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Turning Inward or Focusing Out? Navigating Theories of Interpersonal and Ethical Cognitions to Understand Ethical Decision-Making

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Abstract The literature on ethical decision-making is rooted in a cognitive perspective that emphasizes the role of moral judgment. Recent research in interpersonal dynamics, however, has suggested that ethics revolves around an individual's perceptions and views of others. We draw from both literatures to propose and empirically examine a contingent model. We theorize that whether the individual relies on cognitions about the ethical issue or perceptions of others depends on the level of social consensus surrounding the issue. We test our hypotheses in three studies. Results suggest that not only does social consensus determine whether an individual relies on ethical cognitions about the issue or perceptions of others, but also that an individual's view of self is an important moderator in these relationships. We conclude by considering implications of this research for theory and practice.

Keywords Ethical judgment · Interpersonal relationships · Ethical decision-making · Ethical behavior · View of others · View of self

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Introduction

Corporate scandals, such as exaggerating revenue, paying bribes, facilitating corrupt officials, and mishandling confidential business information, have generated world-wide interest in unethical behavior (Treviño et al. 2006). Although many entities, including the United States Securities and Exchange Commission and the United States Senate, have exerted pressure on corporations to improve employee behavior (Pulliam et al. 2010; Thiel et al. 2012), employees continue to report that they feel pressure to compromise standards and are experiencing retaliation when they report misconduct by managers or organizational representatives (National Business Ethics Survey 2011). Also troublesome are recent national reports of misconduct by retail customers. For instance, retailers estimated that holiday return fraud (in the form of return of stolen merchandise and fraudulent purchases) cost them $3.4 billion (National Retail Survey 2013). These events highlight the importance of understanding the determinants and dynamics of ethical decision-making across both organizational (e.g., Butterfield et al. 2000) and consumer contexts (e.g., Vitell & Muncy 2005; Vitell et al. 2001).

Behavioral ethics researchers have studied direct relationships between ethical behavior and a variety of antecedent conditions. Some have focused on individual differences in demographics, personality, and cognitive ethical development (Treviño et al. 2006). However, a significant amount of the literature in both organizational and marketing ethics assumes that decision makers follow a cognitive and rational approach that revolves around moral judgments about the issue (e.g., Kohlberg 1981; Rest 1986; Reynolds 2006b; Vitell et al. 1991, 2001; Weber 1990). This substantial trend notwithstanding, some scholars have suggested that the cognitive approach fails to fully explain ethical behavior, and have therefore either

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called for or suggested alternative approaches (e.g., Cohen 2010; Haidt 2001; Hannah et al. 2011; Reynolds 2006b; Vitell et al. 2013; Weaver et al. 2014). In this vein, several researchers have argued that a central aspect of ethics is a "consideration of others" (e.g., Brass et al. 1998). These authors emphasize that interpersonal relationships play an influential role in explaining individual ethical decision-making (e.g., attachment theory: Albert and Horowitz 2009; social relationships: Bowler and Brass 2006; Brass et al. 1998; interpersonal dominance: Son Hing et al. 2007). Indeed, research has indicated that one's perceptions of others and intimacy of relationships with others may be related positively to ethical behavior in specific relationships (e.g., Brass et al. 1998; Venkataramani and Dalal 2007; Vetlesen 1994). Additionally, several scholars have also demonstrated that a lack of consideration for others elicits unethical behavior, especially if these behaviors help advance the self-interests of the decision-maker (Duckitt 2001; Son Hing et al. 2007).

Despite a significant amount of research indicating the value of cognitive analyses and interpersonal constructs in explaining ethical behavior, no research has considered these ideas concurrently. Accordingly, we argue that both interpersonal and cognitive factors are critical yet contingent factors in the individual ethical decision making process. Specifically, we propose that whether individuals rely on cognitive judgments or interpersonal factors depends on the level of social consensus regarding the moral issue—the degree of social agreement that the proposed act is good or evil or right or wrong (Jones 1991). Our results provide evidence that an integrated approach involving both interpersonal and cognitive principles is not only justified, but also provides a much more comprehensive explanation of ethical behavior. This research thus contributes to the literature by extending our understanding of the cognitive and interpersonal aspects of ethical decision-making and by highlighting how the nature of the moral issue can shape individual responses to ethical situations.

Two Approaches to Ethical Behavior

The Cognitive Approach

Philosophers have studied ethical behavior for centuries, and most have framed it as a cognitive exercise (Honderich 1995). This long-standing tradition is reflected in the earliest and most widely-regarded theories explaining the psychology of ethics (Hunt and Vitell 1986; Rest 1986). For example, Rest's (1986) four-component model claims that ethical decision making first begins with ethical awareness, an acknowledgment that the issue contains ethical content. Once this recognition has been made, the individual then makes a judgment about the issue at hand, establishes an intention to behave ethically, and finally engages in ethical behavior.

Ethical judgment, considered by many to be the most critical element in the ethical decision making process (Kohlberg 1981), has been researched quite thoroughly (Goolsby and Hunt 1992; Greenberg 2002; Hunt and Vitell 1986; Hunt 1993; Vitell et al. 2001). Two of the most foundational constructs of the ethical judgment literature are consequentialism and formalism (Brady and Wheeler 1996). Per Reynolds (2006a), consequentialism is teleological or ends-based ethical decision making. It emphasizes the "end" or the outcome of an act and contends that the ethical act is that which optimizes or creates the greatest good or benefit. In contrast, formalism represents deontological or obligation-based approaches to ethical decision making. It emphasizes the "means"—normative patterns of behavior and other formal standards as determinants of what is ethical (Brady and Wheeler 1996; Honderich 1995; Hunt and Vitell 1986; Hunt 1993). Together these two constructs capture the most fundamental of concerns in ethical decision-making, and as a result, they have been used in numerous settings to explain a variety of ethical phenomena ranging from perceptions of justice (Schminke et al. 1997), consumer ethical decisions (Vitell et al. 2001) and moral awareness (Reynolds 2006a) to ethical behaviors such as honesty and cheating (Brady and Wheeler 1996; Reynolds and Ceranic 2007). While consequentialism and formalism explain a great deal about ethical decision-making, several scholars have suggested that an interpersonal approach also has much to add.

An Interpersonal Approach

Research has established that individuals have generalized stances toward relationships and "others" that are often spontaneous and unacknowledged (Pietromonaco and Barrett 2000). As Kahn and Kram (1994) suggest, these stances are internalized models developed in childhood that individuals typically carry into adulthood, and which influence behaviors across interpersonal situations. According to Bowlby (1969, 1973), individuals develop these internalized working models based on repeated interactions with early significant figures that subsequently serve as cognitive maps for navigating relationships throughout one's lifespan. Bowlby posited that these working models are comprised of two complementary yet distinct cognitive dimensions: a generalized "view of others" and an internalized "view of self" (Albert and Horowitz 2009; Bartholomew and Horowitz 1991; Dizen and Berenbaum 2011; Kobak and Sceery 1988). While

one's view of others is formed based on expectations about the availability and responsiveness of the attachment figure, one's model of self reflects stabilized beliefs about the acceptability and worth of the self. These working models are thought to be malleable during early development but once consolidated; they stabilize and influence one's behaviors through one's lifetime (e.g., Kobak and Sceery 1988; Sroufe and Waters 1977).

As ethical behaviors often occur in social contexts characterized by interpersonal dynamics (Albert and Horowitz 2009; Brass et al. 1998; Son Hing et al. 2007), it seems clear that these working models inform and shape these behaviors. In fact, research in psychology has established that an individual's perception of others is one of the most important determinants of warm and agreeable behavior (Albert and Moskowitz 2014; Dizen and Berenbaum 2011; Locke 2009; Mayer et al. 1995; Moskowitz 2010; Wood et al. 2010). Interpersonal theorists assert that social perceptions will influence how individuals behave in social situations (Albert and Moskowitz 2014; Horowitz et al. 1997; Kiesler 1996; Moskowitz 2010). Individuals who have a tendency to perceive others as hostile, quarrelsome and unfair prepare to respond in hostile, unfair and threatening ways themselves (e.g., Albert and Moskowitz 2014; Dodge and Crick 1990; Raine 2008). Likewise, individuals who perceive others as friendly, compassionate, agreeable and caring, respond with complementary positive behaviors (Graziano et al. 2007; Graziano and Tobin 2002).

Baldwin (1992, 1995) suggested that an individual's views of others work in combination with his/her view of self to determine how the individual interprets and responds to interpersonal information, and that these conclusions then guide their behavior. Therefore, we suggest that an interpersonal approach encompassing views of others (and of the self) is not only justified, but also will provide unique and valuable information on the interpersonal dynamics of ethical behavior. In the following section, we theorize about how these factors act directly and in combination with ethical judgments to shape ethical decision-making. In short, we suggest that the effects of these factors depend on the level of social consensus regarding the issue being considered (Jones 1991).

An Integrated Model Based on Social Consensus

Jones (1991) developed an issue-contingent model of ethical decision-making in which he proposed that issues vary in their moral intensity (the extent to which the issue involves moral content). According to Jones, moral intensity is comprised of six characteristics: magnitude of harm, temporal immediacy, probability of effects, concentration of effects, proximity, and social consensus. Social consensus is "the degree of social agreement that a proposed act is evil (or good)" (Jones 1991, p. 375); it "indicates the extent to which there is a general concurrence within society about the moral status of the issue" (Reynolds and Ceranic 2007, p. 1611). Subsequent research has empirically demonstrated that social consensus is one of the most important factors in determining an issue's moral intensity (Frey 2000).

When social consensus is high, a clear and shared understanding of what constitutes ethical behavior is apparent. We suggest that under such situations, the individual does not need to rely on personal judgments of ethicality (i.e., consequentialistic and formalistic analyses of the issue) to determine what is moral. Instead, the widely-accepted social standard regarding the issue (i.e., social consensus) spontaneously informs the individual regarding the ethical nature of the issue (e.g., "charitable behavior is good behavior"). High social consensus does not, however, guarantee that the individual will be motivated to perform that ethical action. The individual must be motivated to act upon that social consensus. Scholars have suggested that individuals are motivated to engage in behaviors such as making donations to charity, recycling bottles or donating food, because of their favorable views and feelings about others (Silk 2006). As mentioned, interpersonal research has established that an individual's perception of others is one of the most important determinants of social behavior (Albert and Moskowitz 2014; Dizen and Berenbaum 2011; Horowitz et al. 1997; Locke 2009). Therefore, we expect that behavior in situations of high social consensus will depend on the individual's view of others. If the individual perceives others positively, then the individual is likely to respond with complementary positive behaviors. Most importantly, such individuals would have motivations to operate in a manner consistent with larger social expectations expressed in the social consensus factor. Thus, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 1a When social consensus regarding the ethical issue is high, one's view of others will positively influence ethical behavior.

The literature on interpersonal relationships argues that not only is the individual's view of others important in predicting interpersonal behavior, but also that the individual's view of self affects behavior. The literature on self-views and ethical behavior, however, reveals inconsistent findings regarding their relationship. Conventional wisdom regards low self-esteem as an important cause of violence and unethical behavior (e.g., Long 1990; Oates and Forrest 1985; Wiehe 1991), but a substantial body of research demonstrates that high self-esteem is closely associated with

violence and unethical behavior (e.g., Baumeister et al. 1996; Bradshaw and Hazan 2006). Indeed, Baumeister et al. (1996) argued that the typical self-defining statements of perpetrators of violence and other harmful acts indicated expressions of superiority and capability. These inconsistencies indicate that the relationship between view of self and ethical behavior is not as simple and linear as previously theorized. Thus, we do not necessarily expect view of self to have a direct effect on ethical behavior. Nevertheless, a favorable self-image implies self-confidence to hold firmly and unwaveringly to one's beliefs and values. Individuals with high self-views have been consistently shown to have a greater capacity for self-regulation, persistence in their beliefs and expressing behavior that is consistent with their personal convictions than individuals with low self-esteem (e.g., Crocker and Major 1989; Leary and Tangney 2003; McFarlin et al. 1984). This favorable self-view should also reinforce the individual's ability to engage in behaviors that are consistent with his or her interpersonal convictions. Thus, we propose a moderating effect such that the more favorable the individual's view of self, the stronger the relationship between the individual's view of others and ethical behavior.

Hypothesis 1b When social consensus regarding the ethical issue is high, view of self will moderate the relationship between view of others and ethical behavior such that a favorable self-image will enhance the positive relationship between view of others and ethical behavior.

Of course, social consensus is not always high. By definition, when social consensus is low, widespread disagreement about the ethical course of action exists and therefore the ethical status of the behavior is not obvious. In these kinds of situations, often referred to as ethical dilemmas (Weber 1990), the individual cannot rely on a widely-held opinion about the matter. Instead, the individual must generate his or her own cognitive conclusions to arrive at a moral decision. In other words, the individual is more inclined, perhaps even required, to rely on his or her consequentialistic and/or formalistic analyses about the ethical issue. Thus, we argue that when social consensus regarding an issue is low, consequentialism and formalism will exert direct main effects on ethical behavior and that view of others will have no significant impact on ethical behavior. Specifically, we expect that when social consensus is low, consequentialism will be associated with outcome-oriented behaviors: behaviors that most effectively generate positive outcomes for those involved, even if those behaviors violate well-established rules of conduct. In contrast, we expect that when social consensus is low, formalism will be most closely associated with means-based behaviors: behaviors that demonstrate adherence with moral rules, values and forms of ethical conduct, even if the actions do not involve positive outcomes for those involved or if those behaviors generate generally or personally negative outcomes. These arguments are summarized as follows:

Hypothesis 2a When social consensus regarding the ethical issue is low, consequentialism will be positively associated with more outcome-oriented ethical behaviors.

Hypothesis 2b When social consensus regarding the ethical issue is low, formalism will be positively associated with more means-based ethical behaviors.

Though we have argued that view of others will not have an effect on ethical behavior when social consensus is low, theory and empirical evidence suggest that an individual's view of self still plays an important role in this process. Previous research has documented that individuals often fail to see an ethical judgment through to ethical behavior (Reynolds and Ceranic 2007), but a favorable self-image implies self-confidence to hold on firmly to ethical judgments even in the face of external resistance. Thus, we suggest that as an individual's view of self becomes more positive, the likelihood that he/she will engage in behavior consistent with his or her ethical judgment will also increase. These arguments are summarized below, and all of our hypotheses are illustrated in Figs. 1 and 2:

Hypothesis 2c When social consensus regarding the ethical behavior is low, view of self will moderate the relationship between consequentialism and ethical behavior such that a favorable self image will enhance the positive relationship between consequentialism and outcome-oriented ethical behavior.

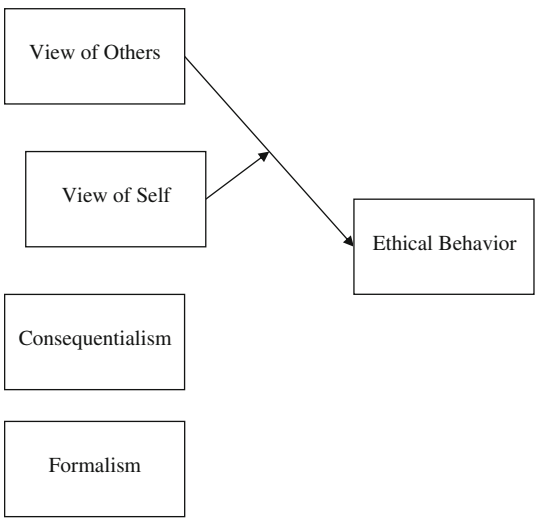

Fig. 1 The influence of cognitive and interpersonal factors on ethical behavior when social consensus is high

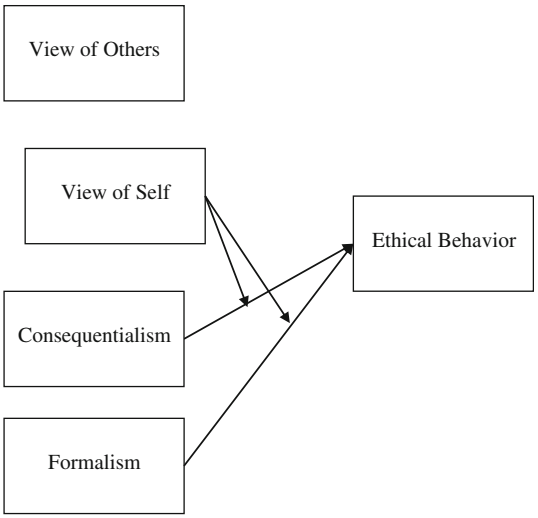

Fig. 2 The influence of cognitive and interpersonal factors on ethical behavior when social consensus is low
When social consensus is low, what constitutes ethical behavior is unclear. In this case, we are arguing that when social consensus is low, consequentialism will be associated with more outcome-oriented forms of ethical behavior and formalism will be associated with more means-based forms of ethical behavior

Hypothesis 2d When social consensus regarding the ethical behavior is low, view of self will moderate the relationship between formalism and ethical behavior such that a favorable self-image will enhance the positive relationship between formalism and means-based ethical behavior.

In the following section, we report three studies that tested these hypotheses. In the first study, we used multiple measures of ethical behavior to repeatedly explore the effects of social consensus, view of others, view of self, consequentialism, and formalism on ethical behavior. In the second study, we extended the generalizability of these results by testing our hypotheses with a consumer measure of ethical behavior and a different sample. In the third study, we used a within-subjects design to test these effects.

Study 1: Method

Sample and Procedure

The sample for the study consisted of 430 individuals holding managerial positions in different organizations on the West Coast of the United States. The participants were recruited from an email list of individuals interested in receiving online survey announcements maintained by the work-life office and the school of business of a large university. With the help of list administrators, we sent a recruitment email to the group of managers inviting them to participate anonymously. After participants confirmed their interest in participating, they received the self-administered questionnaire package in the mail. Of the 430 employees who received the package, 383 completed and returned the questionnaires. Of these, 26 questionnaires were excluded from the analyses due to significant levels of incomplete data or unclear responses. Of the 357 participants in the final sample (83 %), 160 were women and 197 were men. Sixty two percent (221) indicated that they were Caucasian, 15 % (54) indicated that they were Asian, 10 % (36) indicated they were African-American, and 13 % (46) indicated other ethnicities. Most of the respondents (56 %) were between 31 and 50 years old, 33 % were younger than 30 years old and 11 % were more than 50 years old. Each of the participants received a $5 gift certificate from a retailer for participating in the study.

Measures

Ethical Behaviors of High and Low Social Consensus

In their review, Treviño et al. (2006) recognized that the literature has conceptualized ethical behavior in multiple ways. Generally speaking, some measures of ethical behavior focus on the individual's meeting or failing to meet minimal ethical standards (e.g., stealing, being honest), whereas others have focused on behaviors that exceed ethical minimums (e.g., charitable giving). In an effort to capture this variance of social consensus and to provide the most rigorous tests of our hypotheses, we utilized five distinct measures of ethical behavior.

To begin, we focused on charitable giving as a measure of ethical behavior high in social consensus (Reynolds and Ceranic 2007). We measured charitable giving with three items. Participants responded on a four-point scale (1 = never, 4 = many times) to indicate how often they had volunteered for a good cause (homeless shelters), donated non-money items (clothes, food, etc.), and donated money to a charity. The reliability for the three items was .84.

As a second measure of ethical behavior high in social consensus, we utilized a segment of Newstrom and Ruch's (1975) scale of workplace behaviors. The widely-used measure (e.g., Ferrell and Weaver 1978; Kidwell et al. 1987; Peterson 2002; Treviño et al. 1998; Weaver and Treviño 1999) asks respondents to indicate on a Likert type scale (1 = never, 7 = frequently) the extent to which they have engaged in 17 different behaviors. Previous research has consistently demonstrated that four of these items load on a factor representing behaviors perceived to be overt unethical behaviors (high social consensus) in which

managers are least likely to engage (Ferrell and Weaver 1978; George et al. 1999; McCabe et al. 2006). These four behaviors are: (a) Passing blame for errors to an innocent co-worker, (b) Claiming credit for someone else's work, (c) Falsifying time/quality/quantity reports, (d) Padding an expense account of more than 10 %. To confirm the reported findings, we conducted principal component analysis with varimax rotation. Our analysis revealed two distinct factors: the first consisted of the four items mentioned above (eigenvalue = 2.60, 15.29 % of the variance; $\alpha = .82$) and the second consisted of the remaining thirteen items (eigenvalue = 8.66, 50.95 % of the variance; $\alpha = .95$). We used the four behaviors to measure unethical behaviors of high social consensus.

As final measures of high social consensus ethical behaviors, we developed two vignettes. The vignettes described a decision-making situation related to an ethical issue and were listed with a series of other business-related vignettes. The first focused on a situation of claiming credit for a colleague's work and the second focused on illegal bribery. For each vignette, four alternative responses were provided that ranged from what was determined to be the most unethical to the most ethical choice. The single-response format reduced competing preferences to a single scalable behavior. We recognize that vignettes such as these elicit intentions to behave and are less desirable than direct measures of behavior. Nevertheless, as Weber (1990) has noted, vignettes provide a valuable complement to more direct behavioral measures. We computed the mean value of the responses to the two vignettes ($\alpha = .72$), and utilized this measure to provide a more complete test of our hypotheses.

We employed two measures of ethical behavior low in social consensus. The first was comprised of the 13 remaining items from Newstrom and Ruch's (1975) scale. These 13 items reflected less egregious workplace behaviors such as "Calling in sick to take a day off" and "Using company services for personal needs". In each case, the items describe behaviors that involve achieving personal short-term gain while violating both formal and informal rules of conduct. Thus, we considered Newstrom and Ruch's measures of unethical (and ethical) behavior to be proxy measures of outcome-oriented (and means-based) behaviors. While we recognize that alternative consequentialistic (and formalistic) analyses could lead to opposite conclusions, we consider such interpretations to be far less common and therefore inferior representations of these constructs.

As a second measure of an ethical behavior low in social consensus, we included a vignette developed by Reynolds and Ceranic (2007), patterned after vignettes used in prior research on consequentialism and formalism (e.g., Brady and Wheeler 1996; Fritzsche and Becker 1984). It involved a situation where the manager faces an ethical dilemma regarding giving an intern a day off, and had four alternative responses that represented a continuum of behaviors ranging from a highly outcome-oriented option to a highly means-based option. The presentation of the dependent variable measures was randomized.

To test the validity of our claims about the social consensus levels of these dependent variables, we used a separate sample of 103 managers working in the information technology industry (age: $M = 45$, SD = 10.5; tenure: $M = 11$ years, SD = 10.5, 43 % male). They were presented the three charitable behaviors, the behaviors from Newstrom and Ruch's (1975) scale, and the three vignettes described earlier. Items asked to what extent they believed that managers agreed that the behaviors were ethically good or bad. Responses were recorded on a five point scale ranging from 1 ("There is a great deal of disagreement") to 5 ("There is a great deal of agreement"). Results indicated that the managers endorsed charitable giving as a behavior high in social consensus ($M = 4.74$, $SD = .66$). The four items from Newstrom and Ruch (1975) ($M = 4.73$, SD = .63) and the vignettes representing illegal bribery ($M = 4.73$, SD = .70) and claiming credit for a colleague's work ($M = 4.71$, SD = .71) were also perceived by the managers as behaviors with high social consensus. Paired sample t-tests revealed that the respondents believed that the remaining thirteen items ($M = 3.55$, SD = .67) were perceived as having a significantly lower level of social consensus than charitable giving, t (102) = 15.06, $p < .01$. The Cohen's d (1.76) and the effect size correlation ($r = .67$) indicated a large effect. The tests also revealed that respondents perceived the four items as having higher social consensus than the other 13 items, t (102) = 16, $p < .01$. The effect size of this difference was large ($d = 1.82$, $r = .67$). Finally, participants perceived the vignette describing the situation with the intern ($M = 3.66$, SD = 1.26) as having a significantly lower level of social consensus than charitable giving, t (102) = 8.43, $p < .01$ ($d = .94$; $r = .43$). These results supported our claims about the levels of social consensus surrounding the six measures.

View of Self

As a measure of view of self, we used Rosenberg's Self-Esteem (RSE) scale (Rosenberg 1965). Participants rated the self-descriptiveness of ten statements (e.g., "I take a positive attitude toward myself") on a four point scale (1 = not at all descriptive, 4 = very descriptive). The reliability alpha for this measure ($\alpha = .88$) was consistent with previous research (Robbins et al. 2001).

View of Others

As a measure of view of others, we used a modified version of the schema assessment of typicality (Burks et al. 1999). This measure consists of nine pairs of corresponding positive (e.g., approachable) and negative (e.g., cold) terms. Participants indicated which term best described their perceptions of others (in general). The mean number of positive characteristics was computed, and a higher score indicated a more positive view of others ($\alpha = .92$).

Consequentialism and Formalism

We used the character traits section of the Measure of Ethical Viewpoints (Brady and Wheeler 1996) to measure the extent to which respondents generally preferred consequentialistic or formalistic forms of ethical judgments. This instrument is based on the assertion that ethical predispositions are associated with particular character traits and that individuals consider certain character traits to be important based on their ethical predispositions. The instrument lists character traits that respondents rate on a 7-point scale (1 = not important to me, 7 = very important to me). Consequentialism was measured using seven items ("innovative," "resourceful," "effective," "influential," "results oriented," "productive" and "being a winner") and formalism was measured using six ("principled," "dependable," "trustworthy," "honest," "noted for integrity" and "law-abiding"). The reliability alphas for the measures were .87 for consequentialism and .88 for formalism. These results are consistent with previous research (Reynolds 2006a; Reynolds and Ceranic 2007; Schminke et al. 1997).

Control Variable

Even though we solicited anonymous responses, we recognized that social desirability bias could influence the participants' responses. Therefore, we included the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding (Paulhus 1984, 1998) as a control for social desirability bias in our analyses. The BIDR measures two constructs: self-deceptive positivity and impression management. Each of these constructs was measured by 20 items stated as propositions, the responses to which were summed to yield an overall measure of social desirability. Respondents rated their agreement with each statement on a seven-point scale and one point was added for each extreme response (6 or 7) (Paulhus 1998).

Study 1: Results

Means, standard deviations, and correlations of the variables are presented in Table 1. To test each hypothesis, we followed the procedures recommended by Aiken and West (1991). We mean centered the independent variables and created separate sets of regression models for each of the dependent variables (Aiken and West 1991). In each model, the main and interaction effects of the independent variables were investigated.

Table 2 indicates that the inclusion of the interpersonal variables significantly improved the regression model for charitable behavior ($\Delta R^2 = .08$, $p = .00$). Participants' views of others positively influenced charitable giving behavior, $\beta = .13$, t (353) = 5.73, $p = .00$, and view of self did not significantly predict charitable behavior, $\beta = .01$, t (353) = .11, $p = .92$. When the ethical judgment variables were entered into the model, the change in

Table 1 Study 1: Means, standard deviations, and correlation matrix of research variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. View of others	4.71	2.30									
2. View of self	2.86	.85	.20**								
3. Formalism	4.23	1.67	.07	.10							
4. Consequentialism	4.11	1.66	−.02	.08	.11*						
5. Social desirability	16.42	8.40	.22**	.09	.10	.07					
6. Charitable behavior	2.74	.97	.34**	.13*	.02	−.04	.26**				
7. High consensus work behaviors	4.05	1.71	−.35**	−.05	−.03	−.01	−.16**	−.34**			
8. High consensus vignettes	2.66	.94	−.52**	−.10	−.05	.01	−.36**	−.47**	.40**		
9. Low consensus work behaviors	4.18	1.69	−.04	.09	−.35**	.41**	.00	−.05	.07	−.01	
10. Low consensus vignette (intern)	2.70	.96	.01	−.02	−.31**	.30**	.05	−.05	.07	.02	.43**

$N = 357$

* $p < .05$, two-tailed

** $p < .01$, two-tailed

Table 2 Study 1: The effects of view of others, view of self, and ethical predispositions on charitable giving

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4			
	B	*B*	*B*	*B*	SE	η^2	95 % CI
Constant	2.74**	2.74**	2.74**	2.66**	.05	.90	2.57, 2.75
Social desirability	.03**	.02**	.02**	.02**	.01	.04	.01, .03
View of others		.13**	.12**	.09**	.02	.05	.05, .13
View of self		.01	.01	.00	.06	.00	−.11, .12
Consequentialism			−.03	−.05	.04	.00	−.12, .02
Formalism			−.01	.02	.03	.00	−.05, .08
View of others × View of self				.16**	.03	.10	.11, .21
View of self × Consequentialism				.06	.04	.01	−.02, .14
View of self × Formalism				−.03	.04	.00	−.11, .05
R^2	.07	.15	.16	.25			
Adjusted R^2	.07	.15	.14	.23			
F	26.44**	21.25**	12.91**	14.24**			
ΔR^2	.07**	.08**	.00	.09**			
ΔF	26.44**	17.43**	.47	14.07**			

$N = 357$ for all models. Unstandardized regression coefficients are shown

** $p < .01$, one tailed

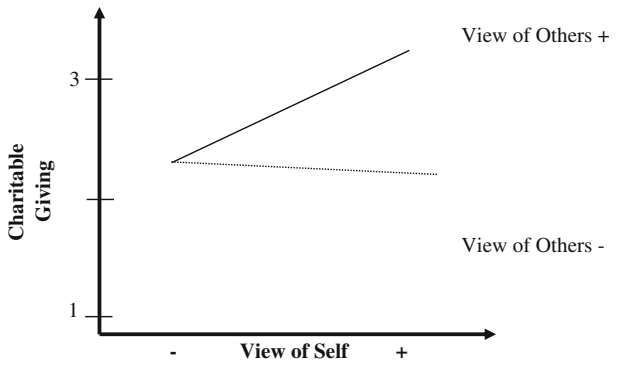

Fig. 3 Study 1: The interaction of view of others and view of self on charitable giving behavior

R^2 was not significant. These results support our arguments in Hypothesis 1a that when social consensus regarding an ethical issue is high, an individual's view of others will positively motivate one's ethical behavior above and beyond the main effects of one's view of self and ethical judgments.

When the interaction terms were examined, the only factor that was significant was the interaction between view of others and view of self ($\Delta R^2 = .09$, $p = .00$). Simple slope analyses (Aiken and West 1991) revealed that when view of self was high, view of others positively and significantly influenced charitable giving; $B = .24$, $t = 9.44$, $p = .00$ (See Fig. 3). However, when view of self was low, the relationship was not significant; $B = -.02$, $t = -.67$, $p = .50$. These results support our arguments in Hypothesis 1b that when social consensus regarding a moral issue is high, view of self will moderate the positive effect of view of others on ethical behavior. Charitable giving behavior was strongest for those individuals who had high views of others as well as of themselves, probably because a favorable self-view enabled them to hold strongly to their positive convictions regarding others, consequently leading to higher levels of charitable behaviors than those with less favorable views of themselves.

With regards to Newstrom and Ruch's (1975) unethical behaviors of high social consensus, the predictive power of the model was enhanced when the interpersonal variables were introduced into the model ($\Delta R^2 = .11, p = .00$); view of others influenced ethical behavior in the expected direction $\beta = -.26$, $t\ (353) = -6.65$, $p = .00$. The remaining three independent variables: view of self, consequentialism and formalism did not influence behavior (see Table 3). This validated our assertion in Hypothesis 1a. Among the interaction variables, the interaction effects of view of self and view of others again significantly improved the overall regression model ($\Delta R^2 = .05$, $p = .00$). The interaction pattern demonstrated that a favorable view of self enhanced the negative relationship between view of others and unethical behavior. Simple slope analysis revealed that when view of self was high there was a significant negative relationship between view of others and ethical behavior, $B = -.40$, $t = -8.60$, $p = .00$. When view of self was low, the effect of view of others on ethical behavior was not significant, $B = -.07$, $t = -1.16$,

Table 3 Study 1: The effects of view of others, view of self, and ethical predispositions on high consensus work behaviors

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4			
	B	*B*	*B*	*B*	SE	η^2	95 % CI
Constant	4.05**	4.05**	4.05**	4.12**	.09	.89	3.95, 4.29
Social desirability	−.03**	−.02**	−.02**	−.02**	.01	.01	−.04, .01
View of others		−.26**	−.26**	−.23**	.04	.09	−.30, −.15
View of self		.17	.17	.16	.11	.00	−.05, .37
Consequentialism			−.02	.03	.06	.01	−.09, .16
Formalism			.00	.02	.06	.00	−.10, .14
View of others × view of self				−.19**	.05	.05	−.28, −.10
View of self × consequentialism				.04	.08	.00	−.11, .19
View of self × formalism				.10	.07	.01	−.04, .25
R^2	.03	.13	.14	.19			
Adjusted R^2	.02	.13	.12	.17			
F	9.31**	18.23**	10.92**	9.93**			
ΔR^2	.03*	.11**	.00	.05**			
ΔF	9.31	22.13**	.10	7.31**			

$N = 357$ for all models. Unstandardized regression coefficients are shown

** $p < .01$, one tailed

Table 4 Study 1: The effects of view of others, view of self, and ethical predispositions on high consensus vignettes behaviors

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4			
	B	*B*	*B*	*B*	SE	η^2	95 % CI
Constant	2.67**	2.67**	2.67**	2.71**	.04	.93	2.63, 2.79
Social desirability	−.04**	−.03**	−.03**	−.03**	.01	.08	−.04, −.02
View of others		−.19**	−.19**	−.17**	.02	.19	−.21, −.13
View of self		.03	.03	.03	.05	.00	−.07, .13
Consequentialism			.01	.02	.03	.00	−.04, .08
Formalism			.00	.01	.03	.00	−.05, .07
View of others × view of self				−.11**	.02	.07	−.15, −.07
View of self × consequentialism				.02	.04	.01	−.06, .09
View of self × formalism				.02	.04	.00	−.05, .08
R^2	.13	.33	.33	.38			
Adjusted R^2	.13	.33	.32	.37			
F	53.12**	58.62**	35.02**	26.69**			
ΔR^2	.13**	.20**	.00	.05**			
ΔF	53.12**	53.52**	.08	8.88**			

$N = 357$ for all models. Unstandardized regression coefficients are shown

* $p < .05$, one-tailed

** $p < .01$, one tailed

$p = .24$. These results mirror the results obtained when charitable behavior was used as the dependent variable.

Similar results were also obtained with regard to the composite measure of the two vignettes measuring high social consensus unethical behaviors, claiming credit for a colleague's work and illegal bribery. As expected, view of others influenced unethical behavior ($\Delta R^2 = .20$, $p = .00$) (See Table 4) in the expected direction. View of self and the two ethical judgment variables did not change the regression model. Finally, the interaction of view of self and view of others significantly improved the regression model ($\Delta R^2 = .05$, $p = .00$). All of these results support the arguments listed in Hypotheses 1a and 1b.

Table 5 Study 1: The effects of view of others, view of self, and ethical predispositions on low consensus work behaviors

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4			
	B	*B*	*B*	*B*	SE	η^2	95 % CI
Constant	4.18**	4.18**	4.18**	4.14**	.07	.90	4.00, 4.28
Social desirability	.00	.00	.00	.00	.01	.00	−.01, .02
View of others		−.05	−.02	.13	.03	.01	−.10, .03
View of self		.21	.04	.00	.09	.00	−.04, .31
Consequentialism			.42**	.27**	.05	.07	.16, .37
Formalism			−.41**	−.23**	.05	.05	−.33, −.13
View of others × View of self				.03	.04	.00	−.04, .11
View of self × Consequentialism				.37**	.06	.09	.24,.49
View of self × Formalism				−.28**	.06	.06	−.40, −.16
R^2	.00	.01	.33	.41			
Adjusted R^2	.00	.00	.32	.39			
F	.00	1.32	34.93**	29.72**			
ΔR^2	.00	.01	.32**	.07**			
ΔF	.00	1.98	84.42**	14.37**			

$N = 357$ for all models. Unstandardized regression coefficients are shown

* $p < .05$, one-tailed

** $p < .01$, one tailed

Table 6 Study 1: The effects of view of others, view of self, and ethical predispositions on low consensus vignette (intern)

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4			
	B	*B*	*B*	*B*	SE	η^2	95 % CI
Constant	2.70**	2.70**	2.70**	2.71**	.05	.91	2.62, 2.80
Social desirability	.01	.01	.01	.01	.01	.01	.00, .02
View of others		.00	.02	.02	.02	.00	−.03, .06
View of self		−.03	−.04	−.06	.06	.01	−.17, .05
Consequentialism			.19**	.12**	.03	.04	.06, .19
Formalism			−.20**	−.11**	.03	.03	−.18, −.05
View of others × View of self				−.04	.02	.00	−.09, .01
View of self × Consequentialism				.18**	.04	.05	.10, .26
View of self × Formalism				−.10**	.04	.02	−.18, −.03
R^2	.00	.01	.21	.27			
Adjusted R^2	.00	.01	.20	.25			
F	1.14	.75	7.62**	6.83**			
ΔR^2	.00	.00	.21**	.06**			
ΔF	.76	.08	45.89**	9.30**			

N = 357 for all models. Unstandardized regression coefficients are shown

* $p < .05$, one-tailed

** $p < .01$, one tailed

With regards to work behaviors low in social consensus, view of self and view of others did not influence ethical behavior (See Table 5). As expected, both consequentialism and formalism significantly improved the predictive power of the model ($\Delta R^2 = .32$, $p = .00$). Consequentialism was positively and significantly associated with more outcome-oriented ethical behaviors, $\beta = .45$, $t\ (353) = 9.99$, $p = .00$, and formalism was negatively and significantly associated with those behaviors $\beta = -.41$, $t\ (353) = -9.26$, $p = .00$, even after the effects of view of self and view of others are considered. These results confirmed the arguments of Hypothesis 2a and 2b. The

inclusion of the interaction terms between the ethical predisposition and view of self variables significantly improved the regression model ($\Delta R^2 = .07$, $p = .00$). The interaction of view of self and consequentialism on behavior was positive and significant, $\beta = .37$, t (353) = 5.73, $p = .00$ and the interaction of formalism and view of self on behavior was negative and significant, $\beta = -.28$, t (353) = −4.53, $p = .00$, thereby validating the arguments of Hypotheses 2c and 2d. Simple slope analyses revealed that high self-esteem enhanced the positive relationship between consequentialism and outcome-oriented ethical behavior ($B = .78$, $t = -12.9$, $p = .00$) and the negative relationship between formalism and outcome-oriented behaviors ($B = -.72$, $t = -11.06$, $p = .00$), while for low self-esteem individuals, the slopes were non-significant.

With regard to the vignette depicting an ethical behavior low in social consensus, the results were consistent with those of the low social consensus work behaviors. The main effects of view of self and view of others were not significant (see Table 6). Both consequentialism and formalism influenced ethical behavior in the directions expected ($\Delta R^2 = .21$, $p = .00$). The interactions between the ethical predisposition and view of self variables significantly improved the regression model ($\Delta R^2 = .06$, $p = .00$). Formalistic judgments are based on an argument that behaviors that adhere to standards are ethical. When this ideal was combined with a high view of self, the resulting behavior was the most means-based. Conversely, consequentialism provides an argument that the ethical status of a behavior is determined by the benefit the outcome may provide. When consequentialism was combined with a high view of self, it resulted in the highest level of outcome-oriented behaviors.

The results of Study 1 provided support for our hypotheses. Nevertheless, questions remained about the generalizability of these findings. To address this issue, we conducted a second study with a different sample (undergraduate students), alternative measures of key independent variables, and a different moral domain (consumer ethics).

Study 2: Method

Sample and Procedure

Participants were 250 undergraduate business students enrolled in a core business class in a large Western university in the US. They completed a survey for which they received extra-credit applicable to their final course grade for participation. Of the 250, 135 were women and 115 were men. Seventy-eight percent of the respondents indicated that they were Caucasian (195), 30 (12 %) indicated that they were Asian, and 10 % (25) indicated other ethnicities.

Measures

Ethical Behaviors of High and Low Social Consensus

Ethical behaviors of high and low social consensus were measured with a widely-used consumer ethics scale (Muncy and Vitell 1992; Vitell 2003). The scale includes four dimensions, and we focused on the two dimensions that most effectively represent situations high and low in social consensus: (i) the actively benefitting from illegal actions scale (e.g., Drinking a can of soda without paying for it) ($\alpha = .82$); and (ii) the passively benefitting scale (e.g., Not saying anything when the waitress miscalculates the bill in your favor) ($\alpha = .81$) (See Muncy and Vitell 1992; Vitell and Muncy 2005). Participants indicated the extent to which they engaged in the list of behaviors on a Likert type scale (1 = never, 7 = frequently). As in Study 1, we noted that measures of unethical behavior involved a short-term personal gain at the expense of a rule violation. Therefore, we recognized the measures as proxies for outcome-oriented (vs. means-based) behaviors.

We validated the social consensus factor using a separate sample of undergraduate business students ($N = 75$). The participants indicated the extent to which they believed that other students agreed that the behaviors were ethically good or bad. Responses were recorded on a five point scale ranging from 1 ("There is a great deal of disagreement") to 5 ("There is a great deal of agreement"). Paired sample t-tests revealed that the students believed the illegal behaviors had high social consensus ($M = 4.71$, SD = .29) while the passively benefitting scale did not ($M = 2.55$, SD = .66), t (86) = 27.9, $p = .00$. The Cohen's d (4.24) and the effect size correlation ($r = .90$) indicated a large effect.

View of Self

As a measure of view of self, we used the General Self Efficacy Scale (Revised) (Chen et al. 2001; Schwarzer and Jerusalem 1995). Participants rated the self-descriptiveness of eight statements (e.g., "I will be able to achieve most of the goals that I have set for myself") on a five point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree; $\alpha = .82$).

View of Others

As a measure of view of others, we used the Interpersonal Trust Scale (Rotter 1967). The scale measures an individual's general views regarding others. Participants rated their generalized expectations of others on a five point scale (e.g.,

Table 7 Study 2: Means, standard deviations, and correlation matrix of research variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. View of others	3.11	1.02						
2. View of self	3.43	1.10	.05					
3. Formalism	4.21	2.04	−.02	.10				
4. Consequentialism	4.28	1.70	−.07	.15*	.30**			
5. Social desirability	9.45	5.84	.25**	.04	−.07	−.03		
6. Illegal behaviors	3.97	1.61	−.46**	−.08	.04	−.02	−.16**	
7. Passive behaviors	4.32	1.87	.02	.07	−.27**	−.40**	.10	.10

N = 250

* $p < .05$, two-tailed

** $p < .01$, two-tailed

"An honor system in which teachers would not be present during exams would probably result in increased cheating"; 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree; $\alpha = .85$).

Consequentialism/Formalism

We used the character traits section of the Measure of Ethical Viewpoints (Brady and Wheeler 1996) to measure the extent to which respondents preferred consequentialistic or formalistic forms of ethical judgments.

Controls

As before, we controlled for socially desirable responding using the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding (Paulhus 1984, 1998).

Study 2: Results

Means, standard deviations, and inter-correlations of the variables are presented in Table 7. We tested each hypothesis, using the procedure similar to Study 1.

When the main effects of the interpersonal and judgment variables on ethical behavior of high social consensus were investigated, only participants' views of others significantly influenced illegal actions, thereby supporting Hypotheses 1a and 1b ($\Delta R^2 = .19$, $p = .00$), $\beta = -.71$, $t\ (246) = -7.68$, $p = .00$. Among the interaction terms, the only significant interaction was that between view of self and view of others ($\Delta R^2 = .12$, $p = .00$). Simple slope analyses revealed that when view of self was high the negative effect of view of others on illegal actions was the strongest; $B = -1.11$, $t = -11.07$, $p = .00$. When view of self was low the slope was negative but significantly less steep; $B = -.22$, $t = -1.94$, $p = .05$. This finding supports the assertion of Hypothesis 1b that when social consensus regarding an ethical issue is high, a favorable view of self enhances the positive effect of view of others on ethical behavior.

When examining issues of low social consensus, views of self and others did not influence ethical behaviors. However, both consequentialism and formalism independently influenced the behaviors in the directions expected (Consequentialism: $\beta = .42$, $t\ (244) = 7.36$, $p = .00$; Formalism: $\beta = -.45$, $t\ (244) = -8.71$, $p = .00$) and significantly improved the predictive power of the model ($\Delta R^2 = .27, p = .00$). This validated Hypotheses 2a and 2b. The inclusion of the interaction terms between the ethical judgment and self-view variables significantly improved the regression model ($\Delta R^2 = .16, p = .00$); Simple slope analyses revealed that the effects of both consequentialism and formalism were strongest for individuals with the high views of self. For individuals with high views of self, consequentialism had a significant positive effect on outcome-oriented behavior ($B = .62$, $t = 6.64$, $p = .00$) and formalism had a significant negative effect on these behaviors ($B = -.73$, $t = -10.29$, $p = .00$), while the slope for individuals with low self-esteem was statistically non-significant. These results provide support to the assertions of Hypothesis 2c and 2d.

The results of Studies 1 and 2 provided support for our hypotheses. Nevertheless, these studies were not without limitations. Most notably, the studies examined the effects of social consensus via separate and distinct measures, which is perhaps not the strongest means for testing these relationships. To address this issue, we designed a within-subjects exercise that isolated the effects of social consensus on ethical decision-making.

Study 3: Method

Sample and Procedure

Participants were 93 managers registered on a standing panel for social scientific research (see www.studyresponse.

com for details). Forty were female. Seventy-four were Caucasian, 13 were Asian, 3 were African-American, 2 were Native-American, and 1 was Hispanic. When asked to select an age category, 3 selected 22–25 years old, 15 marked 26–30, 34 marked 31–40, 23 marked 41–50, and 15 indicated they were 51 or older. In addition, 63 indicated at least 10 years of work experience.

Participants were contacted by the panel administrators and offered the opportunity to participate in this online in-basket exercise in exchange for $5. Consistent with our instructions, participants required 26 min, on average, to complete the exercise.

Design

The design was a repeated measures experiment. The within-subjects factor was social consensus. Participants were asked to assume the identity of a manager in a fictitious company and were presented with several tasks to complete (order office supplies, read a memo, etc.). One of the exercises was recommending punishment for employees who had engaged in specific behaviors. The behaviors were designed to represent two conditions of social consensus. The behavior high in social consensus was, "An employee threatened his supervisor's life after a performance review session." The behavior low in social consensus was, "An employee spent a workday afternoon in her cubicle doing her personal income taxes on her computer." This factor was validated via an expert panel. We contacted five individuals who research and teach on the topic of business ethics. We presented a list of 8 behaviors, including the 2 behaviors in this study, to the panel members and asked them to what extent they believed society generally agreed about the ethical standing of each behavior (1 = people are very likely to disagree about whether this is unethical; 5 = people are very likely to agree that this is unethical). Data from this group indicated that the expert panel believed the first behavior (threat) had a high degree of social consensus (mean = 5.00) while the second behavior did not (mean = 2.60). These differences were statistically significant ($t = 4.71$; $p < .01$) and thus validated our design. The behaviors were randomly presented to the participants.

Measures

Ethical Behaviors of High and Low Social Consensus

Ethical behavior was measured as the punishment recommended by the participant for the behavior high in social consensus and the behavior low in social consensus. For each behavior, participants could recommend a punishment of increasing severity: 1 = do nothing, 2 = verbal reprimand, 3 = written reprimand, 4 = suspension, 5 = termination. Punishment is considered to be a second-order ethical decision in that it is contingent upon the first-order behavior of another. As the colloquialism "the punishment fits the crime" suggests, punishment is the punisher's behavioral response toward the first-order act (Bedau 2010). More severe punishments, which reflect an unwillingness to accept the violation of the moral rules involved in the situation, were considered to be ethical behaviors, and, using the same logic as in Studies 1 and 2, were considered to be more means-based behaviors. Seven participants did not provide answers for both measures, so ultimately we collected 172 observations for analysis.

Independent Variables

Formalism, consequentialism, view of self, and view of others were measured with the same scales as in Study 1. In the case of view of others, the questions were contextualized and referred to the participants' co-workers, parents/care-givers, and bosses and leaders. All of the scales demonstrated reliability and factor loadings comparable to Study 1.

Table 8 Study 3: Means, standard deviations, and correlation matrix of research variables

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. High consensus punishment	4.42	.89	1.00				
2. Low consensus punishment	2.86	.94	.09	1.00			
3. Formalism	6.27	.74	.52**	.15	1.00		
4. Consequentialism	5.72	.74	.19	.13	.54**	1.00	
5. View of self	3.92	.71	.39**	−.14	.30**	.17	1.00
6. View of others	5.33	.94	.19	.20	.17	.13	.25*

$N = 86$

** $p < .01$

* $p < .05$

Table 9 Study 2: Within-subject effects on punishments

Source	Mean square	F	Partial η^2
Factor (Social Consensus High and Low)	.34	.63	.01
Factor × formalism	7.00	13.09**	.14
Factor × consequentialism	1.05	1.95	.02
Factor × view of self	.73	1.36	.02
Factor × view of others	7.22	13.49**	.15
Factor × view of self × formalism	5.80	10.84**	.12
Factor × view of self × consequentialism	.77	1.44	.02
Factor × view of self × view of others	6.45	12.06**	.13
Error	.54		

$N = 86$

Number of observations = 172

** $p < .01$

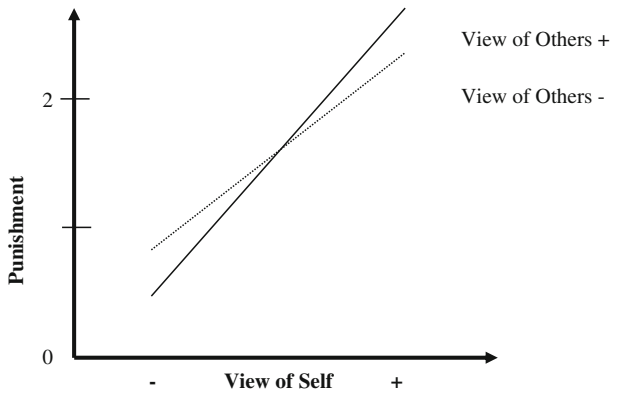

Fig. 4 Study 3: The interaction of view of others and view of self on punishment (high consensus)

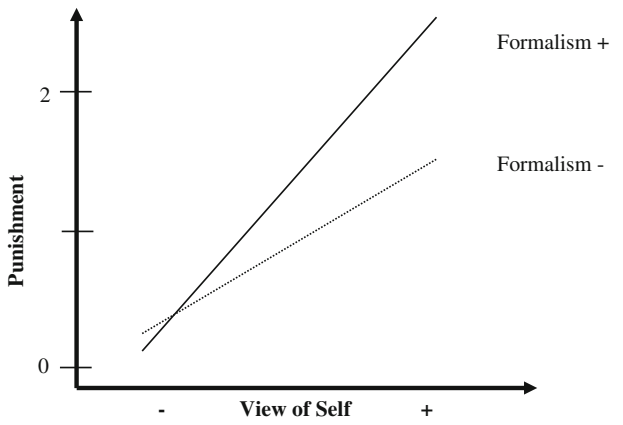

Fig. 5 Study 3: The interaction of formalism and view of self on punishment (low consensus)

Study 3: Results

Means, standard deviations and a correlational matrix of all of the variables in this study are presented in Table 8. A paired samples t test of the two measures of the dependent variable generated a t value of 11.69 ($p = .00$) indicating a within-subjects effect. To analyze the nature of this effect, we conducted a General Linear Model (GLM) repeated measures analysis. Test of within-subjects effects are reported in Table 9. Per the table, formalism and view of others demonstrated significant effects across measures (H1a and H2b). In other words, the effects of these variables on the dependent variable varied according to the factor, social consensus. Similarly, the interaction effects of view of self/formalism and view of self/view of others were also similarly significant across measures (H1b and H2c). To examine the nature of these interaction effects, we referred to the parameter estimates generated by GLM analysis for each independent measure. For the behavior high in social consensus, the interaction of view of self and view of others significantly predicted the punishment recommendation ($B = .33$, $p < .01$) while the interaction of view of self and formalism did not ($B = -.31$, $p = .13$). As Fig. 4 demonstrates, punishment was harshest when view of self and view of others were highest. For the issue low in social consensus, in contrast, the interaction of view of self and formalism was significant ($B = .65$, $p = .01$) while the interaction of view of self and view of others was not ($B = -.27$, $p = .07$). To our argument, punishment was harshest when view of self and formalism were both highest (Fig. 5). Consequentialism was not a significant factor in any of these models. In hindsight, we recognize that Brady (1985) argued that formalists are past-oriented and consequentialists are future-oriented, and that this exercise emphasized the past (e.g., what someone did) but provided no information about the future conditions of the employees (e.g., the consequences for the company of terminating an employee). In that light, these specific

results were not surprising. On the whole, then, the results of Study 3 provided strong support for four of our hypotheses.

General Discussion

Our objective in this research was to test whether an integrated model combining principles from ethical cognitive and interpersonal research streams would help explain ethical behavior more comprehensively. Our results suggest that individuals rely on both judgments about the ethical issue and perceptions of others when facing ethical issues. Results indicate, however, that whether the individual uses judgments about the issue or view of others to make ethical decisions depends on whether the ethical issue involves high social consensus or not. The results of these studies indicated that when social consensus regarding an issue was high, the individual's view of others positively influenced ethical behavior independent of the influence of cognitive judgments about the issue. In contrast, when social consensus was low, ethical predispositions influenced ethical behavior even after the effects of view of others were accounted for. Importantly, the results of all three studies indicate that an individual's view of self is a key moderator in these relationships.

Theoretical Implications

From a theoretical perspective, these results make important contributions to the discipline of behavioral ethics. To begin, this research contributes to literatures on ethical cognition by providing additional evidence of the general importance of ethical predispositions. It is well established that ethical judgments are very important to ethical behavior, but these findings confirm and extend existing work which suggests that the processes and effects of ethical judgments are quite nuanced. Clearly, individuals engage in cognitive analyses of ethical issues, but this research confirms that social consensus is a critical factor in activating and shaping the influence of different processes. Moreover, this research demonstrates the moderating role that view of self plays in influencing ethical behaviors of low social consensus.

Additionally, this research contributes to the interpersonal research stream by demonstrating the importance of an individual's view of others in explaining ethical behaviors of high social consensus. This research specifically demonstrates that an unfavorable view of others causes managers to engage in overt unethical behaviors prescribed by society as being explicitly wrong. Further, it clarifies the moderating role that view of self plays in influencing ethical behaviors of high social consensus. When considering an issue of high social consensus, a favorable image of the self seems to intensify the effect of the individual's view of others on unethical behaviors, causing a powerful interaction of characteristics that in its most extreme form may perhaps reflect a sense of entitlement and superiority above existing social norms. As a possible example of this effect, managers at Manville Corporation suppressed evidence that asbestos inhalation was posing a risk to their own employees (Sims 1992). Although we can only speculate on the causes for this specific violation, it is plausible to suggest that overarchingly negative views of others may have combined with inflated views of self to contribute to this overt ethical violation.

We further note that given our choice of measures, our research also contributes to work on self-esteem and deviant behavior. Perhaps as a matter of tradition, some have assumed that individuals with low self-views engage in deviant behavior (e.g., Long 1990; Wiehe 1991). This study, however, confirms the counter-intuitive findings of other recent work: Individuals with overly favorable self-image do engage in deviant and unethical behavior. Our research clarifies these inconsistencies by suggesting that view of self does not directly predict deviant behavior. Instead, it influences the relationship between view of others and ethical behavior. In the present research, view of self also interacted with consequentialism and formalism to magnify their effects on ethical behavior in situations low in social consensus. Such a finding is important in that it clarifies the nature of this well-known but misunderstood relationship.

Limitations and Future Research

This research is not without limitations. First, perhaps our results are construct-dependent. For example, scholars have identified numerous constructs to represent the cognitions associated with ethical decision-making, so future research should be willing to utilize constructs other than consequentialism and formalism to confirm our results. Second, the nature of our designs does not allow us to definitively establish the causal arguments we hypothesize. Granted, our core constructs are individual traits and it is inherently difficult to establish causal relationships with such variables. Nevertheless, future research could focus on designs that establish causality more definitively than these designs have allowed. Third, although we employed a wide variety of measures of ethical behavior including self-reported direct measures, vignettes, and an in-basket simulation, we did not capture all of the different variants of ethical behavior. Future research could utilize more operationalizations of the dependent variable including direct measures that are more common in lab studies (e.g., lying) and

less direct measures that might be identified in field observations. Future research might also examine multiple constructs representing core self evaluations (such as self-confidence, ego-strength, etc.) and evaluations of others to capture additional variance across these related yet distinct domains. Of course, no research or stream of research will ever capture all of the diversity that is reflected in the concept of ethical behavior, but to the extent that researchers can focus on meaningful representations of distinctive elements of the concept, then the merits of our claims and the generalizability of our results can be established more fully.

Practical Implications

In our view, this research provides some explanation of why individuals engage in behaviors that are widely regarded as unethical. Our research suggests that a negative view of others, coupled with an overly favorable view of the self, is associated with behaviors often regarded as self-serving or even arrogant. In today's competitive workplace, achievement and performance are well-rewarded. A positive self-image seems to correlate positively with self-confidence, achievement and competence. Consequently, we might expect to see managers with favorable self-images receive positive performance evaluations and promotions to positions of power and influence. This increases the likelihood that these managers will have strong convictions about their views of others and their judgments of ethical situations. Whereas managers with favorable views of others will likely emphasize their duties and obligations to others and express their convictions by protecting fairness and justice in their organizations, managers with less favorable views of others would likely emphasize the pursuit of their own self-interest at the expense of others and express their convictions by engaging in unethical behavior. They may even build an environment that tolerates ethical violations more nonchalantly, exert pressure on subordinates to behave unethically, and possibly cultivate an unethical organizational climate (Sweeney et al. 2010). Consequently, behaviors that were traditionally condemned as ethically reprehensible might become commonplace in the organization. This research helps us understand the importance of promoting managers who regard others favorably and treat others with fairness and respect. This strengthens calls for improving organizational evaluation systems to include assessments of managerial fairness and ethical performance in addition to traditional evaluations of organizational goal-related performance. This research also provides several insights regarding ways of improving ethical behavior in organizations. First, organizations can devote attention to improving individual ethical judgments in organizations. To the extent that employees are improving their cognitive skills, they are more likely to make sound decisions, particularly in situations where strong consensus has yet to be achieved. Second, this study expounds the importance of social consensus in understanding, predicting and managing the ethical behavior of managers. Organizations can conceivably reduce the ambiguity of important ethical issues by communicating and establishing the organization's view of behaviors that may not engender high social consensus. In this way, organizations can provide their own consensus about ethical issues and guide individual behavior through this individual decision-making path.

Conclusion

Ethical behavior is a complicated phenomenon. Given the complexity that any ethical issue can entail, it seems reasonable that an individual could respond with comparable degrees of complexity. In that sense, it seems quite logical that an individual would utilize different sets of processes to respond to different ethical issues. For as obvious as that conclusion might seem, researchers have only begun to explore explanations that account for multiple processes. We hope that our research provides a useful example of how such research can proceed and thereby opens a door for other similar efforts.

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