

# Investigating The Relationship Between Moral Judgment Intensity and Motivational Relevance

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## INTRODUCTION

What makes people condemn certain behaviors more than others?

- **Motivational relevance** influences the degree to which a representation impacts thought and behavior (Eitam & Higgins, 2010)
- In two studies, we tested whether motivational relevance predicts **differences in moral judgments**
- We utilized a framework of goal pursuit activities that distinguishes **four motive domains** (promotion-truth, prevention-truth, promotion-control, and prevention-control; Nakkawita & Higgins, 2021)

## METHODS

**Participants:** 67 (S1) + 73 (S1B) M-Turk workers

**Moral judgment assessment:** Participants judged the immorality of scenarios involving broken promises in each of the four motive domains. Example:

Colleague A was finalizing a contract that was needed to close a business deal. Colleague B promised to Colleague A to verify the terms of the contract, but did not do so.<sup>1</sup>

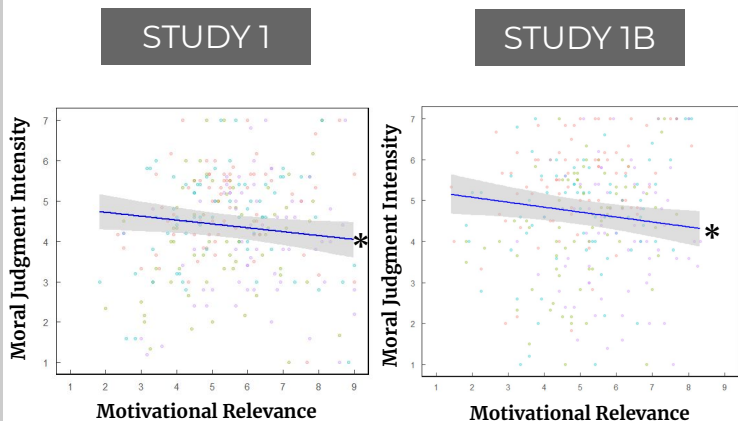
How morally wrong is Colleague B's failure to verify the terms of Colleague A's contract?

Not at all morally wrong   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Very morally wrong

<sup>1</sup>In Study 1B, the outcome was held constant in all scenarios by specifying that, as a result, Colleague A lost the client.

## RESULTS

When other individuals fail to act as promised, people are **less harsh** when judging failures from **more motivationally relevant domains**



### Motive Domain

● Prevention-control   ● Prevention-truth   ● Promotion-control   ● Promotion-truth

## METHODS (cont.)

**Motivational relevance assessment:** Participants rated activities from each domain with regard to:

- Perceived frequency of engagement

Looking back, how **frequently** do you engage in this activity?

	Never at all	1	2	Rarely	3	4	Sometimes	5	6	Frequently	7	8	9	Constantly
Discovering	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Verifying	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Assessing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

- Satisfaction

How **satisfying** do you find this activity?

	Not at all satisfying	1	2	3	4	Somewhat satisfying	5	6	7	8	9	Extremely satisfying
Discovering	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Verifying	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Assessing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## DISCUSSION

- Studies help to establish the **nature of the relations between motivation and moral judgments**
- Suggest that **people may engage in motivated cognition when judging moral failures** in motive domains that are personally relevant

**Future directions:** Test for causal association between motivational relevance and moral judgment intensity

### References

Eitam, B., & Higgins, E. T. (2010). Motivation in mental accessibility: Relevance of a representation (ROAR) as a new framework. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 4(10), 951–967. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9004.2010.00309.x>  
 Nakkawita, E., & Higgins, E. T. (2021). *Motivating the journey: An integrative framework of prevention versus promotion goal pursuit activities*. Manuscript under review.