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Abstract

Why do men have more lenient ethical standards than women? To address this question, we test the *male pragmatism hypothesis*, which posits that men rely on their social and achievement motivations to set ethical standards more so than women. Across two studies, motivation was both manipulated and measured before examining ethicality judgments. Study 1 manipulated identification with two parties in an ethical dilemma and found that men were more *egocentric* than women. Whereas men's ethicality judgments were affected by the identification manipulation, women's judgments were not. Study 2 examined whether implicit negotiation beliefs, which predict achievement motivations to either *demonstrate* or *develop* negotiating skill, predicted ethicality judgments and, if so, whether this relationship was moderated by gender. As hypothesized, fixed beliefs predicted lower ethical standards, particularly for men. In combination, these findings suggest men are more pragmatic in setting ethical standards than women.

Male Pragmatism in Ethical Decision Making

If Bernie Madoff had been born Bernadette, would similarly egregious ethical lapses have occurred? Since Gilligan's (1982) seminal work on moral development, differences have been observed in how men and women distinguish right from wrong. Though the notion that men and women have categorically distinct moral orientations has received only modest empirical support (Jaffey & Shibley Hyde, 2000), women appear to have higher ethical standards than men in business contexts (Franke, Crown, & Spake, 1997). Indeed, men are more accepting of ethically questionable negotiation tactics (Lewicki & Robinson, 1998; Robinson, Lewicki, & Donahue, 2000) and engage in more deception than women in strategic interactions (Dreber & Johannesson, 2008).

To understand the source of this gender gap in ethics, we explore its cognitive-motivational underpinnings. We hypothesize that men are more *pragmatic* in their ethical reasoning than women. Ethical pragmatism involves judging ethicality on the basis of practical consequences and whether decision makers' goals are achieved (James, 1896). People are generally motivated to interpret ambiguous information beneficially and to seek information supporting self-interested conclusions (Kunda, 1990; Lord, Ross, & Lepper, 1979). However, men in particular are socialized to "get the job done" and solve the problem at hand (Bussey & Maughan, 1982). As a result, we expect men to reason ethically as motivated tacticians, showing more or less bias depending on their motivations (Fiske, 2004; Fiske & Taylor, 1991).

The current work examines two manifestations of male pragmatism. First, we explore whether men are particularly prone to egocentric interpretations of ethically ambiguous situations. We expect men to assess the ethicality of actions on the basis of their identification

with parties in ethical dilemmas. Second, we explore whether men are particularly instrumental in setting ethical standards. We expect men's achievement goals to guide their ethics, with those motivated to *demonstrate* competency exhibiting lower ethical standards than those motivated to *develop* competency. For women, what benefits them personally and what helps them to accomplish their goals are expected to be orthogonal to their ethical standards.

We ground our examination of male pragmatism in negotiations, or strategic interactions involving cooperation and competition. Gender stereotypes linking masculinity to negotiating success give men an advantage (Kray & Thompson, 2005; Stuhlmacher & Walters, 1999), yet they may also enhance men's felt pressure to succeed (Kray, Thompson & Galinsky, 2001). Because masculinity is precarious and requires continuous validation, threatening it can provoke aggressive behaviors (Vandello, Bosson, Cohen, Burnaford, & Weaver, 2008). Here we explore whether the pressure for men to demonstrate competency in this domain predicts lower ethical standards.

We make several novel contributions to the literature. In contrast to previous work, which has documented gender main effects without fully explaining them, the current work develops a theoretical framework for understanding the intersection of gender and ethics. By demonstrating a stronger influence of social motivations on ethical judgments for men than women, we address the question of why gender differences emerge in ethical decision making. For the first time, we link egocentrism and instrumentalism to gender and the formulation of ethicality judgments. Whether considering the level of identification with negotiating parties or how success on the task is mentally framed, ethical decision making is more influenced by social motivations for men than women.

Overview of Experiments

To test the male pragmatism hypothesis, we both manipulate and measure social and achievement motivations across two studies. In Study 1 we manipulated participants' identification with negotiators in an ethically ambiguous situation and then measured ethicality judgments. We predicted that men's determination of right versus wrong would be more influenced by their identification with negotiators than would women's judgments. In Study 2 we measured implicit negotiation beliefs, which correspond with goals to demonstrate versus develop negotiating ability, and then examined whether they predicted ethicality judgments. We expected a stronger relationship between implicit negotiation beliefs and ethicality judgments for men than for women.

Study 1

Since Hastorf and Cantril's (1954) seminal study of divergent recollections of a football game among rival spectators, egocentrism's role in shaping social perception has been appreciated. Dartmouth students seemed to have witnessed a different game than Harvard students. Recollections of key plays and perceptions of sportsmanship were biased in a direction favoring each student body's own team.

Just like students' identification with their teams produced biased judgments, identifying with a particular negotiator can produce egocentrism. For example, identification with negotiators in a lawsuit influences what is believed to be a fair settlement (Babcock, Lowenstein, Issacharoff, & Camerer, 1995). Similarly, egocentrism can impact ethicality judgments. Kronzon and Darley (1999) showed that taking the perspective of either a perpetrator or victim biased evaluations of an ethically ambiguous action. Observers who identified with a party who had

misrepresented their position in order to secure concessions from their counterpart regarded this action as more morally acceptable than observers who identified with the counterparty.

Myriad research speaks to the powerful role that egocentrism plays in negotiations, arising in part from negotiators' motivation to justify their side's perspective. Yet the question of whether gender moderates this relationship remains unexplored. The current study seeks to fill this gap by examining whether men's ethical judgments are more egocentric than are women's.

Method

Participants

Ninety-six MBA students at an East Coast university participated in this study as part of a class exercise. The sample was 67% male and 33% female.

Materials and Procedure

Participants evaluated a scenario adapted from an advice column published in *The New York Times Magazine* in which a person describes an ethical dilemma concerning the possible purchase of a home (Cohen, 2004). Specifically, the scenario read:

I have an opportunity to buy the property of my dreams. The problem is that the elderly couple who have lived there for more than 40 years love the house and assume that I will maintain it. I intend to tear it down and build a more modern house on this beautiful property. If I reveal my plan, they may refuse to sell me the house and the land. Am I ethically bound to tell?

Participants were asked to "provide your own advice to the buyer" in an open-ended paragraph.

Negotiator Identification Manipulation

We manipulated negotiator identification via role assignments in a negotiation (*Bullard Houses, 1995*) they completed prior to evaluating the scenario. This simulation involves two agents in a real estate transaction (cf. Kern & Chugh, 2009). Buyers' agents faced a very similar ethical dilemma to the scenario because they were prohibited from revealing to sellers' agents their client's intended use of the property, a use inconsistent with the sellers' interests.

Ethicality Judgments

Two judges coded participant responses for ethicality. Consistent with the newspaper columnist's advice (e.g., "By deliberately withholding facts the seller regards as paramount, you are practicing tacit deceit, and there's nothing ethical about that."), unconditionally advising the buyer to reveal the intended use of the property was deemed the ethical response. Responses coded as ethical included: "I think you are ethically bound to tell. By withholding information or lying outright, you are preventing the seller from making an educated decision about the transaction." Responses coded as unethical included: "No you are not. A rule of real estate is 'never fall in love with bricks and mortar'. The couple will move on and find a new home and lifestyle." In line with the columnist's advice, participants who equivocated in their response (i.e. "it depends") were coded as unethical ($n=31$). Seven participants failed to answer the question posed in the scenario; these responses were dropped from further analysis. Inter-rater agreement for the remaining 89 participants was adequate ($\kappa=.89$). Disagreements were resolved through discussion. Word length of responses ($M=57.97$, $sd=40.47$) was unrelated to gender, negotiator role and ethicality judgments (all $p>.15$).

Results and Discussion

We examined whether gender and negotiator identification impacted ethicality judgments with a hierarchical log-linear analysis (see Table 1). As in past research, females were more likely than males to make the ethical recommendation that the buyer's intentions be divulged, $\chi^2(1, 89)=8.58, p=.003$. Consistent with the pragmatism hypothesis, gender interacted with negotiator identification, $\chi^2(1, 89)=3.88, p=.049$. Men identifying with the buyer were significantly less likely to recommend the buyer's intentions be revealed than did men identifying with the seller, $\chi^2(1, 59)=4.68, p=.03$; in contrast, women's advice to the buyer was not significantly related to role identification, $\chi^2(1, 30)=.71, p=.40$.

As in past research, men demonstrated more lenient ethical standards than women. More importantly, we obtained support for the male pragmatism hypothesis: men were relatively egocentric in their ethicality judgments. That is, men who identified with the buyer were significantly less likely to recommend that the buyer's intentions be revealed than men who identified with the seller. In contrast, women's ethicality judgments were insensitive to their identification with negotiators.

Study 2

The current study examines another facet of male pragmatism by exploring instrumentalism in setting ethical standards. Instrumentalism implies a consideration of goals and expectations. Related work finds men are more instrumental than women in deciding whether to trust in an investment game (Buchan, Croson, & Solnick, 2008). In this research, men's contribution to a risky investment depended on whether they expected reciprocation from their

counterpart, whose investment would ultimately determine the size of the return for both. In contrast, women's investment size was unaffected by their expectations of reciprocation.

Here we examine male instrumentalism in ethicality judgments. Although ambitious goals reduce ethicality (Schweitzer, Ordonez, & Douma, 2004), does the *type* of goal adopted also matter? To address this question, we measured implicit negotiation beliefs (INBs), an individual difference producing distinct achievement goals (Elliott & Dweck, 1988), and then examined their relationship with ethicality judgments. Dweck and Leggett (1988) first distinguished between fixed versus malleable beliefs about human nature (i.e. intelligence). Since then, Kray and Haselhuhn (2007) extended this work into negotiations: whereas fixed beliefs suggest negotiating prowess is innate, malleable beliefs suggest hard work predicts negotiation success. By directing efforts towards demonstrating competency (rather than developing it), fixed beliefs predict poorer negotiation performance when success is uncertain. In contrast, malleable beliefs promote the adoption of learning goals, leading to persistence and growth even when failure is possible.

Assuming more lenient ethical standards provide negotiators with greater flexibility in achieving the concomitant goal of demonstrating success, negotiators with fixed beliefs are expected to set lower ethical standards than negotiators with malleable beliefs. Just as beliefs in a fixed life course (i.e., determinism) promote cheating (Vohs & Schooler, 2008), fixed beliefs about human nature are expected to reduce ethical standards in belief-relevant domains. The male pragmatism hypothesis predicts this pattern to be stronger for men than women.

Method

Participants

Four hundred eleven MBA and undergraduate business students were recruited from large East Coast ($n=299$) and West Coast universities ($n=121$). Most participants (69%, $n=284$) participated as part of a class exercise; the remainder ($n=127$) participated in exchange for \$10. In the analyses below, we control for both participant location and payment type. The sample was 53% male and 47% female.

Materials and Procedure

We measured participants' INBs prior to completing the Self-reported Inappropriate Negotiation Strategies (SINS) scale (Robinson, Lewicki, & Donahue, 2000), which gauges the perceived appropriateness of ethically ambiguous negotiation tactics. East Coast participants completed both scales as part of a single survey, with a filler task in between. West Coast participants completed the INB scale and then rated the appropriateness of negotiation tactics eight weeks later.

Implicit negotiation beliefs. We administered Kray and Haselhuhn's (2007) INB scale ($\alpha=.77$).

Ethical judgments. The SINS scale involves rating the appropriateness of 16 negotiation tactics (Robinson et al., 2000), including tactics related to: 1) traditional competitive bargaining; 2) attacking opponent's network; 3) false promises; 4) misrepresentation; and 5) inappropriate information gathering.

Results and Discussion

A hierarchical regression examined the relationship between gender, INBs, and ethicality judgments. Three statistically significant effects emerged. Consistent with past research, males rated the ethically ambiguous tactics as more appropriate than did females, $\beta=.16$, $B=.31$, $SE=0.09$, $t=3.287$, $p<.001$. Second, as expected, fixed beliefs predicted more tolerance for questionable negotiation tactics, $\beta=-.13$, $B=-.02$, $SE=0.01$, $t=-2.59$, $p=.01$. Finally, consistent with the male pragmatism hypothesis, a significant INB X Gender interaction emerged, $\beta=-.72$, $B=-.04$, $SE=0.02$, $t=-2.20$, $p=.03$. To understand the significant interaction, we conducted separate regressions for males and females (see Table 2). As depicted in Figure 1, INBs predicted SINS responses for males ($\beta=-.24$, $B=-.04$, $SE=0.01$, $t=-3.44$, $p<.001$), but not females, $\beta=-.04$, $B=-.006$, $SE=0.01$, $t=-0.47$, *ns*.

As expected, men were more lenient in their ethicality judgments than women. To examine whether gender differences in instrumentality account for this pattern, we first showed that fixed beliefs led to greater acceptance of ethically questionable negotiating tactics than malleable beliefs. We then showed that men's ethicality judgments were uniquely predicted by their INBs; women's ethical judgments were insensitive to whether negotiating ability was believed to be fixed versus malleable. This pattern is consistent with the hypothesis that men's instrumental goals—in this case, whether to demonstrate versus develop negotiating prowess—shaped their ethicality judgments.

General Discussion

Across two studies, men demonstrated more pragmatism in their ethical reasoning than women. Like past research, we observed that men are more lenient in their judgments of

ethically ambiguous actions than women. In addition, for the first time, the current research provides evidence to suggest men's ethical leniency is driven by pragmatism in that they were more egocentric (Study 1) and more instrumental (Study 2) in how they set ethical standards. By both manipulating identification with negotiating parties (Study 1) and measuring implicit negotiation beliefs (Study 2), the combination of approaches suggests a robust tendency for men to adopt a pragmatic approach to judging ethically ambiguous situations and negotiating tactics.

Male ethical pragmatism was demonstrated in two ways. First, men's ethicality judgments were influenced by their identification with negotiators in a way that women's judgments were not. Men who had just faced an ethical dilemma about whether to disclose information about their client's intended use of a property were less likely to conclude that information disclosure was ethically required than men who had been in the position of wanting this type of information from their counterpart. In Study 2, we first demonstrated that fixed views of ability, which promote goals to demonstrate competency, led to more leniency in ethical judgments than malleable beliefs. Consistent with our male egocentrism hypothesis, this pattern was driven entirely by men. Men with malleable beliefs held higher ethical standards than men with fixed beliefs. For women, no such pattern emerged.

We began by asking whether a hypothetical Bernadette Madoff would have committed the same infamously unethical actions as the real Bernie. The current research suggests not and, importantly, offers an explanation as to why not. Though men and women may share common social and achievement motivations, they appear to differ in the extent to which their experiences and beliefs are called upon to set ethical standards. By relying more heavily on their motivations, men derive considerable leeway in setting ethical standards, rendering them more vulnerable to ethical lapses.

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Table 1

Study 1: Ethical responses by Gender and Negotiator Role Identification

	Buyer	Seller	Overall
Male	20.83% (<i>n</i> = 24)	48.57% (<i>n</i> = 35)	37.29%
Female	71.43% (<i>n</i> = 21)	55.56% (<i>n</i> = 9)	66.67%
Overall	44.44%	50.00%	

Table 2

Study 2: Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations Between Variables for Males and Females

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<i>Males</i>									
1. INBs	35.85	5.34	--						
2. Overall SINS	3.27	0.92	-.27	--					
3. Traditional bargaining	5.39	1.29	-.09	.50	--				
4. Attacking network	2.45	1.18	-.27	.78	.22	--			
5. False promises	2.36	1.23	-.32	.73	.04	.57	--		
6. Misrepresentation	2.98	1.17	-.19	.85	.34	.57	.58	--	
7. Information gathering	3.28	1.45	-.14	.78	.24	.55	.48	.54	--

<i>Females</i>									
1. INBs	35.17	5.54	--						
2. Overall SINS	2.99	0.96	-.01	--					
3. Traditional bargaining	5.13	1.49	.15	.62	--				
4. Attacking network	2.10	1.07	-.08	.76	.27	--			
5. False promises	2.06	1.03	-.09	.72	.17	.61	--		

6. Misrepresentation	3.01	1.20	-.02	.85	.44	.58	.62	--
7. Information gathering	2.74	1.35	.01	.80	.38	.65	.54	.55

Note: Significant correlations ($p < .05$) are in boldface.

Figure Caption

Figure 1: Appropriateness of SINS tactics by gender and implicit negotiation beliefs.

