

## **Moral Character in Negotiation**

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### **Abstract**

In this article, we discuss the role of moral character in negotiation and identify open questions and promising directions for future scholars to explore. We advance research in this area by introducing a dyadic model of moral character in negotiation, which highlights the joint influence of each party's moral character on negotiation attitudes, motives, and behaviors. We discuss the implications of our model and conclude that personality science, and especially the study of moral character, has great potential to enhance research and practice in negotiations. Our hope is that this work will accelerate theoretical development and empirical studies that address the question of how moral character influences negotiation processes and outcomes—from pre-negotiation (e.g., planning, selecting negotiating partners) to actual bargaining (e.g., bargaining tactics, concessions) and finally, post-negotiation (e.g., deal implementation, long-term consequences, relationship building and maintenance, reputations)—and provide a springboard for future studies on this topic.

*Keywords:* Negotiation; Deception; Character; Morality; Unethical Behavior; Personality

### Moral Character in Negotiation

After a long period of skepticism, researchers have recently begun to recognize and appreciate the role that personality plays in negotiation processes and outcomes (Elfenbein, 2015). Personality traits have been shown to influence first impressions and satisfaction with negotiation partners (Wilson, DeRue, Matta, Howe, & Conlon, 2016), probability of initiating negotiations (Kapoutsis, Volkema, & Nikolopoulos, 2013), estimations of value (Sharma, Bottom, & Elfenbein, 2013), concession strategies (Amanatullah, Morris, & Curhan, 2008), distributive and integrative bargaining success (Barry & Friedman, 1998; Dimotakis, Conlon, & Ilies, 2012), and speed of reaching final agreements (Wilson et al., 2016), among other behaviors. One area of personality science that has been less explored but is receiving growing attention in negotiation research is moral character.

Moral character represents an individual's general tendency to think, feel, and behave in ways associated with ethical and unethical behavior (Cohen & Morse, 2014; Cohen, Panter, Turan, Morse, & Kim, 2014; Fleeson, Furr, Jayawickreme, Meindl, & Helzer, 2014; Goodwin, Piazza, & Rozin, 2014). It is a multidimensional construct that subsumes a number of more specific traits, including *moral identity* (Aquino & Reed, 2002), *guilt proneness* (Cohen, Panter, & Turan, 2012), *empathy* (Davis, 1983), *conscientiousness* (Roberts, Jackson, Fayard, Edmonds, & Meints, 2009), and *honesty-humility* (Lee & Ashton 2012), among other related characteristics. The "Dark Triad" traits of *Machiavellianism*, *narcissism*, and *psychopathy* reflect low moral character (Hodson et al., 2018; Jones & Paulhus, 2017; LeBreton, Shiverdecker, & Grimaldi, 2018). Broadly speaking, individuals who are low in moral character are more willing to behave unethically to get what they want from their counterpart while those high in moral

character are not. Rather, high moral character individuals tend to be honest and trustworthy even in circumstances where unethical behavior could go unpunished.

Scholars have found encouraging evidence that individual differences in moral character are important determinants of negotiation attitudes and behaviors. For instance, Cohen, Panter, Turan, Morse, and Kim (2014) demonstrated that a wide variety of moral character traits are correlated with disapproval of unethical negotiation tactics, as captured by the Self-reported Inappropriate Negotiation Strategies (SINS) scale (Lewicki, Saunders, & Barry, 2007). And, studies of lying in negotiation role-play simulations and in economic decision-making games consistently find that those with high levels of moral character are more honest (e.g., Aquino, Freeman, Reed, Lim, & Felps, 2009; Cohen, Wolf, Panter, & Insko, 2011; Hilbig & Zettler, 2015; Jones & Paulhus, 2017; Kennedy, Kray, & Ku, 2017).

Yet, like many nascent areas in science, personality researchers have made considerable progress on certain negotiation topics while others remain largely unexplored. In the present paper, we identify three major limitations in the literature that we believe, once addressed, would substantially advance our understanding of how moral character unfolds in the negotiation environment. First, we discern the need for a greater focus on moral character at both sides of the negotiating dyad. Because existing negotiation studies have focused almost exclusively on the individual level, it is often assumed that moral character has a one-sided influence on negotiation behaviors. We challenge this assumption and instead advocate an interactionist view of moral character in negotiation, which takes into account the dynamic relationship between the character-driven attitudes, motives, and behavior of the two (or more) parties.

Second, we encourage a broader view of negotiation, including pre- and post-negotiation processes. Moral character could influence different phases of the process, from pre-negotiation

(e.g., planning, selecting negotiating partners) to actual bargaining (e.g., bargaining tactics, concessions) and finally, post-negotiation (e.g., deal implementation, long-term consequences, relationship building and maintenance, reputations). Current empirical work in negotiations has disproportionately focused on the actual bargaining process as compared to the pre-negotiation and post-negotiation stages (Jang, Elfenbein, & Bottom, 2018).

Furthermore, we observe that extant research generally assumes high levels of moral character yield cooperative behaviors. Personality scholars, however, have recently begun to recognize the complexity of personality, and point out that even the most desirable traits can be detrimental (to oneself or others) in certain contexts (Bendersky & Shah, 2013; Grant, Gino, & Hofmann, 2011; Judge, Piccolo, & Kosalka, 2009; Smith, Hill, Wallace, Recendes, & Judge, 2018). In line with this perspective, we suggest that moral character traits can manifest differently depending on features of the situation, and can sometimes motivate competitive rather than cooperative behaviors. Drawing on research in social psychology, we describe moral character's capacity to produce both competitive and cooperative interactions between people depending on the social context, and discuss specific implications for the negotiation setting.

Overall, the aim of the present article is to promote a more sophisticated understanding of moral character as it pertains to negotiations. We pursue our goal by first synthesizing the existing literature on moral character. Next, to move research in this area forward, we propose a dyadic model of moral character in negotiation, which highlights the joint influence of each party's moral character on negotiation attitudes, motives, and behaviors. The model also suggests moderators that might lead to moral character motivating unexpected attitudes, motives, and behaviors (e.g., intergroup competition). We conclude by discussing the implications of our dyadic model for negotiation scholars. Our hope is that this work will enhance the relevance and

rigor of moral character research in negotiations and provide a springboard for future studies on this topic.

### **Moral Character in Negotiation: A Brief Review**

When situational constraints are weak, many people are tempted to deceive to advance their own self-interest in negotiations. Some give in to this temptation and lie to get what they want from their counterparts. Others do not; maybe they resist; maybe they are not tempted at all by the lure of ill-gotten gains. Who are these individuals that act honestly and are trustworthy even when unethical negotiation behavior could go unpunished? What qualities do they possess that cause them to act ethically when others would not?

Among other desirable qualities, individuals with high levels of moral character tend to be fair and genuine when interacting with others even when they could be taken advantage of by them (Ashton & Lee, 2008; Lee & Ashton, 2012). They also have a strong conscience, meaning that they feel guilty when they make mistakes or do the wrong thing, and more importantly, they can anticipate this, which keeps them from transgressing in the first place (Cohen et al., 2012; Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Moral individuals are considerate of others' feelings and perspectives (Davis, 1983; Eisenberg & Miller, 1987), and see morality as central to their own personal identity (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Hertz & Krettenauer, 2016). Moreover, those with high moral character have strong willpower and a great capacity to avoid succumbing to temptation (Roberts et al., 2009). While some scholars prefer to separate moral personality from moral values (Parks-Leduc, Feldman, & Bardi, 2015) and moral identity (Aquino & Reed, 2002), we advocate a more inclusive view, considering all individual differences that are associated with a tendency to think, feel, or behave in ethical ways as elements of moral character (Cohen & Morse, 2014).

Whereas those among us with the highest moral character have high standing on all of these facets of character, most people have more moderate levels of these characteristics, or have high standing on some but low standing on others. The most unethical individuals—those who are callous, irresponsible, and untrustworthy—have very low scores on all of these facets of character. If a person has low moral character, they embody the Dark Triad of high Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy—a toxic combination of attributes that are associated with more competitive, zero-sum beliefs about negotiations (ten Brinke, Black, Porter, & Carney, 2015).

While situational factors can certainly pull people toward unethical behavior—in negotiations and elsewhere—individuals with high moral character are largely (but not completely) resistant to such pressures. Those with high levels of moral character have a strongly internalized sense of right and wrong, and this moral sense is chronically accessible to them, thus facilitating their moral behavior across a broad array of situations in which people are faced with decisions about whether to take advantage of counterparts for personal gain. For example, studies of the moral character trait honesty-humility show that individuals with high (vs. low) levels of honesty-humility are more generous in dictator games (Hilbig, Thielmann, Hepp, Klein, & Zettler, 2015; Hilbig, Zettler, Leist, & Heydasch, 2013), are more likely to honor people's trust in trust games (Thielmann & Hilbig, 2015), are more cooperative in prisoner's dilemma games (Zettler, Hilbig & Heydasch, 2013) and public goods games (Hilbig, Zettler, & Heydasch, 2012), have more cooperative social value orientations (Hilbig, Glöckner, & Zettler, 2014; Hilbig & Zettler, 2009), and act more honestly when faced with situations in which they could cheat for financial gain (Hilbig & Zettler, 2015). Likewise, a meta-analytic review summarizing findings from 111 studies examining the relationship between moral identity and moral action

(Hertz & Krettenauer, 2016) revealed that the character trait of moral identity is a robust predictor of moral behaviors and attitudes across a variety of settings and social interactions, including telling the truth, sharing resources, donating money and time, and helping others in the workplace.

This tendency to behave in other-oriented, cooperative ways in interpersonal interactions may help explain why high moral character negotiators make better impressions on their negotiation counterparts and are more sought after as negotiation teammates. As evidence of this, consider a recent study by Cohen (2017), who collected data on moral character and negotiator reputations and relationships from MBA students in negotiations classes. Throughout the course, the students completed four one-on-one negotiation role-plays, as well as a class survey that included a measure of guilt proneness, which is a key element of moral character that captures the strength of a person's conscience (Cohen et al., 2012). Prior work has established that individuals high in guilt proneness are considerably more trustworthy (Levine, Bitterly, Cohen, & Schweitzer, in press) and honest (Cohen et al., 2011) than individuals low in guilt-proneness. After each negotiation role-play, the students indicated the impressions their counterparts made on them ranging from positive to negative. And, at the end of the course they indicated which students in the class they would want to negotiate with in the future as part of their negotiation team. MBA students with higher levels of guilt proneness made significantly more positive overall impressions on their negotiation counterparts and were significantly more likely to be chosen as negotiation teammates at the end of the course. These findings highlight the positive downstream consequences for the reputations and relationships of high moral character negotiators.

While Cohen's results indicate that high moral character benefits negotiators' reputations and relationships, this does not necessarily mean high moral character negotiators will uniformly outperform low moral character negotiators when it comes to financial outcomes. In fact, research by ten Brinke and colleagues (2015) suggests that high moral character can be costly for claiming value when negotiations are mainly distributive and have little value creation potential, such as when there is a single issue and no long-term relationship between the negotiators. In multi-issue negotiations or those with potential for long-term relationships, however, the costs associated with high moral character are likely to be offset by benefits associated with greater value creation. That is, high moral character is, in general, an asset in negotiations that have value creation potential because character oftentimes (but not always) fosters interpersonal cooperation and facilitates better social interactions. But, at the same time, high moral character can be a liability in negotiations that are purely distributive because high levels of moral character are generally not conducive to a highly competitive bargaining approach.

### **Can Moral Character Change?**

One question that often arises when thinking about moral character is whether it changes across the lifespan. The answer to this question is yes, and no. Certainly, change is possible, and mean levels of moral character tend to increase over the life-span (Ashton & Lee, 2016). For example, Figure 1 shows the average level of guilt proneness among more than 18,000 respondents aged 14 to 74 who completed the Five-Item Guilt Proneness scale (Cohen, Kim, & Panter, 2014) in a web-based survey (see Lee & Ashton 2016 for details of the survey administration). This figure is similar to one reported by Ashton and Lee (2016) for the honesty-humility dimension of personality, which, like Figure 1, also suggests that people become more moral as they get older. Conscientiousness—the willpower element of moral character—

similarly follows an upward trajectory as people age (Ashton & Lee, 2016; Roberts, Walton, & Viechtbauer, 2006). While the results shown in Figure 1 are from a cross-sectional survey, a meta-analysis of 92 longitudinal studies by Roberts, Walton, and Viechtbauer (2006) corroborate these findings by showing similar evidence of mean-level changes in the Big Five personality dimensions throughout the life span, thereby bolstering our confidence in the conclusion that personality changes as people age, both with respect to moral and non-moral traits.

Still, despite the mean-level changes in moral character over time, there is a high degree of heritability and rank-order stability of moral character. For example, a study of more than 2000 Swedish adult twins finds that genetics account for a substantial amount of variance (e.g., 30-50%) in accounting for people's moral standards (Loewen, Dawes, Mazar, Johansson, Koellinger, & Magnusson, 2013). Consistent with this genetic variation, children who are more moral than peers of the same age will as older adults continue to be relatively more moral than peers of the same age (i.e., there is strong rank-order stability over time).

A study by Stuewig and colleagues (2015) that investigated guilt proneness in children over the course of ten years illustrates the rank-order stability of moral character in a compelling way. They found that children with low levels of guilt proneness in fifth grade (10-12 years old) were subsequently arrested and convicted of more crimes over a period of ten years following the initial personality assessment than were children with high levels of guilt proneness. So, while moral character can, and often does, increase across the lifespan, it is nonetheless the case that the most moral among us will continue to be the most moral from the time we are children until we are older adults. And, those of us with the lowest moral character will often remain in relatively low standing unless strong efforts are made to change the dispositional tendencies that emerge early in life—dispositional tendencies that seem to be based, in part, on genetic variation.

## Open Questions

All areas of scientific research face challenges. Given the relatively new area of inquiry of moral character in negotiation, it perhaps is not surprising there are areas for improvement. One particularly striking shortcoming in the literature is that negotiations are dyadic or multiparty in nature, yet the study of how character influences negotiations has largely neglected to consider the complex interactions between the two (or more) parties. What are the dynamics of negotiations between individuals with low levels of moral character and those with high levels of moral character? What happens when negotiators who both have low levels of moral character face off against one another? Conversely, what happens when two people who are both high in moral character negotiate?

A study by Wilson and colleagues (2016) suggests that negotiators who are similarly high or low on personality traits—agreeableness and extraversion were the focus of their study—tend to reach faster agreements and develop more positive feelings about their counterpart than negotiators who are dissimilar in personality. By extension, it is possible that dyads who are similar in moral character may fare better in negotiations than mismatched dyads (i.e., one person high in moral character interacts with a counterpart who is low in moral character). However, this possibility remains to be tested, and while we can speculate about possible behaviors and outcomes that might ensue in different character pairings (which we do in the next section), the reality is that we know very little about how negotiation behaviors and outcomes manifest according to the combination of the two (or more) parties' moral characters.

A second open question is how personality generally, and moral character specifically, influences different stages of the negotiation process. Scholars have focused heavily on understanding the impact of personality during the actual bargaining process while overlooking

other relevant phases of the negotiation, such as pre-negotiation (e.g., planning, selecting negotiating partners) and post-negotiation (e.g., deal implementation, long-term consequences, relationship building and maintenance) (Jang et al., 2018). Accordingly, we know more about how moral character traits influence negotiators' willingness to lie and engage in other unethical tactics during the negotiation itself and much less about how moral character traits influences earlier and later phases. We expect that moral character may play a particularly strong role in the post-negotiation phase, where there are likely to be many opportunities for deals and relationships to directly and indirectly be undermined through unethical and untrustworthy actions. Negative reputational and financial consequences are likely to ensue for negotiators low in moral character (as well as the organizations they represent) as potential partners and negotiation counterparts learn to avoid working with people and organizations they deem dishonest and untrustworthy.

Finally, we believe that the relationship between moral character and negotiation behavior is more complex than has been assumed in much of the extant literature. Accordingly, a third open question is how the influence of moral character on negotiation behaviors and outcomes is moderated by contextual influences. It would be natural to assume that moral character has a simple and straightforward relationship to cooperative behavior, however, we caution against this line of thought. Instead, we argue that moral character can sometimes lead individuals to behave uncooperatively toward others, and this is likely to be especially true when dyadic negotiations are situated in a competitive intergroup context in which accountability to the ingroup is strong and ingroup loyalty pressures are high.

To support our perspective, we turn to social psychological research on "group morality," which suggests that character traits may motivate different sorts of behaviors depending on the

social environment and the moral norms that are activated (Insko, Kirchner, Pinter, Efav, & Wildschut, 2005; Pinter, Insko, Wildschut, Kirchner, Montoya, & Wolf, 2007; Rai & Fiske, 2011). Put simply, the theory of group morality posits that there are different moral standards for intergroup interactions than there are for interpersonal interactions because group-on-group interactions activate a different set of moral concerns (e.g., ingroup loyalty) than do one-on-one interactions (e.g., fairness) (Cohen, Montoya, & Insko, 2006; Rai & Fiske, 2011; Wildschut & Insko, 2006). One prediction that follows from this theory is that character traits are associated with very different kinds of behaviors depending on the relational context. That is, moral character should, by definition, give rise to moral behavior, but what behaviors are considered moral versus immoral vary depending on the relational context (Rai & Fiske, 2011). For example, although guilt proneness, in general, promotes exceedingly positive interpersonal behaviors, including honesty, helping, and ethical business decision making. (Cohen et al., 2012), it has nonetheless been shown to also be associated with competitive rather than cooperative behaviors toward members of outgroups when accountability to the ingroup is high and ingroup loyalty is prioritized (e.g., Cohen et al., 2006; Insko et al., 2005; Pinter et al., 2007; Wildschut & Insko, 2006). These empirical findings from lab-based social interactions suggest that while individuals with high levels of moral character may indeed act very cooperatively toward their counterparts in one-on-one negotiations, they nonetheless might act very competitively towards their counterparts in intergroup negotiations in which accountability to the ingroup is high and ingroup loyalty is a salient moral concern.

Although the group morality literature has yet to be fully incorporated into the negotiations literature, it has substantial implications for our understanding of how moral character might influence intergroup negotiations. We believe that high levels of moral

character—and specifically the character trait of guilt proneness, given its particular association with trustworthiness and adherence to moral norms (e.g., Cohen et al., 2006; Insko et al., 2005; Pinter et al., 2007; Wildschut & Insko, 2006)—will produce uncooperative behaviors toward outgroups in disputes and other bargaining situations in which negotiators perceive threats to the ingroup’s welfare. As yet, however, there has been no systematic attempt to integrate group morality research into the negotiations literature, nor has there been attempts to integrate other potentially relevant moral theories that may shed light on potential complexities in how moral character influences negotiation behaviors and outcomes. Other relevant moral theories include moral foundations theory, which, like the theory of group morality, also highlights the importance of ingroup loyalty as a moral value (Graham, 2011; Haidt & Graham, 2007), and the theory of dyadic morality, which highlights the importance of perceived harm in moral judgment (Schein & Gray, 2018). We encourage researchers to transfer and embed these and other pertinent moral theories in future studies of negotiations. Doing so will help elucidate the kinds of behaviors moral character could motivate in different negotiation contexts.

In the next section, we take a first step toward addressing some of these open questions and bridging these gaps in the literature by introducing a new dyadic model of moral character in negotiation.

### **Dyadic Model of Moral Character in Negotiation**

Negotiations are dyadic, or multi-party, by nature, yet researchers have focused mostly on the individual level when examining the effects of personality on negotiation attitudes, motives, and behaviors. To address this concern, we introduce a dyadic model of moral character (Figure 2) that specifically focuses on explaining the dynamic relationship between the

character-driven attitudes, motives, and behaviors of the two parties and their joint influence on the entire negotiation process and outcomes.

We begin by briefly summarizing the key features of the model. The rectangle in the center of the model depicts the entire negotiation process from the pre-negotiation phase (e.g., planning, selection of counterparts) through the actual bargaining phase (e.g., cooperative and competitive tactics), and ultimately to the post-negotiation phase (e.g., deal implementation, relationship building and maintenance, reputations). Each negotiator's moral character influences his or her own attitudes, motives, and behaviors throughout all of these stages, and this process is dynamic in that Person A's moral character affects the attitudes, motives, and behaviors of Person B and vice versa. The dyadic negotiation process is also influenced by contextual features of the negotiation, which determine the character-driven perceptions and responses of each person throughout the negotiation process. Rather than provide a comprehensive list of all the contextual variables that may influence negotiation processes and outcomes, which is beyond the scope of this article, we highlight four contextual factors (i.e., agent versus self, competition, culture, and power/status) that we believe are particularly pertinent to our model due to their theoretical relevance to moral character and their previously demonstrated significance in existing negotiation studies.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, the negotiators' attitudes, motives, and behaviors lead to the final outcomes of the negotiation, which impact the negotiators themselves and their stakeholders (e.g., their clients, their organizations, society). We illustrate the applicability of the model by discussing

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<sup>1</sup> Although we have presented an abbreviated list of contextual variables that we believe are particularly relevant in the dyadic model, we strongly encourage scholars to broadly explore interactions between personality and contextual factors in future research, including contextual variables that are not directly covered in this article.

three possible negotiation scenarios—when dyad members are both high in moral character, when dyads members are both low in moral character, and when dyad members are mismatched in moral character.

### **Scenario #1: High Moral Character Negotiator versus High Moral Character Negotiator**

First, we discuss a potential negotiation in which Person A and Person B are both high in moral character. We expect that two individuals with high standing in moral character might approach the negotiation by preemptively adopting an integrative, cooperative frame and forming trusting initial impressions of one another. During the bargaining process, they may engage in a series of mutually reinforcing cooperative behaviors, such as using trust-building and value-creation tactics. The negotiators may ask a lot of questions, honestly share information about their needs and priorities, and employ active listening techniques to uncover their counterpart's underlying interests. When the negotiators snag on an issue, they may respond by brainstorming alternative solutions rather than becoming entrenched in their positions. A negotiated agreement that benefits both sides and, more importantly, an honest and cooperative bargaining process in which both parties feel respected, is likely to build a positive foundation for a long-term, trusting relationship in which both parties continue to share information with one another, avoid major inefficiencies, and repeatedly engage in mutually beneficial interactions.

It is important to recognize that contextual variables could moderate these phases in a number of different ways, and in doing so, fundamentally change the negotiation process and outcomes. For instance, we expect that the presence of social or organizational roles, such as acting as an agent on behalf of others in a highly competitive environment, could impact negotiations involving two high moral character individuals. If Person A and Person B represent

the interests of others whom they are accountable to and care strongly about, and the negotiation is situated in a competitive context, they may each adopt a competitive approach to the negotiation and utilize uncooperative tactics, such as resisting compromise or challenging the opponent's position, in order to advance the interests of the people they represent. These behaviors are likely to arise when the situation is such that there is an inherent conflict between the negotiating parties due to the structure of the situation, such as when there are limited resources and one side doing better inherently means the other side must do worse (Cohen et al., 2006)—a situation that interdependence theory labels “noncorrespondence” of outcomes (Kelly & Thibaut, 1978). As articulated in the preceding section of the paper, the reason we expect this switch in behavior among the high moral character negotiators is that the moral standards that guide negotiators' behaviors are likely to be very different in interpersonal negotiations involving only two individuals—where fairness and trust are the most salient moral concerns (Cohen, Wildschut & Insko, 2010)—as opposed to in intergroup negotiations in which representatives are expected to strongly advocate for their client's or group's interests—where ingroup loyalty is the most salient moral concern (Cohen et al., 2006; Insko et al., 2005; Pinter et al., 2007; Rai & Fiske, 2011; Wildschut & Insko, 2006). Thus, our expectation is that the most moral negotiators (i.e., those with the highest moral character) will act exceptionally cooperatively toward one another in interpersonal, one-on-one negotiations (because of trust and fairness motivations), and will act exceptionally competitively toward one another in intergroup negotiations when the situation is such that helping one's own side necessarily means harming the other side (because of ingroup loyalty motivations).

The expression of high levels of moral character may also vary across cultures. Culture is important to the study of character because it can heighten or inhibit the salience of certain moral

values for negotiators. For example, prior work indicates that the values of harmony and honor are emphasized in East Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East whereas goal achievement and personal gain are emphasized in Western Europe and North America (e.g., Aslani, Ramirez-Martin, Brett, Yao et al., 2016; Brett, 2000; Gelfand, Brett, Gunia, Imai et al., 2013; Gelfand, Severance, Lee, Bruss, et al., 2015; Gunia, Brett, Nandkeolyar, & Kamdar, 2011). Because harmony and honor are closely linked to ingroup loyalty values that are characteristic of group morality, we expect that, in order to advance the interests of their ingroup, negotiators from East Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East who have high standing on moral character could behave more uncooperatively toward outgroup counterparts as compared to negotiators from Western Europe and North America, at least in some negotiation contexts, such as those in which promoting harmony for the ingroup is at odds with treating the outgroup cooperatively.

### **Scenario #2: Low Moral Character Negotiator versus Low Moral Character Negotiator**

In the second scenario of our model, we consider a negotiation in which Person A and Person B are both low in moral character. Similar to the first scenario, we expect each person's moral character to shape his or her approach to the negotiation. However, instead of adopting an integrative, cooperative frame, we suggest that two individuals with low standing in moral character will preemptively adopt a distributive, competitive frame toward the negotiation. We also expect the low moral character dyad to engage in mutually reinforcing acts of dishonesty and competition during the actual bargaining process. For example, an initial act of lying by Person A may cause a reciprocal act of dishonesty by Person B, which may subsequently launch a chain reaction of increasingly egregious unethical negotiation behaviors by both parties. Person A and Person B may eventually reach a negotiation outcome or may become caught in an impasse and devolve into a "distributive spiral" (O'Connor & Arnold, 2001). Opportunities for

value creation are likely to be squandered because neither side will trust the other enough to understand or care about the other's underlying interests. Put simply, such negotiations are likely to be "lose-lose" as opposed to "win-win", in terms of both the objective value of the settlement and the subjective value associated with the process and the outcomes.

With respect to downstream consequences, one possibility is that the unscrupulous tactics and low degree of trust and trustworthiness that are likely to arise when two low moral character negotiators face off will ruin any chance of a future relationship between the two parties and damage their reputations. However, an interesting alternative hypothesis is plausible, based on the research by Wilson and colleagues (2016) described earlier. It is possible that because they are similar to one another in terms of core values, or lack thereof, two low moral character negotiators could come to respect one another, in an "honor among thieves" sort of way. For example, each side could come to respect the devious, Machiavellian tactics employed by the other and, this respect for each other's gamesmanship could temper the negative feelings that might otherwise be expected when people feel cheated and disrespected. As this is a heretofore unstudied topic, future research is sorely needed to understand the post-negotiation relationships and reputations that emerge when two low moral character individuals negotiate with one another.

With regard to contextual factors, we do not expect culture nor acting as an agent to meaningfully impact low moral character negotiators because these individuals do not particularly care about upholding moral values, regardless of their cultural importance, or promoting the interests of others. Instead, we expect competition, power, and status to have stronger influences on how low moral character negotiators behave. First, we expect that highly competitive negotiations amplify the amount and intensity of immoral actions committed by low

moral character negotiators because each side experiences increased pressure to outmaneuver their counterpart in order to walk away as the “winner”.

In addition, previous research has shown that having high (vs. low) power can increase self-interested goals and behaviors, whereas having high (vs. low) status can lead to more fair and generous behaviors (Blader & Chen, 2012; Diekmann, Soderberg, & Tenbrunsel, 2012; Handgraaf, van Dijk, Wilke, & Vermunt, 2003; Tenbrunsel, 1998; van Dijk & Vermunt, 2000). Thus, it may be a particularly toxic combination for two negotiators to have low moral character and high power, as there would be few internal or external constraints on bad behavior in such cases. For example, low moral character negotiators with high power may readily exhibit brazen acts of deception and bullying, which can create an unhealthy negotiation environment right out of the gate. In contrast, having high status might inhibit the negative influence of low moral character and instead encourage the negotiating dyad to reach more integrative, value-creating solutions, and limit the extent to which “money is left on the table.” Perhaps the negotiators are strongly committed to reaching a final agreement in order to maintain their high-status positions, leading them to be more balanced in their demands and more willing to reciprocate concessions than they would normally allow.

### **Scenario #3: High Moral Character Negotiator versus Low Moral Character Negotiator**

Finally, we describe a negotiation in which Person A is high in moral character and Person B is low in moral character. When pairs are mismatched, we believe that the dyad members will adopt different styles and approaches to the negotiation, at least initially. Person A may view the negotiation from an integrative lens, for example, whereas Person B may preemptively adopt a distributive lens. In addition to having a different view of the negotiation from the outset, the two negotiators will use different bargaining strategies to meet their goals

and objectives. Despite Person A's best intentions, it is unlikely that the negotiators will be able to collaborate effectively to create shared value because Person B's tendencies toward dishonesty and untrustworthiness are likely to get in the way. Still, it may be possible for Person A to buffer the pair from devolving into a negative tit-for-tat cycle of unethical actions by refusing to reciprocate bad behavior or by using other effective conflict management techniques (Lytle, Brett, & Shapiro, 1999). Alternatively, it could be the case that Person B causes both sides to behave badly, by for example, exhausting all of the willpower Person A has to keep herself from stooping to Person B's level.

At some point, the joint attitudes, motives, and behaviors of the negotiators will determine the final outcomes and downstream consequences of the negotiation. It is possible that mismatched pairs will reach better overall outcomes than dyads containing two low moral character negotiators due to the relatively lower levels of mutual dishonesty among mismatched pairs as compared to low-low pairs. The mismatched pairs may be able to achieve comparable or only slightly worse outcomes than high moral character dyads, depending on how the negotiation unfolds and which negotiator ends up holding more sway over the process and outcomes. Asymmetry in outcomes between the two negotiators is a likely possibility. If Person A makes the mistake of being overly trusting of Person B, then Person A could find himself or herself in a disadvantageous position and could be "taken for a ride" by being cheated, duped, or swindled. If this were to occur, the downstream consequences for the negotiators' relationship would no doubt be terrible, and the reputation of the low moral character negotiator might also suffer. Alternatively, for one-time negotiations in which the two parties do not share overlapping social networks, the low moral character negotiator might successfully take advantage of the other party without facing repercussions. Yet as the pair continues to interact and as society becomes

increasingly transparent, the risk of getting caught for using underhanded tactics will likely lead to negative reputational effects.

There may be interesting interactions between moral character and contextual variables for mismatched pairs. In highly competitive negotiations or disputes in which the high moral character individual is representing others and cares strongly about their interests, it is possible that both the high and low moral character negotiator will engage in hard bargaining tactics, such as holding firm to their positions and demanding concessions from their opponent, and will leave potential mutual benefits on the negotiation table, possibly for different reasons. A similar pattern of behavior may arise when the high moral character actor identifies with a harmony and honor culture and the low moral character counterpart belongs to a competitive outgroup. In contrast, in negotiations where there is low inherent competition in the situation and the low moral character individual has high status that needs to be maintained, the dyad might employ value-creation tactics and work together toward reaching integrative, cooperative solutions. Altogether, our conceptual model implies that moral character does not operate in a vacuum, but rather influences the ongoing dyadic process between two negotiators and the downstream consequences of that process.

### **Discussion**

Personality science helps us understand how people think, feel, and behave. Moral character is one of the most fundamental elements of personality (Ashton & Lee, 2008; Lee & Ashton, 2012; Goodwin et al., 2014), and it is unfortunate that it has not yet received much attention in the negotiations literature. Through this paper, we aim to change that. We reviewed current research and outlined unexplored questions that merit further investigation. In particular, we stressed the importance of studying moral character at both sides of the negotiating dyad and

encouraged a broader view of the negotiation process that includes pre- and post-negotiation phases. We also recognized the need to account for situational moderators when studying moral character and negotiation behavior.

To inspire future studies on this topic, we presented a dyadic model of moral character in negotiation that captures the dynamic interaction between the negotiating parties and its consequences for negotiation processes and outcomes. Unlike previous negotiation models, ours takes a broad view of negotiation by including the pre- and post-phases rather than just the bargaining phase. For instance, we discussed the potential ways negotiators might approach a negotiation and form initial impressions of their counterpart according to their moral character. In addition, we considered the aftermath of bargaining by exploring the extent to which reputational effects, trust, and other downstream consequences are likely to occur across different combinations of moral character. Finally, we introduced complexity in the dyadic model by considering how contextual features of the negotiation (e.g., organizational/social roles, culture, power, status) influence the character-driven perceptions and responses of each party, sometimes motivating unexpected attitudes, motives, and behaviors.

The ideas and conclusions presented in this paper are subject to certain limitations, which suggest future research directions. First, while our dyadic model explores possible scenarios and behaviors that may arise for different combinations of moral character dyads, the usefulness of our analysis is contingent, to some extent, on people being able to determine the moral character of the two (or more) negotiators. While previous studies have revealed that people have both a reasonable understanding of their own ethical tendencies as well as the ethical tendencies of well-acquainted others (Cohen, Panter, Turan, Morse, & Kim, 2013; Helzer, Furr, Hawkins, Barranti, Blackie, & Fleeson, 2014), it nonetheless could be the case that in many circumstances,

negotiators are not aware of, or are inaccurate in their perceptions of their own moral character or the moral character of their counterparts. And, given that negotiations commonly involve interactions between strangers, it is important to determine whether moral character can be detected by strangers, which we encourage negotiation scholars to investigate. Although the inherently socially desirable nature of moral character can make screening difficult in high-stakes settings, there is encouraging evidence that it is possible to do so when you know what to look for and use targeted questions to tap into the relevant traits (Kim, 2018). Moral character assessment is an active research area, and while not perfected yet, we will no doubt see developments along this front in the coming years.

Second, the theoretical perspective put forward in the present paper is limited to negotiations between two parties, either two individuals or two groups. However, negotiations often involve multiple parties—these parties could be individuals, or they could more macro-level entities, such as organizations or countries. While we expect many similarities between dyadic and multi-party models of moral character in negotiation, the conceptual model we presented focuses on negotiations between just two parties. Future work might productively build upon our model by exploring how moral character could influence multi-party negotiations. For example, negotiation scholars might examine how moral character affects negotiations *within* teams, as opposed to between two teams. Does the team dynamic shift when only one member is high in moral character, or, conversely, when only one member is low (cf. Steinel, De Dreu, Ouwehand, & Ramirez-Marin, 2009)? What if the mismatched member is the leader of the negotiation team? Is one bad leader sufficient to spoil the bunch? Exploring how different combinations of moral character impact leader-member relations and intragroup negotiation processes will be fundamentally important to understanding multi-party negotiations.

In closing, we are optimistic that the study of moral character in negotiation is a fruitful area of research. In the current paper, we provide a more sophisticated understanding of moral character as it pertains to the negotiation environment by articulating the character-driven processes and behaviors that might emerge during dyadic negotiations. Our hope is that this paper will accelerate theoretical development and empirical studies that address the question of how moral character influences negotiation, including the pre- and post-negotiation phases.

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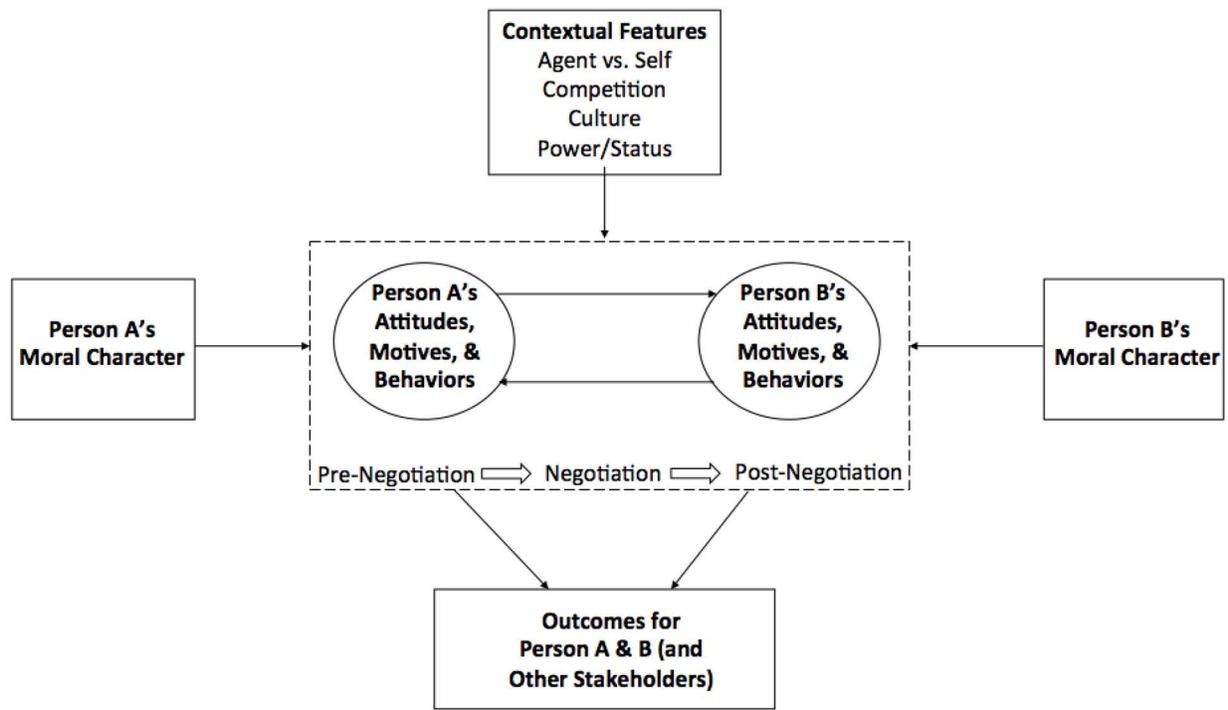
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**Figure 1. Guilt proneness across the lifespan.**



*Note.* Responses from 18,538 individuals were collected in a web-based survey administered by Lee and Ashton (2016). Respondents completed the Five-Item Guilt Proneness scale (GP-5; Cohen, Kim, & Panter, 2014; mean scores are presented (*Range*: 1-5). Age is presented in years from 14 years old to 74 years old. As shown, guilt proneness and age are significantly correlated ( $r = .22, p < .001$ ), such that guilt proneness scores increase throughout the lifespan.

**Figure 2. Dyadic Model of Moral Character in Negotiation**

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