THE EFFECTS OF PERSPECTIVE TAKING AND EMPATHY ON MORAL JUDGMENTS OF BLAME AND PRAISE

A Thesis
by
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Submitted to the Graduate School
at Appalachian State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS

August 2018
Department of Psychology

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Abstract

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JUDGMENTS OF BLAME AND PRAISE

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assessment of the outcomes of a moral event. Perspective taking and empathizing with

people involved in a moral situation were predicted to differentially influence moral

judgments. Perspective taking was predicted to guide observers to focus on the mental states

of an agent, whereas empathy was predicted to guide observers to be more sensitive to the

outcomes of an event and who is harmed or benefitted by the actions of a moral agent. In

turn, perspective taking would intensify moral judgments of blame and praise for outcomes

that were produced intentionally, and empathizing would intensify moral judgments for

accidental actions. Two studies manipulated information about an agent's mental state and

event outcomes by having participants read vignettes that described accidental or attempted

blameworthy and praiseworthy events. Participants were instructed to either take the

perspective of or empathize with the people in the story and make judgments of blame and

praise. Study 1 examined judgments of blame and Study 2 attempted to replicate and extend

Study 1 by including praiseworthy vignettes. Together, the studies yielded mixed results.

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Empathizing was found to produce greater judgments of blame for accidental actions. Moral

judgments of attempted acts did not robustly differ across instruction conditions.

Acknowledgments

I cannot thank my faculty mentor, Dr. Andrew Monroe, enough for his enduring support, patience, and expertise throughout the development and completion of this thesis. I would also like to thank Dr. Twila Wingrove and Dr. Lisa Emery for being a part of my committee and for providing valuable feedback throughout this process. Funding for the collection of data for this thesis was provided by the Appalachian State Graduate Research Associate Mentoring Program.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to my closest friends and family members for always supporting and believing in me.

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The Effects of Perspective Taking and Empathy on Moral Judgments of Blame and Praise

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Abstract

Moral judgments arise from a consideration of both mental state inferences and an assessment of the outcomes of a moral event. Perspective taking and empathizing with people involved in a moral situation were predicted to differentially influence moral judgments. Perspective taking was predicted to guide observers to focus on the mental states of an agent, whereas empathy was predicted to guide observers to be more sensitive to the outcomes of an event and who is harmed or benefitted by the actions of a moral agent. In turn, perspective taking would intensify moral judgments of blame and praise for outcomes that were produced intentionally, and empathizing would intensify moral judgments for accidental actions. Two studies manipulated information about an agent's mental state and event outcomes by having participants read vignettes that described accidental or attempted blameworthy and praiseworthy events. Participants were instructed to either take the perspective of or empathize with the people in the story and make judgments of blame and praise. Study 1 examined judgments of blame and Study 2 attempted to replicate and extend Study 1 by including praiseworthy vignettes. Together, the studies yielded mixed results. Empathizing was found to produce greater judgments of blame for accidental actions. Moral judgments of attempted acts did not robustly differ across instruction conditions.

Keywords: moral judgment, mental state inference, perspective taking, empathy

The Effects of Perspective Taking and Empathy on Moral Judgments of Blame and Praise

Moral judgment and blame, in particular, may be one of the oldest tools for social regulation. Blame highlights a community's values and social norms, as well as establishes boundaries for cooperative social behavior. Blaming persons that harm others or disrupt the flow of communal life discourages future undesirable behavior (Malle & Bennett, 2002; Malle, Guglielmo, & Monroe, 2014) and may even promote cooperation (Fehr & Gächter, 2002). Past research has proposed that people have a natural inclination to blame culpable agents (Alicke, 2000). Blame, however, is a complex social act and making moral judgments of blame requires integrating information about moral events (e.g., the severity of harm; the social meaning of that act) and agent's mental states—what the person intended, wanted, or knew when she acted.

There are many competing theories regarding how people make moral judgments. Most models agree, however, that moral judgments rely on a combination of inferences about the severity of an event's outcome and the agent's mental states (Cushman, 2008). Event evaluation involves assessing the amount of harm or suffering inflicted on a victim, whereas evaluation of mental state inferences involves attempting to understand an agent's intentions, beliefs, and desires. The present investigation examines how a heightened focus on either of these factors can modify moral judgments of praise and blame. Specifically, I examine whether empathy and perspective taking guide perceivers' attention differently to an event's outcome or to an agent's mental states. Below, I review research on the process of making blame judgments, focusing on The Path Model of Blame (Malle et al., 2014). I then outline how empathy and perspective taking might affect this process by directing perceivers'

attention to events versus mental states, and lastly, I review past literature to draw potential distinctions between moral judgments of blame and praise.

The Process of Blame

The Path Model of Blame describes the information processing steps involved in making a blame judgment. The model suggests that the process of blame begins by detecting and evaluating a morally-relevant norm violation (e.g., a slain body on the ground, a dented car door, or a bruised and crying child). Following event detection, moral perceivers search for a responsible causal agent. For example, once a person sees that their car door is horribly dented, he or she is motivated to find out who or what caused the dent: Was it a careless person or falling stones from a nearby hillside? If the event was caused by a non-agent (e.g., windblown rocks), the process ends—people may be angry, but they do not blame rocks or the wind. If, however, the event was caused by an agent, then perceivers attempt to determine whether the behavior was intentional (i.e., dented the door on purpose) or unintentional (Malle & Holbrook, 2012). If the act was intentional, then perceivers seek information about the agent's reasons (e.g., motives, desire, plans or beliefs), and if the behavior was unintentional, perceivers consider whether the agent could have or should have prevented the harmful event.

Whereas the Path Model offers a detailed account of how perceivers process specific pieces of morally relevant information, one could break this process into two broad, principal steps: (1) detecting and evaluating events (the Event stage of the model) and (2) attending to the causal and mental contributions of an agent (the Intentionality, Reasons, Obligation, and Preventability stages of the model). The following sections go on to explain in detail these important contributing elements.

Events Powerfully Shape Moral Judgments

The detection of norm-violating events initiates the moral judgment process (Malle et al., 2014) and motivates perceivers to find the cause of a norm-violating event (Malle, 2004; Mikhail, 2007). In some cases, event detection may be quite sparse—noticing that an object is broken or damaged—whereas, in other cases, events may provide a rich tapestry of information (e.g., a man holding a smoking gun over a victim). Additionally, what counts as a norm violation will vary widely based on perceivers' values, culture, and social norms (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009; Rai & Fiske, 2011). Regardless of *how* people define moral violations, detecting a moral violation is usually accompanied by an initial evaluative response (e.g., anger) based on the amount of harm inflicted. Indeed, some researchers consider such evaluative responses to be the primary motivating force behind moral judgments (Alicke, 2000; Haidt, 2001; Mazzocco, Alicke, & Davis, 2004). For example, Alicke and colleagues show that event severity (i.e., the amount of harm inflicted on a victim) influences people's perceptions of causality (Alicke, 1992) intentions (Alicke, Weigold, & Rogers, 1990), and preventability (Mazzocco et al., 2004). Specifically, when events are more severe people believe agents were more causal, had worse intentions, and were more able to prevent bad events (i.e., were more negligent) compared to less severe events.

Other moral theorists place a similar emphasis on the importance of events for moral judgment. Haidt (2001) proposes that perceiving a moral event (e.g., someone cleaning a toilet with the American flag) triggers an immediate, intuitive moral judgment (e.g., that's wrong!). Knobe (2003; 2010) echoes this perspective, suggesting that moral judgments are intuitive and that the morality of events (their goodness or badness) biases people's

perceptions of the social world including causality (Knobe & Fraser, 2008), intentionality

(Knobe, 2004), and even freedom (Phillips & Knobe, 2009).

Together these theoretical perspectives highlight the importance of how people

perceive and evaluate moral events for subsequent moral judgments. However, events alone

often do not provide sufficient information to make a judgment. For example, if one were

judging a person on the basis of events alone, then a woman who shoots a former lover for

threatening her children would have to be appraised identically to a woman who shoots a

former lover out of selfish jealously. Most people would agree that even though the events

are identical (a man is killed in both cases), the two women deserve different amounts of

blame because of their mental states. Thus, inferring the mental states of others is a

complementary and necessary process for making moral judgments.

Mental State Inferences are Central to Explaining Moral Events

Whereas event-focused models of blame provide useful information about the process

of moral judgment, attending to events ignores some of the important information

influencing people's moral judgments. Understanding the motives, desire, and beliefs of

others is critical for accurately assessing moral events. For example, Gray and Wegner

(2008) demonstrate that people experience an electrical shock delivered by a partner as more

painful if the partner intentionally delivered the shock compared to doing so accidentally.

Similarly, Reeder, Vonk, Ronk, Ham, and Lawrence (2004) show that even for positive

events, people's judgments of others depend on the actor's motives. In this experiment,

researchers asked participants to evaluate a scenario where a professor dropped a stack of

books he was carrying, and a student went out of her way to help him (a clearly morally

praiseworthy act). In this study, Reeder manipulated the motives of the student such that in

one condition the student was motivated by a desire to be helpful, whereas in another condition the student was motivated by a desire to 'suck up' in order to win an award the professor was handing out later. This manipulation of the student's mental states fundamentally changed participants' judgments of the student's moral character—they rated her as a good moral person in the case where she acted out of a desire to be helpful, but participants rated the student as being immoral when she acted out of nefarious self-interest. Thus, mental state inferences, independent of events, play a critical role in how people make their moral judgments.

In a recent paper, Cushman (2008) demonstrates how mental state and event information come together in the moral judgment process. In his studies, participants were presented with a set of vignettes that manipulated an agent's beliefs about an event and manipulated the outcome (whether or not harm was caused by the agent). Participants were then asked about how much blame and punishment the agent deserved, alongside questions about how wrong and permissible the behavior was. Cushman (2008) showed that people strongly differentiated between attempted harm (where an agent fails to cause harm but has malicious intentions/motives), and accidental harm (where an agent causes harm but has innocent intentions/motives). People blame attempted harm more harshly than accidental harm, showing that perceivers place a premium on a person's mental states, while still attending to events. Additionally, Cushman (2008) demonstrated that different moral judgments differentially rely on mental state versus event information. Judgments of wrongness and permissibility were primarily driven by the mental states of the agent, specifically, beliefs and desires. By contrast, judgments of blame and punishment responded to both mental states and events.

Similarly, recent work with fMRI further highlights the distinction between events and mental states, as well as the central contribution of mental state inferences to moral judgments. The right temporal parietal junction (RTPJ) is identified as a key area implicated in the integration of outcome and belief information for making moral judgments. Higher activation in this region was predictive of using mental state information (above outcome information) to make a moral judgment (Young & Saxe, 2008; Young & Saxe, 2009). Similar to Cushman's studies, Young & Saxe (2009) manipulated both outcome and belief information using vignettes. Agents in the scenario either had neutral or negative intentions and believed that they were or were not causing harm. For example, in one scenario, Grace is visiting a chemical plant with a friend and goes to a nearby coffee machine to get some coffee for her friend. Grace adds a white powder to her friend's drink. The substance is labeled as "toxic" or as "sugar" leading Grace to believe the powder may or not be safe. If she selects the "toxic" substance, she intends to harm her friend. If she selects "sugar" then she has neutral intent. This belief information is crossed with a neutral or harmful outcome, where the substance either is or is not harmful to Grace's friend. The results of this study revealed that higher activation in the RTPJ was correlated with participants blaming Grace less for causing harm accidentally than participants with lower activation in this area. Successful harm (Grace selecting a toxic chemical that made her friend sick) was marked by less activation in the RTPJ, as well as greater blame.

The reduced activation in this region when a harmful outcome is paired with harmful intention has been hypothesized as due to differences in the processing of accidental versus attempted harm. Judging an accidental act requires a robust consideration of what the agent knew or believed when they were acting in order to decide whether the agent should be

blamed for the harm they caused. However, for attempted harm there is no causal outcome competing with a consideration of the agent's mental state, leading to a reduced response in areas associated with the inference of mental states.

Other experiments have found similar results where the RTPJ was consistently selective for mental state information rather than information about other relevant social features of moral events such as physical traits (e.g., appearance, bodily sensations) or personality traits (Saxe & Powell, 2006; Young, Cushman, Hauser, & Saxe, 2007). This consistent regional selectivity for mental state information suggests that mental states play a central role in moral judgment. Together these studies highlight a that (1) events and mental states are key inputs to moral judgment and (2) that processing these pieces of moral information is distinct. Given these two claims, it would be informative to consider how varying activities that we engage in might impact our moral judgments. More specifically, if we are directed to shift our attention more or less towards either event or mental state information, might this varying focus impact how our moral judgments develop? Recent research suggests that empathy and perspective taking are such activities that may differentially affect how perceivers' moral judgments turn out.

Empathy & Perspective Taking

Empathy is sometimes referred to broadly without regard to the specific elements that compose it. Empathy, however, is a multidimensional construct that has both cognitive and affective components. The cognitive aspects—sometimes referred to as "perspective taking"—are usually defined as the ability to "step outside of oneself" to recognize the intentions, mental states, and point of view of another person (Davis, 1980). By contrast, "empathy" or "empathic concern" captures the feelings and emotional response that the

empathizer has for another person (i.e., feeling what they feel), but not necessarily a consideration of the target's point of view (Batson, Klein, Highberger, & Shaw, 1995).

Data from studies on the neural bases of empathy suggest that perspective taking and affective empathy belong to different neural systems: one cognitive and one emotional (Batson & Moran, 1999; Davis, 1980; Decety & Cowell, 2014; Kanske, Bockler, Trautwein, Lesemann, & Singer, 2016; Shamay-Tsoory, 2011; Tuller, Bryan, Heyman, & Christenfeld, 2015). Regions associated with perspective taking heavily overlap with areas associated with theory of mind and mental state inference processes, including the right and left temporal parietal junction (RTPJ, LTPJ), precuneus, and medial prefrontal cortex (Young et al., 2007). Contrastingly, regions associated with affective empathy include the anterior insula, inferior frontal gyrus, and the anterior cingulate cortex (Kanske et al., 2016), areas often associated with perceptions of the distress of others, emotional stimuli (Decety & Howard, 2013), and the perception of others' pain (Decety & Jackson, 2004).

Not only are perspective taking and empathy differently instantiated in the brain, they also have distinct social functions and behavioral effects. For example, perspective taking is more adapted to strategic social interactions (e.g., negotiations) compared to empathy. Galinsky, Maddux, Gilin, and White (2008) compared the effects of perspective taking and empathy during a game where participants negotiated over the purchase of a property or over a job offer. In each scenario, a prima facie solution was not available. So, in order to succeed in the negotiation, participants needed to uncover any bargaining chips that might be available other than the stated cost. The participants were instructed to either focus on their own needs and strategy (control), empathize with (e.g., imagine how they feel, what are their emotions?), or take the perspective of their opponent (e.g., what are they thinking? What are

their goals in this scenario?). Of the three instructions, perspective taking was most effective

at producing agreements that maximized both individual and collective gains. Empathizing,

on the other hand, had no advantage over the control group, thus failing to uncover the

specific motives and goals of their opponent that might have led to a more ideal agreement

(Galinsky et al., 2008).

   Gilin, Maddux, Carpenter, and Galinsky (2013) conducted several studies examining

when perspective taking or empathy are more advantageous in competitive situations.

Perspective taking was better suited for competitive situations that required cognitive skill

versus affective skill. For example, participants that scored high in perspective taking on the

Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI), a scale used to measure empathy and perspective taking

tendencies, performed better in a simulated, dyadic war game. Success in the game was

determined by being able to infer the opponents' goals and behavior over the course of

several rounds. More empathetic participants were poorer at choosing the appropriate

strategy as well as successfully carrying them out. In a following study using a paradigm

where people were organized into groups with the goal of building a coalition by interacting

with group members and later "matching" with a partner, participants high in empathy were

more successful at matching than those high in perspective taking tendencies. Accuracy in

matching with a coalition partner was determined by partners choosing the same partner as

them, which is facilitated by making a judgment about the interpersonal connection you

made with your interaction partners at the start of the task. Being more empathetic, compared

to being better at taking perspective, provided the empathizers with the emotional

intelligence needed to be better at choosing the correct coalition partners.

One reason suggested for the dissimilar outcomes for perspective taking and empathy is that each activity focuses the observer on different types of information. Perspective-taking is a cognitively immersive process where the observer identifies the target's mental states and considers what their experience might be like (Ku, Wang, & Galinsky, 2015). Here, the observer goes beyond mere recognition of emotion and actively tries to understand what the target might think or believe about the situation. The mentalizing aspects of perspective taking are what makes it more effective when performing tasks that require inferring the thoughts of others. Being empathetic, however, is more useful when attempting to understand the emotional states of others (e.g., building social bonds, cooperating; Gilin et al., 2013).

Empathy may lead observers to attend more to moral outcomes than mental states. Although this has not been examined in the moral judgment literature, support for this prediction comes from work on moral typecasting. The theory of moral typecasting posits that underlying our assessment of moral event lies the perception of a moral dyad, consisting of a moral agent and moral patient (Gray, Young, Waytz, 2012). A moral agent is someone that can act autonomously and cause acts that have an effect on others. The moral patient experiences the effects of the agent's actions. The emotional responsiveness that results from being empathetic makes us more aware of and sensitive to the presence of the moral patient, thus, causing outcomes to drive moral judgments more than mental states.

Related to the current project, perspective taking has been shown to have a more pronounced effect on moral judgments of blame compared to empathy. Lucas, Galinsky, & Murhnigan (2016) had participants recall moral transgressions and categorize them based on malevolent or benevolent intentions and then were given instructions either to take the

perspective of or empathize with the perpetuator of the task. Control subjects were given instructions to focus on themselves. Relative to control, perspective taking amplified judgments of blame and punishment when the perpetrator had malevolent intent, but perspective taking mitigated blame relative to control when the perpetrator had neutral intent. Contrastingly, empathy (relative to control) did not exacerbate blame in response to agents' bad intent, nor did it mitigate blame in response to innocent intent.

Further, in a follow-up study that had participants play a dictator game where they were allotted funds to punish a malevolent or nonmalevolent dictator, the results were similar. Perspective taking led participants to spend a much greater amount of their own funds to punish a dictator based on his malevolent intent, above and beyond the empathy and self-focus group (Lucas et al., 2016). These results suggest that taking the perspective of a malevolent agent leads the observer to home in on this mental state information and intensify judgments in a way that empathy does not. Praise judgments were not examined in this study, but it is possible that perspective-taking and empathy could also have their own distinctive effects on praise judgments. This current study seeks to uncover more ground concerning how these two activities might factor into moral judgments of praise and blame specifically.

Despite support for the distinct outcomes that perspective taking and empathizing can produce, it is worth noting the potential for perspective taking and empathizing to produce similar outcomes when it comes to making moral judgments. Perspective taking has been used as an effective way to promote or activate empathetic responses and feelings towards others, thus, indicating less independence between the two behaviors (Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000; Myers, Laurent, & Hodges, 2014). Even though different neural structures are implicated in perspective taking and empathizing, due to the similarity of the

behaviors, there is clearly overlap in the processes associated with each, which may lead to similar outcomes. Many attempts have been made to try to disentangle the cognitive and affective components that separate perspective taking from empathy (Decety & Cowell, 2014; Melloni, Lopez, & Ibanez, 2014). The nature of this study, its context and design may potentially yield similarities rather than differences between perspective taking and empathy. Lucas et al. (2016) had participants think of real-life moral events that they had witnessed in their workplace in the past. Our set of studies uses novel, third-person vignettes to examine moral judgments and participants will read instructions on how to empathize or take perspective of the individuals in the vignettes. Prior studies that have examined the effects of perspective taking and empathy in varying social contexts (e.g., negotiation, competitive interactions, first-person perspectives) may be more likely to elicit measurable differences in perspective taking and empathy in a way that third-person vignettes may not be able to.

Extending from Blame to Understand Praise

Whereas the vast majority of research and theory focuses on judgments of moral violations, perhaps equally important is how people evaluate morally good behavior. In part, this focus on moral violations and blame, in particular, derives from the power of negative events to command human attention and cognitive resources more powerfully than positive events (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001). Additionally, ignoring or misperceiving negative events is likely more costly and risky compared to making similar perceptual errors for positive events.

Despite the relatively sparse treatment in the literature, several studies have documented a number of interesting asymmetries between judgments of blame and praise. Importantly, these asymmetries often correspond to how people weight information about

events and mental states. For example, for negative behaviors, intentional acts are reliably

blamed more than unintentional ones (Malle & Bennett, 2002; Ohtsubo, 2007); however, this

effect is weaker for praiseworthy behaviors. Pizarro, Uhlmann, and Bloom (2003) observed

a "discounting" of moral judgments of blame relative to praise. For negative behaviors,

people discounted blame if an agent behaved impulsively or expressed behavior-inconsistent

mental states (e.g., regret); however, perceivers did not similarly discount for positive

behaviors. For people who exhibited positive behaviors, observers believed that these

individuals had compatible desires (i.e., I don't regret impulsively doing that good thing) if

they acted impulsively, thus they did not see someone as deserving less praise for acting

positively. Similarly, Newman, De Frietas, and Knobe (2015) found that people assigned

more blame for negative behaviors performed intentionally versus impulsively, but praise

judgments were constant regardless of whether behavior was intentional or impulsive. There

is yet to be a study that examines if this asymmetry persists when observers make judgments

after taking another person's perspective or empathizing with them.

The Present Studies

Based on the prior evidence that perspective taking and empathy lead to distinct

behavioral outcomes by focusing observers' attention on either moral events/outcomes or an

agent's mental states, this set of studies examined how these activities influence moral

judgments of blame and praise. Study 1 tested the effects of perspective taking and empathy

on blame judgments. Study 2 attempted to replicate and extend this work by examining the

impact of perspective taking and empathy on both judgments of blame and praise. Three key

predictions guided these studies:

 (1) Perspective taking will intensify the impact of *mental state information* on judgments of blame and praise. Specifically, relative to the objective control and empathy conditions, perspective taking should intensify blame and praise for attempts (where agents have morally-relevant intentions) and mitigate blame and praise for accidents (where agents *lack* morally-relevant intentions).

(2) Empathy will intensify the impact of *outcome information* on judgments of blame and praise. Compared to the objective control and perspective taking conditions, empathy should intensify blame and praise for accidents (where agents cause a morally-relevant outcome) and mitigate blame and praise for attempts (where agents *fail to cause* a morally-relevant outcome).

(3) Attempted acts will receive more intense moral judgments of blame and praise compared to accidental acts, based on prior evidence that shows that intentional acts are blamed more than unintentional acts.

(4) Following from previous research (Baumeister et al., 2001), blame judgments should be more extreme overall compared to praise judgments.

In addition to the main predictions, we pursued two exploratory hypotheses regarding (1) moral typecasting and (2) individual differences in perspective taking and empathy. Our first exploratory hypothesis examined whether our manipulation produced moral typecasting. We tested this by measuring whether participants empathized with the victim or took the perspective of the agent when making moral judgments. We predicted that people in the perspective-taking condition would indicate that they took the perspective of the agent of the story more than the victim. Contrastingly, we predicted that people in the empathy condition would indicate that they empathized with the victim of the story more than the agent.

Lastly, we explored whether individual differences in perspective taking and empathizing moderated the impact of our manipulation on people's blame judgments. We included the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) (Davis, 1980), a measure of perspective taking and empathetic tendencies, so that we could test whether people's natural tendency for perspective taking and empathy moderated the effect of our manipulations. We predicted that participants with higher perspective taking and empathy scores on the IRI would show stronger effects of the perspective taking and empathy manipulations respectively. The Institutional Review Board of Appalachian State University approved these two studies on November 30, 2017 (Appendix A). The procedures we used are compliant with the ethical standards proposed by the American Psychological Association.

Study 1

Participants

We obtained 361 participants using Amazon's Mechanical Turk. Only participants in the United States were able to participate. Participants were compensated $0.25 for participation. Sixty percent of participants were women ($n = 216$) and 77% identified as White ($n = 290$), 8% as African American ($n = 25$), 7% as Asian (n = 24), 5% as Latino/Hispanic ($n = 12$), 2% as Native American ($n = 3$), and 1% as Middle Eastern ($n = 2$). For political orientation we collapsed scores above four as conservative, four as moderate, and scores less than four as liberal. Forty-five percent were liberal, 26% moderate, and 29% identified as conservative. Most participants responded one on the religiosity scale, with 35% indicated that they were not at all religious, followed by 25% that responded four on the scale, 14% responded three, 13% responded two, and 13% responded five, indicating that they were very religious. An a priori power analysis with G*Power indicated that we had sufficient power to detect an effect

size of d = .35 with 85% power. A Cohen's d of .35 is close to effects observed in studies

examining differences between perspective taking an empathy.

Design & Materials

Study 1 used a 3 (focus: perspective-taking, empathy, objective-instruction control) x

2 (behavior: accidental harm, attempted harm) between-subjects design with one dependent

variable. Participants were randomly assigned to one three focus conditions: perspective-

taking, empathy, or objective-instruction control.

In the perspective-taking condition, instructions read: "On the next screen you're

going to read about an interaction between two people. When you read the story, try to focus

your attention on the thoughts and intentions of the person involved. What thoughts do you

think were going through that person's head? Try to understand what that person believed or

wanted."

Instructions in the empathy condition read: "On the next screen you're going to read

about an interaction between two people. When you read the story, try to focus your attention

on the emotions and feelings of the person involved. What feelings and emotions do you

think that person was experiencing? Try to understand what that person felt."

Instructions in the objective-instruction condition read "On the next screen you're

going to read about an interaction between two people. When you read story, try to be as

objective as possible." These focus instructions were modified from Lucas et al. (2016) and

are similar to the instructions commonly used to effectively manipulate perspective taking

and empathy. In order to examine moral typecasting, we worded the instructions to not

advise the participants who to empathize or perspective take with when reading the vignettes.

After reading the instructions, particpants were then assigned to read one of two brief

behavior vignettes. The vignettes described either an accidental harm or an attempted harm. Each type of scenario was closely matched in content and length (see Appendix B). The vignettes read:

> **Attempt:** *Jennifer is making a cake for her cousin's birthday and she believes that her cousin is violently allergic to hazelnuts. She thinks, however, that the cake needs hazelnuts to taste better so she adds them anyway. Her cousin eats the cake and is fine.*
>
> **Accident**: *Jennifer is making a cake for her cousin's birthday and she believes that her cousin is **not** allergic to hazelnuts. She thinks that the cake needs hazelnuts to taste better so she adds them. Her cousin eats the cake and becomes violently ill because of the hazelnuts.*

The main dependent variable in Study 1 was blame; after participants read the vignette they were asked to make a judgment on a bipolar scale (-5 a lot of blame, 0 no blame or praise, +5 a lot of praise). This scale is commonly used in studies measuring judgments of both blame and praise. This scale was selected to maintain the same scale of measurement in Study 2 when both judgments are measured. Next, participants were asked "Who did you take the perspective of/empathize with, Jennifer or her cousin?" This question examined the moral typecasting prediction and confirmed the target of the participants' focus. Based on the prediction that perspective taking directs observers to mental states when making moral judgments and empathizing directs observers to event outcomes, we predicted that more empathizers would indicate that they attended to the moral patient and more perspective takers would indicate that they attended to the moral agent.

Next participants were asked "Which of the following strategies did you use: perspective taking, being empathetic, or remaining objective?" and "Did Jennifer intend to harm her cousin (yes or no)?" These measures were initially meant to serve as manipulation checks to ensure that the participants were reading both the instructions and vignettes respectively, and acknowledging the agent's intentions, however, upon analysis, "incorrect responses" to these measures yielded results that could be attributed to how our vignettes were constructed and our study design. Participants' responses to the manipulation check items proved to be critical to understanding the results of the main analysis of variance. Because of this, we report the results with no participants excluded to avoid loss of statistical power and meaning. Additionally, we report the results of the manipulation check items as exploratory analyses because of the support the results offer in interpreting the key findings.

Additionally, we used the IRI (Davis, 1980; see Appendix C) to measure individual differences in perspective taking ($\alpha = .75$ for men and $\alpha = .78$ for women) and empathic concern ($\alpha =.72$ for men and $\alpha = .70$ for women), and controlled for these variables by including these two subscales as covariates. The complete 28-item IRI measures individual differences in the five dimensions of empathy, including perspective taking, fantasy, empathetic concern, and personal distress (Davis, 1994). Each subscale is seven items placed on a 5-point scale (1 Does not describe me well, 5 Describes me very well). The scale has been used in other studies examining the behavioral differences in perspective taking and empathy. Some items include "I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me" (empathy) and "I sometimes find it difficult to see things from the 'other guy's' point of view" (perspective taking). The participants also filled out a short demographics survey that asks participants for their gender, race/ethnicity, and age.

Procedure

Participants on MTurk were presented with an online informed consent form. After giving consent, participants read the perspective taking, empathy, or objective instructions. After reading the instructions participants were randomly assigned to read one of the two behavior vignettes (accidental harm or attempted harm). They then responded to the moral judgment scale and to the strategy and intent manipulation check items. Based on the experimental instruction condition that participants were assigned to, they were asked specifically who they empathized or took the perspective of when reading the vignette. Afterwards, participants completed the IRI and demographics items. Lastly, participants were debriefed.

<div align="center">

Results

</div>

Examining Effects on Blame

For Study 1 we predicted that, relative to the objective control and empathy conditions, perspective taking should intensify blame and praise for attempts and mitigate blame and praise for accidents. Additionally, relative to the objective control and perspective taking conditions, empathy should intensify blame and praise for accidents and mitigate blame and praise for attempts. To examine our key predictions, we conducted a 3 (focus: perspective-taking, empathy, objective-instruction control) x 2 (behavior: accidental harm, attempted harm) between-subjects ANOVA to examine the main effects of focus and behavior, and the interaction effect between focus x behavior on moral judgment. The test revealed a main effect of behavior $F(1, 355) = 32.48$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .08$. Accidents were blamed significantly less ($M = -.98$, $SD = 2.05$) than attempts ($M = -2.40$, $SD = 2.6$). The effect of focus, however, was nonsignificant, $F(2, 355) = 2.16$, $p = .116$, $\eta^2 = .01$. Planned

comparisons indicated that blame was marginally stronger in the objective condition (M = -2.09, SD = 2.44,) compared to the empathy (M = -1.47, SD = 2.52, p = .058), and perspective taking (M = -1.55, SD = 2.37, p = .094) conditions. Contrastingly, blame judgments in the perspective taking and empathy conditions were statistically equivalent, p = .810. The behavior x focus interaction was nonsignificant $F(2, 355)$ = .049, p = .952, η^2 = .00.

Scores on the empathic concern and perspective taking subscales of the IRI were highly correlated with each other, r = .48, $p < .001$, so we entered each subscale as a covariate into a separate ANOVA model rather than entering both covariates into a single model. Controlling for perspective taking had a significant impact, $F(1, 351)$ = 6.38, p = .012, η^2 = .02. Scores on the perspective taking subscale impacted moral judgments such that as participants scored higher in their perspective taking tendencies, the greater their judgments of blame were. The effect of behavior remained significant, $F(1,351)$ = 35.93, $p < .001$, η^2 = .09, and the effect of focus became marginally significant, $F(2,351)$ = 2.61, p = .075, η^2 = .01. Controlling for empathic concern had a significant impact overall, $F(1, 347)$ = 4.324, p = .038, η^2 = .01. Higher scores on the empathetic concern subscale impacted moral judgments such that, as participants scored higher on the scale, the greater their judgments of blame were. The effect of behavior remained significant, $F(1, 347)$ = 33.79, $p < .001$, η^2 = .09, and the effect of focus remained nonsignificant $F(2, 347)$ = 2.00, p = .137, η^2 = .00.

Exploratory Analyses: Effects on Intentionality and Focus

We tested whether participants in the attempt and accident conditions differentially perceived Jennifer to be acting intentionally. A Chi-squared test, $\chi^2 (1, N = 361)$ = 45.17,

$p < .001$, demonstrated that the majority of participants in the accidental condition (96%) viewed Jennifer as not intending to harm her cousin, whereas, a small portion of participants (4%) saw the harm as intentional. A binomial test indicated that these proportions were statistically different, $p < .001$ (2-sided). By contrast, 31% of participants in the attempt condition viewed Jennifer's behavior as intentional, compared to those who did not (69%). A follow-up binomial test indicated that these proportions were statistically different, $p < .001$ (2-sided).

To analyze the proportion of participants that focused on either Jennifer or Jennifer's cousin when reading the vignettes, we conducted two Chi-squared tests and two-sided binomial analyses. This information was recorded for participants that were given either perspective taking focus instructions or empathy focus instructions (see Figure 1). In the empathy focus condition, there were significant differences in who participants empathized with based on the type of vignette they read, $\chi^2 (1, N = 118) = 12.47, p < .001$. When participants read the accidental vignette, equal numbers empathized with Jennifer (59%) compared to her cousin (41%), $p = .193$. Contrastingly, when participants read about attempts, the majority of participants empathized with Jennifer's cousin (73%) compared to Jennifer (27%), $p = .001$. Opposite patterns emerged for perspective taking. Participants differentially took the perspective of Jennifer versus her cousin based on the behavior that took place, $\chi^2 (1, N = 122) = 18.31, p < .001$. When reading about accidental harms, significantly more participants took Jennifer's perspective (80%) compared to her cousin (20%), $p < .001$. Contrastingly, when reading about attempted harm, equal proportions of participants took Jennifer's (43%) and her cousin's (57%) perspective, $p = .306$.

Discussion

Although the main predictions were not supported, the results of Study 1 do support previous work demonstrating that attempts are blamed more harshly than accidents (Chakroff & Young, 2015; Cushman, 2008). Additionally, whereas the effects of empathy and perspective taking were not differentiated, both conditions showed a marginally significant difference from the objective condition. Participants instructed to remain objective blamed more strongly compared to participants in either the perspective taking or empathy conditions. This suggests that engaging in either perspective taking or empathizing may lead observers to give more "credit" to agents, reducing blame overall. Alternatively, instructing participants to remain objective may actually amplify moral judgments, as being objective may not be people's default means of evaluating a moral situation.

The responses to the question about the agent's intent, although surprising, are in line with evidence regarding how intentionality is assessed. Participants may have been inclined to see the attempted act as less intentional because Jennifer's cousin did not get sick; the lack of culpable outcome may have reduced the overall perception of intentionality (Malle & Bennett, 2002; Pizarro et al., 2003). Additionally, participants may have been puzzled by this outcome since the vignette did not explicitly indicate that Jennifer wanted and believed (two key components of intent, see Malle & Knobe, 1997) her actions would cause harm; participants may have viewed Jennifer as negligent or indifferent to the possible harmful outcome.

Regarding the moral typecasting prediction, we initially predicted that for both accidents and attempts, those in the empathy condition would be sensitive to attending to Jennifer's cousin since she is/or could potentially be harmed; those in the perspective taking

condition would pay more attention to Jennifer, the agent, to identify mental state

information. There was some support for this hypothesis. For accidents, perspective takers

attended to Jennifer significantly more than Jennifer's cousin and they blamed the least

compared to remaining objective and empathizing. This finding suggests that information

about an agent's mental state may have factored into mitigating the blame judgment more

than the outcome did for perspective takers. Fifty-nine percent of empathizers attended to

Jennifer and the rest attended to her cousin, but these differences were not statistically

different. For the attempted act, we obtained results in the opposite direction. As predicted,

most empathizers (73%) stated that they attended to Jennifer's cousin, which was

significantly greater than those who attended to Jennifer. Perspective takers were roughly

equivalent in who they attended to, with 57% attending to Jennifer's cousin. Paired with the

finding that only a small percentage of participants saw the attempted act of harm as

intentional, the data may reflect that because Jennifer is acting in an undesirable way

(unconcerned about her cousin's allergy), participants are reluctant to engage with her.

Regardless of her cousin not being harmed, participants are more sensitive to Jennifer's

cousin's experience when they are being empathetic, as predicted.

Study 2

Study 2 was intended to expand on the findings of Study 1 and test to determine if a

differential pattern of moral judgments arises for judgments of praise. Based on the prior

evidence that shows that praiseworthy acts are evaluated less intensely than blameworthy

acts (Newman et al., 2015; Pizarro, Uhlmann & Bloom, 2003), I predicted that judgments of

praise for both attempts and accidents will exhibit a similar pattern of results, where empathy

intensifies the judgment of accidents and perspective taking intensifies the judgment of

attempts; however, praise was predicted to produce judgments of lower magnitude relative to blame.

Participants

We obtained 361 participants using Amazon's Mechanical Turk. Participants that participated in Study 1 were prevented from signing up for this study and only participants in the United States were permitted. Participants were compensated $0.25 for compensation. Sixty-three percent of participants were women ($n = 226$) and 78% identified as White ($n = 280$), 7% as African American ($n = 26$), 8% as Asian ($n = 34$), 4% as Latino/Hispanic ($n = 15$), 1% as Native American ($n = 2$), and 1% as Middle Eastern ($n = 3$). For political orientation we collapsed scores above four as conservative, four as moderate, and scores less than four as liberal. Forty-six percent were liberal, 26% moderate, and 28% identified as conservative. Most participants responded one on the religiosity scale, with 35% indicated that they were not at all religious, followed by 19% that responded four on the scale, 16% responded three, 19% responded two, and 11% responded five, indicating that they were very religious. The average age of the sample was 38.42 ($SD = 12.47$). A power analysis with G*Power indicated that we had sufficient power to detect an effect size of $d = .35$ with 85% power.

Design and Procedure

This study used a 2 (story valence: praise, blame) x 3 (focus: perspective-taking, empathy, objective instruction control) x 2 (behavior: accident, attempted) mixed design with story valence manipulated within-subjects, and focus and behavior manipulated between-subjects. After consenting to participate in the study, participants were assigned to read one of the three focus instructions (identical to Study 1) and then read one of two vignettes (an

accidental help/harm, or an attempted help/harm). We counterbalanced the order of the

praiseworthy and blameworthy behaviors, and matched the vignettes so participants only

receive one level of the behavior manipulation. For example, if a participant read about an

attempted harm, s/he also read about an attempted helpful behavior. The same blameworthy

vignettes from Study 1 were used in this study (see Appendix B). An example of the

praiseworthy vignettes are as follows:

> **Attempt:** *Jennifer is making her cousin's favorite cake for her birthday. She sets the*
>
> *oven to preheat, believing that it is on, and she places the cake in the oven to bake. A*
>
> *little while later, her cousin arrives, and Jennifer takes the cake out to discover that*
>
> *the oven is broken and the cake never baked.*
>
> **Accident**: *Jennifer is making a cake for herself. She sets the oven to preheat, and she*
>
> *places the cake in the oven to bake. A little while later, her cousin arrives, Jennifer*
>
> *realizes suddenly that it is her cousin's birthday. The cake she baked happens to be*
>
> *her cousin's favorite, so her cousin assumes the cake was made just for her; they sit*
>
> *down and eat the cake together.*

The focus instructions were given before reading each vignette. After reading each vignette,

participants responded to the moral judgment item. For the both the praise and blame

vignettes, participants were asked how much blame or praise the agent of the story deserves

(-5 a lot of blame, 0 no blame or praise, +5 a lot of praise). Participants then responded to the

strategy and manipulation check items. Depending on the experimental instruction condition

that participants were assigned to, they were asked specifically who they empathized or took

the perspective of when reading the vignette. As in Study 1, responses to this question were

treated as supporting exploratory analyses rather than manipulation checks. Then participants completed the IRI, the demographic questionnaire, and were debriefed.

Results

We predicted that Study 2 would replicate the results of Study 1. The only predicted difference was that judgments of blame would be more intense overall than judgments of praise. The results of Study 2 were surprising in that a majority of the moral judgment scores were negatively valenced, indicating that participants evaluated our praiseworthy scenarios as blameworthy. Because of this, the dependent variable of interest for these analyses will be judgments of blame unless stated otherwise.

Effects on Blame and Praise

We conducted a three-way analysis of variance with the behavior (accident vs. attempt) and focus (perspective taking, empathy, or objective) factors as between-subjects variables and the valence factor (praise vs. blame) as a within-subjects variable to test the main predictions. The analysis revealed that the predicted three-way interaction was marginally significant, $F(2, 355) = 2.702$, $p = .068$, $\eta^2 = .015$. The main effect of valence was significant, $F(1, 355) = 4.54$, $p = .034$, $\eta^2 = .012$. The praiseworthy vignettes received a greater amount of blame ($M = -.95$, $SD = 2.62$) than the blameworthy vignettes ($M = -.50$, $SD = 2.56$). All other main effects and interactions were not significant (Fs < 1.02, ps > .310). We therefore decomposed the three-way interaction into two 3 (focus) x 2 (behavior) between-subjects ANOVAs (one ANOVA for each behavior valence). One model assessed moral judgments about the blameworthy vignettes and the other model assessed moral judgments about the praiseworthy vignettes.

The ANOVA for blameworthy behaviors revealed a significant main effect of focus, $F(2,355) = 10.15$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .053$ (see Figure 3). On average, those in the objective condition evaluated the blameworthy scenarios as being somewhat praiseworthy ($M = 0.32$, $SD = 2.23$). Judgments in the objective condition were significantly more positive than moral judgments in the perspective taking ($M = -0.79$, $SD = 2.41$, $p = .001$) and empathy conditions ($M = -1.03$, $SD = 2.81$, $p < .001$); whereas, the empathy and perspective taking conditions produce equivalent amounts of blame ($p = .471$). There was also a significant main effect of behavior $F(1, 355) = 7.31$, $p = .007$, $\eta^2 = .02$. Replicating Study 1, we found that accidents ($M = -0.15$, $SD = 2.34$) were blamed less than attempts ($M = -0.86$, $SD = 2.71$). The focus x behavior interaction was not significant, $F(2, 355) = 3.28$, $p = .586$, $\eta^2 = .003$.

Planned comparisons demonstrated that although the interaction was not significant, the pattern of results were in line with our predictions. Descriptively, participants in the empathy condition ($M = -0.75$, $SD = 2.83$) blamed accidental harm significantly more than those in the objective condition ($M = 0.55$, $SD = 2.02$, $p = .005$). People in the empathy condition also blamed more than those in the perspective taking condition ($M = -0.26$, $SD = 1.94$), but this difference was nonsignificant ($p = .279$). Perspective takers blamed marginally more than those who remained objective ($p = .072$). For attempted behaviors, perspective taking ($M = -1.34$, $SD = .322$) produced a greater amount of blame than those in the empathy ($M = -1.31$, $SD = 0.32$, $p = .952$) and objective condition ($M = 0.08$, $SD = 0.32$, $p = .002$). This effect, however, was only significantly different from those in the objective condition.

The praiseworthy ANOVA revealed the predicted significant interaction of focus x behavior, $F(2, 355) = 11.24$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .06$ (see Figure 4). Additionally, there was a main

effect of focus, $F(2, 355) = 13.72$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .068$, though the effect of behavior was

nonsignificant, $F(1,355) = 1.103$, $p = .294$, $\eta^2 = .003$. Planned comparisons demonstrated that

for accidents, being objective ($M = -0.20$, $SD = 2.27$) produced significantly less blame than

the empathy condition ($M = -2.36$, $SD = 2.60$, $p < .001$), but an equivalent amount of blame

as the perspective taking condition ($M = 0.08$, $SD = 2.11$, $p = .530$). Empathy produced

significantly more blame than those in the perspective taking condition ($p < .001$). For

attempts, the objective ($M = -0.15$, $SD = 2.19$) condition produced significantly less blame

than both the empathy ($M = -1.31$, $SD = 2.90$, $p = .010$) and perspective taking conditions

($M = -1.83$, $SD = 2.64$, $p < .001$). Perspective taking produced more blame than the empathy

condition, but this effect was nonsignificant ($p = .249$).

Next, we tested to see if controlling for scores on the PT and EC subscales impacted

moral judgments. As in Study 1, the perspective taking and empathy subscales were highly

correlated with one another ($r = .50$, $p < .001$), so we entered each subscale into a separate

model to examine the impact of individual differences on moral judgments. The PT subscale

had a significant effect on the model, $F(1,353) = 4.055$, $p = .045$, $\eta^2 = .020$, such that as

scores on the PT subscale increase, moral judgments become more negative (blameworthy).

The EC concern was also nonsignificant, $F(1,347) = .008$, $p = .930$, $\eta^2 = .00$.

Exploratory Analyses: Effects on Intentionality Judgments

Lastly, we tested whether participants in the attempt and accident conditions

differentially perceived Jennifer to be acting intentionally. First, when evaluating our

blameworthy vignettes, a Chi-squared test demonstrated that the majority of participants

(69%) evaluating the accidental vignettes viewed Jennifer as not intending to harm her

cousin, whereas, a small portion of participants (31%) saw the harm as intentional, χ^2 (1,

$n = 360) = 9.16$, $p = .003$. A binomial test indicated that these proportions were statistically

different, $p < .001$ (2-sided). By contrast, 47% of participants in the attempt condition viewed

Jennifer's behavior as intentional, compared to those who did not (53%). A binomial test

indicated that these proportions were not statistically different, $p = .412$ (2-sided).

When evaluating praiseworthy vignettes, a Chi-squared test demonstrated that the

majority of participants in the accidental condition (73%) viewed Jennifer as not intending to

harm her cousin, whereas, a small portion of participants (27%) saw the harm as intentional,

χ^2 $(1, N = 360) = 11.23$, $p < .001$. A follow-up binomial test indicated that these proportions

were statistically different, $p < .001$ (2-sided). By contrast, 43% of participants in the attempt

condition viewed Jennifer's behavior as intentional, compared to those who did not (57%). A

follow-up binomial test indicated that these proportions were marginally different, $p = .086$

(2-sided).[1]

Discussion

Study 2 produced several patterns of findings that diverged from Study 1.

Importantly, one distinction of Study 2 is that the overall pattern of results fit more closely

with our initial predictions. Perspective taking and empathy produced harsher judgments of

blame relative to being objective. This pattern also appears for our praiseworthy vignettes.

Additionally, blame for accidental acts was highest for those empathizing with the persons in

the vignettes and blame or attempts was highest for perspective takers. Curiously, these

effects were most prominent for our praiseworthy vignette rather than our blameworthy

vignettes.

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[1] Due to an error in data collection for Study 2, we are unable to report who participants in
both the empathy and perspective taking conditions focused on when reading each vignette.

After re-evaluating our vignettes, we identified some possibilities for why participants saw these judgments as not praiseworthy. In our attempted act of harm, Jennifer may be seen as responsible for performing an important birthday task (i.e., baking a cake), and failing to turn on the oven may indicate a morally-blameworthy disregard for this responsibility and her cousin's feelings overall. Our vignettes may not have conveyed praiseworthy intent clearly or reflected a willingness to carry out the praiseworthy outcome. Whereas for our accidental case, participants who were instructed to empathize may have been sensitive to perceiving deception: Jennifer not only forgot her cousin's birthday, but then passed the cake that she made for herself off as a gift. This would explain why empathizers are blaming the most for this behavior but perspective takers are somewhat neutral in their judgments. Perspective taking may lead observers to focus more on the agent, less on the patient and credit the agent if harmful intent is not apparent. Empathizing amplifying blame for the accidents on the basis of the moral patient who appears to be getting deceive by a family member.

General Discussion

Two studies examined how perspective taking and empathizing affect moral judgments of blame and praise. We had four central hypotheses for our studies. First, following from the theory of moral typecasting (Gray et al., 2012), we predicted that perspective taking would intensify judgments of blame and praise for attempted acts, because perspective taking would focus perceivers on the agent's intent to harm or benefit another person. Second, we predicted that empathizing would intensify judgments of blame and praise for accidents because empathy would focus perceivers on the suffering of the moral patient. Third, consistent with previous research in moral psychology (Cushman, 2008;

Young & Saxe, 2009), we predicted that moral judgment of blame and praise would be more extreme in response to attempts compared to accidents. Lastly, we predicted that compared to judgments of blame, judgments of praise would be less extreme.

Taken together, the results of the present studies provide some evidence in support of our hypotheses. Consistent with our third prediction, we observed greater blame for attempted actions relative to accidents for both studies. This is consistent with past research (Cushman, 2008; Young & Saxe, 2009) and demonstrates that malevolent intention (even without actual harm) produces harsher judgments of blame than actually harming another person accidentally. However, evidence for our first and second hypotheses were more mixed. In Study 1, we did not observe meaningful differences in judgments of blame between our perspective taking, empathy, and objective instructions. Regardless of the instructions given, participants evenly blamed for accidents and attempts.

In Study 2, we observed meaningful differences in the outcomes that each type of instructions produced, however, the results did not replicate our findings from Study 1. Even though we used the same blameworthy vignettes across both studies the pattern of blame reversed in the second study. The objective instructions yielded somewhat neutral judgments that were surprisingly slightly positively valenced instead of negatively valenced as we predicted. Unlike in Study 1, in Study 2, perspective taking and empathy both produced greater blame than in the objective condition. The most puzzling finding of Study 2 was the pattern of moral judgments we observed for our praiseworthy vignettes, which were not judged as being praiseworthy. Despite not receiving praise, the pattern of results were in line with our prediction that empathizing would lead to increased judgments of blame for accidents, and perspective taking would lead to reduced amounts of blame for accidents. Due

to participants generally not rating our vignettes as praiseworthy, we were not able to evaluate the intensity of judgments of praise versus judgments of blame.

Responses to our Study 1 exploratory items allowed us to further interpret how people perceived the intentionality of our vignettes, as well who people focused on when reading the vignettes. The results of these items somewhat affirm that perspective taking or empathizing when evaluating a moral event, paired with varying levels of intentionality (i.e., accidents and attempts), can lead observers to focus differently on the individuals involved in the moral event. This coincides with our moral typecasting prediction as well as prior work in this area (Gray & Wegner, 2008; Schein & Gray, 2014). An area for future studies would be to look more deeply at how focusing more or less on either the agent or victim involved in a moral event impacts moral judgments and how they are formed. Additionally, what features of moral events leads observers to pay more attention to either person.

The most consistent finding was that in Study 2 empathy amplified judgments of blame beyond perspective taking and being objective for both valences of vignette. This effect held up when we analyzed participants who responded correctly to our intent manipulation check items. Participants who read both our accidental blameworthy and praiseworthy vignettes as unintentional, the pattern blame was as predicted, with empathy significantly intensifying blame for accidents beyond perspective taking and being objective. Perspective taking produced significantly more blame than being objective. However, due to the small group size when omitting incorrect manipulation check items, we refrain from making broad assumptions from the data.

Limitations and Future Directions

Vignette influence on observed moral judgments. One explanation for the differing results for Studies 1 and 2 may be attributed to features of the vignettes. One issue is that participants may have attributed negative traits to our moral agent when reading about Jennifer's failed attempt at baking a cake for her cousin's birthday (i.e., negligence, irresponsible), thus, leading the vignette to seem more blameworthy instead of praiseworthy. A way to resolve this issue would be to create longer vignettes that detail the agent's character more clearly and convey intentionality more strongly, so that participants do not fill in traits about the agents due to a lack of information about their character. In real life, if we were to witness such an attempt we might be indifferent to the situation if we knew nothing else about Jennifer's character.

An alternative explanation is that praise is predominantly reliant on the outcomes of an action, such that attempting to cause a praiseworthy outcome and failing is more likely to produce a neutral response rather than a praiseworthy response. Another possibility is that praise judgments are critically reliant on both outcomes and an intentional mental state, thus making accidental acts of praise seem odd and incomplete. Praise might stem from the realization that someone caused a positive outcome *and* intended to do so. Our accidental case, may have been seen as blameworthy on account of participants inferring that Jennifer ultimately is lying by omission. She makes a cake for herself but then appears to let her cousin believe that she made the case for her birthday.

If participants are evaluating both vignettes as somewhat blameworthy and are filling in character information about Jennifer in the first vignette they read, then this may have affected moral judgments in the second vignette, which might explain why judgments about our blameworthy vignettes did not replicate judgments made about them in Study 1. This

possibility could have been prevented by using a different set of names for each vignette.

Additionally, it may be have been preferable to use characters that were not related to one

another. Participants could have seen each act as less praiseworthy because some amount of

irresponsibility or deception was involved in either scenario. Sensitivity to these negative

qualities may have been heighted based on the mere fact that the characters are related and

Jenifer may have had a duty to be more honest with her cousin or to ensure that her birthday

cake is baked. Overall, pretesting vignettes is a necessary step, as is perhaps asking

participants to indicate why they made a particular moral judgment afterwards.

   Isolating the impact of empathy and perspective taking. One thing that is still

unclear is how our instructions affected the directionality of people's moral judgments. Is

empathy intensifying blame for accidents or is it that perspective taking and being objective

are actually mitigating blame? One reason to believe that perspective taking is reducing

blame for accidents may be that it is a more effortful and controlled process than empathizing

is (Decety & Jackson, 2004). Empathizing may be producing a more immediate moral

judgment, whereas perspective taking arrives at a more reasoned judgment as the observer

attempts to examine the situation in a less emotionally reactive way, thus reducing blame

after considering the agent's mental state. In the moral judgment literature, accidents have

been shown to be cognitively challenging events that "require overriding a pre-potent

response to an emotionally salient outcome" (Young & Tsoi, 2013, p. 588). If this is the case,

then it may partially suggest that perspective taking and being objective work in similar

ways. Both behaviors may require an inhibition of emotional responding to the harmful

outcome to arrive at a final moral judgment. Future studies that include a "no instruction"

control condition could disentangle these two explanations. Additionally, perspective-taking

and empathizing my not produce distinct behavioral outcomes in all social situations. Our instructions or vignettes may not have created the engagement needed to produced distinct effects. On the other hand, it could be the case that when it comes to moral judgment perspective taking and empathy may produce very similar effects regardless of the moral scenario and that is somewhat supported by our findings.

Conclusion

Although we obtained mixed results, the evidence from this set of studies seems to support the claim that empathizing and perspective taking can have varying effects on moral judgments. Specifically, both behaviors appear to be differently impacted by morally relevant features such as agent intentionality and event outcomes. As evidenced by our individual differences measures, being more oriented towards perspective taking or empathizing may work to intensify the differential effects of either behavior, thus leading to greater moral judgments of praise or blame.

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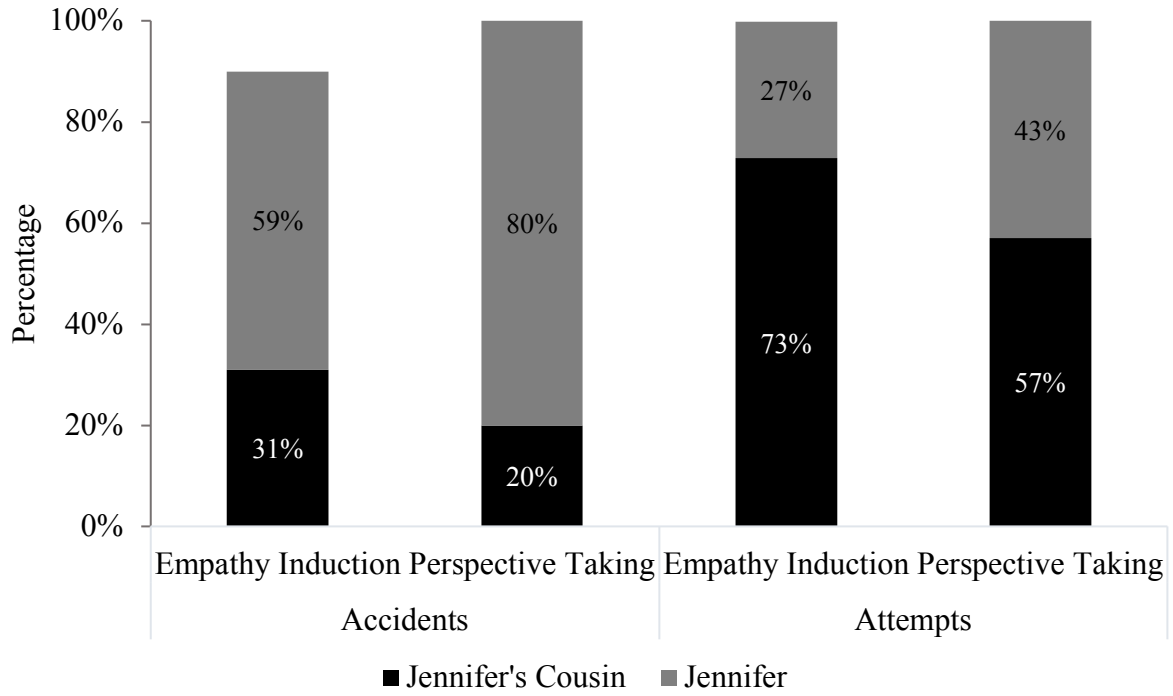
    doi:10.1111/spc3.12044

Figure 1. Who participants focused on when reading about accidental and attempted harm based on the instructions in Study 1.
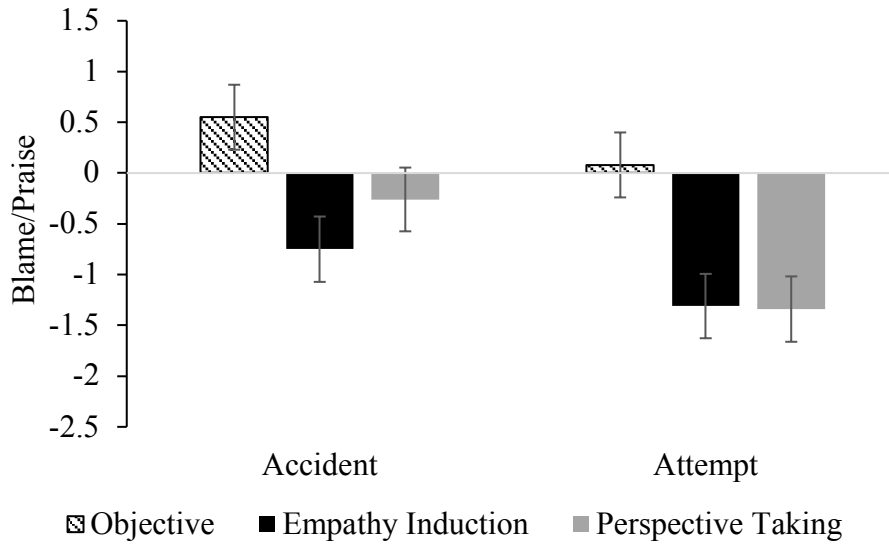
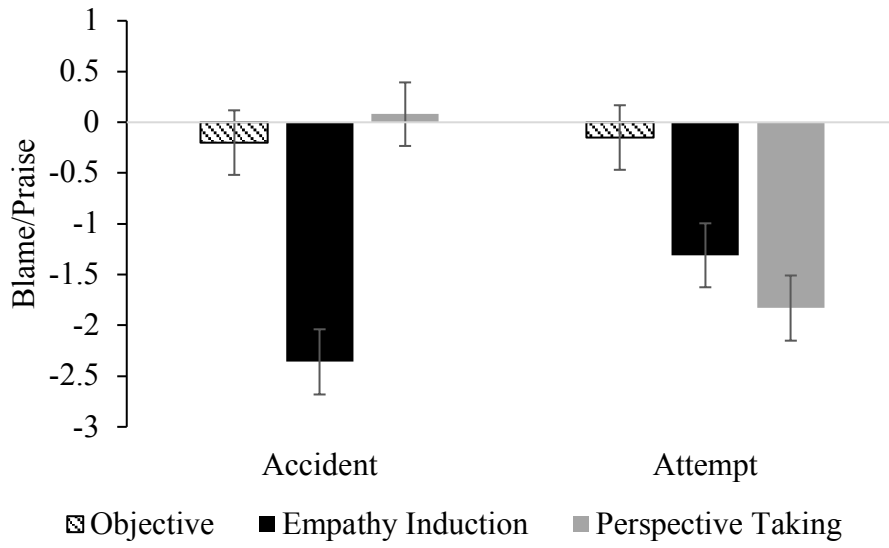*Figure 2.* Moral judgment mean ratings for blameworthy vignettes in Study 2.

Figure 3. Moral judgment mean ratings for praiseworthy vignettes in Study 2.

Appendix A

Appalachian
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INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
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To: Andrew Monroe
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CAMPUS EMAIL

From: Dr. Andrew Shanely, IRB Chairperson
RE: Notice of IRB Approval by Expedited Review (under 45 CFR 46.110)
Date:
Agrants #:
Grant Title:

STUDY #: 17-0156
STUDY TITLE: Blaming in everyday life
Submission Type: Renewal
Expedited Category: (7) Research on Group Characteristics or Behavior, or Surveys, Interviews, etc.
Renewal Date: 11/30/2017
Expiration Date of Approval: 11/29/2018

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) renewed approval for this study for the period indicated above. The IRB found that the research procedures meet the expedited category cited above. IRB approval is limited to the activities described in the IRB approved materials, and extends to the performance of the described activities in the sites identified in the IRB application. In accordance with this approval, IRB findings and approval conditions for the conduct of this research are listed below.

Study Regulatory and other findings:

The IRB determined that this study involves minimal risk to participants.

All approved documents for this study, including consent forms, can be accessed by logging into IRBIS. Use the following directions to access approved study documents.

1. Log into IRBIS
2. Click "Home" on the top toolbar
3. Click "My Studies" under the heading "All My Studies"
4. Click on the IRB number for the study you wish to access
5. Click on the reference ID for your submission
6. Click "Attachments" on the left-hand side toolbar
7. Click on the appropriate documents you wish to download

Approval Conditions:

Appalachian State University Policies: All individuals engaged in research with human participants are responsible for compliance with the University policies and procedures, and IRB determinations.

Principal Investigator Responsibilities: The PI should review the IRB's list of PI responsibilities. The Principal Investigator (PI), or Faculty Advisor if the PI is a student, is ultimately responsible for ensuring the

protection of research participants; conducting sound ethical research that complies with federal regulations, University policy and procedures; and maintaining study records.

Modifications and Addendums: IRB approval must be sought and obtained for any proposed modification or addendum (e.g., a change in procedure, personnel, study location, study instruments) to the IRB approved protocol, and informed consent form before changes may be implemented, unless changes are necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants. Changes to eliminate apparent immediate hazards must be reported promptly to the IRB.

Approval Expiration and Continuing Review: The PI is responsible for requesting continuing review in a timely manner and receiving continuing approval for the duration of the research with human participants. Lapses in approval should be avoided to protect the welfare of enrolled participants. If approval expires, all research activities with human participants must cease.

Prompt Reporting of Events: Unanticipated Problems involving risks to participants or others; serious or continuing noncompliance with IRB requirements and determinations; and suspension or termination of IRB approval by external entity, must be promptly reported to the IRB.

Closing a study: When research procedures with human subjects are completed, please log onto our system at https://appstate.myresearchonline.org/irb/index_auth.cfm and complete the Request for Closure of IRB review form.

Websites:

1. PI responsibilities:
http://researchprotections.appstate.edu/sites/researchprotections.appstate.edu/files/PI%20Responsibilities.pdf

2. IRB forms: http://researchprotections.appstate.edu/human-subjects/irb-forms

Appendix B

Instructions & Vignette Stimuli

<u>Perspective taking instructions:</u>
On the next screen, you're going to read about an interaction between two people. When you read story try to focus your attention on the thoughts and intentions of the person involved. What thoughts do you think were going through that person's head? Try to understand what that person believed or wanted.

<u>Empathy instructions:</u>
On the next screen, you're going to read about an interaction between two people. When you read story try to focus your attention on the emotions and feelings of the person involved. What feelings and emotions do you think that person was experiencing? Try to understand what that person felt or experienced.
 (Modified from: Lucas, Galinsky, & Murnighan, 2016)

<u>Objective instruction:</u>
On the next screen, you're going to read about an interaction between two people. When you read story try to be as objective as possible.

<u>Blameworthy Scenarios:</u>
Attempt- *Jennifer is making a cake for her cousin's birthday and she believes that her cousin is violently allergic to hazelnuts. She thinks, however, that the cake needs hazelnuts to taste better so she adds them anyway. Her cousin eats the cake and is fine.*

Accident- *Jennifer is making a cake for her cousin's birthday and she believes that her cousin is not allergic to hazelnuts. She thinks that the cake needs hazelnuts to taste better so she adds them. Her cousin eats the cake and becomes violently ill because of the hazelnuts.*

<u>Praiseworthy Scenarios:</u>
Attempt- *Jennifer is making her cousin's favorite cake for her birthday. She sets the oven to preheat, believing that it is on, and she places the cake in the oven to bake. A little while later, her cousin arrives, and Jennifer takes the cake out to discover that the oven is broken and the cake never baked.*

Accident- *Jennifer is making a cake for herself. She sets the oven to preheat, and she places the cake in the oven to bake. A little while later, her cousin arrives, Jennifer realizes suddenly that it is her cousin's birthday. The cake she baked happens to be her cousin's favorite, so her cousin assumes the cake was made just for her; they sit down and eat the cake together.*

Appendix C

INTERPERSONAL REACTIVITY INDEX

The following statements inquire about your thoughts and feelings in a variety of situations. For each item, indicate how well it describes you by choosing the appropriate letter on the scale at the top of the page: A, B, C, D, or E. When you have decided on your answer, fill in the letter on the answer sheet next to the item number. READ EACH ITEM CAREFULLY BEFORE RESPONDING. Answer as honestly as you can. Thank you.

ANSWER SCALE:

A	B	C	D	E
DOES NOT				DESCRIBES ME
DESCRIBE ME				VERY
WELL				WELL

1. I daydream and fantasize, with some regularity, about things that might happen to me. (FS)

2. I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me. (EC)

3. I sometimes find it difficult to see things from the "other guy's" point of view. (PT) (-)

4. Sometimes I don't feel very sorry for other people when they are having problems. (EC) (-)

5. I really get involved with the feelings of the characters in a novel. (FS)

6. In emergency situations, I feel apprehensive and ill-at-ease. (PD)

7. I am usually objective when I watch a movie or play, and I don't often get completely caught up in it. (FS) (-)

8. I try to look at everybody's side of a disagreement before I make a decision. (PT)

9. When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective towards them. (EC)

10. I sometimes feel helpless when I am in the middle of a very emotional situation. (PD)

11. I sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective. (PT)

12. Becoming extremely involved in a good book or movie is somewhat rare for me. (FS) (-)

13. When I see someone get hurt, I tend to remain calm. (PD) (-)

14. Other people's misfortunes do not usually disturb me a great deal. (EC) (-)

15. If I'm sure I'm right about something, I don't waste much time listening to other people's arguments. (PT) (-)

16. After seeing a play or movie, I have felt as though I were one of the characters. (FS)

17. Being in a tense emotional situation scares me. (PD)

18. When I see someone being treated unfairly, I sometimes don't feel very much pity for them.
     (EC) (-)

19. I am usually pretty effective in dealing with emergencies. (PD) (-)

20. I am often quite touched by things that I see happen. (EC)

21. I believe that there are two sides to every question and try to look at them both. (PT)

22. I would describe myself as a pretty soft-hearted person. (EC)

23. When I watch a good movie, I can very easily put myself in the place of a leading character. (FS)

24. I tend to lose control during emergencies. (PD)

25. When I'm upset at someone, I usually try to "put myself in his shoes" for a while. (PT)

26. When I am reading an interesting story or novel, I imagine how <u>I</u> would feel if the events in the story were happening to me. (FS)

27. When I see someone who badly needs help in an emergency, I go to pieces. (PD)

28. Before criticizing somebody, I try to imagine how <u>I</u> would feel if I were in their place. (PT)

NOTE: (-) denotes item to be scored in reverse fashion
          PT = perspective-taking scale
          FS = fantasy scale
          EC = empathic concern scale
          PD = personal distress scale

A = 0
B = 1
C = 2
D = 3
E = 4

Except for reversed-scored items, which are scored:

A = 4
B = 3
C = 2
D = 1
E = 0

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Vita

April D. Young was born in North Augusta, South Carolina, in 1989 to Harmon "Leroy" Martin and Shirley Young. She has two older siblings, Athena and Eric. April obtained a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from Augusta State University in 2012. She is expected to earn her Master of Experimental Psychology from Appalachian State University in August 2018.