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# Examining the Interactive effects of Group Status and Perceived Morality on Personality Judgments



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## Background

- We as humans have a tendency to show a bias toward those who are most similar to ourselves in areas such as gender, ethnicity and religious affiliation.
- This bias feeds into the perceived ideas that our group (the in-group) is good and that the other group (the out-group) is bad (Rosenbaum & Holtz, 1985).
- Ruthland et al. (2010) demonstrated that when one is challenged to choose between morality and group bias, moral reasoning is given priority over group membership.
- Our religious belief system, whether it is Christianity or Islam, can affect the way that we view our in-group and the out-group.
- Additionally, we believe that various components of our religious orientation can have a moderating effect on our perception of others.
- We focused this study on the effects of a quest religious orientation on group status and perceived morality.
  - Quest religiousness often focuses on how an individual views their religion as a journey. Those who are believed to have high quest religiousness indicate an orientation that approaches religion as open-ended through active questioning and exploration of their beliefs.

## Hypothesis

- We sought to find an understanding of the interaction between how people perceive those belonging to other religious groups, who are morally good and morally bad, through the ratings of a fictitious person that may be in the in-group or out-group and perceived as morally good or morally bad.
- We also believe that differences in religious orientation of the participants will moderate the effects on the target evaluation of morality and group status.

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## Methodology

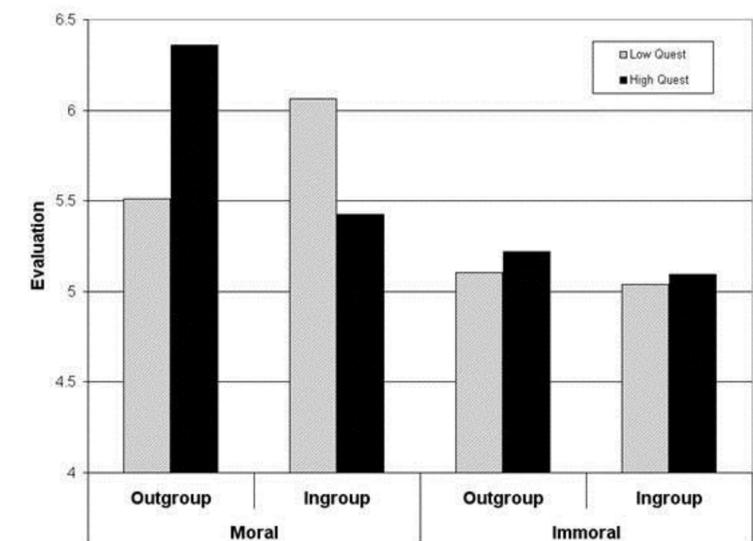
- 118 participants (73 female, 45 male) were randomly assigned to one of four conditions based on group bias and level of morality:

In-group morally good	Out-group morally good
In-group morally bad	Out-group morally bad

- After the informed consent was given, participants filled out a series of individual difference measures on the computer, including the quest scale.
- The quest religiousness scale contains 12 statements on a 9-point scale to investigate the perception of religion as a journey.
- Participants then answered a series of individual measures and wrote a short description of themselves including positive and negative aspects.
- For the target evaluation, participants read a fictitious description of a person that matched one of the four conditions to which they were assigned and then rated the target on several dimensions. The target descriptions were selected based upon feedback from a pilot study (n = 48), in which participants rated the sample descriptions. We selected target descriptions that were the most believable for both a target rated as highly moral and a target rated as not moral.
- Given that all participants were self-identified Christians, we manipulated the in-group description by having the target disclose behaviors related to the Christian faith, whereas the out-group description disclosed behaviors related to the Islamic faith.
- In the primary study, each participant rated the target on a 7-point scale on five dimensions: (a) how friendly the target was, (b) their perceived ability to work with the target, (c) how much they liked the target, (d) how well they would like to get to know the target, and (e) how well they would get along with the target. These mean score of these five items represented the target evaluation ( $\alpha = .89$ ). We also included two items to ensure our manipulations were effective: (a) how moral the target was and (b) how religious they perceived the target to be.
- Finally, the participants were debriefed, thanked, and dismissed.

## Results

- First, an ANOVA was performed as a manipulation check and ensured that the moral description was rated as more moral (M = 6.12, SD = .75) than the immoral description by participants (M = 5.22, SD = 1.34),  $F(1, 116) = 20.21, p < .001, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .15$ .
- A main effect was found through a two-way ANOVA where participants rated the moral target more favorably (M = 5.89, SD = .81) than the immoral target (M = 5.12, SD = .90),  $F(1, 114) = 23.24, p < .001, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .17$ . There was no main effect for group status ( $F < 1, p = .429$ ).
- A significant three-way interaction between quest religiousness, target morality, and group status demonstrated the effect that differences in religious orientation will moderate effects of the target evaluation  $F(1, 110) = 5.02, p = .027, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .04$ .
  - Those with higher ratings in quest religiousness associated with more favorable ratings of out-group members and less favorable ratings of in-group members.



## Discussion

- These results provide insight into how varying levels of morality and religious group membership affects our perception of others
- The results demonstrate that our religious orientation can also affect the way that we view others that share our stated religious beliefs.
- The implications of this study suggest that by highlighting an individual's morality may enhance judgments of that individual even with unshared religious beliefs and can lead to better understandings of reducing tension between different belief systems.