Morality's Centrality to Liking, Respecting, and Understanding Others

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Abstract

We examine morality's relationship to three distinct dimensions of social perception: liking, respecting, and knowing a person. Participants completed two independent tasks. First, they rated acquaintances' morality, competence, and sociability, and how much they liked, respected, and knew those acquaintances. In the second task, they rated a variety of moral and competence traits on their importance to liking, respecting, and knowing a person. Several findings emerged. First, morality was the most important factor to liking, respecting, and knowing a person but relatively more important to liking and respecting than to knowing; this finding replicated across tasks. Second, certain moral traits were more important than others, especially honesty, compassion, and fairness. Third, these traits were considered important because they were seen as potentially beneficial to the social perceiver. This research reveals morality's centrality to evaluating and understanding others.

Morality trumps nearly any other characteristic when individuals form impressions and evaluate others (Goodwin, Piazza, & Rozin, 2014). Individuals care deeply about other's morality, see morality as more important to global evaluations than other characteristics, and deem morality as intrinsic to one's identity (Goodwin et al., 2014; Strohminger & Nichols, 2014; Wojciszke, Bazinska, & Jaworski, 1998). Although a person's morality is what individuals care about most when forming global evaluations, little is known about whether individuals care as deeply about morality when forming specific evaluations or when understanding a person. This is an important question because judgments of specific evaluation—particularly liking and respecting—and understanding are ubiquitous, made with frequency in everyday life, and are crucially important to social interaction. The purpose of this article is to examine morality's centrality to liking, respecting, and understanding. Relatedly, we identify what specific moral traits are most important to liking, respecting, and understanding and why they are so important.

Research demonstrates the dominance of morality in global evaluations (Goodwin et al., 2014). Individuals are more sensitive to moral information (Ybarra, Chan, & Park, 2001) and seek out information about morality before other qualities such as competence or sociability (Brambilla, Rusconi, Sacchi, & Cherubini, 2011). People also view moral traits as more important and informative than other traits in the impression formation process (De Bruin & Van Lange, 2000; Judd, James-Hawkins, Yzerbyt, & Kashima, 2005).

Such findings have replicated extensively across a variety of studies, including experiments involving fictitious targets,

judgments of acquaintances, and naturalistic methods (e.g., Goodwin et al., 2014; Wojciszke et al., 1998). For example, Wojciszke, Bazinska, and Jaworski (1998) found that individuals selected moral traits over competence-related traits as most important when evaluating someone favorably and deciding whether someone can be trusted. Similarly, Goodwin, Piazza, and Rozin (2014) demonstrated that, controlling for warmth, moral character was the most important factor driving global evaluations. When rating targets who varied in warmth (cold, warm) and morality (moral, immoral), participants preferred targets who were moral but cold over targets who were immoral but warm. Thus, morality is so important that we prefer others to be moral, even at the cost of other desirable qualities, such as warmth or competence.

What Is Morality's Relationship to Liking, Respecting, and Understanding?

Although research demonstrates the power of perceived morality in shaping global evaluation, it does not reveal whether it shapes meaningfully distinct dimensions of social perception

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in different ways. Liking, respecting, and understanding are three fundamental dimensions of perception underling global evaluation, but they differ in their nature and cognitive antecedents (Wojciszke, Abele, & Baryła, 2009).

For example, although liking and respecting are both specific forms of evaluation, liking reflects personal interest and attraction toward a person, whereas respecting reflects high regard and deference to a person (Baryła, 2014; Pontari & Schlenker, 2006). Moreover, liking and respecting differ in the characteristics of targets each is influenced by (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002; Spears, Ellemers, & Doosje, 2005): Individuals are liked for their communal traits, such as being cooperative and friendly, whereas they are respected for their agentic traits, such as being competent and accomplished (Pontari & Schlenker, 2006; Wojciszke et al., 2009).

Such findings imply that perceptions of a target's morality may be more important in shaping liking, whereas competence may be more important in shaping respect. However, Goodwin et al. (2014) found that moral traits strongly predicted participants' impressions of targets they liked *and* targets they admired. Therefore, it remains unclear whether morality is important when evaluating liking versus respecting others.

Separate from morality's centrality to evaluating liking and respecting is its centrality to how we understand and come to know others' identities. Research suggests that perceptions of a person's morality, more so than any other trait, have powerful effects on the degree to which individuals feel they know that person (Wood, 2015). Morality is seen as uniquely human and is deemed essential to identity (Goodwin et al., 2014; Skitka, Baumann, & Sargis, 2005), more so than many crucial mental faculties, including basic cognition and perception, personality, desires, and memories (Strohminger & Nichols, 2014).

Unfortunately, no research has integrated the social perceptual dimensions of liking, respecting, and knowing in one study. Although morality seems central to all three, it might be associated with each to different degrees. Given the importance of liking, respecting, and knowing, fully understanding morality's relationship to social perception demands systematic examination across all three dimensions (Goodwin, Piazza, & Rozin, 2015).

Which Elements of Morality Are Most Important to Liking, Respecting, and Understanding?

The question of morality's involvement in liking, respecting, and knowing raises another question: *Which* moral traits are most important to these dimensions? Although previous research demonstrates the power of morality as a broadband construct, certain moral traits may be more important than other traits when evaluating liking, respecting, and understanding. For example, research suggests that individuals who are loyal and cooperative are most liked, whereas individuals who are cruel, dishonest, and unsympathetic are least liked (Wortman & Wood, 2011; see also Dumas, Johnson, & Lynch, 2002). Thus, these five moral traits may be important when evaluating liking; however, previous studies did not explore a

wide variety of moral traits, so other moral traits might be more influential. Although there is less research on the traits most central to respect, studies exploring the traits most central to understanding suggest that individuals consider honesty, evilness, abusiveness, and genuineness as informative to knowing a person (Wood, 2015). Strohminger and Nichols (2014) examined several moral traits' centrality to knowing a person and found that honesty, cruelty, compassion, and generosity were seen as most important to one's ''true self'' and most likely to ''persist after reincarnation.'' Moral traits such as wholesome and empathetic received lower ratings. Revealing which moral traits are most central to liking, respecting, and knowing would deepen our understanding of what we seek in others, and the role morality plays in interpersonal relationships.

Why Are Certain Moral Traits More Important to Evaluation Than Others?

The moral traits of honesty, compassion, cruelty, and generosity are especially salient to evaluation and social perception more broadly (Brambilla et al., 2011; Brambilla, Sacchi, Rusconi, Cherubini, & Yzerbyt, 2012; Wojciszke et al., 1998), but it is not clear *why* such traits are important. These traits might be valued in others because they are adaptive and advantageous to the social perceiver (Wojciszke et al., 2009; Wortman & Wood, 2011): Interacting with someone who is honest and compassionate might benefit a person more than interacting with someone who is wholesome or humble. Bocian and Wojciszke (2014) demonstrated that self-interest affects individuals' liking and subsequent moral judgments of a target person. In addition, individuals tend to respect and hold cooperative and generous people in higher esteem (Hardy & Van Vugt, 2006). Thus, self-interest may explain why perceivers find certain traits likable and respectable. However, little research has directly tested this. The current research will examine whether the traits individuals consider most important to evaluation are those seen as potentially beneficial.

Overview

We extend previous work by examining morality's importance to three separate dimensions of social perception: liking, respecting, and perceived knowing of others. We examine this through two independent tasks employing fundamentally different approaches, enabling us to evaluate replicability. In the ''acquaintance rating'' task, participants rated several acquaintances' morality, competence, and sociability. This task reveals whether the people participants like and respect most are those they see as most moral and whether believing that one knows a person's morality predicts how strongly one believes they know that person *in general*. Previous research suggests that the people participants like more are those they see as most moral and that feeling like one knows a person in general should be tied to feeling like one knows that person's morality. In regard to respect, past research (Wojciszke et al., 2009) implies that the people most respected should be those seen

as most competent. However, if morality is as central to global evaluation as previous research indicates, participants may both like *and respect* those they see as most moral.

In the "trait rating" task, participants rated many traits on how characteristic they were of someone likable and respectable and how informative each was toward knowing who a person is. This task reveals whether the traits one considers likable, respectable, and informative to knowing are moral traits. We expected the moral traits of honesty, cruelty, compassion, and fairness to emerge as especially important in general. However, other moral (or competent) traits might emerge as particularly important to liking, respecting, or knowing. For example, competence traits may emerge as important to respect, more so than moral traits. Because moral foundations theory (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009) is a framework for understanding and organizing the panoply of moral traits, we additionally examined this question at the foundation level to explore which foundations were important to liking, respecting, and knowing. The trait rating task, combined with independent ratings of each trait's value to a social perceiver, also allowed us to test *why* certain traits were considered important to specific evaluations: Specifically, whether the most likable and respectable traits are particularly beneficial to the social perceiver. Previous research suggests the most likable and respectable traits should be seen as most beneficial (e.g., honest) compared to other traits that may be good to have in their own right but would not necessarily benefit the social perceiver (e.g., wholesome). We did not examine whether the traits most informative to knowing were beneficial, as these traits could be desirable *or* aversive.

Method

Community participants ($N = 94$ [22 male, 72 female], $M_{age} = 49.49$, $SD = 14.55$) were compensated US$150 for participating in several studies. Similar studies (e.g., Goodwin et al., 2014; Strohminger & Nichols, 2014) revealed medium-to-large effect sizes with comparable sample sizes, indicating we had appropriate power to detect an effect.

Acquaintance Rating Task

Participants rated eight acquaintances varying in how much they were known and liked (i.e., two targets whom they knew well and liked, two they knew well but did not like, two they did not know well but liked, and two whom they did not know well and did not like). Participants were told to choose "family members, coworkers, friends, former friends, relationship partners (past and present), and anyone else in [their] life who might qualify." They then rated their liking, respecting, and knowledge of each target. Participants received the prompt "To what extent . . ." and then rated liking (e.g., "would you say you like or dislike this person? enjoy spending time with this person?"; $\alpha = .79$), respect (e.g., "do you respect this person? admire this person?"; $\alpha = .89$), and degree of knowing (e.g., "would you say that you really know this person? How

confident are you that your impression of this person is accurate?"; $\alpha = .90$) on a 1–5 scale. They also rated each target's morality, sociability, and competence on a 1–7 scale (e.g., "To what extent would you say this person is fair?; $1 = not$ *at all*, $7 = very much$). The morality items included fair, dishonest, compassionate, and selfish ($\alpha = .52$); competence included capable, independent, determined, and incompetent ($\alpha = .80$); and sociability included extroverted, talkative, reserved, and boring ($\alpha = .64$), and negatively keyed items were reversed before aggregation. To examine whether "really knowing" someone's morality makes one feel they know the person in general, additional questions assessed participants' confidence in their morality, sociability, and competence ratings. Participants read, "To what extent do you feel you *really know* this person in terms of their standing on . . ." and rated the degree to which they "really knew" the target on the same aspects of morality, competence, and sociability (αs = .93, .92, and .94).

Trait Rating Task

Participants rated a variety of moral, competence, and control traits' importance to liking, respecting, and knowing a person. We identified 20 moral traits (e.g., "honest"), 20 competence traits (e.g., "intelligent"), and 20 control traits (e.g., "annoying"; see Table 1). Terms were selected using data from Wood (2015), in which participants ($N = 152$) rated 498 traits' relevance to morality and competence on a 1–4 scale ($1 = not\ at$ *all relevant*, $4 = extremely\ relevant$). Traits receiving high morality ratings (median ≥ 3.5) but low competence ratings (median ≤ 2) were defined as moral traits. We retained 20 by eliminating clear synonyms (e.g., honest/truthful) and antonyms (e.g., honest/dishonest). The same procedure was used for competence. Control traits were chosen by selecting traits with low medians (<1.5) for morality and competence.

Given our goal of identifying which moral (or competent) traits were most central to social perception, we used the Q-sort forced choice paradigm (Block, 2008; Funder, Furr, & Colvin, 2000; Ozer, 1993). This method avoids the possibility that participants rate all positive traits equally highly, forcing sharper distinctions to reveal which traits are *most* central to social perception. The Q-sort encourages raters to consider ratings of each item against each other item. Participants completed 3 Q-sorts: liking, respecting, and knowing.

Participants sorted the 60 traits (see Table 1) based on how characteristic each was of someone they would like and repeated this for someone they would respect. Participants were told, "You will be presented with a series of words that can be used to describe people. Your task is to group these words into those that are most characteristic of a person you would like (respect) and those that are uncharacteristic of someone you would like (respect)." These Q-sorts were on a 1–9 scale of rating options ($1 = extremely\ uncharacteristic$, $5 = relatively$ *neutral*, $9 = extremely\ characteristic$). In contrast to traditional Likert-type scale methods, participants could only use each rating option in the following amounts: $1 = twice$, $2 = 4\ times$, 3

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Traits Characteristic of Liking and Respecting and Informative to Knowing (Trait Rating Task).

Q-Sort Mean Ratings

Liking	Mean (SD)	Respecting	Mean (SD)	Knowing	Mean (SD)
Honest (m)	8.28 (1.02)	Honest (m)	8.44 (0.71)	Honest (m)	5.52 (0.73)
Compassionate (m)	7.60 (1.21)	Fair (m)	7.46 (1.22)	Compassionate (m)	4.53 (1.14)
Fair (m)	7.15 (1.23)	Compassionate (m)	7.29 (1.18)	Fair (m)	4.45 (0.97)
Trusting (m)	7.05 (1.40)	Giving (m)	6.93 (1.03)	Kind (m)	4.35 (1.43)
Giving (m)	6.87 (1.20)	Kind (m)	6.76 (1.32)	Giving (m)	4.31 (0.92)
Kind (m)	6.85 (1.49)	Intelligent (c)	6.74 (1.31)	Disrespectful (m)	4.29 (1.79)
Peaceful (m)	6.44 (1.33)	Knowledgeable (c)	6.68 (1.18)	Cruel (m)	4.14 (1.95)
Mature (c)	6.41 (1.14)	Humble (m)	6.60 (1.26)	Trusting (m)	3.90 (1.50)
Humble (m)	6.37 (1.45)	Lawful (m)	6.50 (1.46)	Mature (c)	3.80 (1.28)
Forgiving (m)	6.36 (1.29)	Peaceful (m)	6.47 (1.33)	Humble (m)	3.76 (1.26)
Knowledgeable (c)	6.25 (1.02)	Educated (c)	6.46 (1.02)	Confrontational (m)	3.61 (1.55)
Entertaining	6.16 (1.41)	Certain (c)	6.41 (1.11)	Forgiving (m)	3.60 (1.27)
Funny	6.16 (1.44)	Trusting (m)	6.41 (1.56)	Intelligent (c)	3.57 (1.75)
Intelligent (c)	6.14 (1.35)	Efficient (c)	6.35 (1.23)	Lawful (m)	3.52 (1.49)
Articulate (c)	6.08 (1.31)	Mature (c)	6.33 (1.30)	Grateful (m)	3.49 (1.66)
Educated (c)	6.08 (1.12)	Forgiving (m)	6.32 (1.12)	Peaceful (m)	3.42 (1.14)
Creative (c)	6.04 (1.23)	Logical (c)	6.23 (1.17)	Knowledgeable (c)	3.41 (1.42)
Warm (m)	6.04 (1.34)	Experienced (c)	6.19 (1.34)	Logical (c)	3.41 (1.35)
Certain (c)	6.02 (0.96)	Articulate (c)	6.17 (1.29)	Educated (c)	3.39 (1.39)
Logical (c)	6.00 (1.18)	Organized (c)	6.15 (1.05)	Unfaithful (m)	3.30 (1.69)
Lawful (m)	6.00 (1.55)	Practical	6.07 (1.09)	Articulate (c)	3.29 (1.49)
Practical (c)	5.88 (1.22)	Sympathetic (m)	5.91 (1.06)	Warm (m)	3.29 (1.59)
Sympathetic (m)	5.83 (1.39)	Creative (c)	5.90 (1.07)	Sympathetic (m)	3.25 (1.54)
Organized (c)	5.77 (1.02)	Accomplished (c)	5.84 (1.15)	Assertive (c)	3.22 (1.19)
Efficient (c)	5.73 (1.21)	Warm (m)	5.84 (1.07)	Competitive (c)	3.20 (1.24)
Experienced (c)	5.56 (1.34)	Grateful (m)	5.74 (1.03)	Organized (c)	3.19 (1.35)
Grateful (m)	5.56 (1.19)	Wholesome (m)	5.54 (1.23)	Creative (c)	3.12 (1.51)
Extroverted	5.42 (1.41)	Delightful	5.48 (0.98)	Efficient (c)	3.06 (1.41)
Delightful	5.40 (1.32)	Influential (c)	5.35 (1.30)	Extroverted	3.03 (1.31)
Wholesome (m)	5.36 (1.25)	Funny	5.32 (1.01)	Practical (c)	3.02 (1.15)
Accomplished (c)	5.13 (1.03)	Pure (m)	5.11 (1.37)	Experienced (c)	3.01 (1.37)
Spontaneous	5.06 (1.22)	Entertaining	5.09 (1.21)	Dependent (c)	2.92 (1.17)
Employed (c)	4.99 (1.03)	Assertive (c)	4.97 (1.34)	Wholesome (m)	2.76 (1.31)
Familiar	4.98 (1.05)	Employed (c)	4.95 (0.87)	Lazy (c)	2.62 (1.34)
Pure (m)	4.97 (1.54)	Extroverted	4.85 (1.15)	Accomplished (c)	2.61 (1.43)
Assertive (c)	4.92 (1.29)	Familiar	4.57 (0.92)	Funny	2.58 (1.47)
Good looking	4.80 (1.49)	Spontaneous	4.55 (1.02)	Indecisive (c)	2.55 (1.35)
Influential (c)	4.78 (1.12)	Cool	4.39 (1.13)	Needy	2.49 (1.26)
Cool	4.74 (1.27)	Competitive (c)	4.37 (1.30)	Influential (c)	2.48 (1.25)
Athletic	4.73 (1.26)	Athletic	4.35 (1.04)	Emotional	2.48 (1.42)
Feminine	4.36 (1.07)	Feminine	4.35 (0.85)	Entertaining	2.48 (1.19)
Wealthy	4.35 (1.12)	Wealthy	4.29 (1.10)	Delightful	2.43 (1.55)
Ordinary	4.29 (1.13)	Emotional	4.28 (0.85)	Possessive (m)	2.42 (1.30)
Emotional	4.16 (0.93)	Good looking	4.21 (1.16)	Grateful (m)	2.41 (1.47)
Competitive (c)	4.15 (1.47)	Ordinary	4.12 (1.07)	Anxious	2.39 (1.05)
Dependent (c)	3.93 (1.17)	Cheap	3.63 (0.83)	Annoying	2.37 (1.23)
Forgetful	3.64 (0.78)	Dependent (c)	3.54 (0.88)	Pure (m)	2.32 (1.37)
Cheap	3.59 (0.84)	Possessive (m)	3.41 (0.77)	Defensive	2.32 (1.29)
Anxious	3.41 (0.92)	Anxious	3.32 (0.85)	Spontaneous	2.22 (1.13)
Indecisive (c)	3.22 (0.87)	Forgetful	3.30 (0.76)	Certain (c)	2.10 (1.15)
Defensive	3.18 (0.65)	Defensive	3.05 (0.74)	Forgetful	2.10 (1.12)
Lazy (c)	3.06 (0.81)	Needy	2.98 (0.94)	Familiar	2.03 (1.03)
Possessive (m)	3.03 (1.01)	Indecisive (c)	2.96 (0.72)	Athletic	1.87 (1.10)
Needy	2.89 (0.79)	Lazy (c)	2.84 (0.75)	Employed (c)	1.86 (1.28)
Annoying	2.75 (0.73)	Annoying	2.82 (0.70)	Cool	1.76 (0.97)

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Q-Sort Mean Ratings

Liking	Mean (SD)	Respecting	Mean (SD)	Knowing	Mean (SD)
Grouchy	2.41 (0.81)	Unfaithful (m)	2.47 (0.92)	Ordinary	1.69 (0.85)
Confrontational (m)	2.40 (1.32)	Grouchy	2.37 (0.67)	Cheap	1.63 (1.07)
Unfaithful (m)	2.28 (0.94)	Confrontational (m)	2.12 (1.12)	Good looking	1.60 (1.10)
Disrespectful (m)	1.55 (0.94)	Cruel (m)	1.62 (0.76)	Feminine	1.52 (0.82)
Cruel (m)	1.39 (0.66)	Disrespectful (m)	1.23 (0.52)	Wealthy	1.52 (1.02)

Note. All other traits not labeled were control traits. Trait ratings for liking and respecting were made on a 1–9 scale; trait ratings for knowing were made on a 1–6 scale. m = moral traits; c = competence traits.

= 8 *times*, 4 = 10 *times*, 5 = 12 *times*, 6 = 10 *times*, 7 = 8 *times*, 8 = 4 *times*, 9 = *twice*. That is, they could rate only two traits as being "extremely uncharacteristic," four as being "very characteristic," and so on. This "forced distribution" encourages participants to think carefully about the differences among the trait terms.

We used a modified approach for traits' informativeness toward knowing someone. Instructions were similar: "Your task is to group these words into those that are most informative toward feeling like you understand who someone really is and those that are least informative toward feeling like you understand who someone is." This Q-sort was on a 1–6 scale (1 = *not at all informative*, 6 = *extremely informative*); participants used each rating: 1 = 14 *times*, 2 = 13 *times*, 3 = 11 *times*, 4 = 10 *times*, 5 = 8 *times*, 6 = 4 *times*. This scale differs from the liking and respect scale, using the logic that no traits could be "negatively informative" toward knowing someone.

Independent ratings. To obtain objective ratings of trait's standing on morality, social value, and moral foundations, we collected three sets of independent ratings on Amazon Mechanical Turk. We collected *morality ratings* of each trait: Raters ($n = 51$) were asked, "To what degree does each word describe someone who is moral versus immoral?" and rated each of the 60 traits on a 1–7 scale (1 = *extremely immoral*, 4 = *neither moral nor immoral*, 7 = *extremely moral*); they repeated these ratings for competence (interrater reliability, αs = .98, .98). For subsequent analyses, we computed each rater's mean moral (and competence) rating across raters. We similarly collected *beneficialness ratings*. Raters ($n = 19$) assessed each trait's social value or "beneficialness" to the perceiver by rating the "likelihood that a person could benefit or be harmed if an acquaintance is [trait]" (α = .97). Finally, we obtained *moral foundations ratings*. Raters ($n = 27$) assessed each moral traits' relationship to each moral foundation: care/harm, fairness/cheating, loyalty/betrayal, authority/subversion, and sanctity/degradation (α = .97). For more information, see Supplemental Online Material.

Procedure

Participants completed both tasks. The acquaintance rating task was administered online; participants completed the task on their own time. Participants completed the trait rating task during lab visits, each Q-sort 1 week apart.[1]

Results

In order to reveal the degree to which each person views morality as central to liking, respecting, and perceived knowing, we computed within-person correlations. For example, for the acquaintance rating task, we examined whether the acquaintances a participant likes the most were those she or he saw as most moral. To illustrate, Figure 1A presents Participant 15's ratings of how much she or he liked each target, plotted against how moral she or he thought those targets were, with each point representing a target. Correlating Participant 15's liking and morality ratings yields a within-person r of .67, revealing a strong relationship between liking and morality: The people Participant 15 likes are those she or he sees as most moral. We computed a within-person correlation in this manner for every participant and repeated this procedure for morality's relationship to respect and perceived knowing. We repeated this again for competence and sociability ratings. We used a similar procedure for the trait rating task, in which the unit of analysis was the 60 traits rather than the 8 targets (see Figure 1B), correlating participants' trait ratings with independent raters' morality and competence ratings.

What Is Morality's Relationship to Liking, Respecting, and Understanding?

Using the acquaintance rating task, we examine whether the people one likes, respects, and knows best are those one thinks are most moral. Because morality, competence, and sociability ratings were moderately to highly correlated (rs = .15–53), we wanted to isolate morality's relationship with each social perceptual dimension and did so by partialing out competence and sociability when computing the correlations illustrated in Figure 1A. Likewise, correlations for competence partialed morality and sociability, and correlations for sociability partialed morality and competence ratings.

We obtained the mean within-person correlation between participants' liking ratings and their morality ratings for the targets. As shown in the top row of Table 2, for the average participant, liking someone was strongly associated with how
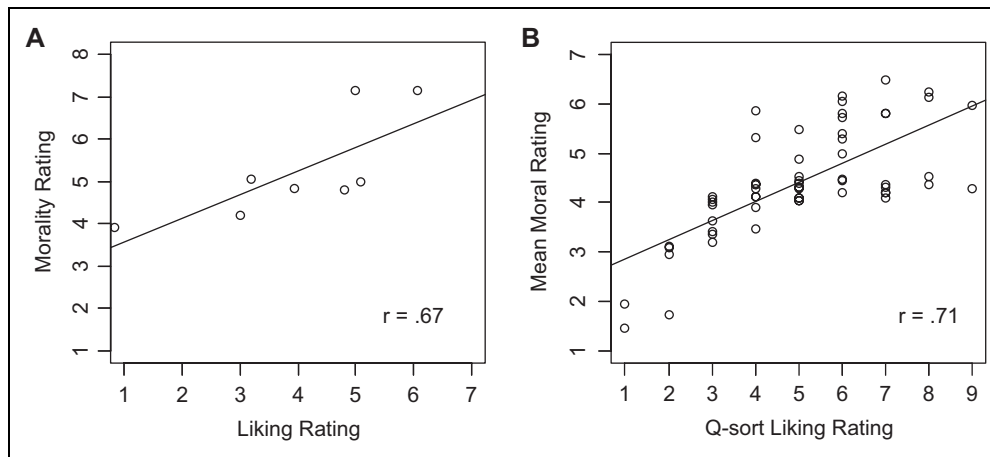
Figure 1. Illustrative scatter plots of single participants. Panel A illustrates the relationship between Participant 15's liking and morality ratings for each of the eight targets from the acquaintance rating task. The within-person *r* of .67 reveals the degree to which the people Participant 15 likes are the people she or he sees as most moral. Panel B illustrates the relationship between Participant 1's Q-sort liking and independent raters' mean moral ratings for each trait from the trait rating task. The *r* of .71 reveals the degree to which Participant 1 sees the traits that are most moral as characteristic of someone likable.

Table 2. Mean Within-Subject Correlations for Acquaintance and Trait Rating Tasks.

| | Social Perceptual Dimension | | | | | |
| | Liking | | Respecting | | Knowing | |
Correlate	Mean *r* (SD)	Range	Mean *r* (SD)	Range	Mean *r* (SD)	Range
Acquaintance rating task						
Morality	.68 (.32)***	−.43 to .99	.75 (.24)***	−.03 to 1.0	.26 (.45)***	−.92 to .96
Competence	.21 (.47)***	−.96 to .99	.33 (.44)***	−.99 to .93	.17 (.47)***	−.84 to .94
Sociability	.06 (.48)	−.90 to .89	−.06 (.49)	−.83 to .99	.07 (.44)	−.97 to .94
Trait rating task						
Moral rating	.68 (.13)***	.02 to .87	.69 (.11)***	.19 to .87	.37 (.23)***	−.22 to .73
Competence rating	.24 (.07)***	−.04 to .39	.28 (.08)***	−.08 to .43	.05 (.17)**	−.37 to .60
Moral foundation						
Care harm	.49 (.15)***	−.18 to .72	.47 (.13)***	.08 to .73	.10 (.23)***	−.47 to .70
Fairness cheating	.46 (.12)***	−.05 to .78	.49 (.13)***	−.31 to .71	.25 (.16)***	−.16 to .60
Loyalty betrayal	.42 (.12)***	−.03 to .65	.38 (.11)***	.02 to .65	.00 (.22)	−.58 to .67
Authority subversion	.34 (.13)***	−.18 to .63	.41 (.11)***	.00 to .72	−.04 (.24)	−.59 to .43
Sanctity degradation	.08 (.15)***	−.22 to .43	.10 (.14)***	−.18 to .56	−.29 (.26)***	−.82 to .37

Note. For the acquaintance rating task, "knowing" correlations are the correlation between degree of knowing the target and "really knowing" the targets' standing on morality, competence, and sociability. For the trait rating task, knowing correlations are the correlation between participants' ratings of each trait's informativeness with raters' ratings of how relevant each trait was to morality. For the trait rating task, all 60 traits were used when correlating Mechanical Turk moral and competence ratings with Q-sort ratings; only the 20 moral traits were used when correlating moral foundation ratings with Q-sort ratings. Significance indicates mean within-subjects correlations significantly different from zero. *SD* = standard deviation.
*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

moral that person was seen. This relationship was somewhat stronger between morality and respect: The targets that participants respected most were those they saw as most moral, repeated measures *t*-test of mean liking vs. respect correlation: $t(88) = 2.48$, $p < .05$.

Next, we correlated participants' knowing ratings of each target with their ratings of how well they felt like they really knew each targets' morality. As shown in Table 2, the average correlation between knowing a target and knowing their

morality was significantly greater than zero, but significantly less strong than that observed for liking and respecting, $ts(75) = 6.56, 8.70$; $ps < .001$, and greater variation across participants (see *SDs*; Pitman–Morgan test between two variances, $ts(75) = 3.02, 5.89$; $ps < .01$). Repeating these analyses for competence and sociability revealed that liking and respecting a person were significantly more associated with how moral that person was compared to how competent, $ts(89) = 6.74, 7.25$; $ps < .001$, or sociable he or she was, $ts(89) = 10.67$,

13.36; ps < .001, and knowing a person was significantly associated with how moral the person was compared to how sociable he or she was, $t(75) = 2.34$; $p < .05$.

We also examined these issues via the trait rating task. For each participant, we correlated his or her liking (and respecting) ratings for the 60 traits with independent raters' morality ratings (e.g., Figure 1B). As shown in Table 2, the traits that participants consider likable and respectable were those seen by the independent raters as most moral. The mean within-person correlations for liking/respecting and morality were nearly .70 and were significantly greater than 0. We also examined whether the traits most informative to knowing a person were those most relevant to morality.[2] Again, the mean correlation between "relevance to" morality and knowing was significantly lower than the correlations between morality and liking and respecting, ts(92) = 15.46, 14.93; ps < .001, but still nearly .40 and significantly greater than 0. In other words, the traits most informative to understanding a person were the traits most relevant to morality.

Which Moral Traits Are Most Important to Liking, Respecting, and Understanding?

Table 1 provides descriptives for all 60 traits for each social perceptual dimension. As suggested by the analyses above, the five most important traits for liking, respecting, and knowing someone were moral qualities. Similarly, four of the five traits generally seen as most "uncharacteristic" of likable or respectable people were immoral (e.g., cruel and unfaithful). No moral trait was seen as uninformative to understanding someone.

Table 1 reveals clear differences among the moral qualities. For example, honest was the most important to all three dimensions, especially perceived knowing. Compassionate, fair, kind, giving, and trusting also received high ratings for all dimensions. In contrast, the moral qualities of pure, wholesome, grateful, sympathetic, and warm received "neutral" ratings with regard to liking and respecting. Similarly, pure, wholesome, sympathetic, warm, and possessive received relatively low ratings for informativeness to knowing a person (low when compared to other moral traits). Notably, morality was not universally more important than competence. For example, the competence qualities of intelligent, mature, and knowledgeable were seen as more characteristic of someone likable and respectable, and more informative toward knowing someone, compared to several moral traits.

For a systematic treatment of such differences, we turned to moral foundations theory. We computed within-person correlations (see Figure 1B) between each participant's liking/respecting ratings for the moral traits and independent raters' aggregated moral foundations ratings of the traits. As shown in Table 2, the average participant's liking and respecting are relatively closely linked to care/harm, fairness/cheating, loyalty/betrayal, and authority/subversion and relatively less linked to sanctity/degradation. In addition, the average participant's understanding of someone is most strongly linked to fairness/cheating (which, according to independent raters, included the traits of honesty and, of course, fairness) and is least linked to sanctity/degradation (which, according to raters, includes the traits of pure and wholesome).

Are the Most Likable and Respectable Traits Beneficial to the Social Perceiver?

We next tested whether the traits that are most important to liking and respecting (e.g., honesty, fairness, etc.) are seen as particularly advantageous to the social perceiver, using the independent raters' beneficialness ratings. We recomputed within-subject correlations between liking (and respecting) and moral ratings (as in Table 2), now partialing the traits' beneficialness. If participants see particular traits as characteristic of someone likable or respectable because those traits could benefit them, then the partialed correlation should be close to zero (in contrast to the ∼.70 correlations in Table 2). The mean partialed correlations for liking and respecting remained positive and significant, $\bar{r}$s = .28, .27, respectively (ps < .001). But this decrease from the raw (∼.70) to partialed correlation (∼.30) suggests that individuals like and respect a person who is honest, compassionate, and fair, in part, because they could benefit from associating with that person.

Discussion

We examined morality's relationship to liking, respecting, and knowing a person using two independent tasks: One in which participants rated real people and their personality characteristics, and the other in which participants rated personality characteristics and their relationship to people. Across both tasks, results replicate the established finding that a morality is what individuals care about most when forming impressions. However, our results go well beyond this finding, illuminating morality's centrality to three important and distinct dimensions of social perception.

Three major findings emerged. First, on the global level, although morality was the most central factor in liking, respecting, and knowing, it was more important to liking and respecting, as compared to knowing a person. This finding replicated across tasks. Second, on a fine-grained level, various moral traits were not equally important to liking, respecting, or knowing. Compared across a wide variety of traits, the moral traits of honesty, compassion, fairness, and generosity were most important in liking, respecting, and knowing. Other moral traits, such as purity and wholesomeness, were seen as less important; even less than certain competent traits. Third, these traits are likable and respectable, in part, because they may be beneficial to social perceivers.

Differences Between Liking, Respecting, and Knowing

Our results reveal several novel findings regarding morality's importance to liking, respecting, and understanding. First, across tasks, morality was equally important to liking and

respecting. Given research suggesting liking and respecting are distinct forms of evaluation influenced by different aspects of the social target (Baryła, 2014), this finding was somewhat unexpected and suggests these processes may be more similar than previously thought or at least both heavily influenced by morality. We did not systematically analyze traits beyond the domains of morality, competence, and sociability, so more robust differences between liking and respecting might lie outside these trait domains.

Second, compared to its powerful relationships with liking and respecting, morality was less important to understanding someone. Across tasks, all domains we examined (competence, sociability, moral foundations) were less important to knowing than to liking and respecting. As this is the first examination of morality's role in specific evaluation alongside understanding, these findings raise questions about connections between liking, respecting, and knowing others. One possibility is that ''understanding'' someone may be a more complex process than evaluations of liking and respecting, being influenced by a wider variety of personality, behavioral, or relational qualities, and thus not strongly influenced by any single domain of qualities. In this case, even if all perceivers agree about what it takes to know someone, the average correlation for morality would still be low. The second possibility is that perceivers simply do not agree on what it takes to know someone. If some people believe that morality plays a strong role, while others do not, then morality's average correlation with knowing will be small. Indeed, relatively large between-person variation (*SD*s were larger for knowing; see Table 2) implies less consensus about the importance of morality (or any domain) toward knowing someone.

Implications for Morality's Connection to Interpersonal Relationships

Our findings provide insight into why honesty, compassion, fairness, and generosity are so central in social perception and what we look for in others. To our knowledge, this is the first empirical test of adaptive or "self-interested" explanations of likable traits, derived from previous findings that individuals tend to like and affiliate with those who are cooperative and trustworthy (Wojciszke et al., 2009; Wortman & Wood, 2011) and have respect and high esteem for people who are cooperative and generous (Hardy & Van Vugt, 2006). Our findings indicate that a perceiver might see these moral traits as important in an acquaintance, in part, because an acquaintance having such traits might benefit the perceiver in some way. However, results also revealed that the adaptive explanation does not completely account for morality's desirability in others. Individuals might find moral traits desirable, in part, because they are intrinsically good in ways unrelated to personal gain.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Our study was initially designed to focus on the roles of morality, competence, and sociability in social perception, not to examine moral foundations theory. We focused on competence and sociability as contrast traits because they have been studied extensively in previous research on impression formation; however, our analyses of moral foundations are tentative. Correlations between the social perceptual dimensions and sanctity/degradation may have been low compared to care/harm because the moral traits we selected did not include enough traits relevant to sanctity/degradation. Future research should expand the variety of traits examined in order to thoroughly explore relationships between morality; personality traits; and their importance to liking, respecting, and knowing others.

One might argue that our set of moral traits for the trait rating task was overly inclusive or that the nonmoral traits provide an inadequate contrast, making it too easy for participants to rate moral traits as most important. However, rerunning correlations (Table 2, row 4) using only the 20 moral traits, produced similar results (i.e., correlations $\bar{r}$s > .82, .84, and .31). Thus, *even among moral traits*, the *most* morally relevant traits are most connected with liking, respecting, and knowing. It is also important to recall that we did not select traits a priori with regard to social impact; they were selected by independent judges out of 500 traits as relevant to morality. Control traits were selected because judges rated them as not relevant to competence or morality.

Overall, our study elucidates morality's relationship to liking, respecting, and understanding, how these dimensions differ, and why certain moral traits are considered valuable in others. This study raises questions for the study of morality's relationship to person perception: What do moral traits signal about the potential for an interpersonal relationship? Are there characteristics of *social perceivers* that make them care about morality when evaluating and understanding others? To answer these questions, future research must probe more deeply into the perception, attributional, and evaluative processes driving judgments of moral character.

Notes

1. Because participants completed Q-sorts 1 week apart, sample sizes (and therefore *df*) varied slightly across liking, respecting, and knowing Q-sort analyses.

2. Because of differences between liking/respecting and knowing Q-sorts, we rescaled independent ratings of the traits to reflect "relevance" to morality before correlating them with participants' ratings of each trait's informativeness to knowing. For example, a rater may rate "cruel" as 1 (*extremely immoral*) and rate "athletic" as 4 (*neither moral nor immoral*). We rescaled this to reflect that cruel is highly relevant to morality and athletic is not relevant. Morality ratings of 1 and 7 were rescaled to 4 (*extremely relevant to morality*), 2 and 6 rescaled to 3, 3 and 5 rescaled to 2, and 4 rescaled to 1 (*irrelevant*). We correlated relevance ratings with participant's ratings of the traits' "informativeness" to knowing. Thus, each person's correlation reflects the degree to which she or he views the traits that are most relevant to morality as being more informative to knowing.

Supplemental Material

The online data supplements are available at http://spps.sagepub.com/supplemental.

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