When the Ones We Love Misbehave: Exploring Moral Processes in Intimate Bonds

by

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Abstract

How do we respond when those we are closest to behave unethically? Previous research has almost exclusively investigated individuals’ reactions to transgressions committed by strangers. Here we examined how observers evaluated close others and their misbehaviour, how close others’ misbehaviour affected observers’ own morality, and how relationship relevant outcomes were impacted when a close other, compared to a stranger, acted immorally.

Participants read hypothetical transgressions (Study 1), recalled actual transgressions (Study 2), and witnessed transgressions occur in the laboratory committed by romantic partners, friends, and strangers (Study 3). Effects were consistent across Studies 1 and 2, but less so for Study 3. For the most part, participants evaluated transgressors and their unethical actions less harshly, but exhibited greater negative effects on their own morality and perceived relationship outcomes when close others acted unethically, compared to strangers. This work suggests that sharing intimate bonds with transgressors impact moral evaluations.
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Chapter 1
Introduction

In the late fall of 2017, several sexual assault accusations came out against former American television news anchor Matt Lauer. Hundreds of news articles and social media posts emerged in response to the scandal, with almost universal condemnation of his actions. However, the reactions among Lauer’s friends and coworkers were more ambivalent. For example, Al Roker, Lauer’s colleague and friend, stated that he and his coworkers were “dealing with the news of our friend of 30 years, and we’re all trying to process it” (Wang, 2017). Savannah Guthrie, Lauer’s former co-anchor stated “I’m heartbroken for Matt — he is my dear, dear friend and my partner, and he is beloved by many, many people here” later asking, “how do you reconcile your love for someone with the revelation that they have behaved badly?” (Today, 2017; 1:32). This example highlights the complexities of responding to the unethical behavior of people we care about and the conflict it generates between one’s moral values and one’s cherished relationships. This thesis aims to systematically examine how moral reasoning unfolds in the context of intimate bonds.

We spend a considerable amount of time with friends, romantic partners, and family members, and these relationships fundamentally shape who we are. However, to our knowledge, no work has yet to examine how people judge the unethical actions of close others. Past research examining moral judgment has primarily focused on how individuals respond to the transgressions of strangers (Gray & Wegner, 2009; Greene, Cushman, Stewart, Lowenberg, Nystrom, & Cohen, 2009; Haidt, Koller, & Dias, 1993; Pizarro, Uhlmann, & Bloom, 2003; Reeder & Spores, 1983; Pizarro, Uhlmann, & Salovey, 2003; Wheatley & Haidt, 2005; Stellar & Willer, 2018), though some work has deviated from this norm to investigate reactions to one’s own (Batson, Kobrynowicz, Dinnerstein, Kampf, & Wilson, 1997, Valdesolo & Desteno, 2007,.)
or a group’s unethical actions (Iyer, Schmader, & Lickel, 2007; Kouchaki, 2011; Lickel, Schmader, Curtis, Scarnier, & Ames, 2005; Monin & Miller, 2001). Examining responses to the misbehaviour of close others allows for the opportunity to investigate how individuals navigate powerful conflicting motivations, which may give rise to motivated moral reasoning. As a result, this work provides a more comprehensive view of moral judgment that incorporates crucial social factors, such as one’s relationship to the transgressor. Across three studies, we examined observers’ affective responses and evaluative judgments related to both the transgressor and the observers’ themselves after transgressions were committed by close others, compared to strangers. Finally, in the context of close relationships, we explored how this impacted observers’ perceptions of their relationship with the transgressor.

1 Previous Research

1.1 Evaluations of Transgressors

Unethical acts reliably elicit harsh, global, and enduring responses in others. The moment a transgression takes place, individuals show strong affective responses to the wrongdoer’s behaviour in the form of anger, contempt, and disgust, which amplify moral judgment (Avramova & Inbar, 2013; Goldberg, Lerner, & Tetlock, 1999; Schnall, Haidt, Clore, & Jordan, 2008). Transgressions also evoke swift behavioural responses to punish the perpetrator, even at a potential cost to the self (Boyd & Richerson, 1992; Fehr & Gächter, 2002). Punishment of moral transgressions has been documented in the form of social shunning, gossip, monetary punishment, and physical or verbal aggression (Clutton-Brock & Parker, 1995; Cushman, Dreber, Wang, & Costa, 2009; Cushman, Durwin, & Lively, 2012; Feinberg, Willer, Stellar, & Keltner, 2012; Panchanathan & Boyd, 2004). In addition to eliciting harsh affective and behavioral reactions in others, unethical behaviour has deleterious broader repercussions. A
single misbehavior is highly damaging to global impressions of a transgressor (Anderson, 1965; Goodwin, Piazza, & Rozin, 2014; Kanouse & Hanson, 1972; Leach, Ellemers & Barreto, 2007), which radiate out to influence the perception of seemingly unrelated characteristics such as an individual’s competence (Stellar & Willer, 2018). Finally, negative responses to others’ immoral behaviour persist via negative reputational information. Information concerning bad behaviour is spread through gossip, ensuring the consequences of the misbehaviour carry over to new groups of individuals who may have not witnessed the unethical act itself (Dunbar, 1998). These negative impressions endure even after the individual is credited with several moral deeds, illustrating the power harsh moral judgments can exert (Birnbaum 1972; Riskey & Birnbaum, 1974).

These condemnatory responses are thought to serve a crucial function—upholding societal norms that allow individuals to live together harmoniously in groups (Durkheim, 1915; Haidt, 2007). Ascribing to a code of behaviour, and subsequently rewarding those who behave in line with these norms while punishing those who do not, reigns in the selfish inclinations that threaten the group’s coherence and survival. This drive is deeply rooted; many social animals have been found to exhibit punishing tactics to discourage theft and parasitism and enforce cooperative behaviour (Clutton-Brock & Parker, 1995 for review). This theoretical foundation for morality offers a functional argument for intensity of reactions that typically characterize responses to unethical behaviour.

This theoretical model of moral judgment generates predictions about how individuals would respond to the transgressions of close others. Specifically, it would suggest that individuals would judge close others more harshly than strangers. If morality functions to bind individuals together in cooperative and cohesive groups, the transgressions of those within our innermost
groups (e.g., friends, romantic partners, family) should be the most threatening and elicit the strongest condemnatory responses. In support of this claim, past work has documented the black sheep effect, in which in-group members are judged more extremely for their unethical behaviour than out-groups (Marques, Yzerbyt, & Leyens, 1988). In addition, previous research investigating partner-ideal discrepancies have found that when individuals’ view their partner as failing to live up to their ideal, individuals feel more dejection-related emotions (e.g., disappointed, miserable), demonstrating that individuals react negatively when their close others do not live up to their expectations (Lackenbauer & Campbell, 2012).

However, this theoretical model of moral behavior characterized by harsh responses to other’s moral failures, particularly those of close others, fails to account for potentially conflicting psychological processes that occur when the transgressor is a close other, processes which may alter moral reasoning. Moral reasoning’s intuitive, emotional, and complex nature allows it to be heavily influenced by conflicting goals (Ditto, Pizarro, & Tannenbaum, 2009). Motivated reasoning is a process whereby individuals use cognitive strategies to arrive at a preferred conclusion (Kunda, 1990). In this case of close relationships, their ability to satisfy many fundamental needs (e.g., need to belong; Baumeister & Leary, 1995), generates a strong incentive to engage in rationalization processes in order to stay in these relationships, despite moral transgressions. In keeping with this motivated account of moral reasoning, we hypothesize that individuals would judge close others less harshly than strangers.

There are three features of close relationships that make them particularly likely to motivate individuals to judge close others less harshly. First, intimate bonds are defined by interpersonal closeness, which lead individuals to include close others in their own identity, (self-other overlap; Aron & Aron, 1986; Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992). For instance, a reaction-time
paradigm revealed that participants perceived their romantic partner as being integrated into their own self concepts (Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991). Consequently, witnessing a close other act immorally may threaten one’s sense of one’s own morality, motivating rationalization processes to reduce this threat. This motivated moral reasoning, therefore, originates from the ethical dissonance between a strong desire to uphold a positive self-image and the negative information a transgression produces about one’s shared moral identity with a close other (Barkan, Ayal, Gino, & Ariely, 2012; Greenwald 1980; Sanitioso, Kunda, & Fong, 1990; Schlenker & Leary, 1982; Tajfel, 1982; Valdesolo & Desteno, 2007). In support of this claim, Gino and Galinsky (2012) found that manipulations to increase psychological closeness to someone who has behaved selfishly through perspective-taking, priming, or emphasizing a shared attribute, led participants to view the target’s unethical behaviour as less wrong. In line with this, previous research has found that identification or perceived similarity with a transgressor leads observers to see the transgressor as less responsible and blameworthy, and to transfer the blame to environmental factors (Shaver, 1970).

Second, close relationships are characterized by psychological processes that encourage commitment, which would also promote less harsh judgments of close others by binding us to close others and reducing our desire to exit the relationship (Rusbult, 1983). In support of this, one study found that participants were more likely to exhibit constructive reactions (e.g., discussing problems, suggesting solutions, supporting one’s partner) following a partner’s destructive behaviour (e.g., exhibition of negative emotions towards partner, neglect) when they felt more committed, satisfied, and invested within their relationship (Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991). These processes should increase the tendency to rationalize a close other’s bad behaviour, since they intensify the goal of maintaining the relationship.
Third, unlike strangers, information about close others’ transgressions is incorporated into a host of other background information about that person. This background information could temper the harshness of judgments of close others compared to strangers, where the moral transgression is often the only piece of information known about that person. This is further complicated by the fact that people hold strong positive illusions about close others (Miller, Niehuis, & Huston, 2006; Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996a). Holding unrealistically favourable attitudes about close others functions to support one’s choice of relationship partner and promote relationship satisfaction (Holmes & Boon, 1990; Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996a, Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996b). Individuals idealize their romantic partners, magnifying their virtuous attributes and minimizing their flaws, to reduce the significance of negative characteristics and counter the potential threat of learning about a partner’s shortcomings (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996a; Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996b). In support of this claim, when individuals receive negative information about romantic partners, they demonstrate the capacity to transform their partner’s flaws into virtues (Murray & Holmes, 1993). Further, coders identified that written narratives about a romantic partner’s faults routinely demonstrated a preference towards their partner’s virtues over their flaws, a tendency to find virtue in their flaws, and to refute or minimize these flaws (Murray & Holmes, 1999). These effects were predicted by positive illusions when controlling for narrative content. Strangers may also be perceived as able to cause more harm, since their unethical behaviour is not buffered by other positive characteristics as is the case with close others. Taken together, these unique characteristics of intimate bonds will likely motivate individuals to be more lenient judges of their close other’s misbehaviour.
1.2 Evaluations of the Self

Occurring alongside evaluations of close others who transgress, are self-relevant processes that track the impact the transgression has on the observer’s sense of their own morality. We hypothesize that individuals will see themselves as less moral when a close other transgresses compared to a stranger. In support of this claim, a growing body of research indicates that one’s self-concept is derived not only from internal qualities, but is heavily influenced by one’s relationships with others (Brewer, 1991). Individuals experience self-other overlap with others, expanding their identity to include those they feel close to (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992). In addition, according to social identity theory, individuals identify themselves both as an individual and in the context of their social groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). One study found that a person’s self-esteem or sense of self-worth is heavily influenced by one’s social standing (Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995). Finally, we often see ourselves in juxtaposition to others. Social comparison theory has revealed that we compare ourselves to others, in order to evaluate and gain useful information about ourselves (Collins, 1996; Festinger, 1954; Wills, 1981). As an element of one’s self-concept, moral character may also be similarly influenced by others, especially by those with whom we share close bonds. When witnessing a close other misbehave, people may evaluate themselves more negatively, as the unethical behaviour may be viewed as a negative reflection on the self.

Further, immoral behaviour shows the unique capacity to be perceived as contaminating. Previous research supports this claim, showing that people believe morality can be transmitted from one source to another. Like contagion from physical sources (e.g., disease, spoiled food), there is a belief that morality may also be passed on from one individual to another (Nemeroff & Rozin, 1994). Moral contagion effects even occur from mere contact or proximity to immoral
others or objects. For instance, one study demonstrated that participants are reluctant to wear a sweater previously said to be worn by Hitler (Rozin, Markwith, & McCauley, 1994). Another study found that participants viewed money as less desirable if it came from immoral sources because it threatened the participants’ moral self-images (Stellar & Willer, 2014). Even though the individual may not commit the immoral act him or herself, he/she can feel immoral nonetheless.

Past work has found that people feel collective self-conscious emotions, particularly guilt and shame, when their group members act immorally (Brown, González, Zagefka, Manzi, & Čehajić, 2008; Doosje et al., 1998; Glasford, Pratto, & Dovidio, 2008; Iyer, Schmader, & Lickel, 2007). For example, participants reported feeling guiltier when people they were close to behaved unethically, compared to people from whom they felt distant (Chen, Wei, Shang, Wang, & Zhang, 2018). This is the case even when the observer was not personally involved in committing the bad behaviour. Based on this, we predict that individuals who witness a close other act unethically will report stronger moral contamination effects, through self-conscious emotions and views of their own morality, compared to a stranger.

1.3 Evaluations of One’s Relationships with Close Others

Complicated, and we argue somewhat independent, processes drive evaluations of the transgressor and the self. But how do transgressions impact how an individual sees their relationship with the transgressor? This work provides a unique opportunity to examine whether moral transgressions committed by close others influence relationship relevant outcomes between the observer and wrongdoer. We predict that motivated moral reasoning and a strong desire to maintain a positive relationship with one’s close other will promote rationalization processes, leading to more lenient judgments of a close other’s unethical behaviour compared to
a stranger’s. This suggests that perceptions of the relationship would not be heavily influenced by a close other’s misbehaviour, as observers are motivated to reduce the negative impact the bad behaviour may produce.

We predict that greater lenience occurs in conjunction with relatively independent self-relevant processes, such as potentially stronger contaminating effects from close others’ misbehaviour on the individual’s sense of self. Greater levels of self-conscious emotions and diminished views of individuals’ own morality because of a close other’s unethical behaviour will likely generate a desire for distance, thus harming relationship outcomes. One study examining responses to an in-group member’s immoral behaviour has shown observers reacted with hostility towards that individual. Further, this effect was found to be mediated by collective shame (Piff, Martinez, Keltner, 2012). These contamination processes would suggest that relationship relevant outcomes will be negatively impacted by a close other’s misbehaviour. In our work we aim to investigate how moral judgment and moral contamination processes combine within relationship contexts. Since we do not know how these processes may interact, we treat this question as exploratory.

1.4 The Current Research

To explore the effect of intimate bonds on responses to moral transgressions, we conducted three studies. In Study 1, we examined responses to hypothetical immoral acts (stealing money from a donation jar, putting a bill on someone else’s bar tab, starting a false rumour) committed by romantic partners, friends, and strangers. In Study 2, we asked participants to recall an unethical act committed by their romantic partner, a friend, or a stranger. In Study 3, we conducted a laboratory study in which participants witnessed a romantic partner, friend, or stranger cheat on a math task.
We tested hypotheses with respect to three categories of outcomes, evaluations of: 1) the transgressor and unethical act 2) the self, and 3) the relationship with the close other. With respect to participant’s outward evaluations of the transgressor and the unethical act, we measured how harshly participants judged the transgressor by gathering ratings of the transgressor’s morality and punitive affective responses to the transgressor (anger, disgust, and contempt). We also measured attributions about why the transgressor committed the act, identifying whether they were the result of internal (dispositional) factors or external (situational) factors, which are relevant to assessments of responsibility (Heider, 1944, 1958). Finally, we captured evaluations of the ethicality of the act itself.

**Hypothesis 1:** Participants would be more lenient judges of close others than strangers. Specifically, participants would rate close others as less immoral, report lower levels of other-judging emotions, identify more external and less internal attributions for the transgressor’s bad behavior, and evaluate the act as less immoral.

We also tested predictions about how the individual would evaluate themselves after witnessing a close other transgress. We measured ratings of the participant’s own morality and self-conscious emotions (embarrassment, guilt, shame), which typically arise after people have transgressed themselves.

**Hypothesis 2:** Participants would show stronger moral contamination effects after witnessing a close other transgress, compared to a stranger. Specifically, participants would rate themselves as less moral and report greater levels of self-conscious emotions when witnessing close others transgress.
Finally, we measured relationship relevant outcomes for our two groups of close others, friends and partners. We measured perceived closeness (Study 1; IOS; Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992) and relationship commitment, satisfaction, and closeness (Study 2).

**Research Question 1: In the context of close others, how are relationship outcomes affected when these individuals transgress?**

Finally, our work allows us not only to examine whether relationships are impacted by transgressions, but also whether that impact varies for different types of close others (friends compared to romantic partners). Friendships and romantic relationships are *quantitatively* different; individuals often view their romantic partner as their closest relationship (Berscheid, Synder, & Omoto, 1989). Friendship and romantic relationships are also *qualitatively* different; only romantic relationships are characterized by romantic love. The experience of romantic love leads to commitment-enhancing processes when the relationship is threatened (Gonzaga, Keltner, Londahl, & Smith, 2001). We explore how these two types of close relationship may be differentially affected when these individuals commit moral transgressions.
Chapter 2
Study 1: Moral Judgment of Hypothetical Transgressors

Study 1 used hypothetical scenarios to assess how participants respond to learning that a close other (friend and romantic partner) versus a stranger has acted immorally. Using hypothetical scenarios allowed us to present the same immoral acts to participants, while only varying the transgressor. We selected a repeated measures design, in which participants saw three immoral acts that were randomly paired with a transgressor (friend, romantic partner, and stranger), giving us greater power to test our effects.

2 The Current Study

2.1 Method

2.1.1 Participants

Two-hundred and seven participants (101 male, 106 female) were recruited from Amazon’s Mechanical Turk. The average age was 33.85 years ($SD= 10.72$). The sample was comprised of the following ethnicities: White/European-American (72.5%), 11.1% Asian/Asian-American, 7.7% Black/African-American, 6.8% Hispanic/Latino-American, and 1.9% Native American. An a priori power analysis suggested a sample size of at least 164 participants per condition would detect a medium-sized effect (Cohen’s $d= 0.2$, 80% power, error probability of .05, correlation among repeated measures estimated at 0.5 and non-sphericity correction $\varepsilon=1$) with our repeated measures format using a within-subjects design.

2.1.2 Procedure

Participants completed this study from their own personal computers. Only participants who were currently in a relationship for a minimum of one year were allowed to participate in this study. Participants were asked to provide demographic information as well as the first name and
gender of their current romantic partner and a friend. Then they filled out information about their relationship with their romantic partner and friend including the length of these relationships, and a measure of perceived closeness with their friend and partner (Inclusion of Other in Self scale [IOS]; Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992). In this measure, participants circled the picture that best described their current relationship with their romantic partner. The scale depicts seven increasingly overlapping pairs of circles labeled ‘self’ and ‘other’. Participants then reported a base line measure of how moral or immoral they thought their romantic partner, friend, or the average person is, from 1 (Very immoral) to 7 (Very moral).

Next, participants read three hypothetical scenarios in which their romantic partner, a friend, and a stranger behaved immorally. We randomly varied both the order of the presentation of conditions (partner, friend, stranger) and which immoral act the transgressor was paired with. For the scenarios involving their partner and friend, we inserted in the name or initials and inputted the appropriate gender to make the scenario appear more realistic. For the scenarios involving a stranger, we randomized the gender of the transgressor.

We selected the topics from an original set of ten, which were piloted among an earlier group of 50 participants. Three scenarios were selected to be used in Study 1 based on having roughly equivalent ratings of how immoral the acts were ($\alpha = .60$). In one scenario, participants imagined that their [friend, partner, a stranger] wanted a candy bar from a store but could not afford it so they stole money from a donation jar to pay for the candy ($M= 4.37, SD=0.92$). In another scenario, participants were asked to imagine that their [friend, partner, a stranger] ordered cocktails from a hotel bar and put the bill on someone else’s tab ($M= 4.48, SD=0.80$). In the last scenario, participants were asked to imagine that their [friend, partner, a stranger] decided to spread a false rumour about a co-worker who they did not like ($M=4.61, SD=0.66$).
After participants read each of the piloted scenarios, participants reported how much they would feel anger, disgust and contempt (other-judging emotions; α’s ≥ .84) and shame, guilt, and embarrassment (self-conscious emotions; α’s ≥ 0.64) embedded among three other emotions: happy, upset, and compassion from 1 (Not at all) to 5 (A great deal). Then participants reported on the morality of the perpetrator using the same measure as before the immoral act. Participants also reported on their perception of the morality of each act following the scenario using the item “How ethical or unethical do you think this act is” from 1 (Very unethical) to 7 (Very ethical). To measure perceived closeness with their romantic partner and friend after the immoral act, we used the same Inclusion of Other in Self scale (IOS; Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992) measured before the event.

Lastly, we had participants provide a two to three sentence open-ended response, following the hypothetical scenarios regarding why they thought their romantic partner, friend, or a stranger acted in this way. Five independent coders read the attributional causes of participants’ behaviour and rated them as either internal or external. The response was coded as internal if the raters believed that the reason was a dispositional attribution; people inferred that the event or the person’s behaviour was due to personal factors such as traits, abilities, or feelings. The response was coded as external if the raters believed that the reason was a situational attribution; people inferred that the person's behaviour was due to outside, situational factors. Coders could rate a response as both internal and external if it included both. The coders showed moderate to substantial agreement for internal factors (Fleiss κ = .48 to .61) and external factors (Fleiss κ = .57 to .65). In order to keep the internal or external attribution variables dichotomous (attribution present or not), we used the majority rating from coders. When three or more coders reported the presence of an internal attribution, the participant was coded as 1, when three or more coders reported the absence of an internal attribution, that participant was coded as 0.
2.2 Results

2.2.1 Descriptive Statistics and Data Analytic Strategy

The average relationship length for romantic partners was 7.68 years ($SD=7.98$). The average relationship length for friends was 11.64 years ($SD=8.37$). To conduct our analyses for participants’ evaluations of transgressor, act, and the self, we used multilevel modeling (Mixed Models, SPSS v23), nesting condition responses within individuals. To account for correlation between condition responses, we used an unstructured correlation matrix. The slopes were allowed to vary and we used an unstructured correlation matrix for the random effects, modelling all variances and covariances. We entered condition (coded as 1= stranger, 2= friend, 3= romantic partner) as a within-subjects variable.\(^1\) To conduct our analyses for participants’ attributions for the transgressors’ behaviour and relationship outcomes, we used McNemar’s test and repeated measures ANOVAs respectively.

2.2.2 Evaluations of Transgressors and Act

First, we analyzed differences in ratings of the transgressors’ morality following the hypothetical scenario. We grand mean centered our time 1 morality ratings and entered it as a covariate. Analyses of main effects revealed that moral ratings after the moral transgression differed across condition, $F(2, 185.18) = 4.19, \ p = .02$, controlling for moral ratings before the transgression. Pairwise comparisons between conditions revealed a significant difference in morality ratings after the transgression between strangers and romantic partners ($Mean_{\text{difference}} = -.34, SE=.12, p = .004, 95\% \ CI: -.58, -.11$, and strangers and friends, ($Mean_{\text{difference}} = -.26, SE=.11, p = .02,$

\(^1\) We conducted additional analyses to examine the effect of the participant’s gender. There were no interactions between gender and condition for any of our effects in this Study or any others. There was general main effect of gender such that women had stronger responses (e.g., greater other-judging emotions, lower morality ratings). See appendix B for gender effect analyses for each study. Therefore, we conduct all analyses collapsing across gender.
95% CI: -0.49, -0.03, such that strangers were judged as more immoral than close others. There was no significant difference between romantic partners and friends (Mean_difference = -0.08, SE = 0.08), \( p = 0.34, 95\% \text{ CI:} -0.25, 0.08 \) (see Table 1 for descriptive statistics).

Next, we analyzed differences in levels of other-judging emotions (anger, disgust, contempt) across conditions. Analyses of main effects revealed that ratings of anger, disgust, and contempt, differed across condition, \( F(2, 205.42) = 9.88, \ p < 0.001 \). Pairwise comparisons between conditions revealed a significant difference in other-judging emotions between strangers and friends, (Mean_difference = 0.32, SE = 0.08) \( p < 0.001, 95\% \text{ CI:} 0.17, 0.48 \), and romantic partners and friends, (Mean_difference = 0.25, SE = 0.08), \( p = 0.001, 95\% \text{ CI:} 0.10, 0.40 \), such that friends elicited lower levels of reported other-judging emotions than strangers and romantic partners. There were no significant differences between strangers and romantic partners (Mean_difference = 0.07, SE = 0.08), \( p = 0.37, 95\% \text{ CI:} -0.08, 0.22 \) (see Table 1 for descriptive statistics).

Next, we tested whether participants reported different internal or external attributions for the transgressor’s behaviour depending on condition. McNemar’s test revealed that participants reported significantly more internal attributions for the unethical behaviour of a stranger (86.5%) compared to their romantic partner (72.0%), \( \chi^2(1) = 14.02, \ p < 0.001 \), and a friend (66.2%), \( \chi^2(1) = 25.47, \ p < 0.001 \). There were no significant differences in internal attributions for the unethical behaviour of a romantic partner compared to a friend, \( \chi^2(1) = 1.64, \ p = 0.201 \). Next, we examined whether condition predicted the presence of external attributions. Participant’s reported significant fewer external attributions for the unethical behaviour of a stranger (27.1%) compared to a romantic partner (36.7 %), \( \chi^2(1) = 4.30, \ p = 0.04 \), and friend (40.1%), \( \chi^2(1) = 8.78, \ p = 0.003 \). There was no significant difference in external attributions for the unethical behaviour of a romantic partner compared to a friend, \( \chi^2(1) = 0.41, \ p = 0.52 \).
Finally, we analyzed differences in moral ratings of the act itself by condition. Analyses of main effects revealed that moral ratings of the act were marginally different across condition, $F(2, 204.83) = 2.91, \ p = .06$. Pairwise comparisons between conditions revealed a significant difference in moral ratings of the act between strangers and romantic partners, ($Mean_{difference} = -.15, \ SE = .07), p = .04, 95\% \ CI: -.29, -.01$, and strangers and friends, ($Mean_{difference} = -.17, \ SE = .08), p = .04, 95\% \ CI: -.34, -.01$, such that acts committed by close others were rated as less unethical than acts committed by strangers. There were no significant differences between romantic partners and friends ($Mean_{difference} = -.02, \ SE = .08), p = .75, 95\% \ CI: -.18, .13$ (see Table 1 for descriptive statistics).

### 2.2.3 Evaluations of the Self

Next, we analyzed differences in levels of self-conscious emotions (shame, guilt, embarrassment) across conditions. Analyses of main effects revealed that ratings of shame, guilt, and embarrassment differed across condition, $F(2, 204.92) = 75.65, \ p < .001$. Pairwise comparisons between conditions revealed a significant difference in self-conscious emotions between strangers and romantic partners, ($Mean_{difference} = -1.04, \ SE = .08), p < .001, 95\% \ CI: -1.21, -.88$, strangers and friends, ($Mean_{difference} = -.58, \ SE = .07), p < .001, 95\% \ CI: -.72, -.43$, and friends and romantic partners ($Mean_{difference} = -.47, \ SE = .07), p < .001, 95\% \ CI: -.61, -.33$, such that romantic partner’s transgressions elicited the highest reports levels of self-conscious emotions, followed by friends’ then strangers’ transgressions (see Table 1 for descriptive statistics).

### 2.2.4 Evaluations of One’s Relationships with Close Others

To examine how relationship outcomes changed before and after the induction, and whether those changes were different when friends or partners transgressed, we conducted a repeated-measures, within subjects ANOVA with condition (friend and partner), time (pre- and post-
scenario), and the interaction between the two predicting in perceived closeness using the Inclusion of Other in Self Scale (IOS; Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992). There was a significant main effect of condition, $F(1, 192)= 73.00, p<.001, \eta^2_p =.28$, such that romantic partners were always rated as closer than friends. There was also a significant effect of time, $F(1, 192) = 73.00, p < .001, \eta^2_p =.53$, such that ratings of perceived closeness dropped following the transgression. There was also a significant interaction between condition and time, $F(1, 192) = 14.55, p < .001, \eta^2_p =.11$, such that participants’ perceived closeness with their romantic partner dropped significantly more than their perceived closeness with their friend. Simple effects revealed that closeness ratings dropped significantly for romantic partners, $t(197)=13.77, p < .001, d= 1.11$, and friends, $t(196)=12.64, p < .001, d= 0.82$. Participants were closer to romantic partners than friends at both time 1, $t(197)=11.17, p < .001, d= 1.66$, and time 2, $t(199)=4.81, p < .001, d= 0.34$ (see Figure 1).

### 2.3 Discussion

Overall, we found relatively consistent support that participants were less harsh toward close others who transgressed compared to strangers. Participants rated close others as less immoral, reported less anger, disgust, and contempt toward them, reported fewer internal and more external reasons for their behavior, and rated the act as less unethical when committed by close others than strangers, though in the case of other-judging emotions, romantic partners deviated from this pattern. Participants also reported significantly higher levels of self-conscious emotions after reading about acts committed by their romantic partner compared to both friends and strangers, with friends also eliciting significantly more than strangers. Lastly, participants reported reduced ratings of closeness towards both their friend and romantic partner after reading about their unethical behaviour, with partner ratings dropping significantly more than friends.
Chapter 3
Study 2: Moral Judgment of Retrospective Transgressions

In Study 2 participants recalled past moral transgressions committed by either romantic partners, friends, or strangers. This design ensured that the act was perceived as immoral to each participant reporting it, unlike our pre-selected acts in Study 1. In addition, it allowed us to examine actual, rather than hypothetical, responses to unethical acts.

3 The Current Study

3.1 Method

3.1.1 Participants

Three-hundred and eighty-eight participants (186 male, 201 female, 1 missing) were recruited from Amazon’s Mechanical Turk. The average age was 35.47 years (SD= 11.19). The sample was comprised of the following ethnicities: White/European-American (74.5%), 10.8% Black/African-American, 6.4% Asian/Asian-American, 6.2% Hispanic/Latino-American, 1.0% Native American, and 1.0% Middle Eastern. In study 1, our primary effects were medium in size (Cohen’s $d = 0.4$). An a-priori power analysis suggested a sample size of at least 100 participants per condition (Cohen’s $d= 0.35$, 80% power, error probability of .05, three groups) using a between-subjects design for this study.

3.1.2 Procedure

Participants completed this study from their own personal computers. Only participants who were currently in a relationship for a minimum of one year were allowed to participate in this study. Participants filled out demographic information and some information regarding their relationship (in the romantic partner and friend conditions), and then were randomly assigned to recall and write about a time when they witnessed or heard about their partner, a friend, or a
stranger committing an immoral act. Participants were told that this behaviour could not actively include themselves, nor could the participant be the victim. Participants were asked to provide a phrase or sentence describing the event. A few examples were provided to participants, such as he/she lied, he/she was mean to someone, he/she stole something.

Following the recall task, participants reported the same measures of emotions as Study 1. Again, we created a composite of other-judging emotions (anger, disgust, and contempt; $\alpha = .78$) and self-conscious emotions (shame, guilt, and embarrassment; $\alpha = .80$), asking participants to report on how much they felt these emotions, embedded among three other emotions: happy, upset, and compassion, after the event 1 (Not at all) to 5 (A great deal). Since the event occurred in the past and we did not want to know participants’ current views of the target, we chose to ask participants for their perception of their partner’s, friend’s, and a stranger’s morality using the following prompt, “After this event happened, how much (if at all) did it change how moral or immoral you thought [your partner, your friend, this person] was from 1 (Much more immoral) to 7 (Much more moral). Participants’ perception of the morality of each act was measured following the scenario using the item “How ethical or unethical do you think this act is” on a 1 (Very unethical) to 7 (Very ethical). We also asked participants “Right after this event happened, how much (if at all) did it make you feel differently about your own morality” on a scale from 1 (I felt much more immoral) to 7 (I felt much more moral). Further, as in Study 1, we had participants provide a two to three sentence open-ended response, following the recall task, regarding why they thought their romantic partner, friend, or a stranger acted in this way. Five independent coders read the attributional causes of participants’ behaviour and rated them as either internal or external. The coding scheme was the same as in Study 1. Again, coders could rate a response as both internal and external if it included both. The coders showed fair to moderate agreement for internal factors (Fleiss $\kappa = .30$ to .38) and external factors (Fleiss $\kappa = .41$.)
to .50). In order to keep the internal or external attribution variables dichotomous (attribution present or not), we used the majority rating from coders, as in Study 1.

In the romantic partner and friend conditions, participants also reported satisfaction, commitment, and closeness in the relationship. We measured these variables by asking “Right after this event happened, how much (if at all) did it change how [satisfied, committed, close] you were with your [romantic partner, friend]” on a 1 (I felt less [satisfied/ committed/ close]) to 7 (I felt much more [satisfied/ committed/ close]) as three separate variables which we combined into one overall composite score of relationship quality (α = .85).

We trained three independent coders to assess the severity of the acts. After participating in a training session with the coders, they proceeded to rate all events on a 0 (Not bad at all) to 3 (Very bad) scale. The coders' ratings showed good reliability using two-way random intra-class coefficients (Average Measures ICC= 0.78).

3.2 Results

We removed participants who did not complete the recall task (n=23) or who did not follow directions (reported acts in which the participant was a victim, acts in which the participant was an accomplice; n=35). Our remaining sample size was three-hundred and thirty participants. The average relationship length for romantic partners was 9.35 years (SD=10.24) and 12.21 years (SD=9.84) for friends. The majority of romantic partners were living together (78.9%) and married (55.5%). All analyses controlled for coded severity of the act since participants recalled more severe acts for strangers than friends (t (223) = 3.50, p < .001, d=.47) and romantic partners (t (224) = 6.39, p < .001, d=.86), and more severe acts for friends compared to romantic partners (t (199.97) = 2.52, p =.01, d=.35; see Table 2 for means).
3.2.1 Evaluation of Transgressors and Act

First, we examined whether individuals judged romantic partners, friends, and strangers differently for recalled unethical acts. An analysis of variance revealed a significant effect of condition on evaluations of the transgressors morality, $F(2, 325)=39.65, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .20$. Participants were asked how much their perception of the transgressors’ morality dropped after learning they had acted unethically. Participants recalling a stranger commit a transgression reported that their perceptions of the stranger’s morality dropped more than those recalling a romantic partner, $F(1, 222)=70.77, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .24$, and friends, $F(1, 221)=34.77, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .14$. This drop in moral character ratings was marginally smaller for romantic partners than friends, $F(1, 206)=3.59, p = .06$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$ (see Table 2 for descriptive statistics).

The same analysis revealed a significant effect of condition predicting differences in other-judging emotions (anger, disgust, and contempt), $F(2, 326)=19.14, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .11$. Participants reported significantly stronger other-judging emotions towards strangers than romantic partners, $F(1, 223)=24.22, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .11$, and friends, $F(1, 222)=26.89, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .14$. There were no differences between romantic partners and friends, $F(1, 206)=0.47, p = .49$, $\eta_p^2 = .002$ (see Table 2 for descriptive statistics).

We then tested whether participants reported different attributions (internal or external) for the transgressor’s behaviour depending on condition. The Pearson Chi-Square test was used for our analysis to examine the pairwise differences between the independent dichotomous attribution variables. Participant’s reported significantly more internal attributions for the unethical behaviour of a stranger (82.6%) compared to their romantic partner (68.5 %, $\chi^2(1) = 6.12, p = .01$) or a friend (66.3%, $\chi^2(1) = 7.95, p = .01$). There was no significant difference in internal attributions for the unethical behaviour of a romantic partner compared to a friend ($\chi^2(1) = 0.12$, .01).
There were no significant differences between participant’s reported external attributions for the unethical behaviour of a stranger (33.9%) compared to their romantic partner (35.2%, $\chi^2(1) = 0.05, p = .83$ or a friend (35.6%, $\chi^2(1) = 0.07, p = .79$). There was also no significant difference in external attributions for the unethical behaviour of a romantic partner compared to a friend ($\chi^2(1) = 0.003, p = .96$).

An analysis of variance revealed a significant effect for condition on ratings of the ethicality of the act, $F(2, 326)=12.15, p <.001, \eta_p^2 =.07$. Participants judged the act as significantly more immoral when done by strangers compared to romantic partners, $F(1, 223)=25.39, p <.001, \eta_p^2 =.102$, and friends, $F(1, 222)=5.96, p =.02, \eta_p^2 =.03$. Acts committed by friends were viewed as less moral compared to those committed by romantic partners, $F(1, 206)=5.13, p =.03, \eta_p^2 =.02$ (see Table 2 for means).

### 3.2.2 Evaluation of the Self

An analysis of variance revealed a significant effect of condition on self-conscious emotions (embarrassment, shame, guilt), $F(2, 326)= 7.58, p=.001, \eta_p^2 =.04$. Participants reported significantly lower levels of self-conscious emotions following the recall of a stranger’s unethical behaviour compared to a romantic partner’s, $F(1, 223)= 13.46, p <.001, \eta_p^2 =.06$, or friend’s, $F(1, 222)= 5.30, p =.02, \eta_p^2 =.02$. There were no significant differences in reported self-conscious emotions between the romantic partner and friend conditions, $F(1, 206)= 2.66, p =.10, \eta_p^2 =.01$ (see Table 2 for descriptive statistics).

An analysis of variance also revealed a significant effect of condition on participant’s evaluations of their own morality, $F(2, 326)= 7.27, p=.001, \eta_p^2 =.04$. Participants rated their own morality significantly lower following the recall of their romantic partner’s, $F(1, 223)= 6.07, p=.01, \eta_p^2 =.03$, or friend’s, $F(1, 222)= 10.59, p=.001, \eta_p^2 =.05$, unethical behaviour compared to
a stranger’s. There were no significant differences in ratings of participants’ own morality between the romantic partner and friend conditions, $F(1, 206)= 0.96, p=.33, \eta_p^2 =.01$ (see Table 2 for descriptive statistics).

### 3.2.3 Evaluation of One’s Relationships with Close Others

Next, we investigated how relationship relevant outcomes changed by recalling close others’ unethical behaviour. The prompt we used to ask this question was, “Right after this event happened, how much (if at all) did it change how [satisfied, committed, close] you were with your [romantic partner, friend]”. Therefore, to test this question, we conducted a one sample $t$-test, comparing participant’s reports of whether their change in satisfaction, commitment, and closeness was significantly different from the anchor 0 (did not change at all). The ratings of participants’ reported satisfaction, commitment, and closeness (composite) were significantly different from the 0 anchor for both romantic partners, $t(104)= -3.90, p <.001, d = 0.38$, and friends, $t(103)= -5.68, p <.001, d =0.56$, demonstrating that satisfaction, commitment, and closeness dropped significantly for both conditions.

Next we examined whether the romantic partner and friend conditions differed from each other. An analysis of variance revealed significant differences by condition for relationship relevant outcomes, $F(1, 234)= 5.13, p=.02, \eta_p^2 =0.02$, such that recalling a friend’s misbehaviour more strongly reduced participant’s satisfaction, commitment, and closeness in the relationship compared to recalling a romantic partner’s misbehaviour (see Table 2 for descriptive statistics).

### 3.3 Discussion

For the most part, our findings from Study 2 replicated those from Study 1. Participants judged close others less harshly than strangers, exhibiting smaller drops in ratings of the transgressor’s morality after the act occurred, less strong other-judging emotions, fewer internal attributions for
their bad behaviour, and rated the act as less unethical when committed by a friend or partner, compared to a stranger. These effects held when controlling for the severity of the act itself. In addition, participants reported stronger self-conscious emotions and lower ratings of their own morality when a close other committed a transgression compared to a stranger. Further, participants’ reported drops in their satisfaction, commitment, and closeness following the recall task, with greater drops for a friend’s misbehaviour compared to a romantic partner’s.
Chapter 4
Study 3: Moral Judgment of Actual Events

In Study 3 participants witnessed their friend or partner commit an unethical act—cheating on a math task, in the laboratory. This method allowed us to measure responses in the moment to a standardized transgression.

4 The Current Study
4.1 Method
4.1.1 Participants
Three-hundred and seventy-five undergraduates (95 male, 268 female, 12 other or prefer not to say) from the University of Toronto participated in this study for course credit in a psychology course or for payment. The average age was 19.59 years (SD= 2.82). The sample was comprised of individuals who identified with the following ethnicities: South Asian (32.5%), East Asian (16.5%), Eastern European (12.3%), Western European (10.9%), Middle Eastern (7.7%), Southeast Asian (7.2%), South American (6.9%), Caribbean (6.4%), African (5.1%), Native American (0.3%), and other (3.5%). These percentages add up to greater than 100% as some individuals identified as more than one ethnicity. As this study only examines responses from half the participants (the observers), 188 people are included in the following analyses. Given the difficulty of collecting this sample we aimed to have a recommended minimum of 50 people per condition (Simmons, Nelson, and Simonsohn, 2011). Due to difficulties recruiting long-term couples in an undergraduate pool, only 25 couples participated in this study. We then selected out participants who directly guessed the hypothesis of the study (n=48 [26% of the sample]). Therefore, the final sample contained 15 individuals in the romantic partner condition, 69 individuals in the friend condition, and 56 individuals in the stranger condition. Due to the small
sample size of the romantic partner condition, contrast analyses should be considered illustrative and should be interpreted with caution.

4.1.2 Procedure

Participants arrived at the laboratory with a stranger, a friend, or a romantic partner. Only participants who had been in a romantic relationship or friendship for longer than a year could bring their partner or friend. Participants were told that they were going to take part in different activities and then reunite for a joint activity. Participants were separated into different rooms and each person filled out demographic information.

Since this study involved deception, wherever possible we selected the person who was not a psychology student to be the observer to aid in believability. The observer was told that the study was about accuracy in person perception and they would watch their other person (target) engage in different tasks that would presumably reveal more about the target’s personality. The observer was informed that the target was completely unaware they were being watched throughout all of these tasks and that the target could not see or hear the observer. The observer watched the target recall their day yesterday to the experimenter for two minutes and then made ratings of the target on twenty traits from 1 (Not at all) to 5 (Extremely), in order to gather pre-transgression ratings. To assess the observers’ initial views of the target’s morality, we aggregated four moral traits: ratings of honesty, trustworthiness, fairness, and ethicality (α = .73).

After the observer completed his or her first ratings, they were told they were going to watch the target engage in three tasks meant to reveal more of their personality. They were told they would see the target go through a series of tasks to learn more about their personality. The observer then watched the target spend two minutes responding to a series of questions the experimenter selected from Aron and colleague’s (1997) Fast Friends task, watch a funny video clip (a clip
from television sitcom “I Love Lucy” when Lucy and Ethel go to work at a candy factory), and finally take a math test. The math test consisted of ten quantitative questions from the Graduate Record Examination. The target was informed in view of the observer, that in order to motivate them they would get a two-dollar bonus for each correct answer on the test for a total of up to twenty dollars. Thirty seconds into the math test the experimenter was interrupted by another experimenter who said they needed help with something in another room. The experimenter apologized to the target and told them to continue in her absence. The target was left alone in the room for one minute. The target had been recruited and trained to cheat before the experimenter returned, which they did after the experimenter left the room. When the experimenter returned the target had thirty more seconds to work on the math test before his or her answers were collected by the experimenter.

After watching these three tasks, the observer made a second set of ratings about the target. The observer reported the extent to which they felt our three other-judging emotions of interest: anger, disgust, contempt ($\alpha = .65$) and self-conscious emotions of interest: shame, guilt, embarrassment ($\alpha = .78$) embedded within three other emotions: happy, upset, compassion from 1 (Not at all) to 5 (A great deal). The observer also rated both themselves and the target on the same twenty traits as before. A composite of the moral traits showed high reliability ($\alpha = .92$). Participants were then reunited for two minutes while the experimenter set up the next part of the study. The target was informed not to tell the observer that the study involved deception. This interaction was video recorded. Finally, the observer answered a suspicion check, providing an open-ended response to the question “What do you think the hypothesis of the study was?” and, at the end of the study, the observer and target were debriefed and the deception was revealed.
4.2 Results

4.2.1 Evaluations of Transgressors

An analysis of variance revealed a significant effect of condition on moral trait ratings following the unethical act, controlling for moral trait ratings before the act, $F(2, 135)=8.48, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .11$. Pairwise comparisons with romantic partners should be interpreted with caution due to small sample sizes; however, strangers were rated as significantly more immoral than romantic partners, $F(1, 68)=13.66, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .167$, and friends, $F(1, 121)=15.26, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .112$. Romantic partners and friends were not rated significantly different from each other, $F(1, 80)=1.28, p = .458, \eta^2_p = .007$ (see Table 3 for descriptive statistics).

An analysis of variance did not reveal a significant effect of condition predicting differences in other-judging emotions (anger, disgust, contempt), $F(2, 136)=1.05, p = .35, \eta^2_p = .02$; see Table 3 for descriptive statistics).

4.2.2 Evaluations of the Self

An analysis of variance did not reveal a significant effect of condition predicting differences in self-conscious emotions (shame, guilt, embarrassment), $F(2, 136)=0.01, p = .99, \eta^2_p < .001$, nor participants’ own moral trait ratings, $F(2, 89)=1.28, p = .28, \eta^2_p = .03$, (see Table 3 for descriptive statistics).

4.2.3 Evaluations of One’s Relationships with Transgressors

One advantage of this study design was that for the first time we would be able to compare how relationship relevant outcomes change following an ethical transgression committed by close

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2 The self-morality ratings included a subset of participants as we added this variable after a few months of data collection due to an error.
others and strangers. However, due to an error in data collection, we were not able to collect time one ratings of our relationship variables (closeness, commitment, satisfaction, investment, and quality of alternatives). As we can no longer control for ratings prior to the unethical act, we are unable to analyze differences in relationship relevant outcomes between close others and strangers following the transgression. We will be pursuing this research question further in a subsequent study.

4.3 Discussion

In line with studies 1 and 2, participants rated close others as less immoral when a transgression was committed by a close other. However, ratings of other judging and self-relevant variables did not replicate. This may be due to the design of our study, as it did not seem to elicit strong emotional responses across the board. It is possible that the cheating manipulation was not strong enough to be deemed immoral by participants, or that more participants did not believe the manipulation than we removed. Further, if self-conscious emotions drive feelings of the individual’s own morality, the lack of self-conscious emotions present may explain the null effects for the observer’s moral trait ratings. In addition, this study is underpowered due to the difficulties in collecting a sample of friends and partners, who had been in the relationship for over a year since many participants were undergraduates.
Chapter 5
General Discussion

This thesis focused on how individuals respond when close others misbehave. When it comes to moral evaluations about the transgressor and act, we find evidence for motivated moral reasoning when close others are involved. Participants reported less harsh judgment of close others’ transgressions than strangers’. Across three studies we find that when individuals read about, recall, or witness moral transgressions they rate the wrongdoer as less immoral when the transgressor is a close other compared to a stranger and (in studies 1 and 2) report lower levels of other-judging emotions (anger, disgust, and contempt). Rationalization processes seem to be at play during these judgments, as we find participants reported fewer internal attributions (studies 1 and 2) for the misbehaviour of a close other compared to a stranger and the act itself was deemed less unethical (studies 1 and 2) when committed by a close other compared to a stranger.

In addition, we find support in studies 1 and 2 that moral contamination effects are heightened when transgressions are committed by close others, with greater reported levels of self-conscious emotions and reduced views of participants’ own morality when a close other acts immorally compared to a stranger. Lastly, although individuals are more lenient evaluators of their close others following a moral transgression, our work shows that their relationships are negatively impacted, with observers reporting decreases in perceived closeness (Studies 1 and 2), satisfaction (Study 2), and commitment (Study 2). However, differences in these decreases in relationship outcomes between friends and partners were not consistent. Study 1 found greater drops for partners, whereas Study 2 found the opposite pattern.

Overall, we found that participants were more lenient moral judges of close others’ unethical behaviour compared to strangers’, but also found evidence that close others’ misbehaviour is
contaminating to participants. How is it that participants judge close others less harshly, but feel worse about themselves? We argue that these processes occur independently, with different underlying processes, and therefore can exist at the same time. It seems like the rationalization processes at play are not strong enough to inhibit the negative influence immoral behaviour has on one’s self evaluations or one’s evaluations of their relationship with a close other. The contaminating aspects of immoral behaviour may be the root of the negative impact unethicality has on relationship relevant outcomes.

These findings highlight the importance of incorporating social factors in models of moral judgment. When individuals share relationships with transgressors, conflicting motivations arise between one’s drive to respond harshly to others’ moral transgressions and motivations to maintain one’s relationships. Documenting responses to close others allows us to examine how these conflicting motivations unfold across a variety of outcomes including evaluations of the transgressor, the self, and the relationships. Here we show that these conflicting motives alter moral reasoning in important ways and raise questions regarding how other types of relational ties influence moral judgment (e.g., hierarchal power relationships).

Our work here has several important limitations. First, in general we investigated smaller moral transgressions. It is unclear whether our pattern of results would hold for more serious transgressions (e.g., murder). Second, we did not investigate the underlying mechanisms that explain these effects, due to losing these variables in our third study. Third, in this work we focused on two kinds of close others, friends and romantic partners in order to investigate how close relationships can influence different relationship outcomes. These close relationships were selected because they are free from the confounds of other close relationships, like family (e.g., parents, children, or siblings) since one cannot choose their family. However, further research
should investigate how moral judgment may be altered within these types of relationships. For example, if harsh moral judgments function as a way of inhibiting future transgressions, then perhaps parents whose children behave unethically will encourage moral norms through the severity of their responses. One could also imagine greater contamination of one’s own morality in the case of parents’ responses to children’s misbehavior, as parents are supposed to act as moral teachers for their children. Fourth, and most notably, our manipulation in Study 3 is likely too weak to explore our main effects. Due to the nature of ethical transgressions, laboratory experiments are difficult as more severe moral transgressions cannot be tested. Within online contexts, hypothetical scenarios and recall paradigms allow for responses to a greater range of unethical acts; however, responses to those acts are either imagined or retrospective.

In conclusion, our work here demonstrates the importance of understanding how relationships with transgressors influence observers’ responses. Although theoretically moral judgment functions as a way to promote cooperation and discourage selfish inclinations, this function is complicated when moral evaluation is necessary within the context of close bonds.
References


Appendices

Appendix A: Study 1 Hypothetical Scenarios

Scenario 1:

Imagine your [friend, partner, a stranger] [Name] walked by a store and decided that he really wanted a candy bar so he went inside, picked one out, and got in line. However, when he looked in his wallet he realized he didn't have any money on him and the bank was quite far away. While in line [Name] noticed a donation jar with money in it for the homeless. When the cashier looked away to bag the other customer's groceries he took a dollar from the jar to buy the candy bar, paid for it, and left eating it.

Scenario 2:

Imagine your [friend, partner, a stranger] [Name] went to a hotel bar and ordered three cocktails while he was with his friends. At the end of the night when [Name] got the bill, he said he was staying at the hotel and listed a room number, charging the drinks to a stranger's hotel bill.

Scenario 3:

Imagine at your [friend, partner, a stranger] [Name]'s job he particularly disliked one of his coworkers. The two have not gotten along since [Name] arrived. One day [Name] decided to start a false rumor that the coworker had cheated on his wife and spread it to others in the workplace. Soon everyone thought the rumor was true.
Appendix B: Gender Effects

Study 1

As exploratory analyses, we tested whether the participant’s gender predicted any of our main dependent variables for each condition using multilevel modelling. First, we examined whether gender, or the interaction between gender and condition predicted other focused evaluations of the person and act. Analyses of main effects revealed that women judged all transgressors harsher than men, controlling for prior ratings of morality, $F(1, 203.08) = 13.97, p < .001$ (see Table 3 descriptive statistics). There was no significant interaction between gender and condition predicting after the transgression, $F(2, 205.55) = 0.64, p = .53$. For other-judging emotions, analyses of main effects revealed that women also reported significantly more anger, disgust, and contempt following the hypothetical scenario for all transgressors, $F(1, 205.23) = 12.88, p < .001$. There was no significant interaction between gender and condition predicting levels of other-judging emotions, $F(2, 204) = 2.05, p = .13$. Finally, analyses of main effects for evaluations of the act revealed that women reported the acts as less ethical than men for all transgressors, $F(1, 204.25) = 10.58, p = .001$. Again, there was no significant interaction between gender and condition predicting evaluations of the act, $F(2, 203.95) = 1.96, p = .14$.

Lastly, we examined whether gender or the interaction between gender and condition predicted perceptions of the self. Analyses of main effects revealed no significant differences in reports of self-conscious emotions between men and women, $F(1, 204.11) = 0.45, p = .50$. There was also no interaction no between gender and condition, $F(2, 204.01) = 1.41, p = .25$ (see Table 4 for descriptive statistics).

Next, we conducted a repeated measures, within subjects ANOVA with a three-way interaction for condition, gender, and time predicting perceived closeness. There was a marginal main effect
of gender, $F(1, 191)= 3.06, p=.08, \eta_p^2 = .02$, such that women reported lower levels of closeness than men, and a marginal interaction between time and gender, $F(1, 191)= 3.72, p=.06, \eta_p^2 = .02$, such that women’s reported levels of closeness dropped more than men. The three way interaction was not significant, $F(1, 191)= 1.46, p=.23, \eta_p^2 = .01$.

Study 2

We ran an ANOVA with gender, condition, and an interaction between the two for each outcome variable. For evaluations of transgressors and act, there was only a significant main effect for other-judging emotions, $F(1,323)=5.48, p = .02, \eta_p^2 = .02$, such that women reported greater amounts of anger, contempt, and disgust. There were no main effects of gender for participants’ moral judgment of transgressors or judgments of the act, $Fs \leq 0.66, p \geq .42, \eta_p^2 \geq .002$. For evaluations of the self, there was only a significant main effect for participants’ views of their own morality, $F(1, 361)=1.38, p = .03, \eta_p^2 = .01$, such that women rated themselves as more moral. There was no main effect of gender for participants’ reports of self-conscious emotions, $F(1, 357)=0.04, p = .85, \eta_p^2 = .001$. For evaluations of one’s relationship with close others, there was a marginally significant main effect for our composite of satisfaction, commitment, and closeness, $F(1, 231)=3.71, p = .06, \eta_p^2 = .02$, such that women reported that the unethical behaviour had a greater influence on relationship relevant outcomes. There were no significant interactions for any of these outcomes, $Fs \leq 1.09, p \geq .34, \eta_p^2 \geq .002$ (see Table 5 for descriptive statistics).

Study 3

We ran an ANOVA with gender, condition, and an interaction between the two for each outcome variable. There was a main effect of gender for moral judgment of transgressors, such that women gave lower moral trait ratings for transgressors compared to men, $F(2, 178)=4.30 p$
There were no main effects of gender for other-judging emotions or self-conscious emotions, $F$s $\leq 1.17$, $p \geq .31$, $\eta^2_p \geq .01$. There were no significant interactions for any of these outcomes, $F$s $\leq 1.99$, $p \geq .14$, $\eta^2_p \geq .02$ (see Table 6 for descriptive statistics).
### Tables

**Table 1. Study 1 Descriptive Statistics for Main Dependent Variables**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>M(SD)</th>
<th>Stranger</th>
<th>Friend</th>
<th>Romantic Partner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moral Judgment of Transgressor</td>
<td>2.11(1.30)</td>
<td>2.53(1.35)</td>
<td>2.60(1.59)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other-Judging Emotions</td>
<td>2.96(1.24)</td>
<td>2.63(1.13)</td>
<td>2.89(1.29)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morality of Act</td>
<td>1.90(1.10)</td>
<td>2.08(1.14)</td>
<td>2.05(1.13)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Conscious Emotions</td>
<td>1.85(1.06)</td>
<td>2.43(1.07)</td>
<td>2.89(1.17)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion of Other in Self</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3.10(1.74)</td>
<td>3.75(1.92)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2. Study 2 Descriptive Statistics for Main Dependent Variables**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>M(SD)</th>
<th>Stranger</th>
<th>Friend</th>
<th>Romantic Partner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coded Act Severity</td>
<td>1.96(0.60)</td>
<td>1.69(0.57)</td>
<td>1.63(0.63)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral Judgment of Transgressor</td>
<td>2.30(1.29)</td>
<td>3.40(1.14)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other-Judging Emotions</td>
<td>3.06(1.06)</td>
<td>2.20(1.04)</td>
<td>2.28(0.95)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morality of Act</td>
<td>2.00(1.31)</td>
<td>2.62(1.32)</td>
<td>3.04(1.10)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Conscious Emotions</td>
<td>1.68(0.90)</td>
<td>1.96(0.90)</td>
<td>2.17(0.98)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral Judgment of Self</td>
<td>4.64(1.14)</td>
<td>4.13(0.87)</td>
<td>4.25(0.79)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction, Commitment, Closeness Composite</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3.48(0.91)</td>
<td>3.61(0.75)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3. Study 3 Descriptive Statistics for Main Dependent Variables**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>M(SD)</th>
<th>Stranger</th>
<th>Friend</th>
<th>Romantic Partner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moral Judgment of Transgressor</td>
<td>1.89(0.80)</td>
<td>2.93(1.13)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other-Judging Emotions</td>
<td>1.71(0.97)</td>
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<td>1.51(0.57)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Conscious Emotions</td>
<td>1.74(0.90)</td>
<td>1.74(0.78)</td>
<td>1.71(0.79)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral Judgment of Self</td>
<td>3.74(0.64)</td>
<td>3.90(0.66)</td>
<td>4.06(0.57)</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4. Study 1 Descriptive Statistics for Main Dependent Variables by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>M(SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Stranger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral Judgment of Transgressor</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>2.44(1.41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>1.81(1.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other-Judging Emotions</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>2.65(1.15)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>3.25(1.26)</td>
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<td>Morality of Act</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>2.19(1.21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>1.63(0.92)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Conscious Emotions</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>1.87(1.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>1.82(1.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion of Other in Self</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Study 2 Descriptive Statistics for Main Dependent Variables by Gender

<table>
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<th>Variables</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>M(SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Stranger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral Judgment of Transgressor</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>2.43(1.40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>2.27(1.24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other-Judging Emotions</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>2.90(1.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>3.24(0.99)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morality of Act</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>2.30(1.61)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>1.91(1.14)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-Conscious Emotions</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>1.78(0.96)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>1.74(0.93)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral Judgment of Self</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>4.36(1.14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>4.81(1.16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction, Commitment, Closeness Composite</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6. *Study 3 Descriptive Statistics for Main Dependent Variables by Gender*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>M(SD)</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Stranger</td>
<td>Friend</td>
<td>Romantic Partner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral Judgment of Transgressor</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>3.55(1.09)</td>
<td>3.28(1.20)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>2.68(0.99)</td>
<td>2.77(0.65)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other-Judging Emotions</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>1.52(0.60)</td>
<td>1.47(0.63)</td>
<td>1.44(0.68)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>1.37(0.37)</td>
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<td>1.80(0.97)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Conscious Emotions</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>1.40(0.59)</td>
<td>1.42(0.70)</td>
<td>1.89(1.01)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>1.77(0.88)</td>
<td>1.88(0.86)</td>
<td>1.73(0.86)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral Judgment of Self</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>3.92(0.57)</td>
<td>3.38(1.23)</td>
<td>3.52(0.86)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>4.18(0.45)</td>
<td>4.04(0.50)</td>
<td>3.88(0.54)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1. Study 1 Interaction between condition and time predicting perceived closeness.