

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING MORAL: THE DISTINCTIVE ROLE OF MORALITY IN SOCIAL JUDGMENT

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Agency and communion are the core dimensions of social judgment as they indicate whether someone's intentions toward us are beneficial or harmful (i.e., communion), and whether they have the ability to fulfil their intentions (i.e., agency). Recent advances have demonstrated that communion encompasses both sociability (e.g., friendliness, likeability) and morality (e.g., honesty, trustworthiness) characteristics. In this article, we review the emerging literature highlighting that morality and sociability make unique contribution to social judgment and that morality has a primary role in the evaluations we make of individuals and groups. We also consider the evidence showing that morality and sociability play distinct roles in the positive evaluation of the individual and group self-concept. We conclude that future research on social judgment should expand the two-dimensional model to the more specific aspects of communion captured in information about morality and sociability.

In forming an impression of an individual or a group we may have a variety of information about their traits and behaviors. Extensive research has shown that most of this information can be characterized in terms of two global dimensions variously labelled as agency and communion, competence and warmth, or dominance and nurturance (for recent reviews, see Abele & Wojciszke, 2007; Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007; Wojciszke, 2005). The communion dimension (also called

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warmth) pertains to benevolence in social relations and involves qualities such as friendliness, kindness, cooperativeness, and trustworthiness. In contrast, the agency dimension (also called competence) refers to the power to perform and to influence others and involves qualities such as efficiency, intelligence, strength, and capability (Abele, Cuddy, Judd, & Yzerbyt, 2008; Judd, James-Hawkins, Yzerbyt, & Kashima, 2005). Whereas the communion dimension is important to our impressions of people because it indicates whether someone's intentions are beneficial or harmful, the agency dimension is important because it indicates whether someone has the ability to carry out their intentions (for discussions, see Fiske et al., 2007; Wojciszke, 2005).

The centrality of these two dimensions is well established in the area of person perception. Indeed, an insight of the classic works of Asch (1946) and of Rosenberg, Nelson, and Vivekananthan (1968) was that traits such as cold or warm conveyed very different information from attributes such as intelligent and industrious. Contemporary studies further revealed that agency and communion account for 82% of the variance in global impressions of well-known others (Wojciszke, Bazinska, & Jaworski, 1998) and that three-quarters of over 1,000 personally experienced past events are framed in terms of either agency or communion (Wojciszke, 1994, 2005). Although under the guise of slightly different labels, agency and communion have consistently emerged as the basic dimensions in the perception of groups. Work on the Stereotype Content Model (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2008; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002), as well as previous two-dimensional models of stereotype content, shows that agency and communion underlie the content of most group stereotypes, including nationalities (Phalet & Poppe, 1997; Poppe & Linssen, 1999), older people (Cuddy, Norton, & Fiske, 2005), immigrants subgroups (Lee & Fiske, 2006), subgroups of gay men and lesbians (Brambilla, Carnaghi, & Ravenna, 2011; Clausell & Fiske, 2005), men and women (Eagly & Kite, 1987), and subtypes of women (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2004).

Although the two-dimensional model of social judgment is a highly useful and well-validated approach, recent work suggests that it is important to think about the communion dimension as including at least two distinct characteristics: sociability and morality (Leach, Bilali, & Pagliaro, in press; Leach, Ellemers, & Barreto, 2007). Whereas sociability pertains to being benevolent to people in ways that facilitate affectionate relations with them (e.g., friendliness, likeability, kindness), morality refers to being benevolent to people in ways that facilitate correct and principled relations with them (e.g., honesty, trustworthiness, sincerity).

In this article, we review recent work showing that morality and sociability make unique contributions to social judgment and that morality has a primary role over sociability (and competence/agency) in the impressions that we form and the evaluations that we make of people. We start by considering the primary role of morality in forming impressions of other individuals. We then review evidence that morality and sociability play distinct roles in the stereotypes we have of outgroups and in the impressions we form of these groups. Finally, we consider

research showing that morality, sociability, and competence play distinct roles in positive self-evaluation, whether for the individual or group self.

MORALITY (VS. SOCIABILITY AND COMPETENCE) IN INTERPERSONAL IMPRESSIONS

Impression formation is a multi-componential process, starting with either a search or with a selection of the information useful to make a judgment of a social target, and ending with a global appraisal of the target. Even if both agency and communion are central in impression formation, communion carries more weight than agency in shaping emotional and behavioral reactions toward social targets (Abele & Bruckmuller, 2011; De Bruin & Van Lange, 1999, 2000; Vonk, 1996; Wojciszke et al., 1998; for a review, see Wojciszke, 2005). Indeed, communion traits are processed more rapidly than agency information at early stages of information processing (Abele & Bruckmuller, 2011; Ybarra, Chan, & Park, 2001). Moreover, when forming global impressions of other individuals, people are more interested in gathering information on communion than agency (De Bruin & Van Lange, 2000) and global impressions are better predicted from communion than agency trait ascriptions (Wojciszke et al., 1998). Accordingly, when forming impressions we are primarily interested in defining whether someone's intentions are beneficial or harmful, and with respect to this, communion is more informative than agency (Cuddy et al., 2008; Ybarra et al., 2001). However, most studies in this area tend to conflate sociability and morality into the broader dimension of communion and use the labels "morality," "sociability," and "communion" interchangeably.

By distinguishing the sociability and morality components of communion, we may better explain the dominance of communion in impression formation. Thus, recent research has investigated whether the sociability and morality components of communion play distinct roles at different stages of impression formation. Brambilla, Rusconi, Sacchi, and Cherubini (2011, Study 1) asked participants to choose traits that would help them form an impression of an unknown other. At this information-search stage, participants were more interested in gathering information about the individual's morality (e.g., honest, sincere, trustworthy) rather than their sociability (e.g., friendly, likeable, helpful) or competence (e.g., intelligent, competent, skilful). These findings are in line with prior insights documenting that people highly value trustworthiness in others. Indeed, Cottrell, Neuberg, and Lee (2007) found U.S. students to rate trustworthiness as the most desirable characteristic for an ideal person to possess. Similar results have been obtained more recently in a German sample (Abele & Brack, 2013; see also Bruckmuller & Abele, 2013).

In a second experiment, Brambilla et al. (2011; Study 2) showed that participants searched for more diagnostic information on others' moral characteristics than their sociability or competence. More specifically, when inquiring about the

other person's morality, participants searched for more highly diagnostic negative information than when inquiring about their sociability (or competence). Participants searched most for evidence of immorality because immoral behaviors are taken to be especially diagnostic of a person's moral character (Skowronski & Carlston, 1987; Trafimow & Trafimow, 1999). Indeed, people expect that only dishonest people act dishonestly whereas both honest and dishonest people may act honestly (Reeder & Brewer, 1979), partly because honesty is normative and is thus rewarded (for a review, see Leach et al., in press). Thus, when people search for the most diagnostic information available about a person, they search for negative information about that person's morality.

Further research has revealed that the importance of information regarding a person's morality persists beyond the information-gathering process and thus affects the formulation of global impressions. Indeed, Pagliaro, Brambilla, Sacchi, D'Angelo, and Ellemers (2013) found that the final impressions that participants formed of a stranger were more affected by information pertaining to their honesty and trustworthiness than information pertaining to non-moral characteristics. In addition, participants desire to interact with the unknown other was better predicted by the other's perceived morality. In line with these findings, Goodwin, Piazza, and Rozin (2014) found that overall impressions of both real and hypothetical targets were better predicted by information about the target's moral character than by information pertaining to non-moral characteristics. Thus, it appears that at all stages of impression formation, moral information is more important to how we judge other people than information pertaining to sociability or competence/agency. As a case in point, the perception of trustworthiness in others' faces proceeds more quickly than the perception of sociability or competence. In fact, the perception of trustworthiness appears to involve the amygdala—a subcortical brain structure implicated in the detection of potentially threatening stimuli (Willis & Todorov, 2006; see also Todorov, Pakrashi, & Oosterhof, 2009). Thus, it seems that moral traits are more relevant than sociability and competence traits in order to infer others' intentions. Given that in most social interactions we need to know whether someone's intentions are beneficial or harmful to us, the person's morality is more informative than their competence or sociability. Thus, it makes sense that we are oriented to others' morality and that we make inferences about it very quickly and easily on the basis of minimal information. Taken together, recent findings suggest that the well-known dominance of communion in impression formation may be more precisely explained by the importance of the morality component of communion than the sociability component of communion.

MORALITY (VS. SOCIABILITY AND COMPETENCE) IN INTERGROUP IMPRESSIONS

The distinction between morality, sociability, and competence/agency is not confined to interpersonal perception; it is also relevant to our impressions of out-

groups. This was first shown by Leach et al. (2007, Study 3), who found that traits indicating outgroup morality (e.g., sincere, trustworthy) were distinguishable from traits indicating outgroup sociability (e.g., friendly, kind) and competence (e.g., intelligent, skilled). Leach, Minescu, Poppe, and Hagendoorn (2008) offered further support for the importance of morality in impressions of outgroups in an analysis of face-to-face surveys of over 5,000 people in the Russian Federation who were asked about the traits of Chechens and Jews. Although the traits clustered along two dimensions that corresponded to agency and communion, moral traits operated differently from traits indicating other aspects of communion. For instance, Jews were seen as very peaceful and cooperative, but only moderately honest. When combined with the view of Jews as smart and showing initiative, Russians stereotyped Jews in classic anti-Semitic terms—possessing an untrustworthy competence. If their perceived honesty had not been examined as distinct from other aspects of communion, the quite important moral aspect of the stereotype of Jews would have been missed.

Building on the findings of Leach and colleagues, Brambilla, Sacchi, Rusconi, Cherubini, and Yzerbyt (2012) examined the relative importance of morality, sociability, and competence in predicting reactions to outgroups. In three studies, the authors asked Italians to read scenarios depicting an unfamiliar immigrant group as high (vs. low) in morality, sociability, or competence. Participants' global impression of the outgroup was most affected by its supposed morality (i.e., honesty, sincerity, trustworthiness). In one study, the authors showed that the morality of the outgroup had such a large effect on global impressions because the outgroup's morality was closely linked to the perception of threat. Thus, when an outgroup was presented as immoral it was not liked because it was seen as highly threatening. Going beyond a general perception of threat, more recent work has revealed that immoral outgroup members are seen as posing a real and a concrete danger to the ingroup's survival possibilities and represent a threat to the group's safety (Brambilla, Sacchi, Pagliaro, & Ellemers, 2013). This is consistent with the more general idea that morality is so important in social judgment because it is closely linked to the essential judgment of whether another party's intentions are beneficial or harmful.

If morality is so central to the essential judgment of an outgroup's intentions, interaction with outgroups should most promote positive intergroup relations when it leads to a view of the outgroup as moral. Indeed, Brambilla, Hewstone, and Colucci (2013) recently found that Italians' contact with immigrants increased the degree to which they were willing to take political action against anti-immigrant discrimination mainly because contact increased the degree to which Italians believed immigrants to be moral (i.e., honest, trustworthy). Although contact also increased the perceived sociability and competence of immigrants, these beliefs did not promote political action on behalf of immigrants as much as did beliefs about immigrant's morality. Taken together, these findings show that perceived morality plays a prominent role in the impressions that people form of outgroups. Indeed, morality is central to stereotypes, prejudice, and to the quality of intergroup re-

lations. The consistency of this recent work is all the more impressive when we notice that in these studies morality has been measured as a subjective perception (Brambilla, Hewstone et al., 2013; Leach et al., 2008) as well as experimentally manipulated to establish an objective fact (Brambilla et al., 2012; Brambilla, Sacchi et al., 2013; Leach et al., 2007, Study 3).

MORALITY (VS. SOCIABILITY AND COMPETENCE) IN SELF-CONCEPT

It has long been thought that communion is more important to our impressions of (individual and group) others than to our impressions of ourselves (individual and group). Consistent with this, agency has long been considered to be more important than communion in people's positive evaluations of themselves (for a review, see Wojciszke, 2005). However, recent work reveals a more complex picture, showing that morality is a specific component of communion that plays a distinctive role in the self-concept.

GROUP SELF-CONCEPT

Recent work on that part of the self-concept based in our membership in groups is beginning to show the importance of morality. For example, Ellemers, Pagliaro, Barreto, and Leach (2008) found that group members are more influenced by group norms to be moral rather than sociable or competent. In fact, group members anticipate being respected more by their group when they act on the basis of morality, likely because morality is a better indicator of being valuable to the group than is sociability or other characteristics of communion (for discussion, see Ellemers & Van den Bos, 2012).

In contrast to the common assumption that people most care about the agency of their ingroups, in Leach et al. (2007) participants reported that it is a group's morality that is most important to feeling good about a group. Crucially, the importance of morality to positivity toward ingroups was confirmed with unobtrusive factor analytic methods that simply analyzed how important morality, sociability, and competence were to the positivity in the traits that people ascribed to their ingroups. In addition, with experimental manipulations of morality (vs. sociability or competence), Leach et al. (2007, Studies 4 and 5) showed that it was information about an ingroup's morality that most increased pride in the group. In line with these findings, it has been recently shown that employees' satisfaction and work commitment is strongly tied to the degree to which the organization is perceived as moral/ethical (Ellemers, Kingma, Van der Burgt, & Barreto, 2011).

Consistent with work on the threat of immorality in the perception of outgroups, Brambilla, Sacchi, et al. (2013) recently showed that the morality of the ingroup is so important to the group self-concept because immorality threatens the ingroup's self-image. Thus, an ingroup that was presented as immoral was seen as highly

threatening to the stability and the integrity of the group. This threat was a basis for disliking the immoral ingroup. In sum, the perception of threat is the key underlying mechanism in the effects of ingroup and outgroup morality. Whereas threats to safety drive the response to (im)moral outgroups, threats to self-image drive the response to (im)moral ingroups. Although these threats are different, they represent complementary ways in which a group's morality establishes it as beneficial or harmful to the self.

Because our ingroup's morality is so central to our self-image, we can react quite strongly to the suggestion that our group is not moral (e.g., Leach et al., 2007; for reviews, see Ellemers & Van den Bos, 2012). In a recent pair of studies, Gausel, Leach, Vignoles, and Brown (2012) confronted Norwegians with strong evidence that their country engaged in systematic and comprehensive wrongdoing against a minority ethnic group. When individuals were most concerned with the damage to their country's social image as moral in the eyes of others, they felt rejection and wanted to avoid the issue and the victims. However, those who were most concerned with the specific defect in their national self-image highlighted by the wrongdoing felt ashamed and wanted to improve the ingroup morally and improve things for the harmed outgroup. Thus, when it is possible to improve a recognized moral defect, individuals can react to a moral failure with motivation for moral self-improvement and social improvement.

INDIVIDUAL SELF-CONCEPT

Wojciszke's (2005) double perspective model argues that agency is the most important basis of individuals' evaluation of themselves because individuals focus on their own agency to provide direct benefit to themselves and act effectively in the world. Communion is said to be most important to individuals' evaluations of others because it is another's communion rather than agency that benefits the self. In contrast to the recent evidence showing that morality is primary in people's positive evaluation of their ingroups, a good deal of research shows that agency/competence is most important to people's positive evaluations of themselves as individuals. For example, in several studies, Wojciszke, Baryła, Parzuchowski, Szymkow, and Abele (2011) found that self-ascribed agency (e.g., intelligent and efficient) was a stronger predictor of self-esteem than self-ascribed communion (e.g., fair and good-natured; see also, Bi, Ybarra, & Zhao 2013). Moreover, Gebauer, Wagner, Sedikides, and Neberich (2013) found self-esteem to be somewhat more strongly correlated with belief in one's own agency rather than communion in a study of 187,957 participants in 11 countries. However, there was a great deal of variation in these associations. In fact, *agency* was more strongly correlated to self-esteem for particular participants (younger, men, non-religious) in countries higher in overall agency, whereas *communion* was more strongly correlated to self-esteem for particular participants (older, women, religious) in countries higher in overall communion.

It should be also noted that most examinations on self-esteem contrast the two global dimensions of agency and communion (e.g., Gebauer et al., 2013; Wojciszke et al., 2011, Study 1; Wojciszke & Sobiczewska, 2013) or contrast agency mainly with the sociability component of communion (Bi et al., 2013; Wojciszke et al., 2011, Study 2). The focus on the global dimension of communion appears to have led to an underestimation of the role that more specific aspects of communion, like morality and sociability, have in self-esteem. For example, sociability has been shown to be central to self-esteem when it is conceptualized and studied as indicative of social belonging and inclusion (see Gerber & Wheeler, 2009, for a meta-analysis). In work on adolescents, Marsh (1986) has found moral self-concept (i.e., honesty) to be about equally correlated with self-esteem as academic self-concept. However, sociability-oriented aspects of self-concept are most highly correlated to adolescents' self-esteem. Pelham's (1995) studies of university students' self-esteem also showed "social skills" and other sociability-related aspects of the self-concept to be much more strongly tied to self-esteem than "intellectual ability."

Research on aspects of the self other than self-esteem also shows that aspects of communion, especially morality, are central to the self-concept. For example, large-scale studies of values reveal that people all around the world view morality (e.g., honesty) as the most important guiding principle in their lives (see Schwartz & Bardi, 2001). Indeed, cross-cultural research shows that being trustworthy and otherwise moral is one important way in which individuals maintain a sense of personal honor and virtue (e.g., Dahlsgaard, Peterson, & Seligman, 2005; Rodriguez Mosquera, Manstead, & Fischer, 2002).

Research on individual self-enhancement also shows that individuals tend to see themselves as more honest and trustworthy than others, rather than more competent (e.g., Allison, Messick, & Goethals, 1989; Epley & Dunning, 2000; van Lange & Sedikides, 1998; for reviews, see Leach et al., in press; Paulhus & John, 1998). This has been dubbed the "Muhammed Ali effect" or the "holier than thou" phenomenon, and it is a robust form of individual self-enhancement that occurs across cultures (Balcetis, Dunning, & Miller, 2008). Although moral self-enhancement is not always tied to higher self-esteem (Wojciszke et al., 2011), moral self-enhancement is a pervasive and powerful form of positive self-evaluation (see Gebauer et al., 2013). This is likely why the influential self-affirmation theory focuses on the assertion of moral "self-integrity" as an especially effective means of improving self-evaluation.

Although the morality component of communion appears to be central to some aspects of the individual self-concept, it is not universally important. Thus, morality does not dominate individual self-evaluation the way that it does group self-evaluation. For some people, in some situations, the sociability component of communion appears to be most important to the individual self-concept. In other instances, an individual's believed competence is most important. The above evidence for this variation in importance calls for research that is better able to specify what determines how important morality, sociability, and competence are to the individual self-concept. This work would do well to also attend to the apparent

discrepancies between individual and group as well as self and other. Whatever the approach, it seems clear that the individual self-concept may be best understood by examining the role of specific characteristics like morality and sociability rather than the global dimension of communion.

CONCLUSION

There is little doubt that agency and communion (competence and warmth, dominance and nurturance) are useful characterizations of the most global dimensions on which people judge individuals and groups. However, the work we have reviewed here shows that a failure to differentiate the various ways in which people can be judged to be communal obscures the important role played by the more specific human characteristic of morality. To judge an individual or a group as trustworthy does not have the same implications as to judge them as kind, or caring. Our judgments of another party's morality are more important to the essential decision we must make about whether they represent an opportunity or a threat. And, our judgments of our own morality are an important basis for feeling good about ourselves as individuals or as group members.

Based on this evidence, we can suggest several avenues for future research. First, the distinction between morality and sociability in social judgment may be useful to more general work on morality. It may be important to know, for example, how traits such as honesty and trustworthiness relate to qualities such as harm, fairness, loyalty, authority, and purity that have recently been described as the "foundations" of moral judgment (e.g., Graham, Nosek, Haidt, Iyer, Koleva, & Ditto, 2011). Second, the advantages of a more nuanced characterization of the communion dimension suggest advantages to examining the specific characteristics that indicate agency. Viewing an individual or a group as skillful should have very different implications for social judgment and social interaction than viewing them as strong, dynamic, or assertive (Abele & Wojciszke, 2014; Chen, Jing, & Lee, 2014; Cottrell et al., 2007; Rosenberg et al., 1968). As Leach et al. (in press) recently argued, specific characteristics such as competence, strength, sociability, trustworthiness, fairness, may be conceptualized and examined as more highly specified components of the global dimensions of agency and communion in a way that preserves the well-validated and useful two-dimensional model of social judgment (e.g., Leach et al., 2008). Examinations of social judgment may be better served by attending to the more specific ways in which people judge their own and others' agency and communion. Therefore, our third suggestion for future research is that examinations of the individual self-concept attend to the more specific components of agency and communion so that the particular roles of competence, strength, morality, and sociability can be better understood. Understanding individual, cultural, and contextual variation in the basis of self-evaluation may prove to be important to this endeavor.

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