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To cite this article: Romy van der Lee, Naomi Ellemers & Daan Scheepers (2016) Mastering moral misery: Emotional and coping responses to intragroup morality (vs. competence) evaluations, *Cognition and Emotion*, 30:1, 51-65, DOI: [10.1080/02699931.2015.1050357](https://doi.org/10.1080/02699931.2015.1050357)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02699931.2015.1050357>



Published online: 20 Jul 2015.



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Mastering moral misery: Emotional and coping responses to intragroup morality (vs. competence) evaluations

Romy van der Lee, Naomi Ellemers, and Daan Scheepers

Department of Social and Organizational Psychology, Institute of Psychology, Leiden University, Leiden, The Netherlands

(Received 14 August 2014; accepted 6 May 2015)

In social groups, individuals are often confronted with evaluations of their behaviour by other group members and are motivated to adapt their own behaviour accordingly. In two studies we examine emotional responses towards, and perceived coping abilities with, morality vs. competence evaluations individuals receive from other in-group members. In Study 1, we show that evaluations of one's immoral behaviour primarily induce guilt, whereas evaluations of incompetent behaviour raise anger. In Study 2, we elaborate on the psychological process associated with these emotional responses, and demonstrate that evaluations of immorality, compared to incompetence, diminish group members' perceived coping abilities, which in turn intensifies feelings of guilt. However, when anticipating an opportunity to restore one's self-image as a moral group member, perceived coping abilities are increased and the experience of guilt is alleviated. Together these studies demonstrate how group members can overcome their moral misery when restoring their self-image.

Keywords: Intragroup processes; Morality; Competence; Emotions; Coping ability.

We are evaluated on a daily basis by other members of relevant social groups, such as family members, friends and co-workers. Such intragroup behavioural evaluations often serve the purpose of eliciting and encouraging desired behaviours. Consequently, we are motivated to behave in ways that will yield respect and esteem from important others and ensure our belonging to these others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). This is particularly the case when the judgements of others are relevant to us, for example because these others belong to the same group (Levine & Moreland, 1994; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

But how do these evaluations shape our feelings and behaviours? Whereas negative evaluations can have a strong impact on individuals (e.g., Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001) and may consequently be proffered as an attempt to elicit behavioural change, they can also be counter-effective. For example, the negative self-focused emotions elicited by such evaluations (e.g., guilt, shame) may increase individuals' perceptions of threat related to the fear of rejection or group exclusion, which is likely to reduce the perceived ability to cope with the situation (Ruiter, Abraham, & Kok, 2001; Williams, 2007).

Correspondence should be addressed to: Romy van der Lee, Department of Social and Organizational Psychology, Leiden University, P.O. Box 9555, 2300 RB Leiden, The Netherlands. E-mail: ravanderlee@fsw.leidenuniv.nl

In the current paper, we propose that the impact of the way one's behaviour is evaluated in a social context depends on whether the evaluation concerns behaviour indicative of one's *morality* or one's *competence*. As will be outlined in more detail below, in two studies we test the prediction that criticism of one's moral behaviour raises more negative self-focused moral emotions (e.g., guilt, shame) and lowers the perceived ability to cope, compared to criticism of one's competence. In addition, we assess whether an opportunity to restore one's self-image can alleviate these negative responses.

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). Morality judgements of others have far-reaching interpersonal consequences: Morality information impacts on person perception (Brambilla, Rusconi, Sacchi, & Cherubini, 2011), elicits strong affective responses (Gausel & Leach, 2011; Skitka, Bauman, & Sargis, 2005; Wojciszke, 2005), and in particular negative information about morality is seen as highly diagnostic of someone's true character (Goodwin, Piazza, & Rozin, 2014; Skowronski & Carlston, 1987). These findings all indicate that when evaluating other individuals, especially negative *morality* judgements are of great importance to the social image that emerges and determine the way in which we respond to others.

However, thus far, research examining how individuals and groups compare to each other has mainly focused on *competence* judgements (e.g., Bettencourt, Dorr, Charlton, & Hume, 2001). Evaluations of abilities and task performance are seen as important indicators of individual and group success in terms of outcomes and resources (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). Yet several authors have argued for the fundamental role of *morality* judgements in regulating individual behaviour in groups as an important reason for why people care about morality (e.g., De Waal, 1996;

Rai & Fiske, 2011; Skitka, 2003). Indeed, there is now converging evidence that morality is most important—more so than alternative evaluative dimensions such as competence or sociability—for a positive evaluation of the group (Ellemers, Pagliaro, Barreto, & Leach, 2008; Leach, Ellemers, & Barreto, 2007) and for individuals within the group. Moral in-group norms guide the behavioural choices of individual group members more than competence-based in-group norms (Ellemers et al., 2008), and individuals are motivated to act in line with moral in-group norms as they anticipate gaining in-group respect by enacting their social identity in this way (Pagliaro, Ellemers, & Barreto, 2011; Van Nunspeet, Ellemers, Derks, & Nieuwenhuis, 2014).

In sum, research on the importance of morality 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 when other in-group members criticise one's moral behaviour, this should elicit more negative self-focused moral emotions and should lower perceived coping abilities more than when other in-group members criticise one's competence.

Emotional and coping responses to morality and competence evaluations

Whereas negative feedback is considered as a highly effective tool for eliciting desirable behaviour, its outcome can be counter-effective if the response is too strong. That is, negative intragroup evaluations can elicit a fear of rejection because they indicate that one does not live up to the group's expectations (Levine & Moreland, 1994). This, in turn, can increase feelings of threat (e.g., Williams, 2007), and consequently may elicit defensive responses that prevent change instead of promoting it (e.g., Good & Abraham, 2007).

To assess the impact of morality vs. competence criticism, we gauge a number of negative emotions. Specifically, we focus on the self-focused moral emotions of "guilt" and "shame",

because they are relevant in a context in which one's *own* behaviour is the object of evaluation and hence the source of the emotional response (e.g., De Hooge, Zeelenberg, & Breugelmans, 2010; Gausel & Leach, 2011; Haidt, 2003). Other moral emotions such as "contempt" and "disgust" are less relevant because they primarily occur in response to *others'* moral transgressions (e.g., Fischer & Roseman, 2007; Haidt, 2003).

Apart from addressing the emotional consequences of evaluations of moral transgressions compared to competence failures, we also aim to examine the mechanism through which these divergent responses unfold. As indicated above, one of the possible mechanisms underlying the stronger impact of negative morality—compared to incompetence—evaluations on self-focused emotions is that it is more difficult to cope with the former than with the latter type of evaluation. That is, previous work shows that *negative* information about *morality* is likely to be seen as more diagnostic of someone's true nature (in its predictive value for future behaviour) than negative information about competence (e.g., Goodwin et al., 2014; Martijn, Spears, Van der Pligt, & Jakobs, 1992; Reeder & Spores, 1983; Skowronski & Carlston, 1987). In other words, an immoral image is seen as more stable and will be less easy to "repair" than an incompetent image. Based on the idea that emotions are the managers of our goals, and that the intensity of emotions are a direct function of the distance to its respective goal (Brehm, 1999; see also Frijda, Kuipers, & Ter Schure, 1989), it follows that the negative self-focused emotional response is stronger after being criticised for a moral transgression than for a competence failure because moral transgressions are more difficult to cope with.

The current research

In two studies we examine the impact of the way the self is evaluated by relevant others on morality and competence—two central dimensions of interpersonal and group evaluations (e.g., Leach et al., 2007)—by focusing on emotional responses and perceived coping abilities. In both studies

individuals recalled behaviour that was critically evaluated by other group members in terms of morality vs. competence. Study 1 investigated the impact of negative morality vs. competence evaluations on group members' self-focused emotional responses by comparing moral (e.g., guilt) versus non-moral emotions (i.e., sadness).

Study 2 examined the role of perceived coping abilities, and assessed whether group members can alleviate the negative emotional response (e.g., guilt) triggered by the criticism of their morality (vs. competence) when anticipating an opportunity to display moral, rather than competent, behaviour in a novel group context. This is based on evidence that individuals actually *increase* moral strivings after a moral failure (Jordan, Mullen, & Murnighan, 2011). Thus, while the importance of morality for the group and the individual is likely to result in more intense negative moral emotions as a response to criticism of one's *past* moral (vs. competent) behaviour, a *new* (anticipated) opportunity to demonstrate to others one's worth as a moral (vs. competent) group member might motivate rather than discourage group members, and thus lower negative self-focused emotions and restore coping abilities.

We predict that a negative evaluation of one's moral behaviour by others in the group elicits more negative self-focused moral emotions (e.g., guilt, shame) than a negative evaluation of one's competence (*Hypothesis 1*). In addition, the negative self-focused emotional response elicited by the critical evaluation of one's immoral behaviour is likely to be preceded by lowered coping potential compared to the critical evaluation of one's incompetent behaviour. We thus predict that the relationship between critical evaluations of immoral versus incompetent behaviour and the feelings of guilt and shame that follow from it, is mediated by perceived coping abilities (*Hypothesis 2*). Finally, we predict that the anticipation of an opportunity to improve one's moral self-image through future behaviour will diminish initial negative self-focused emotional responses to criticism of one's prior morality (vs. competence; *Hypothesis 3*).

STUDY 1

Participants recalled a situation in which their group had negatively evaluated their behaviour in terms of morality or competence. Next, we assessed their emotional responses with regard to the recalled situation. We predicted that recalling a negative evaluation of one's immoral behaviour elicits more negative self-focused moral emotions (e.g., guilt, shame) than recalling a negative evaluation of one's incompetent behaviour (*Hypothesis 1*).

Although the primary focus is on own moral transgressions (vs. competence failures), and thus on self-focused moral emotions, we also measured anger in order to create a contrast with an (other-focused) moral emotion (Fischer & Roseman, 2007; Rozin, Lowery, Imada, & Haidt, 1999; Tausch et al., 2011; Van Zomeren, Spears, Fischer, & Leach, 2004). In addition, we measured sadness as a more general self-focused negative emotion that is likely to occur as a result of negative outcomes but does not particularly pertain to moral transgressions.

Method

Participants and design

A total of 64 individuals (36 women, $M_{\text{age}} = 30.20$ years, $SD = 13.23$) were recruited by undergraduate students as part of their Bachelor's thesis. Participants consisted of e.g., family-members, friends, classmates and/or colleagues of these students. Participants completed the paper and pencil questionnaire in return for a lottery ticket with which they could win one of the four gift certificates each worth 20 Euros. In a 2×2 between-subjects design, participants were randomly assigned to one of the four experimental

conditions. However, in the current paper we will report on two of those conditions, i.e., the negative evaluation conditions (Dimension: Morality vs. Competence) only.¹ Participation took approximately 20 minutes.

Procedure

We explained that "all people belong to multiple groups, and that every group has its own norms and values". The cover story further indicated that we were interested in the value of either morality (i.e., trustworthiness, honesty) or competence (i.e., intelligence, skills)—depending on the dimension condition, and how this affects the behaviour 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 the dimension condition) by others in a group context, and to describe both their behaviour and how (someone from) their group confronted them with their behaviour (see also De Hooge et al., 2010). Participants then completed the questionnaire containing the dependent measures.

Measures

All items were presented on 7-point scales (1 = *completely disagree* to 7 = *completely agree*). To check the effectiveness of the dimension manipulation, two independent raters blind to condition coded whether participants' situational descriptions were in line with the instructions and entailed immoral or incompetent behaviour. The Kappa intercoder reliability was .64 ($p < .01$), indicating substantial agreement between the raters on the dimension of the recalled behavioural evaluation.

We measured the following discrete negative emotions: "guilt", "shame", "anger" and "sadness".

¹ Additionally, we also ran two conditions where the evaluative valence was positive rather than negative. Participants were asked to recall a situation in which they had behaved in a way that was evaluated as either *moral* or *competent* (depending on the dimension condition) by others in a group context, and to describe both their behaviour and how (someone from) their group confronted them with their behaviour. Results revealed no effects of Dimension on the discrete negative emotions of guilt, shame and anger ($ps > .18$). However, participants in the competence conditions reported to feel even less sad ($M = 1.86$, $SD = 1.46$) than participants in the morality condition ($M = 2.90$, $SD = 2.11$), $F(1, 63) = 5.51$, $p = .02$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$.

These emotion items were embedded in a list of more general affect items based on the Positive And Negative Affect Scales (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). Example items include “tense”, “enthusiastic” and “nervous”. We asked participants to recall the extent to which they experienced these emotions at the moment when they were confronted—by a member of their group—with their behaviour.

Because we used pre-existing groups rather than experimental groups, we controlled for individual differences regarding group identification and personal 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”; $\alpha = .80$); and membership-esteem was measured using four items (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; e.g., “I was a worthy member of the group”; $\alpha = .76$).

Results

Unless reported otherwise all data were analysed by means of analyses of variance (ANOVAs) with dimension as independent variable.

Checks

The manipulation of Dimension was successful: 95.2% of participants described a situation in line with the intended manipulation, $\chi^2(1, N = 62) = 50.58, p < .001$, and there were no between condition differences, $\chi^2(1, N = 62) = 0.29, p = .59$.^{2,3} Participants indicated the following groups in which the evaluation took place: 54.3% work

group (e.g., classmates, co-workers), 15.5% family, 11.6% friends, 10.9% sports team, 2.3% other (e.g., roommates) and 5.4% did not specify the group. Group type differed per dimension condition: Participants in the competence condition more frequently described a situation in a work group (69.2%) than participants in the morality condition (43.9%, $\chi^2 = 7.99, p = .005$). Conversely, participants in the morality condition more frequently indicated a situation with friends (21.1%) or family (26.3%) than participants in the competence condition (4.6%, $\chi^2 = 7.61, p = .006$ and 7.7%, $\chi^2 = 7.68, p = .006$, respectively). Hence, after testing our main hypothesis we checked whether Group type moderated people’s emotional responses.

We found no between-condition differences in group identification ($M = 5.04, SD = 1.25$), personal self-esteem ($M = 4.94, SD = 1.17$) and membership-esteem ($M = 5.45, SD = 1.18$; all $F_s < 1, p_s > .4$).

Emotional responses

Guilt

Participants in the morality condition reported more guilt ($M = 4.69, SD = 1.98$) than participants in the competence condition ($M = 3.53, SD = 1.72$), $F(1, 62) = 6.23, p = .015, \eta_p^2 = .09$.

Shame

We found a marginally significant effect for shame, $F(1, 62) = 3.46, p = .068, \eta_p^2 = .05$. Participants in the morality condition reported slightly more shame ($M = 4.41, SD = 1.62$) than participants in the competence condition ($M = 3.63, SD = 1.74$).

²Two participants did not provide a situational description. Removing those participants, as well as those who failed to describe a situation as instructed from the subsequent analyses did not significantly change our results. We therefore included those participants in all analyses.

³Examples of the described situations concerning behavioural evaluations are, for immoral behaviour: “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” and incompetent behaviour: “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”.

Anger

Participants in the competence condition reported more anger ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 1.55$) than participants in the morality condition ($M = 2.13$, $SD = 1.41$), $F(1, 62) = 9.27$, $p = .003$, $\eta_p^2 = .13$.

Sadness

There was no significant effect of evaluative dimension on sadness, $F(1, 62) = 1.69$, $p = .20$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$ ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 1.66$ in the morality condition and $M = 2.84$, $SD = 1.61$ in the competence condition).

Additional ANOVA's crossing Dimension with Group type as independent variables for each of the discrete emotions revealed no significant main effects of Group type nor any Dimension \times Group type interactions (all $F_s < 1.20$, $p_s > .33$). However, the main effect of Dimension on anger was no longer present when Group type was included as a factor in the analysis, $F(1, 49) = 0.61$, $p = .44$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$. Additional testing revealed that evaluations of incompetence only elicited more anger than evaluations of immorality in the context of work groups, $p = .012$.

Discussion

This study investigated how negative evaluations of behaviour indicating one's morality or competence influences group members' self-focused emotional responses. Our prediction was supported: Recalling a critical evaluation of one's immoral behaviour by others in a group elicited more negative self-focused moral emotions than a critical evaluation of one's incompetent behaviour (*Hypothesis 1*). However, these results pertained primarily to guilt and less so to shame. Why would group members primarily feel guilt when confronted with their immoral (vs. incompetent) behaviour? The literature on moral emotions offers two explanations. First, guilt is experienced primarily in situations in which one's *behaviour* is negatively evaluated, whereas shame is more likely to be experienced when the negative evaluation affects the *self* as a whole (e.g., Haidt, 2003). As

participants were instructed to recall a situation in which a specific *behaviour* was evaluated by other group members as immoral (vs. incompetent), differences in feelings of guilt between evaluative dimensions are likely to be more pronounced. Second, feelings of guilt are specifically tied to moral transgressions, whereas feelings of shame can occur after moral as well as non-moral (e.g., competence) transgressions (e.g., Smith, Webster, Parrott, & Eyre, 2002). Again, this would render differences between negative morality and competence evaluations to be more pronounced for guilt than shame.

Results also showed that more anger was reported after a critical evaluation of one's competent (vs. moral) behaviour. Additional analyses revealed that this latter effect was most clearly present in a work group context. This can be explained by the plausibility that when regarding competence, one may disagree on the standards for evaluation (e.g., what exactly makes a good or bad performance?), whereas moral standards tend to be more absolute in character (Skitka et al., 2005). Thus, after receiving a negative evaluation regarding one's competence, a plausible response might be to fight the evaluation and express anger to the evaluator, whereas in the case of morality the focus of the emotions turns to the self. However, it should be noted that feelings of anger were relatively low in general, also compared to the other (self-focused) moral emotions. Most important to our present concerns, however, is that the emotional impact of moral transgressions appears to occur independently of group context. This is in keeping with our reasoning that critical evaluations of morality (vs. competence) generally elicit stronger negative self-focused emotions.

We found no effects of evaluative dimension on sadness, an emotion that (like shame) is less specifically moral in character as compared to guilt. Finally, group identification and (personal and collective) self-esteem were in general relatively high, likely because we used pre-existing groups; these ratings did not differ between the evaluative dimension conditions.

STUDY 2

Study 2 was conducted with two aims in mind. The first aim was to test the psychological *process* underlying the negative self-focused emotional responses (i.e., guilt) with respect to one's perceived ability to cope with the behavioural evaluation. Therefore, we included a measure of perceived coping abilities and examined whether lowered coping abilities would mediate stronger feelings of guilt after a moral transgression than after a competence failure. The second aim was to examine whether group members can alleviate their feelings of guilt in response to a critical evaluation of their immorality when anticipating an opportunity to display moral behaviour as a way to improve their moral self-image.

Participants first recalled critical evaluations of their immoral or incompetent behaviour by others in a group (as in Study 1) and then anticipated 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 self-focused emotional response, when anticipating an opportunity to display moral behaviour. Therefore, after recalling an evaluation of immoral (or incompetent) behaviour, we introduced a joint task in a novel group in which participants anticipated an opportunity to display behaviour indicating and affirming their moral vs. competent self-image. We manipulated evaluative dimension as a between-participants factor and added evaluative focus (recall vs. restore) as a within-participants factor.

We expected to replicate the results of Study 1, i.e., recalling behaviour evaluated as immoral by others in a group elicits more guilt than recalling incompetent behaviour (*Hypothesis 1*). Furthermore, we expected the feelings of guilt as elicited by a critical evaluation of one's immoral behaviour (vs. incompetent behaviour) to be mediated by lower perceived coping abilities (*Hypothesis 2*). However, when anticipating an opportunity to restore one's self-image, we expect these negative

effects on guilt and perceived coping abilities to be alleviated (*Hypothesis 3*).

Method

Participants and design

Sixty-one undergraduate students (41 women, $M_{\text{age}} = 21.74$ years, $SD = 3.12$) participated and received either 6 Euros or course credits for their participation. We employed a 2 (Dimension: Morality vs. Competence) \times 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 study consisted of two parts: the first was ostensibly about group values (similar to Study 1), and the second part would involve solving management dilemmas in a group. First, participants recalled own behaviour evaluated as *immoral (incompetent)* by others in a group. Next, we measured emotional responses, perceived coping abilities and additional control variables.

Regarding the second part of the study, 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 behaviour towards their group. We explicitly stated: "With this task you can show your *moral (competent)* behaviour". In anticipation of the group task, participants completed the

second questionnaire, again comprising the same dependent measures. After this, participants had reached the end of the study. They were fully debriefed, paid and thanked for their participation.⁴

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 Study 1) and once in the restore condition (phrased in the present tense).

We measured the following discrete negative emotions: “guilt”, “shame” and “sadness”; we did not measure “anger” in Study 2.⁵ As in Study 1, these emotion items were embedded in a list of more general affect items (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988).

Perceived coping abilities (Folkman, Lazarus, Gruen, & DeLongis, 1986) were measured with four items (“I felt I was able to solve this situation”, “I felt threatened by this situation” [reverse coded], “I found it difficult to solve this situation” [reverse coded], “I felt insecure about solving this situation” [reverse coded], Recall: $\alpha = .70$; Restore: $\alpha = .69$). We again assessed group 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, two independent raters coded whether the situational descriptions provided were in line with instructions and entailed immoral or incompetent behaviour. The Kappa intercoder reliability was .78 ($p < .001$), indicating substantial agreement between the raters on

the dimension of the recalled behavioural evaluation. 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 analysed using repeated measures (RM) ANOVAs with Focus as within-subject factor and Dimension as between-subjects factor. Data from the between-subjects conditions were analysed using ANOVAs with Dimension as independent variable.

Checks

The manipulation of dimension was successful in both focus conditions. In the recall conditions, 84.7% of participants described a situation in line with the intended manipulation, $\chi^2(1, N = 59) = 28.49, p < .001$, and no between condition differences emerged, $\chi^2(1, N = 59) = 1.30, p = .25$.⁶ Participants indicated the following groups in which the evaluation took place: 44.3% work group, 9.8% family, 6.6% friends, 27.9% sports team, 4.9% other, and 6.6% did not specify the group. Group type did not vary as a function of dimension, $\chi^2(1, N = 57) = 5.85, p = .21$.

The manipulation of dimension was also successful in the restore conditions: Participants in the morality restore condition reported to a greater extent that the focus of the management dilemmas was on morality ($M = 6.16, SD = 1.53$) than participants in the competence restore condition ($M = 4.10, SD = 1.40$), $F(1, 59) = 30.12, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .34$.

⁴In this study, participants were attached to apparatus for measuring impedance cardiographic, electrocardiographic and blood pressure signals. After the described procedure, participants engaged in an additional study in which their cardiovascular responses were explored. Analyses of those data are beyond the scope of the current paper.

⁵We used a within-subjects design for this study and participants were asked to fill out the questionnaire twice. Hence, we wanted to limit the number of items on the questionnaire.

⁶Due to technical errors, the situational descriptions of two participants were not saved. Removing those participants, as well as participants who failed to describe a situation conform dimension condition, from the subsequent analyses did not significantly alter our results. We therefore included those participants in all analyses.

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 pre-existing 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 any of these variables (all F s < 2.5 , p s $> .1$).

Emotional responses

Guilt

A RM ANOVAs with Dimension as between-subjects factor and Focus as within-subject factor yielded a significant main effect of Focus which was qualified by the predicted Dimension \times Focus interaction, $F(1, 59) = 5.28$, $p = .025$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$. As can be seen in Table 1, participants in the morality recall condition reported more guilt than participants in the competence recall condition, and this difference disappeared in the restore conditions.

Shame

A similar analysis on shame only revealed a main effect of Focus, $F(1, 59) = 142.25$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .71$. Participants reported more shame in the recall conditions than in the restore conditions, regardless of evaluative dimension.

Sadness

For sadness, we again only found a main effect of Focus, $F(1, 59) = 136.78$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .70$.

Regardless of evaluative dimension, participants reported more sadness in the recall conditions than in the restore conditions.

Perceived coping abilities

A significant Focus \times Dimension interaction was revealed for perceived coping abilities: $F(1, 59) = 7.69$, $p = .007$, $\eta_p^2 = .11$ (see Table 1). Analyses of simple main effects demonstrated that participants in the morality recall condition reported significantly lower perceived coping abilities than participants in the competence recall condition, $F(1, 59) = 7.07$, $p = .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .11$; there was no such difference between perceived coping abilities in the restore conditions. In addition, the increase in perceived coping abilities from recall to restore was only significant in the morality condition ($p < .001$) and not in the competence condition ($p = .53$).

Mediation

To examine whether the effect of dimension on feelings of guilt was mediated by perceived coping abilities, we conducted bootstrapping analyses (Preacher & Hayes, 2004), using the SPSS macro for simple mediation with 5000 bootstrap resamples. For the recall condition, guilt was entered as dependent variable, with dimension as predictor and perceived coping abilities as proposed mediator.⁷

The bootstrap results showed that, in the recall condition, the indirect effect of dimension on guilt through perceived coping abilities was significant with a point estimate of $-.29$ and a 95% bias-corrected and accelerated CI of $-.7021$ to $-.0571$, indicating full mediation (see Figure 1). The lowered perceived coping abilities in the morality recall condition, compared to the competence recall condition, induced stronger feelings of guilt.

Discussion

In this study, we investigated (1) the psychological process, in terms of perceived coping abilities, underlying the self-focused emotional responses

⁷ Since we found no effect of dimension on shame and sadness and neither on perceived coping ability in the restore conditions, the latter was ruled out as potentially mediating the link between dimension and feelings of guilt.

Table 1. Means and standard deviations of emotional responses and perceived coping abilities for the dimension conditions in each focus condition (Study 2)

	Recall behaviour		Restore behaviour	
	Morality	Competence	Morality	Competence
	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
Guilt	5.74 (1.03) _a	5.10 (1.49) _b	1.29 (0.64) _c	1.63 (1.07) _c
Shame	5.00 (1.51) _a	4.77 (1.63) _a	1.58 (1.06) _b	2.10 (1.24) _b
Sadness	4.29 (1.81) _a	3.80 (1.61) _a	1.26 (0.57) _b	1.57 (1.07) _b
Perceived coping ability	3.69 (1.18) _a	4.50 (1.19) _b	4.88 (1.07) _b	4.67 (0.90) _b

Note: Means with different subscripts per row differ reliably from each other ($p < .05$) following LSD post-hoc tests (the difference in guilt between morality and competence in the recall condition is marginally significant, $p = .055$).

(i.e., guilt) to behavioural evaluations and (2) whether group members can overcome their initially induced feelings of guilt after a critical evaluation of one's immorality (vs. incompetence) when anticipating an opportunity to behave morally in a novel group context. We replicated the results of Study 1 by demonstrating that a prior critical evaluation of one's immoral behaviour by others in a group elicited more guilt than a critical evaluation of one's incompetent behaviour (*Hypothesis 1*). We also showed that, as predicted in *Hypothesis 2*, a prior criticism of one's morality rather than one's competence lowered perceived coping abilities which in turn increased feelings of guilt. An anticipated opportunity to restore the critical evaluation, however, facilitated perceived coping abilities and decreased the intensity of guilt for both moral and competent behaviour (*Hypothesis 3*). This suggests that the mere anticipation of an opportunity to restore one's self-image

increases coping potential—this appraisal is not further affected by evaluative dimension.

The results of Study 2 thus indicate that group members can overcome their guilt to a prior criticism of their morality. The mere anticipation of an opportunity to restore their moral self-image alleviates initial feelings of guilt and facilitates similar coping potential as anticipating an opportunity to restore one's competence.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

In two studies, we assessed how intragroup evaluations of group members' behaviour indicating their morality vs. competence affect their self-focused emotional responses and perceived coping abilities. Bridging and extending different literatures on the importance of morality for group members (e.g., Ellemers et al., 2008; Leach et al., 2007; Pagliaro et al., 2011) and the cognitive impact of evaluative judgements on person perception (e.g., Goodwin et al., 2014; Skowronski & Carlston, 1987), we observed differential effects of critical morality vs. competence evaluations on group members' emotional responses. That is, critical evaluations of one's immoral behaviour, rather than one's incompetent behaviour, elicit a negative self-focused emotional response, in the form of intensified feelings of guilt (Study 1 and 2).

In general, group members feel more guilt in response to moral criticism than competence

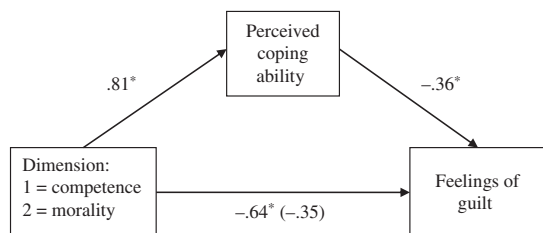


Figure 1. Perceived coping ability mediates the relationship between evaluation dimension and feelings of guilt in the recall condition, Study 2.

* $p < .05$.

criticism. This is likely the case because guilt is particularly relevant in situations where people's *own* behaviour is scrutinised (e.g., De Hooge et al., 2010). More specifically, guilt particularly pertains to moral behaviour whereas shame—another negative self-focused moral emotion—pertains, more generally, to the self as a whole and can also result from non-moral transgressions (Haidt, 2003; Smith et al., 2002). Other negative emotions were more similar in intensity across evaluative dimensions, likely because they either are other-directed (i.e., anger) or non-moral (i.e., sadness) and hence less relevant in the context of the current studies.

Additionally, we demonstrated that critical evaluations of one's prior immoral rather than incompetent behaviour results in lower perceived abilities to cope with the evaluation (Study 2). In turn, this diminished coping potential resulted in heightened feelings of guilt. These findings corroborate our reasoning that critical intragroup morality rather than competence evaluations raise the stakes for group members; they might reveal that one is lacking morality, which in turn can have detrimental consequences for the respect received from other group members, and the inclusion of the self in the group. Yet, this aversive reaction can be alleviated when group members anticipate an opportunity to restore their moral self-image (Study 2). Group members perceive themselves to be equally able to cope with an opportunity to behave morally as to behave competently, and consequently overcome feelings of guilt that arose as a result of prior criticisms to their morality.

Implications

These findings illustrate the relevance of a salient group context in assessing the impact of evaluative judgements. That is, from a mere interpersonal perspective it would be expected that critical competence evaluations would impact as strongly on individuals, or even be more important than moral criticisms, because individuals generally show stronger emotional responses to their own (in)competent rather than (in)moral behaviour

(Wojciszke, 2005). Although we did not directly compare our intragroup context with an interpersonal or out-group context, the results of Study 2 in particular are in line with our reasoning regarding the group-nature of the effects observed. That is, we found that moral criticism impairs coping potential to a greater extent than competence criticism does, which in turn intensifies feeling of guilt. This is also in line with research showing that individuals are more motivated to behave morally—but not more motivated to behave competently—within an in-group setting compared to an out-group setting (Van Nunspeet et al., 2014).

Additionally, our findings confirm the importance of morality for multiple group types, such as families, friends (i.e., intimacy groups), classmates, colleagues and sport teams (i.e., task groups). Whereas intimacy groups and task groups differ in for example their (perceived) entitativity and social responsibility (e.g., Lickel, Hamilton, & Sherman, 2001) as well their willingness to express emotions (e.g., Clark & Finkel, 2005), our findings demonstrate that this does *not* necessarily change emotional responses to moral criticism. Members of both intimacy groups and task groups reported more guilt in response to critical morality rather than critical competence evaluations, implying equal importance of morality for both group types. Group type only made a difference in the likelihood that members of task groups reported more anger in response to critical assessments of their *competence*. Importantly, however, regarding morality our findings seem generalisable to a wide range of group contexts.

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., Ellemers et al., 2008; Jordan et al., 2011; Pagliaro et al., 2011; Skitka et al., 2005). The current research extends and connects to research on moral motivation by demonstrating the emotional consequences and appraisals of morality and competence evaluations of group members' behaviour.

As different motivational strategies (i.e., approach and challenges vs. avoidance and threats) have been associated with emotional valence and arousal (e.g., Blascovich, 2008; Carver, 2004), this suggests that evaluations of one's moral and competent behaviour can elicit different motivational strategies in group members. To illustrate, many groups attempt to monitor and shape the moral behaviour of their members by emphasising what they did wrong in the past. Our data suggest that this may not be the best way to encourage individuals to display moral behaviour, as it diminishes their coping potential. A focus on opportunities to behave morally—thereby emphasising 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 (see also Janoff-Bulman, Sheikh, & Hepp, 2009). Future research might further examine how the adoption of motivational strategies to achieve moral goals affects behavioural displays and which is more effective in establishing intragroup respect.

The current research also contributes to the understanding of group dynamics and the function of emotional responses in groups (e.g., Fischer & Manstead, 2008; Levine & Moreland, 1994; Van Kleef, 2009). That is, we shed light on how group members' evaluations of each other impact on their self-focused emotional responses and coping abilities, which should be relevant to their attempts to conform to the group's norms and to affirm the group's expectations. We varied the dimension of the behaviour central to the evaluation process. Thus, we increased the salience of discrepancies between the moral or competent behaviour of the individual and the expectations of other group members. Yet, we did not explicitly assess the extent to which group members' behaviour actually conforms to the induced group norm or the group's expected level of morality and competence, nor did the current studies address the broader processes that groups can employ to regulate individual behaviour in relation to norm violations. Instead, our current interest related to the way individual group members cope with

behavioural evaluations they receive in a group context. Future research may extend the current findings, for instance by examining the emotional responses (e.g., disgust, contempt) to *other* group members' moral transgressions vs. competence failures, or to intragroup deviance more generally (see also Heerdink, Van Kleef, Homan, & Fischer, 2013).

CONCLUSION

Group members' emotional responses and perceived ability to cope with intragroup evaluations of their behaviour are determined by the dimension of the evaluation that is made. A critical evaluation of one's *immoral* (vs. *incompetent*) behaviour diminishes perceived coping potential, which in turn elicits a negative self-focused emotional response, primarily in the form of guilt. Moral criticism thus impacts more negatively on group members' cognitions and emotions than competence criticism. However, by increasing group members' coping potential—as they anticipate an opportunity to improve their moral self-image—the initial feelings of guilt can be alleviated. Group members can thus overcome their misery after a moral transgression and become positively engaged towards an opportunity to restore their moral self-image.

Acknowledgement

We thank Wilco van Dijk, Serena Does, Bastiaan Rutjens and Elise Seip for their valuable comments on a previous draft of this manuscript.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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