The handle http://hdl.handle.net/1887/20960 holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation.

**Author:** Lee, Romy van der  
**Title:** Moral motivation within groups  
**Issue Date:** 2013-06-13
Chapter 2

Moral Misery and Competent Contentment

Affective and Cognitive Responses

This chapter is based on Van der Lee, R., Ellemers, N., & Scheepers, D. (2012a). Moral misery and competent contentment: The role of affect in group members’ perceived coping ability with morality vs. competence evaluations. Manuscript under review.
We are evaluated on a daily basis by others, such as family members, friends, and co-workers. Behavioral evaluations often serve the purpose of eliciting and encouraging desired behaviors. Consequently, we are motivated to behave in ways that will yield respect and esteem from important others. This is particularly the case when the judgments of others are relevant to us, for example because these others belong to the same group. But how do these evaluations shape our feelings and behaviors? Whereas negative evaluations have a major impact on individuals (see Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001 for a review) and may consequently be used to elicit behavioral change, they can also be counter-effective, for example when such evaluations increase individuals’ perceptions of threat (Ruiter, Abraham, & Kok, 2001). In the current research, we propose that the impact of a behavioral evaluation in a salient group context depends on whether the evaluation concerns behavior indicative of one’s morality or competence. As will be outlined in more detail below, we argue that criticism of one’s moral behavior is experienced more negatively—both in terms of affect and perceived coping ability—than criticism of one’s competence. In addition, we argue that group members can overcome the negative experience triggered by moral criticism when presented with an opportunity to restore their moral image in the group.

In group contexts, much of the behavior of individual group members is driven by concerns for a positive social identity. Research examining how individuals and groups compare to each other has mainly focused on competence judgments (e.g., Bettencourt, Dorr, Charlton, & Hume, 2001; Ellemers, 1993). Evaluations of abilities and task performance are seen as important indicators of individual and group success in terms of outcomes and resources. Competence is thus not only a basis for intergroup comparisons; it is also considered an important within-group source of membership-esteem. The present research complements prior work by also examining morality judgments as a source of membership-esteem in groups.

Several authors have argued for the central role of morality judgments in regulating individual behavior in groups as an important reason for why people care about morality (e.g., De Waal, 1996; Skitka, 2003). Although the importance of morality for groups and its members is acknowledged in various literatures, little is actually known about the consequences of morality evaluations for individual behavior within groups. While the consequences of
morality for individual behavior as incorporated in laws and social norms tend to focus on sanctioning negative breaches of morality and the avoidance of immoral behavior (e.g., the Ten Commandments: “Thou shalt not...”), we examine how group members can overcome this negative impact and display moral behavior. In two experiments, we investigate whether the tendency to comment on behavior that is seen as lacking morality (vs. competence) constitutes the best way to motivate group members to behave more morally in the future by assessing its impact on affective responses and coping ability.

**Behavioral feedback through intragroup evaluations**

According to Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), people derive part of their self-concept from their group membership, and are motivated to maintain a positive social identity. In doing so, people evaluate the extent to which their past and present behavior contributes to attaining this valued goal (Levine & Moreland, 1994). This evaluation process is important for both the group and its individual members: The outcome determines whether individual group members meet group standards and, as a consequence, affects the identity of both the group and its individual members (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). It is thus important for individual group members to know whether other group members approve of their behavior. The esteem they receive from their group depends on feedback indicating whether their behavior is in line with the group’s expectations (Moreland & Levine, 1982), and group members are motivated to act accordingly (Tyler & Blader, 2003).

**The social implications of morality and competence evaluations**

Morality is a primary source of value. Across cultures people consider moral values to be the most important guiding principles in their lives (Schwartz, 1992), and appreciate having a moral identity (Monin & Jordan, 2009). Prior research has addressed the content of morality (e.g., Haidt & Graham, 2007) and the foundations of moral judgments (Greene et al., 2004). Additionally, it has been demonstrated that morality judgments have strong interpersonal consequences: Morality information impacts on person perception (Brambilla, Rusconi, Sacchi, & Cherubini, 2011; Wojciszke, 1994), elicits strong affective responses (Skitka, Bauman, & Sargis, 2005; Wojciszke, 2005), and, in particular
negative information about morality, seems highly diagnostic of the self (Skowronski & Carlston, 1987). These findings all indicate that morality judgments of self and others are of particular importance to people’s social image and social responses.

At the group level, morality is seen as essential for individual survival and cooperation (e.g., De Waal, 1996; Skitka, 2003). However, in examining what drives the behavior of group members, past research has almost solely addressed judgments of competence. Other evaluative dimensions, such as warmth (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002; Judd, James-Hawkins, Yzerbyt, & Kashima, 2005), have been considered as alternative sources of individual and group-esteem that are used when competence seems lacking. Yet, recent research has demonstrated that, within the warmth cluster, sociability ratings (i.e., friendliness, likeability) can and should be distinguished from morality judgments (i.e., trustworthiness, honesty; Leach, Ellemers, & Barreto, 2007). More relevant to the current work, there is now converging evidence that morality is most important—more so than competence or sociability—for a positive evaluation of the group (Ellemers, Pagliaro, Barreto, & Leach, 2008; Leach et al., 2007), and for individuals within the group. Moral ingroup norms guide the behavioral choices of individual group members more so than competence-based ingroup norms (Ellemers et al., 2008), and individuals are motivated to act in line with moral ingroup norms as they anticipate gaining ingroup respect by enacting their social identity in this way (Pagliaro, Ellemers, & Barreto, 2011).

In sum, research on the importance of morality at both the interpersonal and the group level suggests that people want to be considered moral and want to belong to moral groups. Thus, generally speaking, living up to the moral expectations of the group should be more important for group members than behaving in line with the group’s expected level of competence. We therefore argue that criticism of one’s moral behavior impacts more negatively on group members’ affective responses and coping ability than criticism of one’s competence.

Responses to behavioral evaluations

To gain insight in how intragroup morality and competence evaluations impact on group members, we connect to the literature on goal behavior, indicating
that aspects of the message (i.e., evaluation) determine its effectiveness in eliciting behavioral change (e.g., Kahneman & Tversky, 1984). The negativity bias, for example, states that negative information generally has more impact than positive information (Baumeister et al., 2001; Fiske, 1980). Negative feedback is thus considered as an effective tool for eliciting desirable behavior. Yet, if this negative response is too intense, the outcome can be counter-effective. Negative information relevant to the self—as is the case with behavioral evaluations—has the potential to increase perceptions of threat and elicit defensive responses (e.g., Good & Abraham, 2007; Leventhal, 1970).

The impact of negative self-relevant information is partially determined by the individual’s perceptions of self-efficacy (Van ‘t Riet, Ruiter, Werrij, & De Vries, 2008), that is, the individual’s perceived ability to cope with the situation. Research on stress and coping indicates that subjective appraisals of a specific situation depend on how perceived situational demands relate to the individual’s available resources to cope with the situation (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988). When the perception of threat increases, this places situational demands at the forefront (e.g., increased required effort, increased uncertainty), lowering one’s perceived ability to cope with the situation, compared to when the focus is on the coping resources available to the individual (Blascovich, 2008b; Folkman, Lazarus, Gruen, & DeLongis, 1986). Thus, we argue that group members’ affective responses to critical comments regarding their morality vs. competence impact on their perceived ability to cope with the behavioral evaluation.

The current research

Two central dimensions of interpersonal and group evaluations are morality and competence (e.g., Leach et al., 2007). We examine how the outcome of such evaluations impacts on group members’ affective experiences and coping abilities. Connecting to the literature on evaluative judgments, we propose that the impact of the evaluation is affected by both dimension and valence (e.g., Skowronski & Carlston, 1987). That is, whereas positive information about competence is perceived as more diagnostic of the self (in its predictive value for future behavior) than positive information about morality, negative information about morality is likely to be seen as more diagnostic of the self than negative information about competence. Thus, we predict that a negative evaluation of
one’s moral behavior by others in a group elicits more negative affect than a negative evaluation of one’s competence (Hypothesis 1). This is not to say that morality judgments always elicit more intense emotions. In fact, we predict that a positive evaluation of one’s competence elicits more positive affect than a positive evaluation of one’s moral behavior (Hypothesis 2). In addition, the negative affect elicited by the critical evaluation of one’s immoral (vs. incompetent) behavior is likely to increase the salience of situational demands, indicated by a lower ability to cope with the situation. We thus predict that the relationship between critical evaluations of immoral and incompetent behavior on the one hand and perceived coping ability on the other hand is mediated by group members’ initial negative affective responses (Hypothesis 3).

Intragroup evaluations criticizing one’s moral behavior (rather than one’s competent behavior) are regarded as diagnostic of their lack of morality, and as a result group members may be discouraged from striving towards being a good group member who adheres to the moral behavioral standards of the group. Yet, recent research suggests that individuals actually increase moral strivings after a moral failure (Jordan, Mullen, & Murnighan, 2011). This seeming contradiction may be resolved when we separate affective responses to evaluations of one’s past behavior from the perceived ability to cope with a new opportunity to behave as a good group member. While the importance of morality for the group and the individual should be evident from more intense negative affective responses to criticism of one’s past moral behavior, a new opportunity to show one’s worth as a moral (vs. competent) group member should motivate rather than discourage group members since it is likely to increase the salience of available coping resources rather than situational demands. We predict that this will decrease the negative affective response to the prior criticism of one’s morality (vs. competence) and increase the positive affective response towards the opportunity to show moral, rather than competent, behavior (Hypothesis 4).

We tested these hypotheses in two experiments. In both studies individual group members recalled behavior that was evaluated by other group members in terms of morality vs. competence. Experiment 2.1a investigated the impact of negative morality vs. competence evaluations on group member’ affective responses. Experiment 2.1b assessed positive evaluations to demonstrate that the impact of morality judgments is specific for negative
evaluations. Experiment 2.2 examined the mediating role of negative affect on perceived coping ability, and assessed whether group members can alleviate their negative affective response after prior criticism to their morality (vs. competence) when offered an opportunity to display moral, rather than competent, behavior in a novel group context.

**Experiment 2.1a**

Participants in this experiment recalled a situation in which their group evaluated their behavior negatively in terms of morality or competence. Next, we assessed their affective responses with regard to the recalled situation. We predicted that recalling a negative evaluation of one’s moral behavior elicits more negative affect than recalling a negative evaluation of one’s competent behavior (*Hypothesis 1*).

**Method**

*Participants and Design.* Sixty-four individuals (36 women, *M* _age_ = 30.20 years, *SD* = 13.23) were recruited by undergraduate students as part of their Bachelor thesis. Participants consisted of family, friends, and/or colleagues of these students. Participants filled out the paper and pencil questionnaire in return for a lottery ticket with which they could win one of four gift certificates each worth 20 Euros. In a 1-factor (Dimension: Morality vs. Competence) between-subjects design, participants were randomly assigned to one of the two experimental conditions. Participation took approximately 20 minutes.

*Procedure.* The experiment explained that all people belong to multiple groups, and that every group has its own norms and values. The cover story further told that we were interested in the value of either morality (i.e., trustworthiness, honesty) or competence (i.e., intelligence, skills), depending on condition, and how it affects the behavior of group members. Participants were then asked to recall a situation in which they had behaved in a way that was evaluated as either *immoral* or *incompetent* (depending on condition) by others in a group context, and to describe both their behavior and how
(someone from) their group confronted them with their behavior.\textsuperscript{1} Participants then completed the questionnaire containing the dependent measures.

**Measures.** All items were presented on 7-point scales ($1 = \textit{completely disagree}$ to $7 = \textit{completely agree}$). To check the effectiveness of the manipulation, participants reported the extent to which they recalled a situation in which they were negatively evaluated by their group on their 1) moral and 2) competent behavior.

We included a total of 31 emotions in the questionnaire, based on the Positive And Negative Affect Scales (PANAS) by Watson and Clark (1988), and extended these with several additional emotions. To construct the affect scales we conducted a Principle Component Analysis (varimax rotation) and selected the emotions that loaded on the first two factors. We then ran the analysis again with only those items. These 10 items explained 58.91\% of the total variance. Eigenvalues were 3.46 for the first factor (i.e., negative affect) and 2.43 for the second factor (i.e., positive affect). Both scales consisted of five items (negative affect: “worried”, “anxious”, “vulnerable”, “tense”, “nervous”, $\alpha = .83$; and positive affect: “happy”, “enthusiastic”, “inspired”, “pleased”, “proud”, $\alpha = .80$). Participants indicated the extent to which they experienced these emotions while recalling their behavior.

Because we used pre-existing groups rather than experimental groups, we controlled for possible individual differences regarding group identification and self-esteem. Group identification was measured with four items (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999; e.g., “I felt connected to the others in this group”; $\alpha = .86$); personal self-esteem was assessed by five items adapted from Rosenberg (1965; e.g., “I was satisfied with myself in that situation”; $\alpha = .82$); and membership-esteem was measured using four items (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; e.g., “I was a worthy member of the group”; $\alpha = .72$).

\textsuperscript{1} 95.2\% of participants described a situation in line with the intended manipulation, $\chi^2(1, N = 62) = 106.65, p < .001$. Participants indicated the following groups in which the evaluation took place: 51.61\% work group (e.g., classmates), 16.13\% family, 9.68\% friends, 12.90\% sports team, 3.22\% other and 6.45\% did not specify the group. An example of immoral behavior is: “It was at a meeting of my fraternity, when I was wearing a shirt of a different fraternity. I was called on my loyalty towards my fraternity”. An example of incompetent behavior is: “I was supposed to make some arrangements for a show on behalf of my fraternity, but I made several mistakes. Eventually it had to be cancelled all together. It was considered as something important, they confronted me with it”. Removing participants who failed to describe a situation conform condition from the subsequent analyses did not significantly change our results. We therefore included those participants in all analyses.
Results

Unless reported otherwise all data were analyzed by means of Analyses of Variance with dimension as independent variable.

Checks. The manipulation of dimension was successful: Participants in the morality condition indicated to a stronger extent that they described a situation about their immoral behavior ($M = 5.03, SD = 1.71$) than participants in the competence condition ($M = 3.13, SD = 2.00$), $F(1, 62) = 16.81, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .21$. Contrary, participants in the competence condition indicated to a stronger extent that they described a situation about their incompetent behavior ($M = 4.97, SD = 1.73$) than participants in the morality condition ($M = 3.25, SD = 1.70$), $F(1, 62) = 16.02, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .20$. As expected, we found no differences in group identification, personal self-esteem, and membership-esteeem (all $Fs < 1, ps > .5$).

Affect. A repeated measures ANOVA with dimension as between-subjects factor and affect as within-subject factor revealed a significant main effect of affect, $F(1, 62) = 6.12, p = .02, \eta_p^2 = .09$. Participants reported overall more negative affect ($M = 3.34, SD = 1.28$) than positive affect ($M = 2.80, SD = 1.11$). As anticipated, the Affect X Dimension interaction was also significant, $F(1, 62) = 6.84, p = .01, \eta_p^2 = .10$. Simple main effect analyses revealed the predicted effect of dimension on negative affect, $F(1, 62) = 4.88, p = .03, \eta_p^2 = .07$. Participants in the morality condition reported more negative affect ($M = 3.69, SD = 1.36$) than participants in the competence condition ($M = 3.00, SD = 1.12$). For positive affect, the simple main effect analyses revealed a marginally significant effect of dimension, $F(1, 62) = 2.94, p = .09, \eta_p^2 = .04$. Participants in the competence condition reported slightly more positive affect ($M = 3.03, SD = 1.14$) than participants in the morality condition ($M = 2.56, SD = 1.04$).

Discussion

This experiment investigated how negative evaluations of behavior indicating one’s morality or competence influences group members’ affective responses. Our prediction was supported: Recalling a critical evaluation of one’s immoral behavior by others in a group elicited more negative affect than a critical
evaluation of one’s incompetent behavior (Hypothesis 1). Not surprisingly, after recalling a negative evaluation, participants reported overall more negative affect than positive affect. We found no reliable differences between critical evaluations of immoral and incompetent behavior on positive affect.

These results extend previous research, which shows that negative information about morality is seen as more diagnostic of the self than negative information about competence (Skowronski & Carlston, 1987), by empirically demonstrating the affective impact of such information. Recalling a critical evaluation of one’s immoral behavior constitutes a more intense negative affective experience for group members than a critical evaluation of one’s incompetence. It might be possible, however, that group members respond more intensely—regardless of valence—to morality evaluations than to competence evaluations. To rule out this possibility, we conducted a follow-up study in which we examined positive evaluations of group members’ moral vs. competent behavior.

**Experiment 2.1b**

In Experiment 2.1b we asked participants to recall a situation in which their behavior was evaluated as moral or competent by others in a group. As outlined above, we predicted that recalling a critical evaluation of one’s competent behavior elicits more positive affect than recalling a critical evaluation of one’s moral behavior (Hypothesis 2), because of the perceived diagnosticity of positive information about competence, compared to morality, for the self (Skowronski & Carlston, 1987).

**Method**

*Participants & Design.* As part of their Bachelor Thesis, undergraduate students recruited sixty-five participants among their family, friends, and/or colleagues (39 women, $M_{age} = 32.35$, $SD = 14.53$). Similar to the participants in Experiment 2.1a, they received a lottery ticket. Using a 1-Factor (Dimension: Morality vs. Competence) between-subjects design, participants were randomly assigned to one of the two experimental conditions of the paper and pencil questionnaire.
Procedure. The procedure was identical to Experiment 2.1a, except for the valence of our manipulation. Participants recalled a situation in which they behaved in a way that was evaluated as moral (competent) by others in a group context\(^2\), after which they completed the questionnaire.

Measures. A Principal Component Analysis (varimax rotation) showed that the same items as selected in Experiment 2.1a loaded on the first two factors, with Eigenvalues of 5.18 for the first factor (i.e., positive affect) and 1.84 for the second factor (i.e., negative affect), and explained 70.22% of the total variance. Both scales were reliable: \( \alpha = .91 \) for positive affect, and \( \alpha = .85 \) for negative affect. Additionally, we measured group identification (\( \alpha = .85 \)), personal self-esteem (\( \alpha = .77 \)), and membership-esteem (\( \alpha = .78 \)), as well as the effectiveness of our manipulations.

Results

Checks. The manipulation of dimension was successful: Participants in the morality condition indicated to a stronger extent that they described a situation about their moral behavior (\( M = 5.40, SD = 1.22 \)) than participants in the competence condition (\( M = 3.14, SD = 2.05 \)), \( F(1, 63) = 27.95, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .31 \). Contrary, participants in the competence condition indicated to a stronger extent that they described a situation about their competent behavior (\( M = 5.40, SD = 1.59 \)) than participants in the morality condition (\( M = 3.23, SD = 1.98 \)), \( F(1, 63) = 23.91, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .27 \). As expected, we found no differences in group identification, personal self-esteem, and membership-esteem (all Fs < 1, ps > .4).

Affect. A repeated measures ANOVA with dimension as between-subjects factor and affect as within-subject factor revealed a significant main effect of affect, \( F(1, 62) = 49.95, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .45 \). Participants reported overall more

\(^2\) 92.2% of participants described a situation in line with our manipulation, \( \chi^2(1, N = 64) = 99.76, p < .001 \). Participants indicated the following groups in which the evaluation took place: 58.21% work group, 11.94% family, 16.42% friends, 8.95% sports team, 1.49% other and 2.98% did not specify the group. An example of moral behavior is: “In my group of friends there was a lot of gossip about one person. I did not participate with the gossiping. Other friends in the group told me they admired that I stayed out of it”. An example of competent behavior is: “We were losing a soccer match. The whole team already gave up. I kept going and made a goal at the end of the first half. The coach set me as an example for the others in the team”.

46
positive affect ($M = 4.42, SD = 1.58$) than negative affect ($M = 2.32, SD = 1.27$). Importantly, the Affect X Dimension interaction was also significant, $F(1, 62) = 10.51, p = .002, \eta^2_p = .14$. Simple main effect analyses revealed a main effect of Dimension: As expected, participants in the competence condition reported more positive affect ($M = 5.12, SD = 1.22$) than participants in the morality condition ($M = 3.64, SD = 1.60$), $F(1, 62) = 17.47, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .22$. For negative affect, simple main effect analyses yielded no effect of Dimension, $F(1, 62) = 1.57, p = .21, \eta^2_p = .02$ ($M = 2.53, SD = 1.37$ in the morality condition, and $M = 2.13, SD = 1.17$ in the competence condition).

**Discussion**

As predicted, Experiment 2.1b showed that recalling a positive evaluation of one’s competent behavior by others in a group elicits more positive affect than recalling a positive evaluation of one’s moral behavior (*Hypothesis 2*). These results are in line with the idea that positive information about competence is more diagnostic of the self than positive information about morality (Skowronski & Carlston, 1987). Importantly, these results rule out that morality evaluations elicit more intense affective responses overall, since a

---

3 We also analyzed the data of Experiments 2.1a and 2.1b in one combined 2(Dimension: Morality vs. Competence) X 2(Evaluation valence: Negative vs. Positive) design. For positive affect, main effects of Dimension, $F(1, 124) = 18.99, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .13$, and Evaluation valence, $F(1, 124) = 50.17, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .29$, emerged: Participants in the competence condition reported overall more positive affect ($M = 4.11, SD = 1.57$) than participants in the morality condition ($M = 3.08, SD = 1.44$), and participants in the positive evaluation condition reported overall more positive affect ($M = 4.42, SD = 1.58$) than participants in the negative evaluation condition ($M = 2.80, SD = 1.11$). The Dimension X Evaluation valence interaction was also significant, $F(1, 124) = 5.10, p = .03, \eta^2_p = .04$. Simple main effect analyses revealed the predicted pattern: When the evaluation was positive, participants in the competence condition reported significantly more positive affect than participants in the morality condition ($p < .001$).

An ANOVA on negative affect also revealed main effects of Dimension, $F(1, 124) = 5.96, p = .02, \eta^2_p = .05$, and Evaluation valence, $F(1, 124) = 20.61, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .14$. Participants in the morality condition reported overall more negative affect ($M = 3.13, SD = 1.47$) than participants in the competence condition ($M = 2.55, SD = 1.22$), and participants in the negative evaluation condition reported overall more negative affect ($M = 3.34, SD = 1.28$) than participants in the positive evaluation condition ($M = 2.32, SD = 1.27$). Although the Dimension X Evaluation valence interaction was not significant for negative affect, $F(1, 124) = 0.42, p = .52, \eta^2_p = .003$, simple main effect analyses revealed the predicted pattern: When the evaluation was negative, participants in the morality condition reported significantly more negative affect than participants in the competence condition ($p = .03$).
positive evaluation of one’s morality made by others in a group triggers a less intense affective response than a positive evaluation of one’s competence.

Experiment 2.2

The second experiment was conducted with two aims in mind. The first aim was to test the psychological consequences of the initial affective responses with respect to one’s perceived ability to cope with the behavioral evaluation. The second aim was to examine whether group members can alleviate their negative affective response to a critical evaluation of their immorality when offered a new opportunity to display moral behavior.

Participants in this experiment first recalled critical evaluations of their immoral or incompetent behavior by others in a group (as in Experiment 2.1a) and were then offered an ostensible opportunity to restore their image by behaving morally or competently in a novel group. This procedure allowed us to examine whether group members can overcome their initial negative affective response when presented with a new opportunity to display moral behavior. Therefore, after recalling an evaluation of immoral (or incompetent) behavior, we introduced a joint task in a novel group to participants, which offered them an opportunity to display behavior indicating and affirming their image as a moral vs. competent group member. We manipulated evaluative dimension as a between-participants factor and added evaluative focus (recall vs. restore) as within-participants factor.

We expected to replicate the results of Experiment 2.1a, i.e., that recalling behavior evaluated as immoral by others in a group elicits more negative affect than a recalling incompetent behavior (Hypothesis 1). Furthermore, we expected the negative affective response as elicited by a critical evaluation of one’s immoral behavior (vs. incompetent behavior) to decrease perceived coping abilities (Hypothesis 3). However, when offered a new opportunity to restore one’s image in the group, we expect this pattern to disappear. Specifically, we predict a larger decrease in negative affect and a larger increase in positive affect after the prior criticism of one’s morality rather than competence when offered a new opportunity to restore one’s image as a moral (vs. competent) group member (Hypothesis 4).
Method

Participants and Design. Sixty-one undergraduate students (41 women, $M_{age} = 21.74$ years, $SD = 3.12$) participated and received either 6 Euros or course credits for their participation. We employed a 2(Dimension: Morality vs. Competence) X 2(Focus: Recall vs. Restore) mixed-design, with dimension as between-subjects factor and focus as within-subjects factor. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two dimension conditions.

Procedure. Participants arrived in the laboratory and were seated in separate cubicles. The experiment consisted of two parts: The first was ostensibly about group values (similar to Experiments 2.1a and 2.1b), and the second part would involve solving management dilemmas in a group. We introduced the first part of the experiment by providing the same instructions as in Experiment 2.1a: Participants recalled own behavior evaluated as immoral (incompetent) by others in a group. Next, we measured affect, perceived coping ability, and additional variables, after which the second part of the experiment was introduced.

In the second part of the experiment, the cover story explained that we were interested in the way in which people solve management dilemmas in groups. We told participants that these dilemmas often require a trade-off between moral and competent considerations, and that we were specifically interested in either morality or competence (which always converged with the dimension of the recalled evaluation). We then explained that participants would be working in a group with two other participants to find agreement on the best solution for such dilemmas. We presented this interactive group task as an opportunity for participants to show their moral or competent behavior towards their group. We explicitly stated: “With this task you can show your moral (competent) behavior.” In anticipation of the group task participants completed the second questionnaire, again comprising the same dependent

---

$^4$ 88.1% of participants described a situation in line with the intended manipulation, $\chi^2(1, N = 61) = 79.74, p < .001$. Participants indicated the following groups in which the evaluation took place: 52.46% work group, 9.84% family, 6.56% friends, 22.95% sports team, 3.28% other and 4.91% did not specify the group. Removing participants who failed to describe a situation conform condition from the subsequent analyses did not significantly change our results. We therefore included those participants in all analyses.
measures. After this, participants were fully debriefed, paid, and thanked for their participation.\(^5\)

**Measures.** All dependent variables were measured on 7-point scales (1 = *completely disagree* to 7 = *completely agree*). The measures were assessed twice: once in the recall condition (phrased in the past tense; similar to Experiments 2.1a and 2.1b) and once in the restore condition (phrased in the present tense).

We included a total of 25 emotions in our questionnaire, by extending the Positive And Negative Affect Scales (PANAS; Watson & Clark, 1988) with several other emotions. We followed the same strategy as described in Experiments 1a and 1b: We conducted a Principal Component Analysis (varimax rotation) and selected the emotions that loaded on the first two factors to construct our affect scales. These 10 items explained 50.38% of the total variance in the recall condition, with Eigenvalues of 3.62 for the first factor (i.e., negative affect) and 1.42 for the second factor (i.e., positive affect).

In the restore condition, the same items explained 51.13% of the total variance, with Eigenvalues of 3.48 for the first factor (i.e., positive affect) and 1.63 for the second factor (i.e., negative affect). Both scales consisted of five items (positive affect: “happy”, “interested”, “inspired”, “strong”, “proud”; Recall: \(\alpha = .67\); Restore: \(\alpha = .70\), and negative affect: “anxious”, “threatened”, “tense”, “nervous”, “guilty”; Recall: \(\alpha = .75\); Restore: \(\alpha = .71\)).

Coping ability (Folkman et al., 1986) was measured with three items (“I felt I was able to solve this situation”, “I found it difficult to solve this situation” [reverse coded], “I felt insecure about solving this situation” [reverse coded], Recall: \(\alpha = .77\); Restore: \(\alpha = .81\)).\(^6\) We again assessed group

\(^5\) In this study participants were attached to apparatus for measuring impedance cardiographic (ICG), electrocardiographic (EKG), and blood pressure signals. After the described procedure, participants engaged in an additional study in which we explored their cardiovascular responses. Analyses of those data are beyond the scope of the current paper.

\(^6\) To confirm that negative affect and perceived coping ability can be considered two separate constructs, we conducted a principal component analysis, using varimax rotation, of the eight items in both the recall and restore condition. The analysis yielded a 2-factor solution in both conditions. In the recall condition, the items explained 59.97% of the total variance, and Eigenvalues were 3.34 for the first factor (i.e., negative affect) and 1.45 for the second factor (i.e., perceived coping ability). In the restore condition, the items explained 56.85% of the total variance, and Eigenvalues were 2.36 for the first factor (i.e., negative affect) and 2.19 for the second factor (i.e., perceived coping ability), thus confirming the conceptual distinction between negative affect and perceived coping ability.
identification (Recall: $\alpha = .82$; Restore: $\alpha = .90$), personal self-esteem (Recall: $\alpha = .77$; Restore: $\alpha = .87$), and membership-esteem (Recall: $\alpha = .83$; Restore: $\alpha = .82$).

To check the effectiveness of the dimension manipulation, participants indicated, in the recall condition, the extent to which they described immoral and incompetent behavior. In the restore condition, participants indicated the extent to which the solutions to management dilemmas were aimed at morality and competence.

**Results**

Unless reported otherwise, the within-subject data were analyzed using repeated measures (RM) Analyses of Variance with focus as within-subject factor and dimension as between-subject factor. Data from the between-subject conditions were analyzed using Analyses of Variance with dimension as independent variable.

**Checks.** The manipulation of dimension was successful in both focus conditions. In the morality recall condition participants reported to a stronger extent that the described situation was about their immoral behavior ($M = 5.58, SD = 1.23$) than participants in the competence recall condition ($M = 4.33, SD = 1.88$), $F(1, 59) = 9.44, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .14$. A similar pattern was found in the restore conditions: Participants in the morality restore condition reported to a greater extent that the aim of the management dilemmas was on morality ($M = 6.16, SD = 1.53$) than participants in the competence restore condition ($M = 4.10, SD = 1.40$), $F(1, 59) = 30.12, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .34$.

Separate analyses for personal self-esteem, membership-esteem, and identification yielded main effects of focus: In the restore condition participants reported more personal self-esteem ($M = 5.71, SD = 1.02$) than in the recall condition ($M = 3.75, SD = 1.31$), $F(1, 59) = 158.10, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .73$, and more membership-esteem ($M = 5.42, SD = 0.96$) than in the recall condition ($M = 4.02, SD = 1.49$), $F(1, 59) = 53.01, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .47$. In the recall condition participants reported to identify more with their group ($M = 4.37, SD = 1.32$) than in the restore condition ($M = 3.58, SD = 1.50$), $F(1, 59) = 10.14, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .15$, consistent with the use of preexisting groups in the recall condition and minimal groups (to which people tend to identify less) in
the restore condition. Importantly, the interaction with dimension was not significant for each of these variables (all $F$s < 2.5, $p$s > .1).

**Affect.** A repeated measures ANOVA with dimension as between-subject factor and focus and affect as within-subject factors yielded a significant Affect X Focus interaction, $F(1, 59) = 205.60$, $p < .001$, $\eta_{p}^2 = .78$. The predicted three-way-interaction among Affect, Focus, and Dimension was also significant, $F(1, 59) = 8.45$, $p = .005$, $\eta_{p}^2 = .12$. To disentangle these interaction patterns we conducted separate repeated measures ANOVAs for the recall and restore conditions.

Main effects of affect emerged in both the recall condition, $F(1, 59) = 61.22$, $p < .001$, $\eta_{p}^2 = .51$, and the restore condition, $F(1, 59) = 78.09$, $p < .001$, $\eta_{p}^2 = .57$. Overall, participants reported more negative affect ($M = 4.39$, $SD = 1.06$) than positive affect ($M = 2.72$, $SD = 0.92$) in the recall condition, whereas they reported more positive affect ($M = 4.44$, $SD = 0.86$) than negative affect ($M = 2.77$, $SD = 0.87$) in the restore condition.

More importantly, and in keeping with predictions and the results of Experiment 2.1a, the Affect X Dimension interaction was significant in the recall condition, $F(1, 59) = 4.37$, $p = .04$, $\eta_{p}^2 = .07$ (see Table 2.1). Participants reported more negative affect in the morality recall condition than in the competence recall condition, $F(1, 59) = 4.84$, $p = .03$, $\eta_{p}^2 = .08$. Dimension had no effect on positive affect in the recall condition, $F(1, 59) = 1.78$, $p = .19$, $\eta_{p}^2 = .03$. The Affect X Dimension interaction was not significant in the restore condition, $F(1, 59) = 1.50$, $p = .23$, $\eta_{p}^2 = .02$. 

52
Table 2.1
Means and Standard Deviations of Affect and Perceived Coping Ability for the Dimension Conditions in each Focus Condition (Experiment 2.2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Recall behavior</th>
<th></th>
<th>Restore behavior</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Morality (M)</td>
<td>Competence (SD)</td>
<td>Morality (M)</td>
<td>Competence (SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive affect</td>
<td>2.57&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>2.88&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.53&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>4.35&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative affect</td>
<td>4.68&lt;sub&gt;c&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>4.10&lt;sub&gt;d&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.63&lt;sub&gt;e&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>2.91&lt;sub&gt;e&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived coping</td>
<td>3.61&lt;sub&gt;i&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>4.35&lt;sub&gt;j&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>1.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ability</td>
<td>4.40&lt;sub&gt;j&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>4.25&lt;sub&gt;j&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>1.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Means with different subscripts per row and column (for positive and negative affect) differ reliably from each other (p < .05) following LSD post-hoc tests.

Change in affect. For presentational purposes, we computed difference scores for positive and negative affect by subtracting the average affect in the recall condition from the restore condition for both subscales. This way, we created a single indicator of change in positive and negative affective responses between the recall and restore conditions. A repeated measures ANOVA with the affect difference scores as within-subject factor and dimension as between-subject factor yielded a significant main effect of affect, \( F(1, 59) = 205.60, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .78 \), as well as the predicted Affect X Dimension interaction, \( F(1, 59) = 8.45, p = .005, \eta^2_p = .12 \).

Overall, the changes in positive affect (\( M = 1.72, SD = 0.97 \)) and negative affect (\( M = -1.62, SD = 1.25 \)) between the recall and restore conditions were significant, respectively \( t(60) = 13.83, p < .001 \) and \( t(60) = -10.12, p < .001 \). Simple main effect analyses showed that in the morality condition, the increase in positive affect (\( M = 1.97, SD = 0.91 \)) and decrease in negative affect (\( M = -2.04, SD = 0.98 \)) were significantly larger than the
increase in positive affect ($M = 1.47$, $SD = 0.99$) and decrease in negative affect ($M = -1.19$, $SD = 1.36$) in the competence condition, respectively $F(1, 59) = 4.14$, $p = .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$ for positive affect and $F(1, 59) = 8.00$, $p = .006$, $\eta_p^2 = .12$ for negative affect (see Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1
Changes in affective responses between the focus conditions as a function of evaluation dimension, Experiment 2.2. Displayed are the difference scores (restore minus recall; see Table 2.1 for the means) for positive and negative affect.

Perceived coping ability. A marginal significant Focus X Dimension interaction was revealed for perceived coping ability: $F(1, 59) = 3.74$, $p = .06$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$ (see Table 2.1). Analyses of the simple main effects demonstrated that participants in the morality recall condition reported significant lower perceived coping abilities than participants in the competence recall condition, $F(1, 59) = 4.35$, $p = .04$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$; the latter did not differ from participants’ perceived coping abilities in both restore conditions.
**Mediation.** To examine whether the effect of dimension on perceived coping ability was mediated by affect, we conducted bootstrapping analyses (Preacher & Hayes, 2004), using the SPSS macro for simple mediation with 5000 bootstrap resamples. For the recall condition, coping ability was entered as dependent variable, with dimension as predictor and negative affect as proposed mediator.\(^7\)

The bootstrap results showed that, in the recall condition, the indirect effect of dimension on perceived coping ability through negative affect was significant with a point estimate of -.27 and a 95% BCa CI of -.6447 to -.0322, indicating full mediation (see Figure 2.2). The higher level of reported negative affect in the morality recall condition, compared to the competence recall condition, led to decreased perceived coping ability.

![Diagram](attachment:figure2.2.png)

**Figure 2.2**

*Negative affect mediates the relationship between evaluation dimension and perceived coping ability in the recall condition, Experiment 2.2; *p < .05, **p < .01*

---

\(^7\) Since we found no effect of dimension on positive affect in the recall condition, nor on positive and negative affect in the restore condition, positive affect was ruled out as potentially mediating the link between dimension and perceived coping ability.
Discussion

This experiment investigated 1) a psychological consequence of the affective responses to behavioral evaluations in terms of perceived coping ability, and 2) whether group members can overcome their initial negative affective response induced by a critical evaluation of one’s immorality (vs. incompetence) when offered a new opportunity to behave morally in the group. We replicated the results of Experiment 2.1a by demonstrating that a prior critical evaluation of one’s immoral behavior by others in a group elicits more negative affect than a critical evaluation of one’s incompetent behavior (Hypothesis 1). We also showed that, as predicted in Hypothesis 3, a prior criticism of one’s morality elicited more negative affect, which decreased perceived coping abilities, as compared to a prior criticism of one’s competence. The opportunity to restore the critical evaluation induced similar levels of negative affect and perceived coping ability for moral and competent behavior, suggesting that such an opportunity enhances a focus on available resources rather than situational demands—this appraisal is not further affected by evaluative dimension.

When group members were offered a new opportunity to restore their morality or competence, the affective response pattern reversed. Overall, participants reported more positive affect than negative affect when offered the opportunity to restore their image after a critical evaluation; regardless of whether the opportunity concerned moral or competent behavior. In both dimension conditions, the opportunity to restore the critical evaluation induced a decrease in negative affect and an increase in positive affect, compared to considering prior criticism to one’s morality or competence. However, the shifts in negative and positive affect were significantly larger when the opportunity concerned moral behavior rather than competent behavior (Hypothesis 4).

The results of Experiment 2.2 thus indicate that group members can overcome their negative affective response to a prior criticism of their morality. The presence of a new opportunity to restore their moral image in the group induces a decrease in negative affect, an increase in positive affect, and leads to similar coping ability perceptions as an opportunity to restore one’s competence.
General discussion

The current research extends prior findings (Ellemers et al., 2008; Leach et al., 2007; Pagliaro et al., 2011), by showing how critical evaluations of one’s moral (vs. competent) behavior by others in a group impact on group members’ affective experience and coping abilities. In two experiments, we specifically assessed how intragroup evaluations of group members’ behavior indicating their morality vs. competence affect their emotional responses and perceived coping ability. In both experiments, we were able to rule out that these effects are due to differences in (personal or collective) self-esteem or group identification resulting from the evaluations received.

Extending theory and prior research documenting the asymmetrical effects of positive vs. negative valence in evaluative judgments (e.g., Skowronski & Carlston, 1987), we observed differential effects of positive vs. negative evaluations on affective responses. That is, critical evaluations of one’s immoral behavior rather than one’s incompetent behavior elicit a negative affective response (Experiment 2.1a and 2.2), whereas critical evaluations of one’s competence rather than one’s morality elicit a positive affective response (Experiment 2.1b). This corroborates our reasoning that moral criticism has a more negative impact on group members than competence criticism, but does not generate more intense emotional responses overall.

Additionally, we demonstrated that the negative affective response to critical evaluations of one’s prior immoral rather than incompetent behavior elicit coping abilities focusing on situational demands rather than available resources resulting in a decreased perceived ability to cope with the evaluation (Experiment 2.2). Yet, this aversive reaction can be alleviated when group members are presented with a new opportunity to behave morally (Experiment 2.2). Group members feel equally positive towards and able to cope with a new opportunity to behave morally as to behave competently (i.e., increased self-efficacy; Van ‘t Riet et al., 2008), thereby overcoming their initial negative affective response to prior criticisms of their morality.

Implications and future directions

Recent research established the importance of morality for individuals’ personal identity (e.g., Monin & Jordan, 2009) as well as their social identity (e.g., Leach et al., 2007). A growing body of research is starting to uncover the
processes and consequences of morality for motivation (e.g., Bauman & Skitka, 2009; Ellemers et al., 2008; Jordan et al., 2011; Pagliaro et al., 2011). The current research connects to research on moral motivation by demonstrating the affective consequences and appraisals of morality and competence evaluations of group members’ behavior. The literature on motivational strategies generally distinguishes between two basic strategies for self-regulation: The first aims at approaching positive outcomes, ideals and challenges; the second aims at avoiding negative outcomes, obligations and threats (e.g., Blascovich & Tomaka, 1996; Carver & Scheier, 1990; Higgins, 1997). Positive affect has been linked to an approach motivation, and negative affect to an avoidance motivation (e.g., Cacioppo, Gardner, & Berntson, 1999). This is relevant to our results because these suggest that evaluations of one’s moral and competent behavior elicit different motivational strategies in group members. An interesting direction for future research might be to further examine whether the motivation towards attaining a moral identity elicits different self-regulatory processes and arousal regulation.

Determining whether and why group members become preoccupied with situational demands or focus on their available coping resources is relevant for the understanding of individual behavior in groups. A focus on difficulties primarily causes people to monitor their behavior, as they try to avoid being seen as immoral. This may not always be adaptive to improve the situation or their well-being, as it is likely to induce stress (Folkman et al., 1986), and to make them reluctant to speak up or show what they are worth for fear of doing something wrong. By contrast, a focus on opportunities to behave morally—emphasizing the individual’s coping abilities—is more likely to invite creative attempts to behave in moral ways, as it challenges the individual to find new ways to display his/her morality to the group. Many groups attempt to monitor and shape the moral behavior of their members by emphasizing what they did wrong in the past. Our data suggest that this may not be the best way to encourage individuals to display moral behavior. Indeed, recent studies demonstrate the benefits of emphasizing the motivation to display moral behavior for group processes and intergroup relations (e.g., Does, Derks, & Ellemers, 2011; Janoff-Bulman, Sheikh, & Hepp, 2009). Future research might further examine how the adoption of motivational strategies to achieve moral
goals affects behavioral displays and which is more effective in establishing intragroup respect in existing or novel group contexts.

The current research also contributes to the understanding of group dynamics, as we shed light on how group members’ evaluations (Levine & Moreland, 1994) of each other induce attempts to conform to the group’s norms and to affirm the group’s expectations of individual group members. We varied both the dimension and the valence of the behavior central to the evaluation process. Implicitly, this conveyed the group’s norms by increasing the salience of discrepancies between the moral or competent behavior of the individual and the expectations of other group members. Yet, we did not examine the extent to which group members’ behavior actually conforms to the induced group norm or the group’s expected level of morality and competence. An interesting direction for future research might be to address more explicit norm violations and examine how these affect intragroup evaluations.

**Conclusion**

Group members’ affective responses and perceived coping abilities towards intragroup evaluations are determined by the dimension of the evaluation outcome. A critical evaluation of one’s competent, rather than one’s moral, behavior induces a positive affective response. By contrast, a critical evaluation of one’s *immoral* (vs. *incompetent*) behavior elicits a negative affective response, which in turn enhances the salience of situational difficulties rather than available resources, and decreases group members’ perceived coping ability. Moral criticism thus impacts more negatively on group members than competence criticism. However, by increasing group members’ perceptions of self-efficacy—offering a chance to display moral behavior—the initial negative affective response is alleviated, thereby shifting the focus to one’s available resources and increased coping abilities. Group members can thus overcome their misery after a moral failure and become positively engaged towards an opportunity to restore their image as a moral group member.