An Intention-Based Account of Perspective-Taking: Why Perspective-Taking Can Both Decrease and Increase Moral Condemnation

Brian J. Lucas[1,2], Adam D. Galinksy[3], and Keith J. Murnighan[2]

Abstract

Perspective-taking often increases generosity in behavior and attributions. We present an intentions-based account to explain how perspective-taking can both decrease *and* increase moral condemnation. Consistent with past research, we predicted perspective-taking would reduce condemnation when the perspective-taker initially attributed benevolent intent to a transgressor. However, we predicted perspective-taking would *increase* condemnation when malevolent intentions were initially attributed to the wrongdoer. We propose that perspective-taking amplifies the intentions initially attributed to a transgressor. Three studies measured and manipulated intention attributions and found that perspective-taking increased condemnation when malevolent intentions were initially attributed to a transgressor. Perspective-taking also increased costly punishment of a transgressor, an effect mediated by malevolent intentions. In contrast, empathy did not increase punitive responses, supporting its conceptual distinction from perspective-taking. Whether perspective-taking leads to forgiveness or condemnation depends on the intentions the perspective-taker initially attributes to a transgressor.

In 2013, Gilberto Valle was convicted of conspiring to kidnap, kill, and consume the remains of young women. The evidence against him came from Valle's conversations on a website where users discuss their "dark fantasies." Valle's lawyer asserted that these plans were mere fantasies that would never be carried out. Although the jury was initially split, after 16 hr of deliberation, the jury delivered a unanimous guilty verdict. Valle received a life sentence even though he never engaged in any of the charged acts. As his lawyer noted, "the jury couldn't get past [his] thoughts" (Gregorian, Gearty, Molloy, & Miller, 2013).

Inferring the content of other people's minds is a critical component of social perception and judgment (Baron-Cohen, 1995; Epley & Waytz, 2010). Research has consistently shown that perspective-taking elicits a variety of positive interpersonal consequences (Galinsky, Ku, & Wang, 2005; Underwood & Moore, 1982), from increased warmth for out-group members to more beneficial bargaining outcomes (Galinsky, Maddux, Gilin, & White, 2008; Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000; Trotschel, Huffmeier, Loschelder, Schwartz, & Gollwitzer, 2011). Perspective-taking also leads to generous and forgiving attributions to explain the negative outcomes of others (Todd, Galinsky, & Bodenhausen, 2012; Vescio, Sechrist, & Paolucci, 2003).

Recent research, however, has begun to document the boundaries of perspective-taking. For instance, taking a competitor's perspective can increase a person's own competitive behaviors (Epley, Caruso, & Bazerman, 2006) and even promote unethical behavior (Pierce, Kilduff, Galinsky, & Sivanathan, 2013; for a review, see Ku, Wang, & Galinsky, 2015).

The present research investigates how perspective-taking, that is, the simulation of another's thoughts or cognitive mental states (e.g., beliefs, intentions, or priorities),[1] influences evaluations of a moral transgressor. We propose that, depending on the intentions initially attributed to the transgressor, perspective-taking can either increase or decrease moral condemnation. We predict that perspective-taking *reduces* moral condemnation when initial attributions of benevolent intent are made but that it *increases* moral

[1]University of Chicago, IL, USA
[2]Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, USA
[3]Columbia University, New York, NY, USA

Corresponding Author:
Brian J. Lucas, Booth School of Business, University of Chicago, 5807 South Woodlawn Avenue, Chicago, IL 60637, USA.
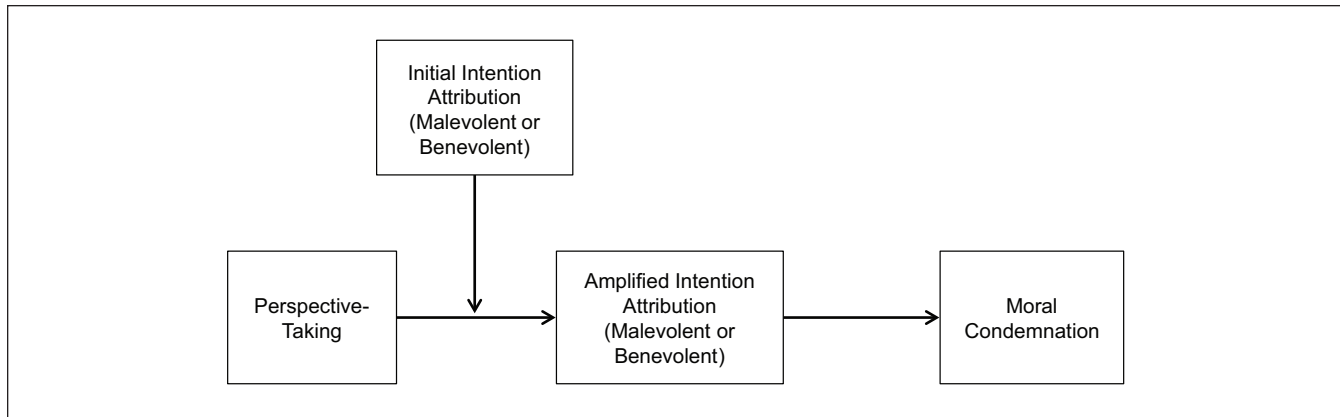Email: brian.lucas@chicagobooth.edu

Figure 1. Conceptual model of the relationship between perspective-taking and moral condemnation.
Note. Perspective-taking amplifies the intentions initially attributed to a transgressor, which in turn determines the magnitude of moral condemnation toward the transgressor.

condemnation when initial attributions of malevolent intent are dominant. According to this perspective, whether perspective-taking leads individuals to be forgiving or punishing depends on the intentions they initially attribute to the moral transgressor.

An Intentions-Based Account of Perspective-Taking

We focus on the role of intentions in moral judgment to explicate when and why taking the perspective of a moral transgressor will increase or decrease condemnation. Both psychologically and legally, the nature of one's intentions is a critical element in moral evaluation (Heider & Simmel, 1944; Malle & Knobe, 1997; Malle & Nelson, 2003). Most notably, transgressors are condemned and punished more when their acts are motivated by malevolent intentions compared with when those same acts are motivated by benevolent intentions (Alicke, 1992, 2000). Given that perspective-taking focuses attention toward others' thoughts and intentions, and that the nature of a transgressor's intentions influences moral judgment, perspective-taking may be particularly impactful when evaluating moral transgressors.

Perspective-taking involves making *inferences* about the contents of a target's mind. Consequently, perspective-taking often results in perceivers elaborating on their own thoughts and knowledge (Epley et al., 2006). In the case of perspective-taking with a moral transgressor, we suspect that perspective-taking will lead people to further elaborate on their initial attributions of the transgressor's malevolent or benevolent intentions.

Our primary argument is that perspective-taking amplifies the intentions initially attributed to a transgressor, which in turn determines the magnitude of moral judgment toward the transgressor (see Figure 1).[2] We predict that when benevolent intentions are initially attributed to a transgressor, perspective-taking amplifies those benevolent intentions and, in turn, decreases condemnation of the transgressor. In contrast,

when malevolent intentions are initially attributed to a transgressor, perspective-taking amplifies those malevolent intentions and, in turn, *increases* condemnation of the transgressor. In this way, perspective-taking is like a spotlight: When shined on a transgressor's mind, perspective-taking further illuminates the malevolent or benevolent intentions the perceiver initially attributed.

Perspective-Taking Versus Empathy

To further establish the role of intentionality in our perspective-taking predictions, we compare the effects of perspective-taking with those of empathy, the simulation of a target's feelings and emotions.[3] Like perspective-taking, empathy is an other-oriented social cognitive process that tends to promote positive social consequences (Batson et al., 1997). Unlike perspective-taking, however, empathy emphasizes focusing on others' feelings and emotions rather than their thoughts and intentions (Davis, 1980). Supporting this distinction, previous research finds that perspective-taking, compared with empathy, is more consequential in strategic social interactions. For instance, in negotiations and war games, perspective-taking boosts understanding of the counterpart's strategic intentions and increases performance, but empathizing does not (Galinsky et al., 2008; Gilin, Maddux, Carpenter, & Galinsky, 2013). Our main prediction was that, because empathy does not prompt an increased focus on intentions, empathy will not increase condemnation of a malevolently intentioned moral transgressor. Based on past empathy research, we expect that, like perspective-taking, empathy will reduce condemnation when benevolent intentions are attributed.

Study Overview and Theoretical Contributions

We conducted four experiments to test our predictions. In Experiments 1A-2, employees recalled an unethical

transgression in their organization and made moral judgments about the transgressor. Malevolent intention attributions were measured (Experiments 1A-1B) and manipulated (Experiment 2). We predicted that perspective-taking prior to making moral judgments would increase condemnation when malevolent intentions were attributed to the transgressor but reduce condemnation when benevolent intentions were attributed. In Experiment 3, we tested the influence of perspective-taking on costly punishment behavior in a modified dictator game. We predicted that perspective-taking would increase costly punishment toward a selfish dictator and that malevolent intention attributions would mediate this effect. Each study included an empathy control condition, which provided a test of discriminant validity. Like perspective-taking, empathy prompts other-focused cognition, but because it does not direct attention toward intentions per se, we did not expect empathy to increase condemnation when malevolent intentions were attributed.

This research makes important theoretical contributions. Our intentions-based account of perspective-taking helps explain a number of perspective-taking's divergent effects. When perspective-takers see transgressors through a jaundiced and condemning lens, they act more negatively than if perspective-taking had not taken place. This research also contributes to prior work distinguishing between perspective-taking and empathy by showing that only perspective-taking amplifies moral condemnation when the transgressor is attributed malevolent intentions. Finally, the research contributes to the moral judgment literature by showing how different forms of mental simulation and consideration can fundamentally alter moral judgments.

Experiment 1A: Measured Intentions

In Experiment 1A, participants recalled an unethical transgression in their organization and then categorized the transgressor's intentions as malevolent or nonmalevolent.[4] Participants were then randomly assigned to a perspective-taking, empathy, or control condition. We expected that malevolent intentions plus perspective-taking would increase condemnation and that nonmalevolent intentions plus perspective-taking would reduce condemnation. We also predicted that empathy would not increase condemnation.

Participants and Design

Four-hundred and ninety-one respondents were recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (Mturk) to complete a survey on organizational behavior. Our target sample size was 500 participants, or around 80 participants per analysis condition. When asked to recall an unethical transgression in their organization, 232 (46%) respondents were able to do so, and 12 people failed an attention check, leaving 220 for analysis (M_{age} = 32.68, SD_{age} = 10.50; 37% women). Everyone worked full-time: 65% nonmanagerial, 32% middle-management, and 3% senior management. We address issues of statistical power in Experiment 1B.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions: perspective-taking, empathy, or control. We also measured intentions and coded responses as either malevolent or nonmalevolent.

Our final design for analysis was a 2 (intentions: malevolent, nonmalevolent) × 3 (condition: perspective-taking, empathy, control) between-participants framework.

Procedure

Respondents were asked to recall an unethical transgression in their organization that did not involve them. We defined an unethical transgression as occurring "when employees engage in any form of lying, cheating, or stealing to benefit themselves at the expense of someone else in the organization or the organization itself." Common transgressions involved the theft of money or company property and bribing potential clients; less common transgressions included sexual harassment and physical violence.

Intentions. After respondents indicated that they could recall a transgression, we asked them to categorize the transgressor's motives into one of six categories that represented, a priori, two broad intention categories: malevolent and nonmalevolent intentions. *Malevolent intentions* included transgressions categorized as "malicious/negative intentions" or "desire to harm another person." *Nonmalevolent intentions* included transgressions categorized as "the transgression was accidental,[5]" "the circumstances drove the person to the behavior," or "unsure about intentionality." The sixth category was open-ended, letting participants write their own response in a text box.

Respondents rated 75 recalled transgressions (34%) as malevolent and 115 (52%) as nonmalevolent; 29 respondents (13%) used the free-response category. Two coders who were blind to the hypotheses categorized the free responses as either malevolent or nonmalevolent. To be coded as malevolent, the free response needed to describe unambiguous intent to harm another person or the organization. This strict criterion resulted in all of the free responses being categorized as nonmalevolent. Thus, our analysis included 75 malevolent (34%) and 145 nonmalevolent transgressions (66%).

Manipulations. We manipulated perspective-taking and empathy with a writing task. These manipulations were directly drawn from Galinsky et al. (2008) and Gilin et al. (2013). All participants were asked to write a few sentences in response to the manipulation prompt. In the *perspective-taking* condition, participants were asked to "focus your attention on the thoughts of the person involved. Try to understand what that person was thinking. What thoughts do you think were going through that person's head while engaging in the unethical behavior?" In the *empathy* condition, they were asked to "focus your attention on the

Table 1. Mean Condemnation by Intention Attributions and Experimental Condition in Experiments 1A and 1B.

	Perspective-taking	Empathy	Control
Experiment 1A			
Attributed malevolent intentions	$n = 25$	$n = 28$	$n = 22$
Condemnation	7.54[a] [1.02]	6.92[a,b] [1.51]	6.61[b] [1.44]
Attributed nonmalevolent intentions	$n = 49$	$n = 52$	$n = 44$
Condemnation	5.43[a] [1.60]	5.55[a] [1.89]	6.35[b] [1.60]
Experiment 1B			
Attributed malevolent intentions	$n = 106$	$n = 111$	$n = 92$
Condemnation	7.39[a] [1.25]	6.99[b] [1.46]	6.94[b] [1.50]
Attributed nonmalevolent intentions	$n = 146$	$n = 148$	$n = 163$
Condemnation	5.43[a] [1.39]	5.77[a,b] [1.57]	5.80[b] [1.44]

Note. Brackets contain standard deviations. Simple comparisons were computed against the overall error term; in Experiment 1A, *df* = 206 and in Experiment 1B, *df* = 760. Within each row, means with different superscripts are significantly different from each other.

emotions of the person involved. Try to understand what that person was feeling. What feelings and emotions do you think that person was feeling while engaging in the unethical behavior?" Participants were asked to write a few sentences in response to the prompt. The *control* condition participants wrote about the transgression with no additional prompt.

Measures. As in previous research, we measured moral condemnation with questions that tapped judgments of the transgression, judgments of the transgressor, and whether the transgressor should be punished (Effron, Lucas, & O'Connor, 2015; Effron & Monin, 2010; Polman, Pettit, & Wiesenfeld, 2013). These 15 items were averaged into a condemnation index (α = .93). Five items assessed how much the transgression was *dishonorable, immoral, inexcusable, unethical,* and *justifiable* (1 = *not at all,* 9 = *extremely*). Eight bipolar scale items assessed perceptions of the transgressor: *cruel-kind, nice-awful, cold-warm, honest-dishonest, unfair-fair, moral-immoral, good-bad, likeable-dislikable* (9-point scales anchored by the trait words). Two items assessed desire to punish the transgressor by asking participants how much they agree with the statements "This person should be punished harshly for his or her behavior" and "No organization should hire this person" (1 = *disagree strongly,* 9 = *agree strongly*).

Results

A 2 (intentions: malevolent, nonmalevolent) × 3 (condition: perspective-taking, empathy, control) analysis of variance (ANOVA) on condemnation found a significant main effect for intentions, $F(1, 214) = 30.10$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .12$, and a nonsignificant main effect of condition, $F < 1$, $\eta^2 = .004$. As predicted, there was a significant interaction, $F(2, 214) = 5.29$, $p = .006$, $\eta^2 = .04$. Means and standard deviations appear in Table 1.

When people made attributions of nonmalevolent intentions, perspective-taking significantly reduced condemnation compared with the control condition, $t(214) = -2.77$, $p = .006$,

$d = 0.58$, $CI_{95\%} = [-1.57, -0.26]$. Empathy also reduced condemnation compared with the control condition, $t(214) = -2.44$, $p = .015$, $d = 0.45$, $CI_{95\%} = [-1.44, -0.15]$, and perspective-taking and empathy did not significantly differ, $t(214) = -0.37$, $p = .709$, $d = 0.07$, $CI_{95\%} = [-0.75, 0.51]$.

In contrast, when malevolent intentions were attributed, perspective-taking increased condemnation compared with the control condition, $t(214) = 2.01$, $p = .046$, $d = 0.75$, $CI_{95\%} = [0.02, 1.86]$. Empathy did not significantly differ from the control condition, $t(214) = .70$, $p = .486$, $d = 0.21$, $CI_{95\%} = [-0.58, 1.21]$. Perspective-taking and empathy did not significantly differ though the means were in the predicted direction, $t(214) = 1.41$, $p = .160$, $d = 0.48$, $CI_{95\%} = [-0.25, 1.49]$.

Consistent with our intentions-based account of perspective-taking, when a transgression was attributed to nonmalevolent intentions, perspective-taking decreased condemnation of the transgressor. However, when a transgression was attributed as having malevolent intentions, perspective-taking *increased* condemnation compared with a control condition.

Experiment 1B: Measured Intentions

Because many Experiment 1A respondents did not recall an ethical transgression, our sample was smaller than anticipated. Experiment 1B replicated the findings of Experiment 1A with a larger sample. To increase response rates, Experiment 1B expanded the definition of "unethical behavior" to include selfish behaviors. Aside from this change, Experiment 1B directly replicated Experiment 1A.

Participants and Design

Eight-hundred four participants were recruited from Mturk. Five did not recall a transgression, and 33 failed an attention check, leaving 766 for analysis ($M_{age} = 33.30$, $SD_{age} = 9.55$; 47% women). Everyone was employed full-time: 65% in nonmanagerial, 31% in middle-management, and 4% in senior management positions.

We randomly assigned the participants to one of three experimental conditions: perspective-taking, empathy, control. We also measured intentions and coded participants' responses as either malevolent or nonmalevolent. Our final design for analysis was a 2 (intentions: malevolent, nonmalevolent) × 3 (condition: perspective-taking, empathy, control) between-subjects framework.

Procedure

We suspected that Experiment 1A's response rate may have resulted from our strict definition of "unethical behavior." In Experiment 1B, the definition was broadened to include selfish behaviors that might cause harm to others (see Dubois, Rucker, and Galinsky, 2015, for a discussion of the link between selfish and unethical behavior). Specifically, we added the following instruction: "If you cannot think of an example of unethical behavior, think about a time when someone behaved selfishly, or had the opportunity to benefit a colleague or the organization but chose not to."

Care was taken to ensure that these instructions did not lead people to recall behaviors that might be considered more petty than unethical. Two judges read each response and coded whether the transgression led to a harmful or unfair outcome for another party. All responses met this criterion. Responses included a wide range of transgressions and victims. For instance, one participant recalled a colleague who lied about being sick, which forced a coworker work a double-shift and to cancel an important family event. Other transgressions were more blatantly unethical. For instance, several participants recalled instances of superiors stealing money from the organization or manipulating the organization's incentive system.

Intention category coding. Like Experiment 1A, participants categorized the transgressor's motives into the same set of six categories. Respondents rated 247 transgressions (32%) as malevolent and 406 (53%) as nonmalevolent; 113 respondents (15%) used the free-response category. Two coders who were blind to the participants' experimental condition categorized the free responses as either malevolent or nonmalevolent, $r(113) = .71$; discrepancies were resolved through discussion. To be coded as malevolent, free responses needed to identify intended or foreseeable harm (cf. Malle & Knobe, 1997) to another person or the organization. Of the free responses, 62 (55%) were categorized as malevolent and 51 (45%) were categorized as nonmalevolent. Thus, our analysis included 309 malevolent transgressions (40%) and 457 nonmalevolent transgressions (60%).

Measures

We measured condemnation with the same 15-item scale used in Study 1 ($\alpha = .93$).

Results

A 2 (intentions: malevolent, nonmalevolent) × 3 (condition: perspective-taking, empathy, control) ANOVA on condemnation revealed a significant main effect for intentions, $F(1, 760) = 182.43$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .19$, but no main effect of condition, $F < 1$, $\eta^2 = .00$. More importantly, the interaction was significant, $F(2, 760) = 5.92$, $p = .003$, $\eta^2 = .02$. Means and standard deviations appear in Table 1.

When people made attributions of nonmalevolent intentions, perspective-taking significantly decreased condemnation compared with the control condition, $t(760) = -2.24$, $p = .025$, $d = 0.26$, $CI_{95\%} = [-0.69, -0.05]$ and compared with empathy, $t(760) = -2.02$, $p = .044$, $d = 0.23$, $CI_{95\%} = [-0.67, -0.01]$. Empathy and the control condition did not significantly differ, $t(760) = -.17$, $p = .864$, $d = 0.02$, $CI_{95\%} = [-0.35, 0.29]$.

However, when people made attributions of malevolent intentions, perspective-taking increased condemnation compared with the control condition, $t(760) = 2.17$, $p = .030$, $d = 0.33$, $CI_{95\%} = [0.04, 0.85]$. Perspective-taking also increased condemnation compared with empathy, $t(760) = 2.02$, $p = .043$, $d = 0.29$, $CI_{95\%} = [0.01, 0.78]$. The empathy and control condition did not significantly differ, $t(760) = .24$, $p = .807$, $d = 0.03$, $CI_{95\%} = [-0.35, 0.45]$.

These data replicated Experiment 1A's findings, with intentions influencing perspective-taking's effects. When our respondents' attributions of intent were nonmalevolent, perspective-takers were less condemning. However, when they were malevolent, perspective-taking increased condemnation.

Discussion

Experiments 1A and 1B support our intentions-based account of perspective-taking. In both experiments, the attribution of nonmalevolent intentions led perspective-taking to decrease condemnation. However, perspective-taking combined with malevolent intentional attributions *increased* condemnation. Empathy was less sensitive to intention attributions. As predicted, empathy did not increase condemnation following malevolent intention attributions in either experiment. Although Experiments 1A and 1B differed in whether empathy reduced condemnation following benevolent intention attributions, the fact that the combination of malevolent intentions and empathy never increased condemnation supports our model.

Experiment 2: Manipulated Intentions

Experiment 1 measured intentions and found that the consequences of perspective-taking with a moral transgressor depend on the nature of the intentions attributed to the transgressor. The goal of Experiment 2 was to replicate these findings while manipulating, rather than measuring, intentions.

Participants and Design

Four-hundred and four respondents were recruited from Mturk to complete a survey on organizational behavior. Forty-five people failed the attention check, leaving 359 for analysis (M_{age} = 34.92, SD_{age} = 10.93; 42% women). Everyone worked full-time: 53% nonmanagerial, 42% middle-management, and 5% senior management.

The experiment had a 2 (intentions: malevolent, nonmalevolent) × 2 (condition: perspective-taking, empathy) between-participants design.

Procedure

As in Experiment 1, respondents were asked to recall an unethical transgression in their organization.

Intentions manipulation. We manipulated whether participants recalled a transgression they believed to be *malevolently* intentioned or *benevolently* intentioned. We defined malevolent intentions as "intentions that are malicious, negative, or involve a desire to harm or undermine another person." We defined benevolent intentions as "intentions that are nonmalicious" and provided examples of nonmalicious motivations such as the desire to help a third party or accidents.

Perspective-taking and empathy manipulations. Once participants had a specific transgression in mind, we asked participants to write about the incident. Here, we manipulated whether participants engaged in *perspective-taking* or *empathy* with the transgressor, using same perspective-taking writing manipulation as in Experiment 1.

Measures. Participants then responded to the same 15-item condemnation measure as in Experiment 1 (α = .96).

Manipulation check. To assess the intentions manipulation, participants indicated whether the transgressor they wrote about was motivated by malevolent versus benevolent intentions (1 = *entirely benevolent*, 4 = *about equal/unsure*, 7 = *entirely malevolent*). Results revealed that transgressors in the malevolent intentions condition (M = 5.60, SD = 1.20) were significantly more malevolent than those in the benevolent intentions condition (M = 3.18, SD = 1.84), t(357) = 14.72, p < .001, d = 1.55, CI$_{95\%}$ = [2.09, 2.74].

Results

A 2 (intentions: malevolent, nonmalevolent) × 2 (perspective-taking condition: perspective-taking, empathy) ANOVA on condemnation found a significant main effect of intentions, F(1, 355) = 126.06, p < .001, η² = .26, a nonsignificant main effect of perspective-taking condition, F(1, 355) = 0.23, p = .632, η² = .001, and, as predicted, a significant Intentions × Perspective-taking condition interaction, F(2, 355) = 8.69, p = .003, η² = .02. Means and standard

Table 2. Mean Condemnation by Intention and Perspective-Taking Condition, in Experiment 2.

	Perspective-taking	Empathy
Benevolent intentions	4.55[c] [1.95]	5.01[c] [2.02]
Malevolent intentions	7.19[a] [1.42]	6.55[b] [1.62]

Note. Brackets contain standard deviations. Simple comparisons were computed against the overall error term, df = 355. Means with different superscripts are significantly different from each other.

deviations appear in Table 2. In the benevolent intentions conditions, perspective-taking marginally decreased condemnation compared with empathy, t(355) = −1.75, p = .081, d = 0.23, CI$_{95\%}$ = [−0.98, 0.06]. More importantly for our predictions, in the malevolent intentions conditions, perspective-taking significantly increased condemnation compared with empathy, t(355) = 2.42, p = .016, d = 0.42, CI$_{95\%}$ = [0.12, 1.16].

Discussion

Experiment 2 manipulated the intentions of the moral transgressor and replicated the effects of the prior experiments that had involved measured intentions. A perspective-taking manipulation *decreased* condemnation when the transgressor was seen as having benevolent intentions, but *increased* condemnation compared with empathy when the transgressor was attributed as having malevolent intentions. Overall, perspective-taking amplified the intentions initially attributed to a transgressor to produce either greater forgiveness or greater condemnation.

Experiment 3: Costly Punishment

The goal of Experiment 3 was to test how perspective-taking and intentions influence a behavioral outcome: costly punishment. Participants were third-party observers of a Dictator Game in which a selfish dictator kept all of a US$10 endowment. Previous research suggests such selfish allocations are perceived and condemned as unethical (Fehr & Fischbacher, 2004; Miller, 2001; Sanfey, Rilling, Aronson, Nystrom, & Cohen, 2003). Given this research, we expected most participants would attribute malevolent intentions to the dictator. Participants were then randomly assigned to the perspective-taking condition or one of three control conditions (empathy, self-focus, or immediate reaction). Then they were given the opportunity to use their own US$5 endowment (which they could otherwise keep) to punish the dictator. We predicted that perspective-taking would amplify attributions of malevolent intent and, consequently, costly punishment compared with the other conditions.

Participants and Design

One hundred seventy-six students from a business school subject pool (M_{age} = 20.54, SD_{age} = 2.31; 59% women) were

paid US$5 to participate. Our recruitment goal was 40 participants per condition. Twelve indicated they did not believe the dictator was a real person and three failed an attention check. These 15 were excluded, leaving 161 for analysis.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions: perspective-taking, empathy, self-focus, or immediate reaction.

Procedure

Participants arrived in groups of three to 13 and sat at individual computer stations in a large room. The instructions indicated that they would be randomly assigned to be Player 1 (the Dictator), 2 (the Receiver), or 3 (an Observer). In fact, all participants were Observers (Player 3). The computer then displayed the rules of the Dictator Game with punishment. Dictators received a US$10 endowment and decided how much, if anything, to allocate to Receivers. Observers received a US$5 endowment. After learning that the Dictator kept the entire US$10, Observers had an opportunity to use any portion of their US$5 to punish the Dictator: Any amount they allocated for punishment would cost Dictators twice as much.

Perspective-taking manipulation. Before participants made their punishment decisions, we manipulated the independent variable. In the *perspective-taking* condition, participants read the following:

> Please take a few minutes and try to understand what Player 1 was thinking as he or she decided how to allocate the US$10. What thoughts do you think were going through Player 1's head? What reasons do you think influenced Player 1's decision?

In the *empathy* condition, participants read the following:

> Please take a few minutes and try to understand what Player 1 was feeling as he or she decided how to allocate the US$10. What emotions do you think Player 1 experienced? What feelings do you think influenced Player 1's decision?

In the *self-focus* control condition, participants read, "What is your reaction to Player 1's decision of how to allocate the US$10?" In all three conditions, participants were asked to write a few sentences in response to the instruction prompt. Finally, because merely contemplating a decision can influence ethical responding (Rand, Greene, & Nowak, 2012; Zhong, 2011), we included a second control condition, the *immediate reaction* condition, in which participants moved directly to the dependent measures.

Measures

Intentions. Participants rated the Dictator's intentions toward the Receiver on seven differential scale items, for example, *benevolent-malicious* and *unfair-fair*, and so on (7-point scales; α = .81).

Costly punishment. Participants next indicated how much of their US$5 endowment they would use to punish the Dictator, using a slider scale that increased in 5-cent increments from US$0 to US$5. Because the structure of the game involved deception, all participants received the full US$5 endowment plus their participation fee.

Manipulation checks. To distinguish between the perspective-taking and empathy manipulations, coders used 3-point scales to rate how much participants considered the Dictator's thoughts (0 = *no attempt made*, 1 = *some consideration*, 2 = *much consideration*), and the Dictator's feelings. To distinguish the self-focus condition, coders rated how much participants focused on their own or the Dictator's perspective (1 = *mostly own perspective*, 2 = *mixed/ambiguous*, 3 = *mostly Dictator's perspective*). Two coders, blind to condition, rated the responses of half the participants. Reliability was adequate for the thoughts, $r(65) = .86$, feelings, $r(65) = .74$, and perspective, $r(65) = .76$, measures. Thus, one coder went on to code the rest of the responses and that coder's ratings were used in the analysis.
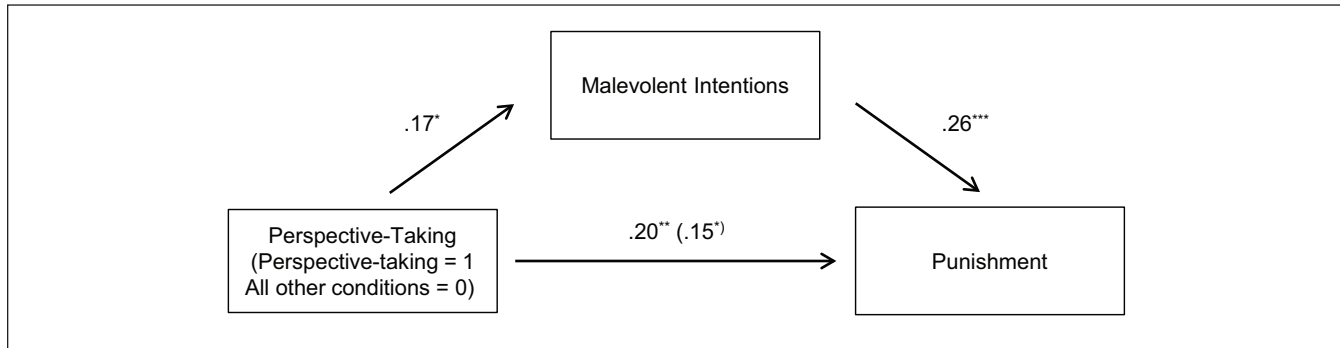
Results

Manipulation checks. Analyses of the manipulation checks suggest that the manipulations were effective. First, Perspective-takers ($M = 1.37$, $SD = 0.75$) considered the Dictator's thoughts significantly more than those in the self-focus ($M = 0.21$, $SD = 0.47$, $t(117) = 7.42$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.86$, $CI_{95\%} = [0.85, 1.47]$); and empathy ($M = 0.74$, $SD = 0.79$, $t(117) = 4.07$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.82$, $CI_{95\%} = [0.32, 0.93]$) conditions; overall one-way ANOVA: $F(2, 117) = 27.55$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .32$. Second, Empathizers ($M = 1.09$, $SD = 0.87$) considered the Dictator's feelings significantly more than those in the self-focus ($M = 0.15$, $SD = 0.37$, $t(117) = 6.66$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.38$, $CI_{95\%} = [0.66, 1.22]$) and perspective-taking ($M = 0.37$, $SD = 0.54$, $t(117) = 5.11$, $p = .004$, $d = 0.98$, $CI_{95\%} = [0.44, 1.01]$) conditions; overall one-way ANOVA: $F(2, 117) = 24.66$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .30$. Finally, those in the self-focus condition ($M = 1.33$, $SD = 0.58$) were significantly less focused on the Dictator's perspective than those in the perspective-taking ($M = 2.61$, $SD = 0.68$, $t(117) = -8.95$, $p < .001$, $d = 2.03$, $CI_{95\%} = [-1.55, -0.99]$) and empathy ($M = 2.65$, $SD = 0.61$, $t(117) = -9.56$, $p < .001$, $d = 2.21$, $CI_{95\%} = [-1.59, -1.04]$ conditions; overall one-way ANOVA: $F(2, 117) = 56.91$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .49$.

Costly punishment. A one-way ANOVA on the amount of punishment revealed a significant main effect, $F(3, 157) = 2.67$, $p = .050$, $\eta^2 = .05$ (see Table 3). Perspective-takers punished significantly more than those in the self-focus, $t(157) = 2.48$, $p = .014$, $d = 0.54$, $CI_{95\%} = [0.22, 1.93]$, and immediate reaction conditions, $t(157) = 2.40$, $p = .017$, $d = 0.51$, $CI_{95\%} = [0.18, 1.87]$, and nonsignificantly more than those in the empathy

Table 3. Mean Punishment and Malevolent Intention Attributions by Experimental Condition in Experiment 3.

	Perspective-taking	Empathy	Self-focus	Immediate reaction
Punishment	US$2.14[a] [2.25]	US$1.54[ab] [1.89]	US$1.07[b] [1.68]	US$1.12[b] [1.75]
Malevolent intentions	5.49[a] [.93]	5.06[b] [.94]	4.86[b] [.93]	5.36[ab] [1.06]

Note. Parentheses contain standard deviations. Simple comparisons were computed against the overall error term *df* = 82. Within each row, means with different superscripts are significantly different from each other, except perspective-taking and empathy on intentions which differ at *p* = .06.

Figure 2. Malevolent intentions mediated the effect of perspective-taking on punishment, Study 2.
Note. Coefficients are standardized betas; **p* < .05. ***p* ≤ .01. ****p* < .001.

condition, $t(157) = 1.42$, $p = .157$, $d = 0.29$, $CI_{95\%} = [-0.23, 1.44]$. A planned comparison [3,−1,−1,−1] found that perspective-takers punished significantly more than participants in all other conditions, $t(157) = 2.56$, $p = .012$, $d = 0.40$. Responses in the empathy condition did not differ from those in the self-focus, $t(157) = 1.13$, $p = .262$, $d = 0.26$, $CI_{95\%} = [-0.36, 1.30]$, or the immediate reaction conditions, $t(157) = 1.03$, $p = .305$, $d = 0.23$, $CI_{95\%} = [-0.37, 1.21]$.

Intentions. A one-way ANOVA on perceptions of the Dictators' intentions was also significant, $F(3, 157) = 3.38$, $p = .020$, $\eta^2 = .06$. Perspective-takers attributed significantly more malevolent intentions to the dictator than those in the self-focus condition, $t(157) = 2.84$, $p = .005$, $d = 0.68$, $CI_{95\%} = [0.19, 1.06]$; the empathy condition, $t(157) = 1.99$, $p = .048$, $d = 0.46$, $CI_{95\%} = [0.00, 0.86]$; and did not significantly differ from those in the immediate reaction condition, $t(157) = .60$, $p = .552$, $d = 0.13$, $CI_{95\%} = [-0.30, 0.56]$. A planned comparison [3,−1,−1,−1] found that perspective-takers attributed more malevolent intentions than participants in all other conditions, $t(157) = 2.20$, $p = .029$, $d = 0.35$. Responses in the empathy condition did not differ from the self-focus, $t(157) = 0.93$, $p = .355$, $d = 0.21$, $CI_{95\%} = [-0.22, 0.62]$, or the immediate reaction conditions $t(157) = -1.42$, $p = .159$, $d = 0.30$, $CI_{95\%} = [-0.74, 0.14]$.

Mediation. We tested whether attributions of malevolent intentions mediated the effect of perspective-taking on punishment (Figure 2). We used a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples and found a marginally significant indirect effect, $b = .20$, $SE = .11$, $CI_{95\%} = [-0.02, 0.42]$, $p = .074$.

Perspective-taking led participants to spend nearly twice as much of their own money to punish a selfish dictator compared with control participants, with attributions of malevolent intentions mediating this effect. These results, in a controlled experiment with real monetary stakes, provide further evidence of the important role of perspective-taking and intention attributions in the condemnation of a transgressor.

General Discussion

This research is the first to investigate the consequences of perspective-taking with a moral transgressor. It reveals that the combination of perspective-taking and attributing malevolent intentions to a transgressor uniquely increases condemnation and costly punishment.

Consistent with past work, Experiments 1A and 1B found that perspective-taking while attributing nonmalevolent intentions to a moral transgressor decreased condemnation; here, perspective-taking was the path to forgiveness. However, novel to the current studies, perspective-taking while attributing malevolent intentions *increased* condemnation. Thus, intentions moderated the effect of perspective-taking on reactions to moral transgressors. In contrast, empathizing did not increase condemnation. Experiment 3 also found that perspective-taking uniquely increased costly punishment; perspective-takers were willing to use their own money to punish a selfish dictator and amplified attributions of malevolent intentions mediated this effect.

This research makes important theoretical contributions. Our intentions-based account of perspective-taking helps explain a number of perspective-taking's divergent effects.

Positive evaluations result when targets are depicted as having (or could be presumed to have) benevolent intentions (Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000; Johnson, 1975; Todd, Bodenhausen, Richeson, & Galinsky, 2011), but evaluations are considerably less lenient and forgiving when targets are perceived as malevolent (Epley et al., 2006; Pierce et al., 2013). In these latter cases, perspective-takers see transgressors through a condemning lens. This research also contributes to prior work that documents when the consequences of considering a target's thoughts versus a target's feelings diverge. This work finds that perspective-taking, but not empathy, is more consequential in strategic interactions where understanding the target's intentions is important for achieving desired outcomes (Galinsky et al., 2008; Gilin et al., 2013). Similarly, the present work finds that perspective-taking amplifies moral condemnation to a greater extent than empathy when the transgressor is attributed as having malevolent intentions.

Future Directions

The present work focused on perspective-taking with moral transgressors and identifying intentions as an underlying mechanism. Although these effects emerged when participants recalled real transgressions and judged an actual behavior, future research should investigate whether these effects emerge in richer social environments, such as live interactions.

Future research might also explore the mechanisms underlying the effects of empathizing with a moral transgressor. One possibility, which we call the "balance sheet" hypothesis, is that empathizing results in positive feelings toward the transgressor that counteract the transgressor's negative intentions. This is consistent with our finding that empathizing does not increase condemnation and, in some cases, when intentions are not malevolent, reduces condemnation. Another possibility, what we refer to as the "elaboration interference" hypothesis, is that empathizing interferes with the perceiver's elaboration of the transgressor's intentions. Future research might distinguish between these two accounts for how empathy relates to intentions and moral reactions.

Our intentions-based account of perspective-taking also has applied relevance. Although in some cases condemning a moral transgressor may be the appropriate response, in many situations, minimizing conflict is a priority. For example, some organizations participate in criminal reintegration programs in which former criminals work alongside nonoffenders. In these situations, encouraging perspective-taking without first considering perceived intentions could provoke conflict and harm performance. Only after some level of benevolence is established might people be encouraged to consider a transgressor's thoughts.

Conclusion

Perspective-taking is a critical cognitive capacity that pushes people to explore the minds of social targets. The present research supports an intention-based account of perspective-taking. Four experiments demonstrated that the intentions attributed to a social target are a critical determinant of perspective-taking's consequences, as perspective-taking amplified the effects of participants' initial attributions. In particular, these results suggest that peering into the mind of a moral transgressor can lead to particularly harsh judgments and punishment.

Supplemental Material

The online supplemental material is available at http://pspb.sagepub.com/supplemental.

Notes

1. Our use of the term *perspective-taking* is similar to cognitive perspective-taking or mentalizing. Each is used with the goal of predicting and understanding a target's behavior (Davis, 1983; Epley & Waytz, 2010).
2. The initial attribution could involve cursory perspective-taking; however, it could also result from other social cognitive inference processes such as stereotyping or projection or other sources of information such as the opinion of a friend (Ames & Mason, 2012).
3. Our use of empathy is limited to the top–down, cognitive form of empathy, sometimes called cognitive empathy or emotional perspective-taking, which involves actively imagining the emotional experiences of a target (Nordgren, van Harreveld, & van der Pligt, 2009; Preston & de Waal, 2002). We do not test the noncognitive components of empathy such as emotional sharing or emotional contagion (Decety & Cowell, 2014).
4. We operationalized *benevolent* intent as *nonmalevolent* intent because pilot testing suggested that few participants would attribute benevolent intentions to unethical behaviors. However, many people attributed the transgressor's intentions to nonmalevolent causes such as situational pressures or job stress. This operationalization provides a stricter test of our hypothesis that perspective-taking and attributing benevolent intentions reduces condemnation of a moral transgressor.
5. Including accidental transgressions allows the possibility that rather than categorizing the content of the transgressor's intentions (e.g., malevolent), we categorized whether the transgression was intentional or unintentional. However, the results suggest this is not the case. First, the percentage of participants selecting the accidental transgression category was very low, 3.65% in Experiment 1A and 3.13% in Experiment 1B. In addition, removing these participants from analysis does not change the interpretation of any results.

References

Alicke, M. D. (1992). Culpable causation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *63*, 368-378.

Alicke, M. D. (2000). Culpable control and the psychology of blame. *Psychological Bulletin*, *126*, 556-574.

Ames, D. R., & Mason, M. F. (2012). Mind perception. In S. T. Fiske & C. N. Macrae (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of social cognition* (pp. 115-137). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE

Baron-Cohen, S. (1995). *Mindblindness: An essay on autism and theory of mind*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Batson, C. D., Sager, K., Garst, E., Kang, M., Rubchinsky, K., & Dawson, K. (1997). Is empathy-induced helping due to self-other merging? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *73*, 495-509.

Davis, M. H. (1980). A multidimensional approach to individual differences in empathy. *Catalog of Selected Documents in Psychology*, *10*, 85.

Davis, M. H. (1983). Measuring individual differences in empathy: Evidence for a multidimensional approach. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *44*, 113-126.

Decety, J., & Cowell, J. M. (2014). Friends or foes: Is empathy necessary for moral behavior. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, *9*, 525-537.

Dubois, D., Rucker, D. D., & Galinsky, A. D. (2015). Social class, power, and selfishness: When and why upper and lower class individuals behave unethically. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *108*, 436-449.

Effron, D. A., Lucas, B. J., & O'Connor, K. (2015). Hypocrisy by association: When organizational membership increases condemnation for wrongdoing. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, *130*, 147-159.

Effron, D. A., & Monin, B. (2010). Letting people off the hook: When do good deeds excuse transgressions? *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *36*, 1618-1634.

Epley, N., Caruso, E. M., & Bazerman, M. H. (2006). When perspective taking increases taking: Reactive egoism in social interaction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *91*, 872-889.

Epley, N., & Waytz, A. (2010). Mind perception. In S. T. Fiske, D. T. Gilbert, & G. Lindzey (Eds.), *Handbook of social psychology* (5 ed., pp. 498-541). New York, NY: Wiley.

Fehr, E., & Fischbacher, U. (2004). Third-party punishment and social norms. *Evolution & Human Behavior*, *25*, 63-87.

Galinsky, A. D., Ku, G. L., & Wang, C. S. (2005). Perspective-taking and self-other overlap: Fostering social bonds and facilitating social coordination. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, *8*, 109-124.

Galinsky, A. D., Maddux, W. W., Gilin, D., & White, J. B. (2008). Why it pays to get inside the head of your opponent: The differential effects of perspective taking and empathy in negotiations. *Psychological Science*, *19*, 378-384.

Galinsky, A. D., & Moskowitz, G. B. (2000). Perspective-taking: Decreasing stereotype expression, stereotype accessibility, and in-group favoritism. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *78*, 708-724.

Gilin, D., Maddux, W. W., Carpenter, J., & Galinsky, A. D. (2013). When to use your head and when to use your heart: The differential value of perspective-taking versus empathy in competitive interactions. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *39*, 3-16.

Gregorian, D., Gearty, R., Molloy, J., & Miller, F. (2013, March). "Cannibal cop" Gilberto Valle faces life in prison after jury finds him guilty of conspiracy to kidnap and illegal use of federal databases. *New York Daily News*. Retrieved from http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/cannibal-faces-life-guilty-conspiracy-kidnap-illegal-databases-article-1.1286075

Heider, F., & Simmel, M. (1944). An experimental study of apparent behavior. *American Journal of Psychology*, *57*, 243-259.

Johnson, D. W. (1975). Cooperativeness and Social-Perspective Taking. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *31*, 241-244.

Ku, G., Wang, C. H., & Galinsky, A. (2015). The promise and perversity of perspective-taking in organizations. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, *35*, 79-102.

Malle, B. F., & Knobe, J. (1997). The folk concept of intentionality. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *33*, 101-121.

Malle, B. F., & Nelson, S. E. (2003). Judging mens rea: The tension between folk concepts and legal concepts of intentionality. *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*, *21*, 563-580.

Miller, D. T. (2001). Disrespect and the experience of injustice. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *52*, 527-553.

Nordgren, L. F., van Harreveld, F., & van der Pligt, J. (2009). The restraint bias: How the illusion of self-restraint promotes impulsive behavior. *Psychological Science*, *20*, 1523-1528.

Pierce, J. R., Kilduff, G. J., Galinsky, A. D., & Sivanathan, N. (2013). From glue to gasoline: How competition turns perspective takers unethical. *Psychological Science*, *24*, 1986-1994.

Polman, E., Pettit, N. C., & Wiesenfeld, B. M. (2013). Effects of wrongdoer status on moral licensing. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *49*, 614-623.

Preston, S. D., & de Waal, F. B. M. (2002). Empathy: Its ultimate and proximate bases. *Behavioral & Brain Sciences*, *25*, 1-20.

Rand, D. G., Greene, J. D., & Nowak, M. A. (2012). Spontaneous giving and calculated greed. *Nature*, *489*, 427-430.

Sanfey, A. G., Rilling, J. K., Aronson, J. A., Nystrom, L. E., & Cohen, J. D. (2003). The neural basis of economic decision-making in the ultimatum game. *Science*, *300*, 1755-1758.

Todd, A. R., Bodenhausen, G. V., Richeson, J. A., & Galinsky, A. D. (2011). Perspective taking combats automatic expressions of racial bias. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *100*, 1027-1042.

Todd, A. R., Galinsky, A. D., & Bodenhausen, G. V. (2012). Perspective taking undermines stereotype maintenance processes: Evidence from social memory, behavior explanation, and information solicitation. *Social Cognition*, *30*, 94-108.

Trotschel, R., Huffmeier, J., Loschelder, D. D., Schwartz, K., & Gollwitzer, P. M. (2011). Perspective taking as a means to overcome motivational barriers in negotiations: When putting oneself into the opponent's shoes helps to walk toward agreements. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *101*, 771-790.

Underwood, B., & Moore, B. (1982). Perspective-taking and altruism. *Psychological Bulletin*, *91*, 143-173.

Vescio, T. K., Sechrist, G. B., & Paolucci, M. P. (2003). Perspective taking and prejudice reduction: The mediational role of empathy arousal and situational attributions. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, *33*, 455-472.

Zhong, C. B. (2011). The ethical dangers of deliberative decision making. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *56*, 1-25.