on judgments of competence. This prediction seems particularly compelling when immoral behavior occurs in a wholly different domain from competence judgments (e.g., infidelity's influence on perceived job competence). Support for this hypothesis comes primarily from theoretical accounts that present morality and competence as unrelated dimensions of social perception. For instance, Fiske and colleagues (2007; p. 78) assert that warmth, defined as socially good and bad traits, is nearly orthogonal to competence, defined as the intellectually good and bad traits. Wojciszke (2005, p. 165) states that morality and competence are clearly orthogonal,

because the two can vary independently of one another (e.g., an incompetent moral person) and Dubois and Beauvois (2005, p. 125) emphasize that the two dimensions are usually assumed to be independent. Consistent with these claims, empirical examinations of social perception often use factor analyses that impose an orthogonal factor model structure of these dimensions (varimax rotation; e.g., Abele & Wojciszke, 2007; Digman, 1997). Finally, one empirical study has demonstrated that individuals can dissociate judgments of morality from competence, when motivated to do so (Bhattacharjee, Berman, & Reed, 2013). Though plausible, we predict that the moral decoupling hypothesis is unlikely, because it is not well supported by empirical evidence, which has documented correlational associations between these two dimensions in social perception (e.g., Rosenberg et al., 1968).

Social Intelligence as the Causal Bridge Between Morality and Competence

In support of the inept sinner hypothesis we predict that social intelligence mediates the relationship between moral information and judgments of competence. Social intelligence is characterized as effectively navigating complex social situations (Orlik, 1978). Individuals who act immorally are likely perceived as less socially intelligent because they lack many of the key facets of social intelligence—empathy, adaptability, adherence to established social norms, and impression management (Orlik, 1978). Observers may interpret antisocial behaviors, which cause emotional or physical harm to others, as symptomatic of a failure to understand the thoughts and feelings of another person, a notion supported by the actual relationship between psychopathy and reduced empathy (e.g., Decety, Chen, Harenski, & Kiehl, 2013). In addition, immorality is defined as antisocial because it represents an unflinching commitment to one's goals even when it causes harm to others (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Therefore, immoral behavior could be perceived to demonstrate a rigidity and unwillingness to effectively adapt to changing situations, especially when those situations require surrendering one's own goals or desires. Acting immorally also signals a failure to adhere to a society's most deeply held social norms. If a person chooses to break moral rules it stands to reason that they may also fail to adhere to smaller social norms that are critical to healthy and harmonious social interactions. Finally, immoral behavior is deeply damaging to global impressions and reputation (e.g., Feinberg, Willer, Stellar, & Keltner, 2012; Rosenberg et al., 1968). Therefore, acting immorally may indicate that the person fails to appreciate the consequences of deviance, which is often enforced through reputational damage.

In turn, social intelligence is central to perceptions of general competence, because the situations individuals must successfully and effectively navigate are very frequently social in nature. In support of this claim, across five countries individuals rated highly social traits such as assertiveness, (lack of) shyness, and (lack of) gullibility under the broader dimension of competence (Abele, Uchrowski, Suitner, & Wojciszke, 2008). Therefore, we also expect the effect of morality on perceived competence will be more pronounced for competence in domains with substantial social aspects (e.g., competence at one's job) compared with less social domains (e.g., competence at driving a car). As a result, we predict that immoral individuals will be perceived as less socially intelli-

gent and subsequently less competent, both broadly and within specific domains.

To establish discriminant validity, we compared perceptions of social intelligence to two less social alternative mechanisms: perceived self-control and general intelligence. Perceived self-control offers a compelling alternative mediating path because immoral behavior can be construed as a self-control failure. Research supports the idea that individuals who act unethically have weaker self-control (Pulkkinen & Hämäläinen, 1995), deficits in delaying gratification (Krueger, Caspi, Moffitt, White, & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1996), and reduced emotion regulation (Eisenberg et al., 1996). We also explore the possible mediating role of general intelligence, a distinct construct from social intelligence and part of competence (e.g., Derksen, Kramer, & Katzko, 2002; Weis & Süß, 2007). If individuals perceive those who behave immorally to be less intelligent in general because they reason poorly about morally relevant decisions, this perception would result in reduced judgments of competence.

Present Research

In a pilot study we explored lay theories about the relationship between morality and competence to examine whether individuals perceive moral information in one domain (e.g., private life) as relevant to judgments of competence in another (e.g., job competence). In Studies 1a and 1b, we then manipulated this moral information and measured whether a target was rated as less competent (inept sinner), more competent (evil genius hypothesis), or equally competent (decoupling hypothesis), compared with moral and control conditions. In Study 2, we examined this question in a laboratory setting in which a past participant had cheated on a lab task, measuring judgments of domain-specific competence, general competence and competence at specific tasks. In Study 3, we teased apart the inept sinner hypothesis from the halo effect by examining whether moral information influenced judgments of social traits like competence more than other traits.

Building off these results, Study 4, which was preregistered, and Study 5, tested whether social intelligence mediated the relationship between morality and competence, comparing it with alternative mechanisms such as self-control and general intelligence. Participants watched a past participant act selfishly in an economic game (Study 4) and read about a target who had received low morality ratings in an organizational review setting (Study 5). In Study 5, we also compared the influence of moral information to warmth information (a closely related domain in which morality is often subsumed). In Study 6 (preregistered), we presented immoral and moral targets as either highly socially intelligent or presented no social intelligence information at all, to experimentally test our mechanism.

We have reported all measures and conditions for all studies in the manuscript as well as any data exclusions. All studies have been approved by our local ethics review board or were deemed exempt from review. Please see our supplement for stimuli presented to participants in each study and our Open Science Framework website (https://osf.io/va6bj/?view_only=1220367fb74e44a4a15c0d8ef3cd8bf4) for study protocols, data files, and preregistrations. As the first set of studies to causally manipulate moral information and measure judgments of competence, we had no data available to conduct a priori power calculations. Therefore, we aimed to have approxi-

mately 50–60 participants per cell in every study, which power analyses revealed would be sufficient to detect a medium-sized effect ($d = 0.5$). This cell size is also above the recommended by Simmons, Nelson, and Simonsohn (2011).

Pilot Study

We began by exploring whether people believe they use moral information about another person when making judgments about that individual's competence. We measured lay reports of the relevance of immoral behaviors in one domain (e.g., private life) to competence in another (e.g., job competence). This design most closely corresponded to the manner in which we tested our hypotheses in our subsequent studies.

Participants

One hundred (63 men, 37 women) adults recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk participated in this study for payment. The sample was 81% White, 8% Latino, 3% Asian-American, 2% African-American, and 6% other ethnicities. Average age was 33 ($SD = 10.17$) ranging from 19 to 64. Two participants were removed from the analyses because the time they spent on the survey was greater than 3 SD s above the mean, suggesting they were doing other tasks during our study, leaving a total sample size of 98 participants.¹

Procedure

Participants completed this study from their own personal computers. They evaluated the job competence of three male targets: a doctor, a waiter, and an engineer. For each target, participants saw five pieces of information (preparation for job, punctuality, time on the job, reviews, and a personal hobby; see supplement for materials). We also included information about the target's past immoral behavior (e.g., shoplifting sneakers from a department store, neglecting his elderly parent, or cheating on a spouse). For each piece of information we asked, *does knowing whether he has (cheated on his spouse) tell you whether or not he is likely to be a competent (doctor)*, for example. Participants responded either *yes* or *no* for each piece of information. After completing this task for all three professions participants were asked, *does knowing whether a person has behaved immorally in their private life tell you anything about how competent that person is at their job?*; again using a *yes/no* response format. We aggregated responses for all three professions because ratings of the relevance of the moral information had sufficient reliability ($\alpha = .67$).

Results and Discussion

Eighty-two percent of participants indicated that moral information was irrelevant to judgments of job competence for all scenarios, with 94% declaring it to be irrelevant for the majority of scenarios (two out of three scenarios). Within the individual scenarios, 83% of participants perceived shoplifting irrelevant to being a waiter, 92% perceived neglecting an elderly parent to be irrelevant to being an engineer, and 96% perceived cheating to be irrelevant to being a doctor.² In response to our second question, 80% of participants said learning that a person had behaved

immorally in their private life indicated nothing about that person's job competence.

These results suggest that, for the most part, people do not believe that immoral behavior, especially in one domain (e.g., private life), is diagnostic of competence in another domain (e.g., workplace). These findings support the *moral decoupling hypothesis* as well as theoretical assertions that morality and competence are unrelated in social perception (Dubois & Beauvois, 2005; Fiske et al., 2007; Wojciszke, 2005).

Study 1a

Study 1 examined whether, when given the chance, people will use moral information in making judgments of competence. Our pilot data suggested that moral information was not considered to be relevant to job competence. However, in this study participants were not told whether the target had actually committed a moral transgression, these evaluations were in the abstract. It may be that people are unaware of their tendency to use moral information when making judgments about another's competence. Therefore in Study 1, we presented information about a target's moral or immoral behavior in the private domain and measured perceptions of that target's job competence. We omitted any mention of whether the targets were caught so that competence inferences would not be based on the target's ability to get away with the behavior.

Method

Participants. Ninety-eight (57 women, 40 men, and 1 decline to state) undergraduates from a large west coast university participated in this study for credit in a psychology course. The sample was 57% Asian-American, 29% White, 5% Latino, 1% African-American, and 8% other ethnicities.

Procedure. Participants completed this study from their own personal computers. We used a mixed design in which participants rated five targets on their job competence before and after learning moral information about them (Time 1 and Time 2) and a between subjects manipulation of the type of moral information presented (moral or immoral act). In between the two time points, participants spent twenty minutes filling out a series of other questionnaires for another study. At each time point, the order of the target scenarios was randomized. Two of the five targets scenarios served as fillers to conceal the purpose of the study.

At Time 1, we described the three targets of interest as moderately competent at their profession (biotechnology researcher, in-

¹ Across all studies our hypotheses for our main variables of interest (judgments of competence and mediations), showed the same pattern of significance when all Mechanical Turk participants were included, except in Study 4 where the 95% confidence interval for the social intelligence mediation included zero [$-.08, .78$].

² We explored whether the three moral behaviors differed in their perceived relevance to the target's job competence. A Cochran's Q test revealed a significant effect of moral topic ($\chi^2(2) = 15.60, p < .001$). An exact McNemar's test between each pair of stories determined that shoplifting was perceived as more relevant to a waiter's job competence than neglecting an elderly parent was for an engineer's, $p = .02$, and cheating was for a doctor's, $p < .001$. Cheating and neglecting an elderly parent were not significantly different from one another, $p = .38$. However, the same career and moral transgression were always paired so some of the variance may be explained by the job type.

vestment banker, and teacher; see supplement for stimuli). At Time 2, we presented the same targets a second time, but with the addition of moral information. Participants were randomly presented either moral or immoral information about each target's behavior outside of the workplace. Moral and immoral information was matched on topic: (a) stealing expensive items from a store (immoral) or returning an expensive item that accidentally fallen in his bag (moral); (b) neglecting an elderly parent (immoral) or diligently caring for that parent (moral); and (c) cheating on a spouse (immoral) or choosing to be faithful despite being propositioned (moral). We did not aggregate the three scenarios because our methodological design was such that participants could receive either moral or immoral information for each individual target.

At each time point, for each target, participants responded to the prompt, *in general how good of a job will the individual do in the future as a (profession)?*; from 0 (*not a good job at all*) to 10 (*as good a job as possible*). At Time 1 the scale was multiple choice and at Time 2 it was a sliding scale to minimize anchoring bias.

Results

We found significant main effects of morality and time for the teacher and researcher scenarios (marginally so for the researcher; see Table 1 for individual scenario test statistics). More importantly, in keeping with our primary hypothesis, Figure 1 shows a significant interaction for all three scenarios between time and morality. Simple effects revealed that perceptions of the targets' future job competence decreased after learning the targets had behaved immorally in all scenarios ($Mean\ change = -1.17, SD = 1.65$) and increased in two of the three scenarios after learning they had behaved morally ($Mean\ change = 0.37, SD = 1.27$). As a result, at Time 2, perceptions of the targets' future job competence were significantly lower in scenarios where the targets had behaved immorally compared with morally in their private life, despite no differences in job competence ratings before learning this information, at Time 1.

Study 1b

In Study 1b we tested these effects in a between-subjects design, which reduces demand effects. In addition, the effects in Study 1a may have resulted from simply presenting any positive or negative information about the target and not the moral nature of these acts. Therefore, we compared the influence of moral or immoral information to the influence of positive or negative nonmoral information about a target.

Method

Participants. Four hundred and ninety (350 women and 140 men) undergraduates participated in this study for credit in a psychology course. The large sample size for this study is the result of our study being included among with a variety of other surveys as part of an online mass-testing packet that went to half of the introductory psychology classes at a large west coast university. The sample was 33% Asian-American, 28% White, 19% Latino, 4% African-American, and 16% other ethnicities.

Procedure. Participants completed the study remotely from their own computers. They were presented three scenarios about three separate targets. The content of the scenarios varied in valence and type of information creating a 2 (valence: positive or negative) \times 2 (type of information: moral or nonmoral information) between-subjects design. In the moral condition a target was portrayed acting either immorally or morally outside of the workplace using the same moral acts as Study 1a. Because almost all traits are related to morality or competence (e.g., Abele et al., 2008), in the control condition we presented information of the same valence that was more related to competence than morality. Therefore, the target was described as failing to learn, or quickly gaining proficiency in, a new skill that was unrelated to the workplace (e.g., swimming, painting, or playing basketball; see supplement for stimuli).

After reading each scenario participants were asked, *how good do you believe he is at his job?*; from 0 (*not good at all*) to 10 (*very good*) amid filler items included to obscure our hypotheses. The target's behavior in each of the three stories was manipulated the same way (e.g., all three targets were shown acting immorally), which differed from the design of Study 1a, allowing us to aggregate ratings across the scenarios for each participant. Responses to the three scenarios showed sufficiently high reliability on our dependent variable ($\alpha = .68$) and were, therefore, aggregated into composites.

Results and Discussion

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed significant main effects of valence, $F(1, 486) = 131.08, p < .001, \eta^2 = .21$ and type of information, $F(1, 486) = 11.64, p = .001, \eta^2 = .02$. Turning to our primary hypothesis, Figure 2 illustrates a significant interaction between valence and type of information, $F(1, 486) = 80.92, p < .001, \eta^2 = .14$. Simple contrasts revealed that targets who had behaved immorally ($M = 4.57, SD = 1.71$) received lower ratings of job

Table 1
Study 1a Main Effects, Interactions, and Simple Effects for Each Scenario

Effects	Investment banker	Researcher	Teacher
Main effects			
Moral information	$F(1, 89) = 2.67, p = .11, \eta^2 = .03$	$F(1, 88) = 2.86, p = .09, \eta^2 = .03$	$F(1, 93) = 6.43, p = .01, \eta^2 = .07$
Time	$F(1, 89) = 1.58, p = .21, \eta^2 = .02$	$F(1, 88) = 12.34, p = .001, \eta^2 = .12$	$F(1, 93) = 10.79, p = .001, \eta^2 = .10$
Interaction effects	$F(1, 89) = 5.66, p = .02, \eta^2 = .06$	$F(1, 88) = 37.44, p < .001, \eta^2 = .30$	$F(1, 93) = 48.24, p < .001, \eta^2 = .34$
Simple effects			
Immoral (T1 vs. T2)	$t(44) = 2.27, p = .03, d = .34$	$t(44) = 5.51, p < .001, d = .85$	$t(46) = 7.08, p < .001, d = 1.07$
Moral (T1 vs. T2)	$t(45) = .93, p = .36, d = .14$	$t(44) = 2.69, p = .01, d = .41$	$t(47) = 2.65, p = .01, d = .38$
Time 1: (M vs. I)	$t(91) = .09, p = .93, d = .02$	$t(91) = .85, p = .40, d = .18$	$t(94) = .87, p = .39, d = .17$
Time 2: (M vs. I)	$t(93) = 2.55, p = .01, d = .52$	$t(92) = 3.42, p = .001, d = .71$	$t(95) = 5.24, p < .001, d = 1.06$

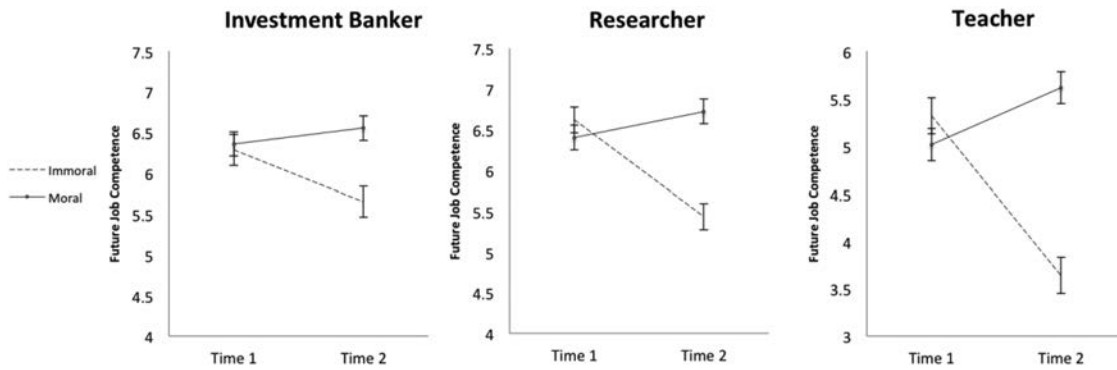


Figure 1. Interaction between moral information and time on perceived future job competence in Study 1a.

competence than those who behaved morally ($M = 7.40, SD = 1.36$), $F(1, 486) = 209.08, p < .001, d = 1.83$, whereas targets in the negative control condition were rated only marginally lower ($M = 6.29, SD = 1.65$) than targets in the positive control condition ($M = 6.63, SD = 1.39$), $F(1, 486) = 3.01, p = .09, d = .22$. More importantly, individuals who behaved immorally were rated as less competent compared with the negative control condition, $F(1, 486) = 72.99, p < .001, d = 1.01$, and individuals who behaved morally were rated as more competent compared with the positive control condition, $F(1, 486) = 16.54, p < .001, d = .56$.

In summary, moral information influenced participants' judgments of targets' predicted and actual competence in both studies, supporting the inept sinner hypothesis. However, these effects were also consistent with the halo effect hypothesis. On average, negative moral information had a stronger influence on competence ratings than positive moral information. Study 1b suggested that this effect was not merely the result of presenting any positive or negative information about a target. However, we were not able to control for the intensity of the information presented. Moral information was inherently more negative, or positive, than our control information, though some scholars argue that intensity is a uniquely defining feature of morality (see Skitka, 2010).

The results of Studies 1a and 1b reveal a tension between how people believe they would act, as evidenced in our pilot study, and how they actually respond to moral information in Studies 1a and

1b. Despite intuitions that private moral transgressions are largely irrelevant to job competence, individuals appear to readily use this information when evaluating a target's job competence. Together, these results indicate that people may be unaware of the powerful influence moral information has on perceptions of competence.

Study 2

In Study 2 we tested whether our effect generalized to judgments of real targets, as opposed to hypothetical targets. Participants rated a past participant from a previous experiment after they learned he had cheated on an experiment task to win money, had refrained from cheating on that task when given the opportunity, or in a control condition, no information was provided. We explored whether moral information affected judgments of a target's general competence, domain-specific competence, and competence at discrete skills. We also aimed to address concerns about whether our findings represent a halo effect by controlling for how much participants liked the targets. In addition, we attempted to garner initial support for our claim that moral information influences perceptions of competence through the shared social nature of the two constructs. We examined whether manipulating moral information affected perceptions of the target's competence at social skills (e.g., working with others) more less social skills (e.g., writing papers).

Method

Participants. One hundred and fifty-five (152 women, 1 men, and 3 declined to state) undergraduates from a large west coast university participated in this study for credit in a sociology course. This study is almost exclusively female because after participating in this study participants took part in a study that examined stereotype threat for women taking math tests.³ Five participants failed the suspicion check, expressing concern that the information presented about the target was not authentic, leaving a sample of 150. The sample was 49% Asian-American, 27% White, 11% Latino, 4% African-American, and 9% other ethnicities.

Procedure. Participants arrived in the lab in groups of ten to twenty. They were each seated at individual computer stations

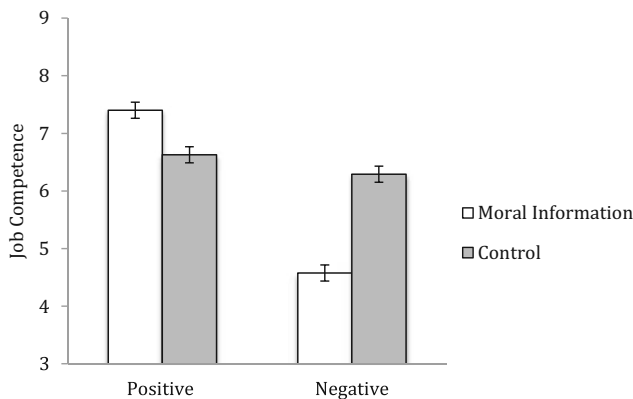


Figure 2. Influence of moral information versus control information of the same valence on ratings of job competence in Study 1b.

³ Although participants were almost exclusively female we did not have any reason to suspect gender effects as there were none in the first three studies, $F_s < 1.01, p_s > .31$.

separated by dividers. The experimenter explained that this study aimed to understand how people use second-hand information to form impressions about others. Participants were told that in a previous study we had groups of three rate each other's personality in an attempt to measure accuracy in person perception. We informed the current participants that to motivate the past participants to be accurate, they were told that the most accurate person would win prize money.

After being informed about the previous study, participants then received a packet from this study in which two past participants (observers) had rated a third participant (target). These packets were designed by the experimenter to manipulate the presentation of moral information. The packets contained demographic information about a target including gender, year in school, major, the state he was born in, and native language. Participants also received ratings that two observers' had each ostensibly made of the target on 10 different traits. These traits were intended to be weakly or unrelated to morality or competence (e.g., talkative, adventurous, anxious; see supplemental for materials). All this information was the same across conditions.

In the additional comments section of the packet the two observers revealed information about the target's behavior in the previous study. This information indicated the target had either cheated, refrained from cheating when given the chance, or no information was presented. In the *immoral condition* both observers mentioned that they saw the target cheat on the main task of the experiment unbeknownst to the experimenter and that he should not be allowed to win the raffle based on his performance. In the *moral condition* the observers both complained in the comments section about the experimenter who made an error during the experiment, which would have given the target all the answers to the task, but that the target told the experimenter without looking at the answers. In the control condition the additional comments section was left blank.

Participants were given one hour to read through these packets and make their ratings of the target. Finally, participants were probed for suspicion and debriefed before leaving the experiment.

Measures.

Domain-specific competence. Domain-specific competence was assessed by asking participants to rate the target as a student and an employee at a part-time job ranging from 1 (*not competent at all*) to 7 (*very competent*). We made a composite of these two measures ($r = .55$).

General competence. Participants rated how capable and competent the target was, ranging from 1 (*very low on this trait*) to 10 (*very high on this trait*), which were embedded within other traits to hide our hypotheses of interest. We averaged the competence and capable ratings to create a composite measure ($r = .68$).

Competence at specific tasks. Participants also rated how competent the individual was at six specific tasks ranging from 1 (*not competent at all*) to 7 (*very competent*): driving a car, studying for exams, turning in papers for their class on time, asking for help from their graduate student instructors, being a group leader, working in teams with others.

Liking. Participants reported how much they liked the target they were rating ranging from 1 (*do not like at all*) to 7 (*like very much*).

Results and Discussion

There was a significant effect of condition on perceptions of domain-specific competence (as a student/employee), $F(2, 149) = 21.81, p < .001, \eta^2 = .23$, this effect held when controlling for liking, $F(2, 146) = 12.82, p < .001, \eta^2 = .15$. Planned comparisons revealed that the target who cheated to win the raffle ($M = 4.13, SD = 0.98$) was seen as less competent than the target in the control condition ($M = 5.14, SD = 0.78$), $t(147) = 5.95, p < .001, d = 1.13$, and the target who did not cheat ($M = 5.18, SD = .78$), $t(147) = 5.79, p < .001, d = .79$. The target who did not cheat was rated as equal in competence to the target in the control condition, $t(147) = .29, p = .78$.

We conducted parallel analyses predicting general competence. There was a significant effect of condition, $F(2, 149) = 9.57, p < .001, \eta^2 = .12$, which remained significant when controlling for liking, $F(2, 149) = 4.15, p = .02, \eta^2 = .05$. Planned comparisons again revealed that the target who cheated ($M = 5.64, SD = 1.67$) was seen as less competent than the target in the control condition ($M = 6.74, SD = 1.20$), $t(147) = 4.00, p < .001, d = .75$, and the target who did not cheat ($M = 6.75, SD = 1.25$), $t(147) = 3.76, p < .001, d = .75$. The target who did not cheat was seen as equally competent to the target in the control condition, $t(147) = .04, p = .97$.

We also examined whether moral information shifted perceptions of competence at a variety of different tasks. We conducted a repeated measures test to examine the role of condition manipulation on ratings of the target's competence at these six tasks. We found a main effect of condition manipulation across these skills, $F(2, 145) = 33.12, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.31$, which held when controlling for liking, $F(2, 144) = 25.34, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.26$. Planned comparisons revealed that participants judged the target who cheated to be significantly worse at the skills than the target in the control condition, $F(1, 100) = 54.67, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.35$, and the target who did not cheat, $F(1, 83) = 44.91, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.35$. The target who did not cheat was seen as equally competent to the target in the control condition at these tasks, $F(1, 107) = .17, p = .68, \eta^2 = 0.002$. There was also a significant interaction between condition and type of skills, $F(10, 720) = 5.87, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.08$, which held when controlling for liking, $F(10, 720) = 4.05, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.05$. Figure 3 demonstrates a pattern by which judgments of the target's competence at more seemingly social skills were more greatly affected than less social skills.

As an additional analysis, we also examined whether there was a significant condition effect for each of our three social tasks

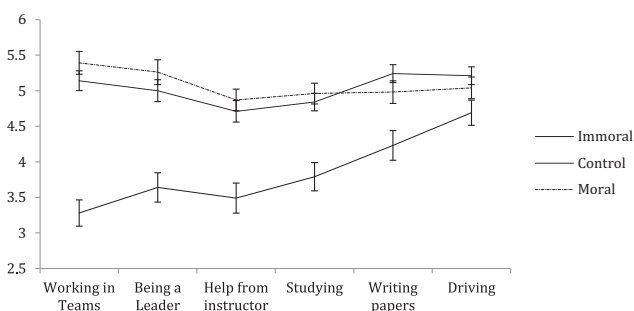


Figure 3. Perceptions of competence at specific tasks for each condition in Study 2.

(working in teams, being a leader, and getting help from an instructor), when controlling for the less social tasks (writing papers, studying for exams, and driving). We found a significant condition effect for all the social tasks: working in teams, $F(2, 142) = 29.12, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.29$, being a leader, $F(2, 142) = 10.24, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.13$, and getting help from an instructor, $F(2, 142) = 4.12, p = .02, \eta^2 = 0.06$, when controlling for the less social tasks.

In summary, the findings from Study 2 replicated those from Studies 1a and 1b, which support the inept sinner hypothesis, outside of a hypothetical scenario. They also demonstrated that these effects generalize beyond judgments of domain-specific competence, affecting general competence and judgments of competence at specific skills. Choosing not to cheat on the task did not lead to greater perceptions of competence than the control condition. This may have been because the moral act—refraining from cheating, was not a strongly moral behavior. It is possible that moral acts that are more positive would influence competence, though we expect it would never have as strong an impact on judgments of competence as immoral behavior. Immoral behaviors are strongly regulated by normative prohibitions backed by social sanctions that are widely endorsed, while positive moral acts are rewarded with approval and respect (Willer, 2009), but typically not expected (see Janoff-Bulman et al., 2009). Thus, whether or not one behaves immorally is likely viewed as more diagnostic of other traits such as competence, than whether or not one engages in positive moral acts.

Our effects held when controlling for how much participants liked the target, suggesting that the halo effect could not fully explain our results. In addition, we also saw initial support that skills, which appear to be more social, were affected more strongly by moral information than less social skills, suggesting some systematic variation in how judgments of competence were affected. Although this study improved upon the previous hypothetical scenario designs by offering real targets, two important limitations are that the targets were caught cheating by observers and it could be argued that they cheated because they were incompetent.

Study 3

In Studies 1 and 2 we found that immoral individuals were perceived as less competent than moral individuals or controls. Although Study 2 suggested that this outcome was not entirely reducible to a halo effect, in Study 3 we focused more directly on this question. Early notions of the halo effect suggest it is an error that influences the perception of other traits to roughly the same degree (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977; Thorndike, 1920). The inept sinner hypothesis on the other hand, predicts that moral information would affect the perception of certain traits, like competence, more than other traits that are perceived as truly unrelated to morality.

Past work has revealed that what appears to be a halo effect, can belie a more meaningful relationship between the perception of traits. For example, a meta-analysis of the well-established halo effect of physical attractiveness, found that the perception of traits associated with social competence (sociable and popular) were more greatly influenced than traits associated with intellectual competence, integrity, or concern for others (Eagly, Ashmore,

Makhijani, & Longo, 1991). Inferring that physically attractive individuals are more socially competent likely reflects the belief that physically attractive individuals have more experience in social situations because others are drawn to them, explaining why those traits are the most strongly affected. However, in the case of morality, can we identify systematic variation in how moral information influences other traits, such as competence?

We hypothesized that moral information would affect perceptions of social traits more strongly than less social traits, because morality is inherently interpersonal. In addition, we claim that competence is perceived as a relatively social trait, despite theoretical treatments that focus on its less social elements (e.g., intelligence; e.g., Wojciszke, 2005). Therefore, we aimed to identify sociality as a systematic dimension on which moral information influences the perceptions of other traits and classify competence as a social trait. These findings would allow us to better disentangle the inept sinner hypothesis from the halo effect by suggesting a meaningful pathway by which moral information influences judgments of competence through sociality.

Method

Participants. Two hundred and seven (79 women, 127 men, and 1 decline to state) adults were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk participated in this study for payment. Average age was 35 ($SD = 11.67$) ranging from 19 to 73. The sample was 73% White, 10% African-American, 10% Asian-American, 4% Latino, and 3% other ethnicities.

Power analyses for a cross-classified model with 40 stimuli using our design require a minimum of approximately 60 participants (according to <https://jakewestfall.shinyapps.io/crossedpower/>) to have 80% power to test our hypotheses. Therefore, with two conditions we aimed to collect a 60 people with each condition. We over-sampled in part because of worries of participant fatigue in a heavily within-subjects design in which 40 stimuli are rated by one person. However, only 15 participants were removed because they failed to correctly identify what moral information they were presented in a later attention check and two additional participants were removed because the time they spent on the survey was greater than 3 SDs above the mean leaving a total sample of 190 participants.

Procedure. Participants were told they would learn information about a person and then make ratings of that person's other traits. Participants were shown background information about a male target (his age, job, city of residence, and picture of him; see supplement). Participants assigned to the immoral condition were randomly presented information that the target had committed one of three possible immoral behaviors (taking money from a jar for donations to homeless children, leaving a dog outside without food or water for a prolonged period, or starting a false and damaging rumor about a coworker). Participants assigned to the moral condition were randomly presented one of three possible moral behaviors (donating a large amount of money to charity for homeless children, diligently caring for a disabled dog, or stopping a false and damaging rumor about a coworker at work). Moral and immoral scenarios were roughly equivalent on subject area.

Participants then made ratings of how much they believed the target had 41 other traits, relative to the average person, on scales ranging from 1 (*much less than average person*), to 4 (*neither*

more nor less than average person), to 7 (more than average person). Participants also rated how moral the target was. Finally participants selected which information they had been provided from three options as an attention check.

Materials development. The 41 traits participants rated were selected from a larger list of 100 traits. These 100 traits (e.g., competent, capable, dishonest, and shy) were rated by different groups of participants on their sociality (sample 1: $n = 42$) ranging from 1 (*not at all social*) to 5 (*extremely social*), morality (sample 2: $n = 45$) ranging from 1 (*very immoral*) to 7 (*very moral*), and valence (sample 3: $n = 47$) ranging from 1 (*very negative*) to 7 (*very positive*; see supplement for materials). The prompt for morality stated, *Some traits have more to do with a person's morality (ex. kindness or cruelty) and some have less to do with a person's morality (ex. muscular or uncoordinated)*. Sociality stated, *Some positive/negative traits have more to do with our social interactions (ex. being extroverted or kind) and some have less to do with our social interactions (ex. being coordinated)*. The valence prompt simply asked participants to rate how positive or negative the traits were.

We chose to only use traits rated as positive, leaving 55 traits. In an effort to isolate the role of sociality from morality because ratings of the two were highly correlated (all positive traits, $r = .43$, $p = .001$), we selected positive traits that were not considered particularly moral (final correlation between morality and sociality for the 41 traits, $r = -.10$, $p = .51$). We only selected traits rated between *neither moral nor immoral* and *slightly moral*, leaving a final list of 41 positive traits.

Results and Discussion

Our primary analysis focused on whether moral information systematically affected perceptions of social traits more so than less social traits. We used a cross-classified multilevel model to explore this hypothesis, which accounts for nonindependence between participants and traits (Judd, Westfall, & Kenny, 2012). We tested a cross-level interaction between moral condition and the sociality rating of each trait (from our earlier sample) in predicting ratings of how much the target was perceived to possess each trait. We controlled for morality, valence, the interaction between morality and condition, and the interaction between valence and condition to isolate the unique contribution of sociality. We entered sociality, morality, valence, and condition as fixed effects in addition to the higher order interactions between each variable and condition. In addition, intercepts were allowed to vary for both participants and traits. Sociality, morality, and valence were allowed to vary for participants. We centered sociality, valence, and morality on their grand mean and condition was dummy coded (0 = immoral, 1 = immoral).

Our cross-classified model revealed a significant interaction between sociality rating and condition, $B = 0.13$, $t(231.31) = 3.89$, $p < .001$, 95% confidence interval (CI) [.06, .20], controlling for valence rating, morality rating, and each of their interactions with condition. Ratings of more social traits were more greatly affected by the manipulation than less social traits. There was also a significant interaction between morality and condition, $B = 0.49$, $t(257.32) = 13.10$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.41, .56], but not between valence and condition, $B = -0.04$, $t(282.66) = 1.06$, $p = .29$, 95% CI [-.11, .03]. Probing the interaction between sociality and

condition revealed that the estimates for sociality did not differ significantly from zero in the moral, $B = 0.05$, $z = .64$, $p = .53$, and immoral conditions, $B = -0.09$, $z = 1.06$, $p = 0.24$, 95% CI [-.11, .03], though the estimates were in the predicted direction such that sociality ratings positively predicted how much moral targets were rated as possessing certain positive traits, but negatively predicted how much immoral targets were rated as possessing these positive traits.

Next, we examined whether competence was perceived to be a social trait. Participants rated competent and capable as moderately social (competent: $M = 3.29$, $SD = 1.13$; capable: $M = 2.93$, $SD = 1.30$). Competent and capable were also rated as only slightly moral (competent: $M = 4.73$, $SD = 1.25$; capable: $M = 4.62$, $SD = 1.28$) and quite positive, (competent: $M = 6.34$, $SD = .92$; capable: $M = 6.38$, $SD = .90$).

Finally, we tested whether there was an effect of condition on judgments of competence. We created an aggregate of the competent and capable traits ($r = .55$). Replicating our effects from Studies 1 and 2 we found that participants rated immoral targets ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 1.37$) as less competent than moral targets ($M = 5.34$, $SD = 1.00$), $t(188) = 12.59$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.84$. To create a stricter test, we reran this analysis controlling for participants ratings on another positive trait that had the lowest sociality rating—frugal (sociality rating: $M = 1.95$, $SD = 0.95$). Any effect of moral information on ratings of frugality, should represent a halo effect and any other mechanisms we have not taken into account with our current measure of sociality. We found a significant effect of condition on ratings of competence, controlling for ratings of frugality, $F(1, 187) = 165.13$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .47$.

In summary, our results suggest that morality affects the perception of social traits to a stronger degree than it affects less social traits, controlling for the morality and positivity of the traits. This outcome would not be predicted by the halo effect, which assumes the perception of all traits should be affected to roughly the same degree. Therefore, competence, which was rated as moderately social, could be influenced by moral information through the perceived shared social nature of the two. These analyses offer additional support for the claim that moral information influence judgments of competence independent of a halo effect.

Study 4

Study 4, which was preregistered, had two aims. First, Studies 2 and 3 suggested that sociality offers an important link between perceptions of morality and competence. Therefore, building off these studies we tested social intelligence, as a mechanism that explains why a target's morality influences judgments of their competence. We used a validated assessment of social intelligence developed by Kosmitzki and John (1993) in which traits loaded onto the theoretical factor of social intelligence. This allows us to use multiple items to assess social intelligence and to obtain ratings of a standardized set of traits that are believed to define this complex construct. We also examined self-control as a competing mechanism for our effects. Self-control, offers a viable, albeit less social, alternative pathway by which moral information, may influence judgments of competence.

Second, we extended our findings to a context in which participants actually observed a target behave morally or immorally. Participants were shown two players in an economic game, osten-

sibly from a past experiment. They watched as one of the players either acted cooperatively with the other player (moral/neutral condition) or acted selfishly by taking advantage of the other player (selfish/immoral condition) in a Trust Game. This manipulation offered the first opportunity for participants to witness an immoral behavior on the part of the targets they were rating.

Participants

Two hundred and ten (100 women, 109 men, and 1 decline to state) adults recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk participated in this study for payment. Average age was 34 ($SD = 10.45$) ranging from 19 to 73. The sample was 77% White, 6% African-American, 9% Asian-American, 4% Latino, and 4% other ethnicities. Fourteen participants were removed from the analyses because they failed the comprehension question for the Trust Game they watched and one additional participant was removed because the time they spent on the survey was greater than 3 SDs above the mean, leaving a total sample size of 195 participants.

Procedure

Participants completed the study remotely from their own computers. They were told that they would be randomly selected to watch two participants from a previous study play a Trust Game and then make ratings of one of these individuals. We explained the Trust Game to participants in detail (see supplement for materials) and included a comprehension check to motivate participants to read the directions carefully. Participants were told the targets in the video had received the same instructions, which outlined how to play the game. Participants then watched a 1.5-minute video of two male confederates, playing this game in separate cubicles using a split screen format. They were told they would make ratings of Player 2.

This game allowed us to present an instance of selfish or cooperative behavior on the part of the second mover in the game. In both conditions, they watched as Player 1 received 10 dollars from the experimenter and chose to send all of it to Player 2. This money was then multiplied by 4 (Player 2 received 40 dollars). In the moral condition Player 2 chose to split the money he received from Player 1, in the immoral condition Player 2 kept all the money that Player 1 had trusted to him.

After the video we included a comprehension check to ensure that participants understood the behavior in that instance of the Trust Game, which asked how much money Player 1 and 2 ended up with. Participants then rated Player 2 on how much they believed he had a variety of traits ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 10 (*a great deal*). Skills were rated on the same anchor, but the prompt given was, *how good is Player 2 at . . . (skill)*. The order of the traits/skills was randomly presented. Filler traits included athletic, emotional, funny, happy, which were only included to obscure our main variables of interest.

Competence was assessed via aggregating ratings of the traits competent and capable ($r = .85$). Self-control was assessed by combining ratings of impulsive (reverse scored), regulating his emotions, self-control ($\alpha = .80$). Social intelligence was assessed using traits/skills from a validated scale (Kosmitzki & John, 1993) including compromising and fair, dealing with people, intelligent, knowing the social rules and norms, open to experiences and ideas,

perspective-taking, social adaptability, social insight, sophisticated and educated, understanding people, warm, and caring ($\alpha = .97$). To create a stricter test of our hypothesis we also removed two items that appeared to be morally laden (compromising and fair, warm and kind; $\alpha = .97$) and conduct our analyses with both item groups for social intelligence.

Finally participants were divided randomly to see one of two prompts. Each prompt explained that Player 2 subsequently took part in a task where they had to build a tower as tall as he could with only certain materials. They were told 100 participants did this activity and asked to guess how they believe a novel experimenter rated Player 2's performance from among those 100 participants, with 1 (*the best performing participant*) to 100 (*the worst performing participant*). In one version of this prompt participants were told Player 2 did this alone, in another version of this prompt they were told they worked with three new people in a group.

Results and Discussion

Participants who saw Player 2 act immorally in the Trust Game rated him as significantly less competent ($M = 5.23$, $SD = 2.16$) than those who saw him act morally/neutrally by splitting the money ($M = 8.16$, $SD = 1.31$), $t(192) = 11.44$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.64$. We also examined whether the condition manipulation would interact with the more versus less social activity to predict ratings of performance. Although we expected an interaction such that participants in the social version of this activity would have performance ratings that were the most affected by our condition manipulation, we did not find one, $F(1, 190) = .30$, $p = .58$, $\eta_p^2 = .002$. There was only a strong main effect of moral versus immoral condition (immoral: $M = 38.25$, $SD = 23.21$; moral: $M = 74.09$, $SD = 14.31$), $F(1, 190) = 147.70$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .44$, and no main effect of social versus nonsocial activity, $F(1, 190) = 1.87$, $p = .17$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$.

We tested whether social intelligence mediated the effect of our morality manipulation on ratings of competence. We ran a mediation analysis comparing the immoral condition (coded as "0") to the control condition (coded as "1"). We conducted bootstrapping analyses (Preacher & Hayes, 2008) with 5,000 resamples with 95% CIs for the indirect effects. Perceived social intelligence was a significant mediator of the influence of morality information on judgments of competence (95% CI [2.92, 4.46]). Perceived self-control also mediated this relationship (95% CI [1.84, 3.15]). Therefore, we tested the indirect effect of each mediator accounting for the other. Social intelligence remained a significant mediator with self-control included as a covariate (95% CI [1.19, 2.50]). However, self-control was not a significant mediator when social intelligence was included as a covariate (95% CI [-.26, .19]). These effects held when using our measure of social intelligence that removed the morally laden items. Social intelligence mediated the effect (95% CI [2.93, 4.44]), even when self-control was included as a covariate (95% CI [.66, .179]), whereas self-control was no longer a significant mediator with social intelligence included as a covariate (95% CI [-.29, .27]; see Figure 4).

These results further support the *inept sinner hypothesis*. In addition, they suggested that social intelligence, more so than self-control, explained the relationship between moral information and judgments of competence.

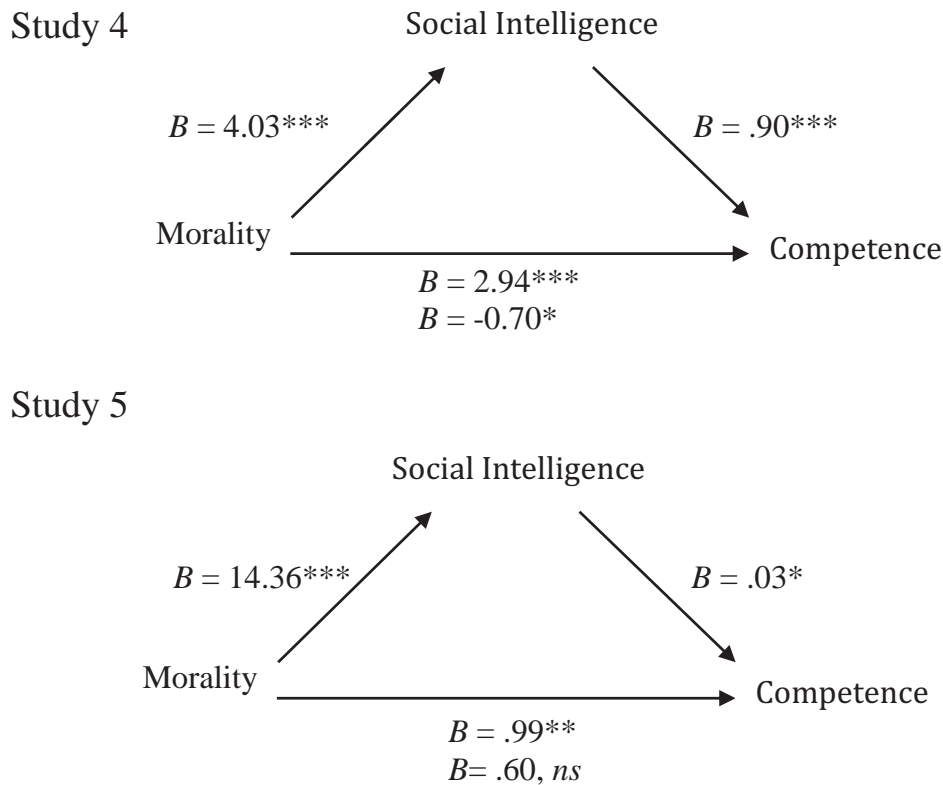


Figure 4. Social intelligence mediates the effect of moral information on perceptions of trait competence in Studies 4 and 5. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Study 5

Study 5 aimed to replicate our mediation from Study 4 using a more objective measure of social intelligence. We asked participants to guess a target's performance on a variety of psychological tests described as assessing social intelligence. We defined social intelligence to participants using past theoretical work by Kihlstrom and Cantor (2000) specifying subcomponents of social intelligence that could be measured objectively such as social awareness, social skill, and social knowledge. We compared perceptions of social intelligence with general intelligence, which we did not expect to mediate our effects because of its largely nonsocial nature.

In addition, we compared the influence of moral information to warmth information on judgments of competence. Past work has suggested that perceptions of warmth are negatively associated with judgments of competence, especially when evaluating groups (Glick & Fiske, 1996). This work is relevant to discussions of morality because morality is often subsumed under the category of warmth (e.g., Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2008). This would imply that morality would shift judgments of competence in the opposite direction (e.g., higher morality generating lower perceptions of competence), but the effects we found in Studies 1–4 suggest this is not the case. More recent work highlights meaningful differences between morality and warmth, which have important consequences for global impressions (Brambilla, Rusconi, Sacchi, & Cherubini, 2011; Goodwin et al., 2014; Leach, Ellemers, & Barreto, 2007). Morality represents one's character or how good a person is, whereas warmth refers to how sociable, happy, agree-

able, funny, and playful a person is (Goodwin et al., 2014). Of the two, morality more clearly reflects on to strongly held societal expectations of norms, whereas norms about warmth are not as strongly, nor universally, held. Therefore, violations of social norms in the form of immoral behavior would more strongly indicate low social intelligence, which we argue shifts judgments of competence. We predicted that signals of low morality would generate reduced perceptions of competence, whereas signals of low warmth generate greater perceptions of competence.

Method

Participants. One hundred and ninety-nine (100 women, 99 men) adults recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk participated in this study for payment. Average age was 35 ($SD = 10.57$) ranging from 18 to 68. The sample was 76% White, 9% African-American, 7% Asian-American, 6% Latino, and 2% other ethnicities. Six participants were removed from the analyses because they time they spent on the survey was greater than 3 SDs above the mean, leaving a total sample size of 193 participants.

Procedure. Participants completed the study remotely from their own computers. Participants were told that they would be evaluating an individual from a previous study who had been rated by ten coworkers on a variety of traits and who had completed several social and general intelligence measures. This study featured a 2 (valence: positive or negative) \times 2 (type of information: morality or warmth information) between-subjects design.

Participants saw a picture of a fictitious male participant along with information about his age, birthplace, education, and occupation (see supplemental for materials). In addition, participants were shown an average of how the target was rated by his coworkers on four different traits. Morality or warmth traits were presented along with three other filler traits: conscientiousness, openness, and optimism. Next to each trait, participants were given the definition of the trait. Openness was defined as “How open is this person to new experiences?” conscientiousness as, “How organized, efficient, and persistent is this person?” and optimism as, “How positive or negative does this person expect outcomes to be?” Targets received moderate to slightly positive ratings for the filler traits on a score from 1 (*not at all*) to 10 (*a great deal*); target’s received a conscientiousness rating of 4.36, openness rating of 5.65, and optimism rating of 6.25. Descriptions of warmth were adapted from Goodwin and colleagues (2014). Warmth was described as “how sociable, happy, agreeable, funny, and playful this person is?” Morality was described as “how moral or good this person is, his strength of character?” Participants received a rating of 7.87 on warmth or morality in the condition when they were portrayed as high on that trait and a rating of 2.13 when they were portrayed as low on that trait.

Participants then estimated how the target was rated by his coworkers on eight traits (competent, capable, friendly, ethical, athletic, selfish, patient, and emotional) on scales ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 10 (*a great deal*). Among these were ratings of the traits competent and capable, which we averaged to form a composite ($r = .87$), as well as friendly and ethical. Then participants guessed what percent of items they believed the target answered correctly on each test of social and general intelligence. Participants filled out demographic information about themselves and were debriefed.

Materials.

Social intelligence tests. We presented participants with four tests of social intelligence and three tests of general intelligence (see supplemental for materials). Each test was described and an example item was given. We measured social intelligence using four subcomponents that were objectively measurable and theoretically derived from Kihlstrom and Cantor (2000), which included: (a) social intelligence (aptitude at negotiating complex social relationships and environments), (b) social awareness (capacity to understand emotions, perspectives, and needs of others), (c) social skill (ability to deal with people and adapt to complex social situations and roles) and, (d) social knowledge (understanding of roles and relationships with others). We made a composite of participants’ guesses of targets’ scores on these four tests of social intelligence ($\alpha = .83$).

General intelligence tests. For general intelligence we asked participants to predict the target’s performance on an IQ test as well as math and verbal GRE tests. We made a composite of participants’ guesses of targets’ scores on these three tests of general intelligence ($\alpha = .66$).

Results and Discussion

We first conducted a manipulation check. There was a significant interaction between valence and type of information in predicting participants’ judgments of the target’s ethicality, $F(1, 188) = 33.03, p < .001, \eta^2 = .15$, and friendliness, $F(1, 188) =$

18.81, $p < .001, \eta^2 = .09$ (see Table 2 for means). Manipulating the valence of warmth information had a stronger influence on ratings of friendliness than manipulating the valence of moral information, whereas manipulating the valence of moral information had a stronger influence on ratings of ethicality than manipulating the valence of warmth information. For the most part, our manipulations appear to have shifted perceptions of the traits they were intended to influence, allowing us to examine the unique effects of manipulating either morality or warmth on judgments of competence.

In a univariate ANOVA we examined the effect of our manipulation on participants’ judgments of how coworkers’ rated the target’s competence. We found no significant main effects for valence, $F(1, 189) = 2.18, p = .14, \eta^2 = .01$, or type of information, $F(1, 189) = .19, p = .67, \eta^2 = .001$, in predicting ratings of trait competence. Importantly, Figure 5 shows a significant interaction between the type of information and whether the target received high or low ratings, $F(1, 189) = 5.56, p = .02, \eta^2 = .03$. A planned contrast analysis revealed that there were significant differences between perceptions of competence for a target who was rated by coworkers as moral or immoral, $F(1, 189) = 7.10, p = .008$, but not for a target who was rated by coworkers as warm or cold, $F(1, 189) = .41, p = .53$ (see Table 2 for means).

Within the two conditions where we manipulated moral information we examined whether perceived social and general intelligence would mediate the difference in judgments of the target’s competence. As shown in Figure 4, participants’ ratings of the target’s social intelligence significantly mediated the effect of moral information on competence judgments (95% CI [.002, .92]), but general intelligence did not (95% CI [−.32, .30]). However, the indirect effect of perceived social intelligence dropped below significance when general intelligence was included as a covariate (95% CIs [−.39, .49]).

In summary, moral information influenced perceptions of competence, but warmth information did not. These results suggest that moral information has a different relationship to competence than warmth information, despite the fact that morality is often considered part of the dimension of warmth. These results also supported the claim that social intelligence, even when presented as objective measures of performance, mediates the relationship between moral information and judgments of competence. Unfortunately when including perceptions of general intelligence, both mechanisms were reduced to nonsignificance. It may be that removing the variance associated with general intelligence fundamentally changed the nature of social intelligence, because they are both rooted in intelligence. Therefore, although we find support for social intelligence as a mediator, these effects should be inter-

Table 2
Means (and Standard Deviations) for Trait Measures for Study 5

Trait	Warmth		Morality	
	Low	High	Low	High
Friendliness	3.78 (2.04)	7.82 (1.51)	5.51 (1.67)	7.42 (1.46)
Ethicality	5.48 (1.67)	7.02 (1.26)	3.74 (2.55)	8.10 (1.035)
Competence	6.00 (1.81)	5.77 (1.76)	5.28 (1.74)	6.27 (1.83)

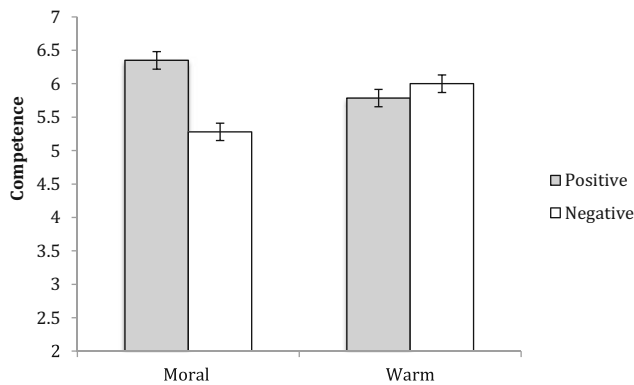


Figure 5. Ratings of a target's competence as a result of receiving information about his morality or warmth for Study 5.

preted with caution as they do not hold when controlling for general intelligence.

Study 6

In Studies 4 and 5 we collected our measures of social intelligence and competence at the same time. Greater confidence in a causal relationship between social intelligence and competence would be supported by an experimental manipulation of our mechanism (Spencer, Zanna, & Fong, 2005). Therefore, in Study 6, which was preregistered, we manipulated targets' social intelligence. In Study 4 and 5 we found social intelligence mediated the negative impact of immoral information on judgments of competence, compared with control conditions. Our consistent and large effects of immoral behavior on competence and theoretical claims that immorality is strongly diagnostic of low social intelligence led us to predict that providing information that a person is highly socially intelligent would eliminate the negative effects of immoral information on perceptions of competence, compared with receiving no social intelligence information.

Method

Participants. Two hundred and eight (117 men, 88 women, and 3 other or decline to state) adults recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk participated in this study for payment. Average age was 37 ($SD = 11.73$) ranging from 19 to 74. The sample was 75% White, 8% African-American, 5% Latino, 8% Asian-American, and 4% other ethnicities. Three participants were removed from the analyses because they time they spent on the survey was greater than 3 SD s above the mean, leaving a total sample size of 205 participants.

Procedure. Participants completed this study remotely on their own computers. Using the same format as Study 5, participants saw a picture of a male target, with demographic information, and average ratings for the target on three traits (conscientiousness, openness, and optimism) made by 10 coworkers in the same manner as Study 5. In addition, participants were randomly assigned to also receive ratings of the target's morality, again in the same way as Study 5; either participant's saw the target received high ratings on morality (rating = 7.87) or low ratings (rating = 2.13). Half of participants received no more information

about the target, the other half were randomly assigned to see that the target was rated as highly socially intelligent (rating = 8.01, see supplement for materials). Social intelligence was defined as *how effectively this person negotiates complex social relationships (interacting with people, perceiving other's thoughts and feelings, inferring social rules and norms)*. As a result, this study featured a 2 (morality: immoral or moral) \times 2 (social intelligence: high or none provided) between-subjects design.

After viewing the coworkers' ratings, participants were asked to report, "How much do you think this person has the following traits?" Participants rated how competent and capable they believed the target to be, which we aggregated ($r = .75$), along with 10 other traits ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 10 (*very much*), in an effort to mask our hypotheses.

Results and Discussion

We found a marginal main effect of manipulating coworkers' ratings of social intelligence, $F(3, 201) = 2.82, p = .09, \eta_p^2 = .01$, and a significant main effect of manipulating morality on participants' ratings of targets' competence, $F(3, 201) = 5.45, p = .02, \eta_p^2 = .03$, and no interaction between our social intelligence and morality manipulation, $F(3, 201) = 1.31, p = .25, \eta_p^2 = .01$. However, importantly, as Figure 6 shows our simple effects were as predicted (see preregistration). Presenting information that a person was high in social intelligence eliminated the effects of receiving positive versus negative moral information on judgments of competence. Specifically, replicating our past studies, in conditions where no social intelligence was presented the immoral target ($M = 5.56, SD = 1.80$) was rated as significantly less competent than the moral target ($M = 6.44, SD = 1.81$), $F(1, 201) = 5.97, p = .02, d = .34$, but in conditions with high social intelligence information the immoral ($M = 6.28, SD = 1.80$) and moral ($M = 6.58, SD = 1.76$) target no longer received different competence ratings, $F(1, 201) = .72, p = .40, d = .12$.

These results suggest that for immoral individuals, social intelligence mediates the link between moral information and perceptions of competence. It may be that individuals presented as immoral, but highly socially intelligent are seen as Machiavellian (Wilson, Near, & Miller, 1996), which could imply competence. These individuals may strategically adhere to social rules, be able

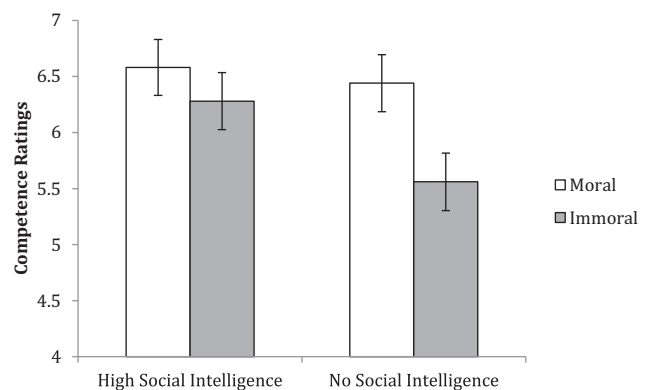


Figure 6. Ratings of competence after receiving information about a target's morality and social intelligence for Study 6.

to adapt to social situations, and empathize, but they use those abilities for their own advantage in a selfish strategic manner, potentially making them perceived as highly competent.

General Discussion

A robust literature demonstrates the importance of moral information in forming general impressions (Goodwin et al., 2014). However, our work demonstrates that moral information even changes the other ingredients that go into these larger impressions, such as competence. Although arguments can be made that an individual's moral behavior is, or should be, irrelevant to judgments of their competence (moral dissociation hypothesis) or that acting immorally indicates greater competence (evil genius hypothesis), we found consistent support that immoral behavior reduced judgments of competence in keeping with the inept sinner hypothesis.

We observed the effect of moral information on judgments of overall competence, competence at specific skills, and domain-specific competence, even when it was a different domain from the moral transgression (i.e., the behaviors took place individuals' private lives, but evaluations were made of their job competence). These effects generalized across a variety of contexts such as reading about hypothetical transgressions (Studies 1 and 3), rating past participants who cheated on a lab task (Study 2), witnessing selfish behavior in an economic game (Study 4) and evaluating coworker ratings of a target's morality (Study 5 and 6), but not to the closely related dimension of warmth (Study 4). These effects were found for men and women from a diversity of ages (our samples ranged from 18–74 years-old) and ethnicities. Our findings with undergraduate samples from a large west-coast university (Studies 1a, 1b, and 2) replicated in adult samples (Studies 3–6) from across the United States. However more work is necessary to explore whether these effects replicate in other cultures, which may hold different views on morality and competence.

Competence, which is construed to be a self-relevant trait having to do with the ability to attain one's own goals (Peeters & Czapinski, 1990), is an unlikely candidate to be influenced by immoral behavior. However, we believe these findings demonstrate that competence is more social than scholars have previously suggested. We found that moral information affected judgments of social traits and skills more strongly than less social traits and skills, countering notions that our effects simply represent a halo effect. Further, we found that perceptions of social intelligence were a robust and superior mediator to alternative mechanisms (self-control in Study 4; general intelligence in Study 5). Experimentally manipulating social intelligence to be high, eliminated the negative effect of immoral information on judgments of competence (Study 6). High social intelligence appears buffer against the negative consequences of immoral behavior on perceptions of competence and may explain why, in certain cases, moral transgressions appear to have little or no effect on perceptions of competence. For example, former President Bill Clinton's approval ratings increased in the wake of the Monica Lewinsky scandal rather than decreased (Newport, 1999).

Implications and Limitations

These findings are interesting in the context of broader models that explain perceptions of moral and immoral individuals such as

Gray and colleagues (2012) *dyadic morality model*. This model may be interpreted to suggest that individuals who are immoral would be seen as more competent because of their greater capacity to do harm. Notable differences exist between this model and our findings, suggesting the two can be reconciled. Gray and colleagues (2012) examine agency in the form of responsibility and intentionality, which is different from competence. They also measure judgments of agency within the context of the moral dyad. As a result, comparisons of agency are often made between a perpetrator and a victim (e.g., a murderer and an orphan, respectively) and focus on the actor's agency within the act itself. Here, we compare a moral transgressor to a more neutral individual of the same age and qualifications. Gray and colleagues did compare a moral agent (psychopath) to neutral individual (CEO), who was not a victim, in one study (Gray & Wegner, 2009) and in this case their findings are more similar to ours. The CEO was rated as higher on agency than the psychopath, though the psychopath had a greater perceived capacity to do harm (moral agency). Therefore, although it is likely that a transgressor would be seen as having a greater capacity to do harm (moral agency), it is unclear that they would have more agency in general, or even further, that they would be seen as more competent. Future work should examine how these different measures of efficacy (competence and moral agency) relate to one another in perceptions of transgressors.

These results have important implications as companies become more interested in gathering information on potential employees through their *Facebook*, or other social media accounts, which could incidentally convey morally relevant information. In addition, it offers important insights into a number of examples ranging from politics, to sports, to business, to the entertainment industry in which individual's unethical behavior is fodder for public discussion.

It also raises interesting questions about when and for how long moral information influences perceptions of competence. When individuals display high levels of competence or incompetence in a domain, moral information may have less of an impact. By design, all of our examples included individuals who were portrayed as neutrally or moderately competent, or where competence was unknown. Some research suggests that when signals of competence are strong, observers may be more likely to separate a target's moral transgression from judgments of his or her competence (Bhattacharjee et al., 2013).

Future work should examine whether certain unethical behaviors have a greater impact on perceptions of competence than others. Some moral acts are breaches of norms about fairness, where individuals act in ways that are unjust (e.g., stealing), while others exhibit a failure to care for another person or an active desire to hurt someone else (e.g., neglecting a sick and elderly parent). In our studies we included a variety of moral transgressions to demonstrate that our effects generalize across different unethical behaviors; however, we do not know whether some categories of transgressions may be considered more relevant to judgments of competence than others. One could argue that norms about harming others are stronger than those about fairness and, therefore, have a greater impact on judgments of competence. On the other hand people may infer competence more from fairness violations, like cheating or stealing.

It is difficult to form conclusions about the accuracy of inferring competence from morally relevant behaviors, as this depends on

judgments of how pertinent moral action really is to social intelligence, and how pertinent social intelligence really is to specific domains of competence. It is possible that individuals who act immorally are less competent in general and in specific domains, but this is an assertion was not tested in our work. Further, it is also difficult to assess the social desirability of the relationship we have studied. Some might view negative competence judgments as fair punishment for past transgression, where others might see it as information appropriately confined to the moral domain. However, while these assessments are beyond the scope of our analysis, we believe it is helpful to understand the power of moral information to influence judgments of competence. Awareness of this relationship is necessary if its influence is to be considered, a factor to be accounted for as individuals calibrate their perceptions of one another to be both valid and just.

Conclusion

Moral information holds a privileged place in social perception with the power to shape interpretations of other qualities or traits that are crucial to forming larger general impressions. The influence of moral behavior on perceptions of competence appears to function underneath our conscious awareness and perhaps despite our intentions.

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