BLAME ATTRIBUTIONS ABOUT DISLOYALTY

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ABSTRACT

The influence of gender, deviance, and norms on mental state and blame attributions about disloyalty was explored. Gender, a target's gender identity, and behavioral norms were varied. Contrary to expectation, positive motive and agency attributions were higher for women compared to men, and intentionality attributions were greater for normative than non-normative disloyal behaviors. Finally, gender deviants whose behavior was dissimilar to their peers' behavior were blamed less than gender deviants whose behavior was consistent with the behavior of their peers.

INTRODUCTION

In the past, research involving moral judgment was divided. One group of researchers studied attributions about traits, and another group focused on responsibility and blame. For example, Jones and Davis (1965) examined factors that lead to dispositional versus situational attributions while Shaver (1985) examined attributions about responsibility and blame. Fortunately, psychologists interested in moral judgments no longer draw a sharp line between person perception and blame attribution (Pizarro, Tannenbaum, & Uhlmann, 2012). Instead, mental state and dispositional inferences are studied alongside responsibility and blame to understand how perceivers explain moral action. Here, we add to the growing body of research on moral judgment with the aim of better understanding perceptions about moral action. We focus on attributions about mental states, such as one's intentionality and motives for acting, attributions about stable dispositions, and attributions about blame.

One reason that moral judgment and attribution research is no longer divided is because researchers have recognized the importance of intentionality judgments in person perception (Hughes & Trafimow, 2011; Malle, 1999; Reeder, 2009). Perceivers consider five components when deciding whether an action was intentional (Malle & Knobe, 1997). Perceivers consider an actor's desires, knowledge about outcomes, plans, awareness, and skill and the first three components are considered central to the construct (Bratman, 1987; Searle, 1983).

Research suggests that intentionality attributions are influenced by general motives for acting, a target person's character, and norms (Guglielmo & Malle, 2010). For example, Hughes and Trafimow (2011) found that intentionality attributions were greater in consistent conditions, when an actor's character and motives matched his behavior, than in inconsistent conditions. Further, norms have a significant impact on inferences about intentionality. An action is seen as more intentional when it violates, rather than conforms to norms (Guglielmo & Malle, 2010; Uttich & Lombrozo, 2010).

Drawing on the notion that norm violations increase intentionality attributions, we sought to examine the effect of character deviance on moral judgments. Specifically, we questioned whether an actor whose very character deviated from mainstream culture would be seen as more agentic and more to blame for immoral acts. This would be surprising because deviants in our culture are minorities who are stereotyped, yet according to our reasoning, they may be seen as more agentic, competent, and intentional when performing immoral action. If character deviance increases intentionality for bad acts, this might explain discrimination against them.

Gender deviance refers to behavioral tendencies that violate traditional gender norms. Although some believe it socially acceptable for individuals to display behaviors that contradict their accepted gender role, most people's gender role beliefs are more traditional (Rudman & Fairchild, 2004). That is, many believe women should behave in more communal and "feminine" ways while men should be agentic and "masculine" (Twenge, 1997; 2001). For example, men in women who work in non-traditional career fields are perceived as gender deviants (Brescoli, Uhlmann, Moss-Racusin, & Sarnell, 2012; Schneider, 2012). Here, rather than manipulating gender deviance in terms of occupation, we simply described target persons as traditionally or non-traditionally masculine or feminine for their gender.

In addition to measuring intentionality we also measured attributions about agency. Agency can be measured in two ways. An agent can be seen as agentic when she performs an action intentionally or more or less capable of agency in general. Gray, Gray, and Wegner (2007) have shown that perceivers distinguish between two dimensions of mind. One dimension refers to one's capacity for intentional action, self-control, and introspection. The other dimension, experience, refers to one's capacity to experience emotions, pleasure, and pain. In their study, Gray et al. (2007) found that people evaluated different entities (i.e., robots, children, women, men) along a continuum from experience to agency. These dimensions of mind perception are similar to concepts such as the content of stereotypes model (i.e., warmth and competence) (Fiske, Cuddy & Glick, 2007). Although the literature on stereotyping and mind perception suggests that minorities and women are seen as less agentic (Fiske et al., 2007; Gray et al., 2007), we suspected that gender deviants would be perceived as more agentic when performing immoral acts.

Recent research on intentionality and blame suggests that several mental state markers influence blame judgments. For example, Inbar, Pizarro, and Cushman (2012) proposed that moral judgments are person-centered and affected by our feelings about people. They found that attributions about blame were influenced by inferences about a target person's "wicked" desires. That is, perceivers blamed a target person even though he did not cause or plan an outcome, but because he stood to profit from harm or misfortune (e.g., a natural disaster, declining stocks). In

studies on side-effects, an agent performs an action that leads to two separate outcomes, only one of which is desired. In these situations, participants blame an actor for an outcome even though it is not explicitly desired, but due to his character and motives (Hughes & Trafimow, 2011; Knobe, 2003).

To test our predictions about the influence of norms and gender deviance on moral judgments, we examined mind attributions about those who performed immoral behaviors. We focused on disloyalty and sexual betrayal in part because such behavior has been found to be highly intentional and immoral (Hughes & Trafimow, 2010), and because past research has shown gender differences in the perception of disloyalty. Feldman, Cauffman, Jensen, and Arnett (2000) examined sexual betrayal and betrayal of a same-sex friend and found that men who betrayed their lover or friend were more accepted than women who betrayed. Further, both men and women perceivers were far less accepting of a woman's act of immorality than when the same behavior had been committed by a man. This finding was explained by gender stereotypes and the sexual double standard whereby men are judged less harshly for sexual promiscuity than women.

In summary, we examined the effect of behavioral norms, gender norms, and gender on attributions about disloyalty. We measured intentionality, positive motives, agency, and blame attributions. Based on the research discussed above, we had five main predictions.

1. We predicted that gender deviants would be seen as more agentic and their sexual betrayal more intentional compared to traditional gender targets.
2. We expected that disloyal behavior that violated norms would be seen as more intentional than normative disloyalty.
3. We expected that traditional gender targets and men would be seen as possessing positive motives to a greater extent than gender deviants and women.
4. In line with the person centered approach (Inbar, Pizarro, & Cushman, 2012; Pizarro, Tannenbaum, & Uhlmann, 2012) and Feldman and colleagues (2000) work, we predicted that blame attributions would be greater for women than men, and that gender deviants would be seen as more blameworthy than traditional gender targets.
5. Finally, although intentionality should contribute to blame attribution, inferences about positive motive and agency were expected to increase the amount of variance explained in blame attributions.

METHODS

Participants

One hundred and seventy (90 female) participants from Mechanical Turk participated in exchange for a monetary incentive. The majority were from the U.S.A. (94%), were Caucasian (71%), Black (11%) or Asian (11%), and ranged in age from 18 to 70 ($M = 34.43$, $SD = 12.19$).

Materials and Procedures

Participants were randomly assigned to one of eight conditions in a 2(Gender: male vs. female) x 2(Deviance: gender deviant vs. gender neutral) x 2(Norms: normative vs. non-normative) between participant design. They read about a male or female who was gender neutral or gender deviant. In the gender neutral conditions, the target person was traditionally masculine or feminine. In the gender deviant conditions, the target was described as a feminine male or a masculine female. Participants also read that the target person's behavior was similar to his peer group or dissimilar to his peer group. In each case the person performed a disloyal behavior. An example of the male, gender deviant, normative scenario is, "James is a rather feminine man. Imagine that James had sex with his best friend's significant other. Most of his friends and colleagues were also disloyal to their friends."

Following the scenario participants were asked to rate the extent to which the behavior was performed intentionally, how much desire and knowledge the actor had, the extent to which the actor possessed positive motives and had good reason to perform the behavior, and how much blame the actor deserved. Ratings were made on 7-point scales ranging from -3 (*very little/not at all*) to +3 (*very much/extremely*). Question order was randomized.

Agency and experience were measured using materials from Gray, Knobe, Sheskin, Bloom, and Barrett's (2012). Participants were asked "compared to the average person" is the target person capable of experiencing pleasure, embarrassment, pain, fear, joy, and rage? Further, compared to the average person is the target person capable self-control, planning, communicating his or her thoughts, being introspective, passing judgment on others, and acting morally? These items were measured on 7-point scales ranging from -3 (*not at all capable*) to +3 (*extremely capable*) and they were randomized across participants.

RESULTS

We did not expect differences across different components of intentionality and therefore averaged the intention, desire, and knowledge items to create a scale, alpha = .71. Further, the positive motive and good reason items were averaged to create a positive motive scale, alpha = .75. The agency (alpha = .87) and experience (alpha = .82) items were also averaged to create scales.

To test our main hypotheses, a factorial ANOVA was used with Gender, Deviance, and Norms as factors. The intentionality scale revealed a main effect of Norms, $F(1,162) = 7.25$, $p = .008$, partial eta squared = .04. Contrary to our prediction, normative behaviors were rated as more intentional ($M = 2.12$, $SD = 0.98$) than were non-normative behaviors ($M = 1.70$, $SD = 1.21$). No other effects emerged.

There was a main effect of Gender on the positive motive scale, $F(1,162) = 13.04$, $p < .001$, partial eta squared = .07, indicating that female targets were seen as possessing more positive motives($M = -1.15$, $SD = 1.64$) than male targets($M = -1.99$, $SD = 1.26$). No other effects were significant. The experience scale showed no differences by condition. However, contrary to previous research, the main effect of Gender, $F(1,162) = 9.52$, $p = .002$, partial eta squared = .06, showed that female targets were seen as more agentic ($M = .001$, $SD = 1.29$) than

male targets ($M = -0.59$, $SD = 1.24$). However, while male targets were seen as less agentic than average, female targets were seen as no more or less agentic than average.

Finally, we examined attributions about blame. The only effect to emerge was the interaction of Norms and Deviance, $F(1,162) = 5.72$, $p = .018$, partial eta squared = .03 (see Table 1). A simple effects analysis with Bonferroni correction showed that within the traditional gender conditions, blame attributions were relatively high but there were no differences between normative ($M = 2.13$, $SD = 1.18$) and non-normative behaviors ($M = 2.39$, $SD = 1.02$), $p = .22$. Within the gender deviant conditions those who performed normative behaviors were attributed more blame ($M = 2.44$, $SD = 1.00$) than those in the non-normative conditions ($M = 1.82$, $SD = 1.39$), $p = .017$, $d = 0.51$ (see Appendix 1 for correlation matrix).

Table 1.

Summary of Sequential Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Blame Attribution

Variable	beta	t	R	R^2	Sr^2
Step 1			.55	.31**	
Intention	.35	4.29**			.28
Desire	.18	2.31*			.15
Knowledge	.14	1.89			.12
Step 2			.61	.37**	
Intention	.31	3.87**			.24
Desire	.17	2.31*			.14
Knowledge	.17	2.25*			.14
Motives	.13	1.59			.10
Good Reason	-.25	-3.10**			-.19
Agency	-.12	-1.75			-.11

Note. * p < .05 ** p < .01

To test our hypothesis about blame attributions we used sequential regression to examine whether motive and agency attribution explained additional variance in judgments of blame above that explained by intentionality. Intention, desire, and knowledge were entered first in the sequence. Then, positive motives, good reasons, and agency ratings were entered in step two. The intentionality variables explained a significant amount of variance, $R^2 = .31$, $F(3, 164) = 24.25$, $p < .001$. Further, an examination of the relative importance of each variable showed that intention had the largest regression coefficient followed by desire (see Table 1). The second step showed that motive, good reason, and agency ratings provided a significant improvement to the model, delta $R^2 = .06$, $F(3, 161) = 5.22$, $p = .002$. The regression coefficients showed that intention still had the greatest relative effect on blame attributions, followed by whether or not the target had good reason to perform the action, and desire (see Appendix 2 for correlation matrix).

DISCUSSION

Contrary to expectation, we found that intentionality attributions were higher for immoral behaviors that were normative compared to those that were non-normative. When a person was

disloyal to her best friend, she was seen as acting more intentionally when her peer group was generally disloyal, than when they were loyal. When one's peer group is loyal, perhaps perceivers suspend judgment and are more likely to believe that there were mitigating circumstances preceding one's bad act. However, when one's peer group is generally disloyal the person appears tainted by their bad acts. One limitation of this finding is that disloyalty, regardless of a group norm, is a norm violation in the broader culture. Malle, Guglielmo, and Monroe (2012) have suggested that perceivers are sensitive to norm violations and that immoral behaviors in general can be seen as norm violations. Consistent with this idea, both intentionality and blame attributions were above the mid-point (zero) of the scale.

Men were viewed as possessing less positive motives than women in the context of cheating. This went against our intuition that men would be viewed less harshly than women for sexual betrayal. The finding aligns with research on ambivalent sexism toward men that suggests that men are viewed as less capable of controlling their sexual desires than women (Glick & Fiske, 1999). Furthermore, according to Brand, Markey, Mills, and Hodges (2007), men and women engage in infidelity for different reasons. When women cheat, they are selective and choose someone who will make them happier than their current partner. Men are more likely to cheat when an opportunity arises. Together, this research suggests that positive motive attributions were higher for women than men because women cheat for so-called "good" reasons (out of a desire for emotional intimacy and romantic connection) whereas men cheat for "bad" reasons (uncontrollable sexual desire).

Gender deviants were not seen as more agentic than traditional target persons. Instead, men were seen as less agentic than women. This finding is consistent with the Feldman et al. (2000) and Glick and Fiske's (1996) work showing that men are believed to be less in control, less agentic, and more compelled toward sexual intercourse than women.

Women and gender deviants were not blamed more than traditional gender targets and men. Instead, an interaction between gender deviance and norms was found. Gender neutral targets were seen as relatively blameworthy regardless of norms. However, blame was attenuated for gender deviants whose disloyalty was carried out among loyal friend compared to those who were disloyal among disloyal friends. This finding may indicate that gender deviants are viewed more positively when surrounded by moral others than immoral others. For gender deviants perhaps blame is lessened by one's associations. Future research should explore this possibility.

A sequential analysis showed that in addition to intentionality attributions, perceptions of motive and agency are also important in blame attribution. Intention, desire, and knowledge significantly predicted blame. However, motives and agency attribution significantly increased the variance explained in blame ratings while controlling for intentionality. The regression coefficients suggested that intentionality, one's reasons for acting, and one's desire to perform an action had the greatest relative influence on blame attributions for a disloyal act.

A limitation of this research was that the results were not replicated and, like much morality research, we relied on scenarios. This limits experimental realism and external validity. We hope that our research sparks empirical curiosity and that future study increases the

robustness of the current finding by replicating them with different samples, methods, and materials.

The idea that the immoral behavior of people who violate social norms is amplified, did not receive empirical support. Gender deviants' immoral behaviors were not seen as more intentional than traditional targets behavior, and there were no differences in attributions about agency or positive motives. However, while gender deviants' and gender neutral targets' disloyalty may not be viewed differently, perhaps others non-normative persons may be viewed differently. This is an important issue to consider, particularly as it applies to discrimination. Examining simple difference in mental state attribution and blame may help us understand these important, broader phenomena.

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Appendix 1. Correlation Matrix for Variables Examined in ANOVAs.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Target Gender		.05	.05	-.28**	-.11	-.23**	.13
2. Norms			-.19**	-.08	.09	.01	-.06
3. Intentionality				-.22**	.26**	.06	.55*
4. Positive Motives					.14	.37**	-.26**
5. Experience						.65**	.06
6. Agency							-.13
7. Blame							

Note. * p < .05 ** p < .01

Appendix 2. Correlation Matrix for Variables Examined in Regression Analysis.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Intention		.50**	.47**	-.09	-.20**	.02	.51**
2. Desire			.37**	-.20**	-.19*	.03	.42**
3. Knowledge				-.14	-.12	.09	.38**
4. Motive					.60**	.35**	-.15
5. Good Reason						.32**	-.33**
6. Agency							-.13
7. Blame							

Note. * p < .05 ** p < .01

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