More Than Meets the Eye: The Unintended Consequence of Leader Dominance Orientation on Subordinate Ethicality

ABSTRACT

Leaders play a pivotal role in establishing ethical norms and behaviors within organizations. Across seven studies (three in the Supplementary Information), we explore how subordinates infer their leader's moral character outside the domain of ethical conduct and document this process's downstream consequences. Specifically, we focus on the dual-strategies theory, which posits that leaders exert influence and obtain deference via two broad orientations of behaviors and cognitions: dominance and prestige. In a field setting of employees and their managers, we find the leader dominance orientation positively relates to subordinate self-reported unethical behavior, while leader prestige is negatively related to the same. In a second sample of working adults, we use a time-lagged study design to show that leader dominance (prestige) positively (negatively) relates to subordinate-reported unethical behavior at work, partly due to a belief that the leaders engage in more (less) unethical behaviors, which contributes to a belief that norm-violating behaviors are more (less) acceptable within teams under dominance- (prestige-) oriented leaders. Finally, across four experimental studies, we observe that participants assigned to a dominance- (vs. prestige-) oriented leader perceived their leader as having lower moral character and expressed a greater likelihood of engaging in unethical behavior. We also document actual unethical behavior for monetary gain. This effect was mediated by the belief that unethical behavior was normative within the team. Our results highlight the importance of moral (mis)perception by demonstrating the consequences of a leader's hierarchical orientation on subordinate ethical perceptions and behaviors at work.

Keywords: leadership; social hierarchy; status; dominance; prestige; trait inference; moral character; unethical behavior

In 2015, Volkswagen (VW) incurred global anger for installing software in over 11 million diesel cars, allowing the carmaker to circumvent emissions testing and deceive regulators. As of 2023, the scandal has cost VW more than $39 billion in fines and settlements and the environmental impact is predicted to cause the equivalent loss of 45,000 disability-adjusted life years (Oldenkamp et al. 2016). The magnitude of this crime culminated in the departure of VW's then CEO, Martin Winterkorn. The desire to hold leadership accountable for the company's egregious behavior is unsurprising. This reaction stems from the belief and evidence that leaders influence normative expectations and employee unethicality at work via their ethical behaviors, proclamations, and rule enforcement—ethical leadership (Brown et al. 2005, Hoch et al. 2018). Regarding this case, Winterkorn had no prior convictions, accusations, or charges of impropriety; on the contrary, he had been lauded for guiding VW to become the world's best-selling automaker and was defended by several executives who spoke to his ethical nature. By this and other accounts, Winterkorn did not qualify as an unethical leader. However, Winterkorn was notorious for engaging with subordinates in an intimidating and controlling manner. One VW executive recalled, "There was always a distance, a fear.… If he would come and visit or you had to go to him, your pulse would go up" (Cremer and Bergin 2015). Winterkorn's dominance although commercially beneficial, may serve as a warning that these behaviors can also produce unintended and material consequences for the individuals and firms guided by such leaders. Thus, in this research, we examine if leadership behaviors outside of the ethical domain inform subordinates' norm perceptions and unethical behaviors at work, defined as voluntary behaviors that significantly violate accepted moral norms in society, such as lying, cheating, or stealing (Brown et al. 2005, Treviño et al. 2014).

There has been considerable discussion within the leadership and behavioral ethics literatures on the factors that contribute to how followers make ethical or moral attributions (i.e., trait attributions) toward their leader (De Cremer and Moore 2020, Fehr et al. 2015, Lemoine et al. 2019). One stream of critiques, rooted in rationalistic perspectives, argues that the uncertainty inherent within organizational environments suggests moral reasoning represents a post-hoc justification originating from more intuitive processing (Sonenshein 2007). In another stream of research, the traditional leadership approach to

studying this phenomenon has commonly focused on "lumped" leadership constructs (Carton 2022). While informative, this approach often lack construct clarity, leaving explanations of why, how, and when leaders influence their subordinates essentially ill-defined; for instance, ethical leadership is comprised of roughly 38 behaviors (Hoch et al. 2018). As a result, our understanding of how leadership influences workplace unethical behavior remains ambiguous, with potentially serious consequences.

This paper responds to this ambiguity in two ways. First, we seek to better understand leader moral character inferences outside the well-studied domain of ethics by taking a behavioral attribution approach. In doing so, we explore how individuals extrapolate beyond observable behaviors to inform their ethical perceptions. Second, we focus on discrete leadership behaviors rather than "lumped" constructs. We present a theoretical model, fundamentally intertwined with the definition of leadership, which is grounded in the ways in which leaders exert influence and obtain deference from those they lead. In particular, we draw on the dual-strategies theory to highlight the impact of leaders' *hierarchal orientation*, which dictates whether their followers' deference is primarily coerced via fear and control, known as a *dominance* orientation, or via the use of knowledge and skill to benefit the group, known as a *prestige* orientation. We contend that the means by which leaders exert influence over their subordinates affect subordinate trait attributions, particularly regarding their leader's moral character. This perception of moral character in turn is extrapolated to inform subordinates' understanding of what is normatively acceptable, thereby influencing subordinate ethicality.

Utilizing organizational surveys and randomized experiments, the present research makes several theoretical contributions. First, this paper broadens the inferential factors that inform subordinates' attributions about a leader's moral character by focusing on how leaders exert influence and obtain deference. This approach provides a few advantages, one of which is that it expands the inferential scope beyond a leader's ethical behaviors and proclamations. Unethical behaviors are primarily concealed from others, so opportunities for subordinates to observe them are infrequent and often ambiguous, which makes intentionality and blameworthiness difficult to discern (Monroe et al. 2017, 2018). Our theoretical approach also emphasizes parsimony and isolates key discrete dimensions of social influence to examine

how the behaviors that leaders enact in leading shape others' moral attributions and resulting behaviors (Carton 2022). Second, this paper aligns with the growing convergence in the impression formation literature that moral character plays a crucial role in person perceptions and impression formation (Brambilla et al. 2021). We respond to calls for research aimed at broadening the inferences that people rely on to make moral character judgments (Brambilla et al. 2021, Goodwin et al. 2014). We identify leaders' hierarchal orientation as providing a novel behavioral and cognitive processes by which moral character can be inferred.

Third, social learning theory plays an essential role in understanding the impact of leadership on subordinate behavior and norm perceptions (Wood and Bandura 1989). This research highlights an overlooked aspect of social learning theory, abstract modeling (Bandura 1977). By introducing trait inference theory, our work expands the observational process of social learning to account for the importance of people's automatic (mis)attributions about who someone is and what they are "likely" to do and document potential negative externalities—unethical behavior. Thus, we highlight the pervasiveness of social learning by considering both direct observation and perceptual inference. Finally, our paper is one of the first to examine the second-order consequences of the dual orientations on subordinate perception and behavior (Kakkar and Sivanathan 2022). By extending our investigation beyond the first-order effects of dominance and prestige, we account for externalities that have not been theorized or empirically demonstrated but are of great importance to organizations—specifically, unethical behaviors. Additionally, our work challenges the dual-strategies theory's assumption that unlike prestige-oriented leaders, dominance-oriented leaders are not preferentially copied, "unless individuals are copying [the leaders'] combat/dominance skills in an effort to become dominant" (Henrich and Gil-White 2001, p. 186). While subordinates may not copy a dominance-oriented leader via a process of self-improvement or mastery, they may do so because normative perceptions allow for more self-interested behavior. In this way, our research provides a broader yet nuanced understanding of these two orientations' full impact on employees, teams, and organizations.

Leadership's Impact on Subordinate Unethical Behavior at Work

In addition to their financial costs, workplace unethical behaviors have a substantial psychological impact on employees, reducing organizational commitment and well-being (Martin and Cullen 2006). Thus, it is not surprising that scholars have devoted significant time to elucidating the antecedents of workplace unethicality (De Cremer and Moore 2020, Treviño et al. 2014). While various factors (i.e., structural and individual differences) impact unethical behavior, the power and authority structures often inherent in organizational designs position leaders as highly influential role models of appropriate behavior at work (Brown et al. 2005).

A leader is broadly defined as someone who influences task objectives, strategies, and compliance in task behavior to achieve objectives (Yukl 1989). The study of leadership has historically been intertwined with questions surrounding ethics; some of the exemplar arguments developed in the Classical period, with Aristotelian ethics and theory on the pursuit of virtuous action, and in the Renaissance period, with Machiavelli's writings on immorality as a tool for leaders (ten Brinke and Keltner 2022). Organizational scholars have contributed to this discussion by focusing less on the prescriptive nature of the past and instead on providing a rigorous exploration of the descriptive nature of leadership ethicality. Specifically, the literature has focused on ethical leadership, which remains the most influential construct explaining leadership's role in predicting subordinate unethicality (Hoch et al. 2018, Ng and Feldman 2015, Peng and Kim 2020).

Ethical leadership is defined as "the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision making" (Brown et al. 2005, p. 120). Ethical leaders reduce unethical behavior because they are seen as role models of moral action and cultivate ethical norms within their teams (Mayer et al. 2009, 2010). For example, a leader's propensity to internalize and symbolize moral schemas positively relates to them being perceived as an ethical leader, which reduces subordinate unethical behavior (Mayer et al. 2012). Additionally, data collected from

active U.S. Army service members showed that ethical leadership was positively related to producing an ethical infrastructure that reduced wartime transgressions (Schaubroeck et al. 2012).

While ethical leadership remains informative, conceptual clarity and distinctiveness concerns have led to calls for greater theoretical precision as to what behaviors are essential to perceive leaders as ethical (Carton 2022, De Cremer and Moore 2020, Hoch et al. 2018). We build on existing literature by taking a more discrete behavioral approach that emphasizes the importance of non-ethically related behaviors that can inform how moral impressions are made. Broadening our understanding of moral character impressions is essential for at least two reasons. First, the prevalence of observable organizational unethical behavior is relatively low. For instance, the 2021 Global Business Ethics Survey Report indicated that U.S non-managerial respondents observed very little organization misconduct (e.g., improper hiring practices (12%), conflicts of interests (9%), and abusive behavior (16%) (Global Business Ethics Survey 2021). Yet, despite the low levels of observed unethical behavior, only 17% of non-managerial respondents reported working in a company with a strong ethical culture. These results support our assumption that inferences outside the domain of ethics likely influence perceived ethical standards in organizations.

Second, existing arguments surrounding the impact of leadership have focused on demonstrating rule enforcement, the moral manager, and behaving ethically, the moral person (Brown et al. 2005). But proclaiming rules and demonstrating ethical values is not enough to deter unethical behavior; leaders must be seen as legitimate and credible models (Bush et al. 2020, Kish-Gephart et al. 2010, Paterson and Huang 2018). This view assumes a certain degree of accuracy when inferring a leader's moral character. Yet, ethical transgressions are often ambiguous. As such, people rely on various actor-related characteristics when inferring intentionality and blameworthiness (Kakkar et al. 2020, Monroe et al. 2017, Polman et al. 2013). Therefore, this paper focuses on better understanding the inferential processes that people rely on to presume a leader's moral character and emphasizes the consequences of moral (mis)perception (Brambilla et al. 2021). To this end, we consider one of the primary aspects of leadership,

influence, and posit that moral impressions can originate from how leaders exert influence and secure deference, i.e., their hierarchical orientation.

The Dual-Strategies Theory of Social Rank: Leader Hierarchical Orientation

The dual-strategies theory draws on the evolutionary theory of social influence to consolidate prior research and provides a parsimonious account of the various cognitions and behaviors that people utilize to obtain and maintain high social rank, categorized under two orientations: dominance and prestige (Cheng et al. 2013, Henrich and Gil-White 2001). Importantly, dominance and prestige are not simply leadership styles, as an individual's hierarchical orientation remains independent of whether one is in a leadership position. Instead, the theory emphasizes the psychological and behavioral processes that individuals adopt to exert influence in the pursuit of deference, not leadership's multifaceted and reciprocal nature (for a review of the differences, see McClanahan 2020).

Dominance leads to positions of high social rank via behaviors defined by exerting control over social interactions and, at times, involving intimidation and coercion (Henrich and Gil-White 2001). These behaviors range from relatively innocuous forms, such as speaking first, more often, and confidently in groups (Anderson et al. 2012, Anderson and Kilduff 2009, Sherf et al. 2018), to more overt forms like engaging in controlling behaviors and leveraging group resources to limit the influence of others (Case and Maner 2014, Maner and Mead 2010, Mead and Maner 2012). In addition, dominance is positively associated with coercive theories of power, which emphasize the utilization of fear and force as prerequisites for power, and is related to trait variables such as aggression and low agreeableness (ten Brinke and Keltner 2022, Cheng et al. 2010). Not surprisingly, dominance is also related to anti-social dispositions such as hubristic pride and malicious envy, reducing concerns for others and facilitating competitive social comparison processes (Cheng et al. 2010, Lange et al. 2019). Thus, dominance increases social rank by signaling perceived competence, inducing fear in others who may challenge one's position, and enforcing hierarchical norms by suppressing others' influence (Maner and Case 2016).

In contrast, prestige leads to higher influence and social rank via behaviors that demonstrate valued expertise and skills, with the outcome that deference is freely conferred (Henrich and Gil-White

2001). Unlike their dominance-oriented counterparts, prestige-oriented individuals utilize collaborative theories of power, which emphasize compassion (ten Brinke and Keltner 2022). Their behaviors are motivated by a desire for social approval and, as such, include autonomy-supporting leadership behaviors like sharing their expertise by offering advice (Case et al. 2018, 2020, Halevy et al. 2019, Lee et al. 2021). Furthermore, prestige is associated with humility, authentic pride, genuine self-esteem, agreeableness, and openness, and is negatively associated with aggression (Cheng et al. 2010, Semenyna and Honey 2015, Weidman et al. 2018). In this way, prestige increases rank and influence by demonstrating competence and by prioritizing group desires and interests (Flynn et al. 2006, Halevy et al. 2012, Willer 2009).

Robust empirical evidence supports the viability of both dominance and prestige as two pathways to exert influence and obtain higher rank (i.e., leadership positions) (Lange et al. 2019). Cheng et al. (2013) demonstrate that independent of likeability, individuals high in either dominance or prestige wield greater influence within their group and command greater visual attention, a measure of social influence (Holland et al. 2017). Even subtle cues of dominance or prestige through body posture, non-verbal displays, and vocal tone are associated with gaining influence (Cheng et al. 2016, Laustsen and Petersen 2015, Witkower et al. 2020). However, while both orientations engender influence and leadership positions (McClanahan et al. 2021, Redhead et al. 2019), situational cues influence the preference for dominance or prestige in a given context. For instance, prestige is often preferred in cooperative situations, given their emphasis on group-based coordination and collective intentions (Halevy et al. 2012, Redhead et al. 2019). Conversely, in times of intergroup conflict or environmental threats and uncertainty, dominance is often preferred, as they inspire confidence and a sense of control (Chen et al. 2021, Halevy et al. 2012, Kakkar and Sivanathan 2017, Laustsen and Petersen 2017, Van Kleef et al. 2021).

Before moving forward, it is important to reiterate that it is possible in complex societies for someone to be perceived as high in both dominance and prestige. However, as outlined above, the two strategies are associated with two different psychological profiles marked by distinct motivational processes that illicit contrasting and internally consistent behaviors across various stimuli (Cheng and Tracy 2014, Henrich and Gil-White 2001). Hence, in line with prior research, we consider dominance and

prestige as a process in which people have dispositional preferences more broadly (Redhead et al. 2019). For this reason, we refer to leaders who rely predominantly on dominance (prestige) as being dominance-(prestige-) oriented or having higher dominance (prestige) orientation. While much of the research on these dual strategies has focused on how they independently impact the pursuit and maintenance of high social rank, we contend that the same behaviors affect the judgments and behaviors of those dependent on the leader—that is, their subordinates. Specifically, we focus on subordinates' moral character inferences about their leaders based on leader hierarchal orientation.

Trait Inference and Moral Character Impression Formation

When interacting with organizational leaders, subordinates are constrained by the type of behavioral observations that they are exposed to; this is due to the inherent nature of the workplace, where interactions are guided by expectations and norms that emphasize the professional over the personal. However, people commonly rely on induction and deduction as complementary avenues to make inferences about others. A vast body of research on trait inference theory demonstrates that creating dispositional attributions of traits based on behavior is a universal human tendency, enacted spontaneously and effortlessly as a way to make the social world more predictable and controllable (Kelley 1973, Newman and Uleman 1989, Uleman et al. 2008, Uleman and Moskowitz 1994). Behavioral inferences remain the basis for individuals to extrapolate beyond readily available information to infer traits about others (Miller 1984, Winter and Uleman 1984). Importantly, trait attribution leads people to expect behavior to be temporally stable and consistent across different situations. However, we know that situational misattributions and implicit assumptions often bias these sorts of behavioral inferences; therefore, inferences do not correlate well across different situations (Kunda and Nisbett 1986, Reeder and Brewer 1979, Ross 1977). In this way, although behavioral exposure may be limited within the workplace, employees engage in inductive processes to make broader trait attributions and form impressions of those around them.

Traditional accounts of impression formation have emphasized the stereotype content model, which centers on the criticality of inferences about whether someone has positive or negative intentions

toward us (i.e., warmth) and whether or not someone is capable of carrying out their intentions (i.e., competence) (Fiske et al. 2002). More recently, impression formation theories posit that individuals are particularly attuned to moral cues in behavior (Brambilla et al. 2021, Crockett et al. 2021, Goodwin 2015). In terms of moral inferences, the predominant focus has been on discerning whether someone is likely to be helpful or harmful to the self (Goodwin et al. 2014, Leach et al. 2007, Wojciszke et al. 1998). Notably, a critical difference between the dominance and prestige orientations is the extent to which self- versus group-focused decisions are valued. More dominance-oriented leaders will often act self-interestedly to protect their position of social rank with behaviors such as responding to perceived threats in the hierarchy by demoting or ostracizing skilled group members, withholding valuable information from subordinates to maintain an advantage, and prevent bonding within their team (Case and Maner 2014, Maner and Mead 2010, Mead and Maner 2012). Thus, dominance-oriented leaders' behaviors—namely, prioritizing the self when forced to choose between self- and group interests and utilizing fear—likely result in subordinate perceptions of their low helpfulness and a potential to harm.

Conversely, prestige-oriented leaders demonstrate the capacity to prioritize group interests. In fact, the extent to which prestige-oriented leaders prioritize their group's desires can come at the cost of optimal decision-making, even if motivated by self-interest (Case et al. 2018). Additionally, the consideration of others manifests through autonomy-supporting behaviors and celebrating the successes of their subordinates (Lee et al. 2021, Weidman et al. 2018). Hence, prestige-oriented leaders are likely to be seen as high in helpfulness and low in harm. In line with moral impression formation, we contend that witnesses to these self- versus group-serving decisions will generally lead to inferences that extend to the leader's moral character (Brambilla et al. 2021). It should be noted that while self-interested behaviors may violate notions of fairness more broadly, the decision-maker in our studies and the existing literature clearly defines the behaviors within a context where the leader has full authority and discretion to act. The leader is, therefore, not violating any rules nor engaging in unethical behavior (Treviño et al. 2014).

Two extant studies provide credence to the potential differing impacts of dominance and prestige on inferring moral character. First, Cheng et al. (2010) sampled varsity male athletes and asked them to

complete self- and peer reports of their team members regarding a range of personality measures, perceived characteristics, abilities, and ratings of dominance and prestige. The results show a positive relationship between perceived prestige and perceptions of ethicality (r = .26) and a negative association with dominance (r = -.41). More recently, a study by Kim and Guinote (2021) suggested there may be an empirical link between dominance and dishonesty. However, it is important to note that the study designs are correlational and an internal meta-analysis of the studies tracking dishonesty suggested a positive but weak relationship between dominance and no relationship with prestige (r = .18, Kim and Guinote 2021). These studies suggest two things: first, the only documented evidence of dominance and a form of unethical behavior, dishonesty, is relatively small and there is no evidence for prestige as being negatively related; second, perceived ethicality is overestimated based on the relationship between hierarchical orientation and a form of observed ethicality, dishonesty. Furthermore, we report a data collection of working adults with managerial experience in the Supplementary Information (SI) section, where we do not find a statistically significant relationship between either dominance or prestige and moral character (SI, Hierarchical Orientation: Moral Character). Therefore, correlational evidence suggests only a tentative relationship between a leader's hierarchical orientation and moral character, and that this inference is potentially erroneous. Through both correlational and experimental designs, holding constant any history of unethical behavior, we test the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1a. *Leaders higher (vs. lower) in dominance orientation are perceived as having lower moral character.*

Hypothesis 1b. *Leaders higher (vs. lower) in prestige orientation are perceived as having higher moral character.*

Leaders as Ethical Norm Setters

Organizational scholars have explored the various ways people understand the ethical norms within firms and teams—the ethical infrastructure (Schneider et al. 2013, Tenbrunsel and Smith-Crowe 2008, Trevino 1986, Victor and Cullen 1988). Theoretically, the ethical infrastructure speaks to the rules to deter unethical behavior at work, the relevance of ethical considerations in normative decision-making, and the ethical expectations within a team or organization. As previously stated, the power and authority

structure often inherent in organizational designs positions leaders as a critical factor in developing the ethical infrastructure (Mayer et al. 2010, Peng and Kim 2020, Schaubroeck et al. 2012).

Leaders have the discretion to set rules and standards within their teams and serve as viable exemplars of appropriate behavior. Social learning theory explains that leaders influence followers' conduct via observational learning and vicarious observation of punishment and reward (Bandura 1986, Mayer et al. 2010). While this understanding is generally accurate, we contend that focusing exclusively on observational learning can limit our understanding of how people infer norms and adopt certain behaviors. Thus, we focus instead on an often overlooked and understudied aspect of social learning theory that highlights the importance of *abstract modeling*, whereby observers extract the rules governing the specific judgments and actions of others (Wood and Bandura 1989). Just as trait inference theory can help explain how moral character impressions are formed based on behaviors outside of the domain of ethics, abstract modeling may also explain how subordinates infer ethical norms in the absence of, or accounting for, ethically related behaviors.

To support our argument of ethical norm (mis)perception, we report a study in the SI conducted with adults who have managerial experience. This study showed no significant relationship between dominance or prestige orientation and the acceptance of subordinate unethical behavior (SI, Hierarchical Orientation: Acceptability of Subordinate Unethical Behavior). Therefore, if subordinates infer a leader's moral character based on interactions that, while not unethical, signal a capacity to be helpful or group-oriented (prestige) or to be harmful or self-oriented (dominance), we contend that moral character inferences spill over and inform the perceived acceptability of norm-violating behavior in the workplace.

Hypothesis 2a. *Leaders higher (vs. lower) in dominance orientation are related to subordinates' perceptions of norm-violating behaviors as more normatively acceptable at work.*

Hypothesis 2b. *Leaders higher (vs. lower) in prestige orientation are related to subordinates' perceptions of norm-violating behaviors as less normatively acceptable at work.*

We also predict that these norm-violating impressions will influence unethical workplace behavior, given that the decision-making procedures that people perceive as normative influence the extent to which they engage in norm-violating behaviors (Mayer et al. 2010). For example, evidence

suggests that norms fostering self-focused (egoistic) decision-making processes are at least partly related to unethical behavior (Kish-Gephart et al. 2010). Research examining 117 work units found that supervisors indicated more unethical behavior when employees reported norms that encouraged more self-focused decision-making. In contrast, other-focused decision-making received lower ratings of unethical behavior (Arnaud and Schminke 2012). Further, we know that subordinates' moral attributions about their leaders influence subordinate unethical behavior at work (Mayer et al. 2009, 2012). In summary, if subordinates infer a leader's moral character based on their hierarchal orientation, which they then extrapolate to infer what is normatively and ethically permissible, workplace unethical behavior will be positively related to a leader's dominance orientation and negatively related to a leader's prestige orientation. Stated formally, we predict the following:

Hypothesis 3a. *Leaders higher (vs. lower) in dominance orientation are related to subordinates engaging in more unethical behavior at work.*

Hypothesis 3b. *Leaders higher (vs. lower) in prestige orientation are related to subordinates engaging in less unethical behavior at work.*

Hypothesis 4a. *Subordinates engage in more unethical workplace behavior under dominance-oriented leaders because these leaders are seen as low in moral character, leading to perceptions that unethical behavior is more normatively acceptable at work.*

Hypothesis 4b. *Subordinates engage in less unethical workplace behavior under prestige-oriented leaders because these leaders are seen as high in moral character, leading to perceptions that unethical behavior is less normatively acceptable at work.*

Overview of Studies

Across seven studies, three of which are in the SI, we demonstrate the consequences of a leader's hierarchical orientation on subordinate workplace unethical behavior. Study 1 surveyed working managers and their subordinates and found that managerial self-reported dominance (prestige) positively (negatively) predicted subordinate-reported unethical behavior at work. Study 2 tested our full model and accounted for alternative explanations for our predictions by sampling full-time working adults using a time-lagged study design. In support of our full model, we found that leader-perceived dominance (prestige) was positively (negatively) related to self-reported unethical behavior at work. Importantly, we found evidence for a serial indirect effect, such that dominance (prestige) was positively (negatively)

related to subordinates believing that their leader would engage in unethical behavior, which positively (negatively) related to the perceived acceptability of norm-violating behaviors. Study 3 replicated the results found in Study 2 using a pre-registered experimental design manipulating leader dominance and prestige. In the SI, three additional pre-registered experimental studies provide additional support, which includes different variations of a control condition to provide directional support for dominance and prestige impacting perceptions of leader moral character, norm perceptions, and unethical intentions. Finally, in Study 4, we ran a lab experiment where participants were placed under the direction of a dominance- or prestige-oriented leader. In support of our model, we found that, under the first type of leader, participants engaged in more observable unethical behavior and viewed unethical behavior as more normative within their team as compared to under a prestige-oriented leader. Thus, our results highlight the importance of moral (mis)perception by demonstrating the consequences of a leader's hierarchical orientation on subordinate unethical behavior in a workplace context. All data and materials are available via the Open Science Framework: (https://osf.io/kdwyh/?viewonly=a83fbad0dd7d4587af2f3143f9db8b0d)

Study 1

Study 1 aimed to assess the extent to which a leader's hierarchical orientation influences subordinate (i.e., employee, in this study) ethicality at work. To this end, we sampled full-time working managers and their employees. We also leveraged the field setting to account for alternative explanations to isolate the independent effect of the leader's hierarchical orientation on employee unethical behavior (Bernerth and Aguinis 2016). Specifically, we included leader and employee-rated moral identity internalization, employee-rated leader-member exchange (LMX), employee-rated ethical leadership, employee-rated job satisfaction, and demographic variables.

The relationship between LMX and employee unethical behavior exists in exchange relationships where subordinates do not perceive a pattern of reciprocal obligation and trust (Martin et al. 2016, Thiel et al. 2018). Relatedly, job satisfaction impacts employee unethical behavior when frustration leads to withdrawal behaviors as a way to regain control or due to a lack of organizational commitment (Dalal

2005, Judge et al. 2006). Thus, it is possible that this second-order relational experience—rather than leader orientation—is what predicts unethical behavior. Additionally, if people infer leader moral character from hierarchical orientation, it could be the case that employees self-select to work with leaders that exemplify their desired moral preferences, in line with the attraction-selection-attrition model (Schneider et al. 1995). Accordingly, we measure employee moral identity, given it is arguably one of the strongest predictors of unethical behavior more broadly (Aquino and Reed 2002, Reynolds and Ceranic 2007).

As discussed, ethical leadership is a leading predictor of subordinate unethical behavior at work. Therefore, we controlled for perceived ethical leadership to determine and distinguish the independent effects of our theoretical argument. Moreover, we wanted to complement perceptions of ethical leadership by controlling for leaders' self-reported moral identity internalization, given its predictive value in engaging in unethical behavior, to further isolate the impact of leader hierarchical orientation (Mayer et al. 2012). Another benefit of measuring moral identity internalization is that we can assess any potential link between hierarchical orientation and moral identity, as was done in the SI (Hierarchical Orientation: Moral Character). Finally, we control for leader and subordinate gender and age as meta-analysis suggests these demographics are related to unethical behavior (Kish-Gephart et al. 2010, Ng and Feldman 2008).

Sample and Procedure

We hired an Indian market research company to survey employees and their corresponding supervisors. The sample consisted of 600 employees (M_{age} = 28.54, *SD* = 5.06, 10.00% female, $M_{CurrentRole}$ = 2.94 years, $M_{WorkwithManager}$= 2.70 years) and 150 managers (Ma_{ge} = 37.56, *SD* = 7.09, 12.00% female, $M_{CurrentRole}$ = 6.36 years) working within intact teams, with four subordinates reporting to each manager. The sample consisted of employees and managers from 23 industries (12% banking, 11.30% information technology, and 10% hospitality—industries representing more than 10% of the sample).

Measures

Unless stated, participants responded on a seven-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

Independent Variable.

Leader Dominance and Prestige Self-Report. Leaders rated their dominance and prestige orientations using a 17-item measure (Cheng et al. 2010). A sample item for dominance was "I am willing to use aggressive tactics to get my way" ($\alpha = .73$). A sample item for prestige was "My unique talents and abilities are recognized by my team" ($\alpha = .90$).

Dependent Variable.

Employee Unethical Behavior. Employees self-reported how often they engaged in unethical behavior at work using a 14-item measure (adopted from Akaah, 1992). A sample item was "Pass blame for errors to an innocent coworker" (1 = *never*, 7 = *daily*; $\alpha = .89$).

Control Variables.

Leader and Employee Self-Rated Moral Identity Internalization. Moral identity was assessed using a five-item measure (Aquino and Reed 2002). After nine characteristics (e.g., caring and helpful) were shown, participants were asked to visualize the kind of person who would have these characteristics and if it would make them feel good to be that kind of person ($\alpha_{leader} = .81$ and $\alpha_{employee} = .78$).

Employee-Rated Leader-Member Exchange LMX. We used a seven-item LMX scale (Graen and Uhl-Bien 1995). A sample item was "I have an effective relationship with my manager" ($\alpha = .88$).

Employee-Rated Ethical Leadership. We measured ethical leadership with a 10-item scale (Brown et al. 2005). A sample item was "Discusses business ethics or values with employees" ($\alpha = .86$).

Employee-Rated Job Satisfaction. Employees rated their job satisfaction with a single-item measure (Wanous et al. 1997): "Overall, how satisfied are you with your current job or position in the company?" (1 = *very unsatisfied*, 5 = *very satisfied*).

Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations among the variables can be found in the SI.

----------Insert Table 1 about here----------

Confirmatory Factor Analysis. Subordinate four-factor confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) revealed a superior model fit compared to any alternative model (Model 1a, $\chi 2$ (588) = 1836.18; $\chi 2$/df = 3.12; comparative fit index [CFI] = .86; standardized root mean square residual [SRMR] = .06; root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = .06). Leader three-factor CFA revealed an okay fit ($\chi 2$ (206) = 359.40; $\chi 2$/df = 1.75; CFI = .89; SRMR = .08; RMSEA = .07). Based on the CFA results, we explored whether or not we could strengthen the model fit (Hu and Bentler 1999). To do so, we tested an alternative model by modifying the dominance and prestige measure, in line with prior research, to capture a reduced eight-item scale from the original 17-item measure (dominance 4-item, α = .82; prestige 4-item, α = .87; Witkower et al. 2020). CFA revealed an excellent fit for CFI, an excellent fit for SRMR, and an excellent fit for RMSEA (Model 2b, $\chi 2$ (62) = 89.89; $\chi 2$/df = 1.45; CFI = .97; SRMR = .06; RMSEA = .06). We report our results with the reduced eight-item scale. Results do not change when using the original 17-item scale. See the SI for model comparisons.

Employee Unethical Behavior. To test our hypotheses that leaders higher (vs. lower) in dominance (prestige) orientation are positively (negatively) related to subordinate unethicality at work, we performed a multilevel mixed-effect regression, treating leaders as a higher-order factor. Table 1 presents the results of the multilevel regression analysis. In support of our hypotheses, leader self-reported dominance had a significant positive effect on employees' self-reported unethical behavior, with (b = .07, *S.E.* = .03, p = .01, Model 3) or without (b = .07, *S.E.* = .03, p = .02, Model 1) the control variables. Furthermore, while leader self-reported prestige did not have a negative, statistically significant effect on employees' self-reported unethical behavior with controls (b = -.05, *S.E.* = .03, p = .13, Model 3), we did detect a significant effect without the controls (b = -.08, *SE* = .04, p = .025, Model 1).

Discussion

Using a field setting employing a non-WEIRD sample of employees and their direct managers from 150 intact teams across multiple industries, Study 1 provided initial evidence of the positive relationship between a leader's dominance orientation and subordinates' self-reported unethical behavior

at work (Henrich et al. 2010). Additionally, we were able to distinguish the unique effect of a leader's hierarchical orientation and its relationship with unethical behavior by controlling for various factors related to a leader's orientation and unethical behavior at work. Regarding these controls, it is important to highlight two implications. First, by controlling for ethical leadership, we test the unique relationship between hierarchical orientation and unethical behavior by accounting for the current standard bearer in the literature. That is, we document how discrete behaviors of leaders in exerting influence, impacts ethical behaviors of others, rather than lumped leadership theories (Carton 2022). Doing so provides a rigorous test of the independent effect of leader hierarchical orientation. It is also worth noting that when ethically related constructs are included in the analyses, the effect of prestige is no longer statistically significant; this suggests that the means by which prestige-oriented leaders reduce unethicality may not be entirely independent of demonstrating ethically related behaviors.

Second, by having leaders self-report their hierarchical orientation and moral identity internalization, we could assess whether either orientation valued or devalued traits traditionally associated with ethical behavior. We found a positive and significant relationship with prestige (b = .14, *S.E.* = .06, p = .02) but we did not find a significant relationship with dominance (b = .01, *S.E.* = .05, p = .83). This result highlights the importance of our considerations of moral (mis)perception and the unintended consequences of leader hierarchical orientation. Still, like all studies, Study 1 had several limitations, including that our sample represented the working demographic trends in a single country and remained skewed toward males, and we did not test the mechanisms of how leader hierarchical orientation impacts subordinate unethical behavior at work. Study 2 addresses these limitations.

Study 2

Study 1 found that leaders' self-reported hierarchal orientation impacted the extent to which subordinates engaged in unethical behavior at work. Study 2 extends these findings in at least three critical ways. First, we test our full serial mediation model, utilizing a time-lagged study design, to test whether subordinate unethicality at work is explained via perceptions of dominance-oriented and prestige-oriented leaders' moral character, which informs the perceived acceptability of norm-violating behaviors.

Second, while Study 1 reduced concerns of common method bias by having leaders report the independent variable and subordinates report the dependent variable, our theorizing is critically dependent on the perceptions of leader hierarchical orientation from the subordinate view. In Study 2, we therefore assess subordinate perceptions. Third, it is likely that a leader's hierarchical orientation affects not only the perceived acceptability of norm-violating behavior but also the contextual factors and intrapersonal processes that may also explain subordinate unethical behavior in the workplace. For instance, leader dominance is positively related to performance pressure, which can threaten employees via an increased sense of inadequacy, which positively predicts unethical behaviors (Gardner 2012, Gonsalves 2022, Mitchell et al. 2018). Furthermore, corruption often spreads in organizations because of other-directed emotions, which include anger and anxiety (Rodell and Judge 2009, Smith-Crowe and Warren 2014). Prior research on emotional experience has shown that a sense of wrongdoing generates anger and motivates a desire to punish those who cause the anger (Judge et al. 2006, O'Reilly et al. 2016). Thus, given that dominance-oriented leaders are controlling and often disliked, unethical behavior may not be driven by a general norm perception but instead by the desire for retribution. Conversely, prestige-oriented leaders should mitigate a sense of retribution since they rely on being liked (Case et al. 2018). Alternatively, a sense of anxiety may motivate unethical behavior at work by increasing feelings of threat and a focus on self-preservation, which predicts self-interested unethical behavior (Kouchaki and Desai 2015). Given that dominance coerces deference via fear, subordinates may engage in unethical behavior due to felt anxiety, while prestige may reduce anxiety due to its supportive nature. By accounting for such alternative mechanisms, we provide support for the efficacy of our proposed mechanism, the perceived acceptability of norm-violating behavior.

Sample and Procedure

Participants. We surveyed (Time 1) 500 full-time workers through Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Two weeks later (Time 2), we surveyed the same sample, receiving 410 responses—an 82% response rate. Four participants were excluded from our analysis for having duplicate IP addresses, and a further 22 participants were identified as using an auto-completion device during the survey (Buchanan

and Scofield 2018). The final analysis consisted of the remaining 384 participants. The average age of the participants (44% women) was 38.97 years (*SD* = 10.72). The average tenure with their manager was 46.20 months (*SD* = 43.94). In terms of industry, 18.50% of our sample reported working in the public sector, 76.60% in the private sector, 4.70% in the not-for-profit sector, and <1% did not report.

Procedures. At Time 1, participants wrote the initials of their leader to enhance the saliency of the person they would be referencing. Additionally, we embedded the initials throughout the survey when their leader was referenced. Participants then indicated their leader's dominance and prestige orientation, the extent to which they believed their leader would engage in unethical behavior, their perceived acceptability of norm violations within their team, performance pressure, emotional experience of anger and anxiety at work, and finally, their workplace and personal demographics. Two weeks later, at Time 2, we distributed the second part of the study, where participants indicated their unethical behavior at work.

Measures

Independent Variable.

Dominance-Prestige Peer-Report. Participants reported their leader's dominance and prestige orientations using an eight-item measure ($\alpha_{dominance}$ = .86 and $\alpha_{prestige}$ = .94; Witkower et al. 2020).

Dependent Variables.

Perceived Leader Moral Character. We measured perceptions of a leader's moral character using six unethical decisions from the Unethical Decision-Making Scale (Detert et al. 2008). Participants indicated how likely their manager would engage in unethical behaviors. A sample item was "[Manager's initials] receives a quarterly bonus check and notices that the review incorrectly reported some of the figures from the quarter. Revealing this error would mean the difference between $5,000 and decides not to say anything" (α = .83). Participants responded on a seven-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *highly likely*).

Perceived Acceptability of Norm Violations (PANV). Norm perceptions were measured using a four-item scale (Van Kleef et al. 2011, Yam et al. 2018). Participants indicated how acceptable it would be for a person in their team to be asocial, immoral, improper, and rude (α = .86), using a seven-point scale (1 = *highly unacceptable*, 7 = *highly acceptable*).

Self-Reported Unethical Behavior. We used the same 14-item measure as in Study 1 (α =.94).

Performance Pressure. We used a four-item performance pressure scale (Mitchell et al. 2018). A sample item was "I feel tremendous pressure to produce results" (α = .88). Participants responded on a seven-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

Anger and Anxiety. We used a two-item anger scale where participants indicated the extent to which they felt anger and hostile at work and a two-item anxiety scale where they indicated the degree to which they felt nervous and anxious at work (r_{anger} = .82 and $r_{anxiety}$ = .81; Rodell and Judge 2009). Participants responded on a five-point scale (1 = *very slightly or not at all*, 5 = *extremely*).

Results

Correlations, means, and standard deviations can be found in the SI. Across all analyses, we ran an ordinary least squares regression (OLS) to test our prediction and controlled for tenure with the manager, the number of people within the organization, age, and gender. The results remain consistent both with and without controls.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis. Six-factor CFA provided the best model fit (Model 1 (χ2 (579) = 1740.49; χ2/df = 3.01; CFI = .89; SRMR = .07; RMSEA = .07). See the SI for comparisons with alternative models.

Perceived Leader Unethicality. In support of our predictions that leaders higher (vs. lower) in dominance (prestige) orientation are perceived as having lower (higher) moral character, we found a significant positive relationship between leader dominance and perceptions of leader unethicality (b = 0.36, p < .001) and a significant negative relationship between leader prestige and perceptions of leader unethicality (b = -0.38, p < .001).

Perceived Acceptability of Norm Violations. In support of our predictions that leaders high (vs. lower) in dominance (prestige) are positively (negatively) related to perceiving norm-violating behaviors as normatively acceptable, we found a significant positive relationship between leader dominance and PANV (b = 0.17, p < .001); conversely, leader prestige had a significant negative relationship with PANV (b = -0.11, p = .02).

Unethical Behavior. In support of our predictions that leaders higher (vs. lower) in dominance (prestige) orientation are positively (negatively) related to subordinate unethicality at work, we found a significant relationship between leader dominance and self-reported unethical behavior at work (b = 0.12, p < .001). Leader prestige had a significant negative effect without controls (b = -0.08, p = .04) but a marginal effect with controls (b = -0.07, p = .07).

----------Insert Figure 1 about here----------

Serial Indirect Effects. To test our serial indirect effect predictions, we used AMOS structural equation modeling to account for the two independent predictors (Gaskin et al. 2020). In support of our predictions, we found a significant serial indirect effect such that perceived leader dominance orientation was positively related to perceptions of a leader as more likely to engage in unethical behaviors, which had a positive relationship with perceiving norm-violating behaviors as being more acceptable, and subsequently led to more unethical behavior (indirect effect = .030, $CI_{95\%}$ [.015, .056]). Furthermore, we found a significant serial indirect effect such that perceived leader prestige orientation was negatively related to perceived leader unethicality, which reduced the perceived acceptability of norm violating behaviors, and subsequently led to less unethical behavior (indirect effect = -.030, $CI_{95\%}$ [-.051, -.015]).

Next, to examine our prediction surrounding the perceived acceptability of norm violations as a unique and independent predictor, we included performance pressure, anger, and anxiety and ran a simultaneous indirect model. The results do not change when run in a serial indirect effects analysis. We again found a positive indirect effect of leader dominance on unethical behavior via the perceived acceptability of norm violating behavior (indirect effect = .05, $CI_{95\%}$ [.025, .088]), and a negative indirect effect of leader prestige on unethical behavior (indirect effect = -0.03, $CI_{95\%}$ [-.062, -.011]). We did not find evidence for two of the alternative mechanisms: performance pressure (indirect $effect_{dominance}$ = .002, $CI_{95\%}$ [-.012, .017]; indirect $effect_{prestige}$ < .001, $CI_{95\%}$ [-.003, .003]) and anxiety (indirect $effect_{dominance}$ = .02, $CI_{95\%}$ [-.004, 0.037]; indirect $effect_{prestige}$ = -.002, $CI_{95\%}$ [-.016, 0.002]). However, we found that anger had a significant indirect effect for both dominance and prestige (indirect $effect_{dominance}$ = .06, $CI_{95\%}$ [.030, .104]; indirect $effect_{prestige}$ = -.06, $CI_{95\%}$ [-.090, -.030)]; see Figure 1).

Discussion

Using a time-lagged study design with a sample of employed adults, from a different geographical region to Study 1, Study 2 provides additional organizationally relevant evidence for our proposed model. Specifically, we found that subordinates' perceptions of their leader's dominance (prestige) were associated with seeing their leader as more (less) likely to engage in unethical behavior and with seeing norm-violating behaviors as more (less) acceptable, which had a serial indirect effect on the positive (negative) relationship with self-reported unethical behavior at work. Importantly, we account for alternative mechanisms such as the day-to-day emotional experiences of feeling anxious or angry and coping with performance pressures. In line with our expectation, the perceived acceptability of norm violations was not the only significant predictor, albeit it was, as we predicted, a unique one. Additionally, we found evidence that participants may engage in unethical behaviors at work out of an anger-driven desire for retribution. Across two-studies, employing different samples of works (WEIRD and non-WEIRD), and employing different methodologies, we have found consistent evidence that leader hierarchal orientation impacts subordinate unethical behavior at work using the survey methodology. In the subsequent studies, we seek to increase confidence in our causal claims by conducting experiments, both online and in person, where leader hierarchical orientation is manipulated.

Study 3

Study 3 addresses one of the primary limitations in Studies 1 and 2 by manipulating leader hierarchical orientation. This study also strengthens our theoretical claims surrounding perceptions of a leader's ethicality by keeping any prior history of unethical behavior constant. Moreover, Study 3 addresses the concern that what a subordinate thinks a leader may do in a context where unethical behavior is possible (captured in Study 2) does not precisely capture attributions about leader moral character. We address this concern in two ways. First, we assess perceptions of the leader's moral character specifically and its impact on norm perceptions and subsequent unethical intentions in a work context. Second, we ran a pre-registered study in the SI (Study S1) and showed that participants perceived a dominance- (vs. prestige-) oriented leader as having lower moral character, the measure used in Study 3,

which had an indirect effect on the perceived likelihood that the leader would engage in unethical behavior, the measure used in Study 2. Doing so highlights the conceptual similarity between the two constructs in capturing perceptions of a leader's moral character.

Sample and Procedure

Participants. We pre-registered the sample size, exclusion criteria, hypotheses, and analyses (https://aspredicted.org/ZW3_KF2). We aimed to recruit 550 U.S. participants via MTurk. A total of 561 participants completed the study. In line with our pre-registered criteria, we excluded 19 participants for failing an attention check, two for duplicate IP addresses, and five for using an auto-completion device. The final sample comprised 535 participants (59% female; M_{age} = 39.36, SD_{age} = 12.84).

Procedures. Participants were asked to imagine working for a company where they reported to their leader, "Taylor." They were then randomly assigned to either the dominance or prestige condition. Next, they watched a 90-second video of a professional male actor depicting auditory and visual cues of the assigned hierarchical orientation (Kakkar and Sivanathan 2022). In the video, "Taylor" informed the participants that all members would report to him; he had control over allocating tasks to different team members and could remove team members if he saw fit. In the dominance condition, Taylor described himself as dominant, assertive, controlling, and aggressive in getting his way. The actor embodied dominance-oriented behavioral cues via a downward head tilt, absence of a smile, active chest expansions, and a lower voice pitch (Cheng et al. 2016, Witkower et al. 2020). In the prestige condition, Taylor described himself as possessing valued skills and highlighted offering advice, guidance, and assistance. The actor embodied prestige-oriented behavioral cues via an upward head tilt, the presence of a smile, subtle chest expansions, and a higher voice pitch (Cheng et al. 2016, Witkower et al. 2020). Complete scripts can be found in the SI. To increase engagement with the manipulation, participants wrote a few sentences to describe how they would feel working under Taylor. After completing the manipulation check questions, participants indicated their perceptions of Taylor's moral character. They then reflected on the work culture within their team before completing the perceived acceptability of norm violation survey and the extent to which they would engage in unethical behaviors.

Measures

Independent Variable.

Dominance-Prestige Peer-Report. We used the 17-item scale from Study 1 ($\alpha_{prestige}$ = .94 and $\alpha_{dominance}$ = .87).

Dependent Variables.

Perceived Moral Character. We measured perceptions of leader moral character with eight items (Goodwin et al. 2014). Participants indicated the extent to which they believed Taylor possessed the following traits: Courageous, Fair, Principled, Responsible, Just, Honest, Trustworthy, and Loyal (α = .96). Participants responded on a nine-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 9 = *extremely*).

Perceived Acceptability of Norm Violations. We used the same four items as in Study 2 (α =.87).

Unethical Behavioral Intentions. We used the same measure from Studies 1 and 2, except that in this study, the stem of the question read, "Still imagining that you work under the leadership of Taylor, please indicate the extent to which you would engage in the following behaviors*"* (α =.93).

Results

Manipulation Check. Supporting the efficacy of our manipulation, an independent-sample two-tailed t-test showed that participants reported Taylor as (a) higher in dominance in the dominance condition (M = 5.73, SD = 0.90) than in the prestige condition ([M = *4.22*, SD = 1.29], t[533] = 15.77, p < .001, d = 1.37), and (b) higher in prestige in the prestige condition (M = 4.38, SD = 1.39) than in the dominance condition ([M = 2.74, SD = 1.24], t[533] = 14.49, p < .001, d = 1.26).

Perceived Moral Character. An independent-sample two-tailed t-test found a significant difference between the dominance and prestige conditions on perceived leader moral character (t[533] = 13.96, p < .001, d = 1.21). Participants in the dominance condition perceived their leader to have lower moral character (M = 3.35, SD = 1.85) than those in the prestige condition (M = 5.66, SD = 1.98).

Perceived Acceptability of Norm Violations. An independent-sample two-tailed t-test found a significant difference between the dominance and prestige conditions on perceiving norm-violating behaviors as normatively acceptable (t[533] = 5.98, p < .001, d = .52). Participants in the dominance

condition believed norm-violating behaviors were more acceptable (M = 3.09, SD = 1.57) than those in the prestige condition (M = 2.37, SD = 1.15).

Unethical Behavioral Intentions. An independent-sample two-tailed t-test found a significant difference between the dominance and prestige conditions on unethical intentions (t[533] = 5.14, p < .001, d = .45). Participants in the dominance condition indicated they would engage in more unethical behavior (M = 2.21, SD = 1.28) than those in the prestige condition (M = 1.71, $S.D.$ = .91).

Serial Indirect Effect. In support of our hypotheses, using the PROCESS macro 6 for SPSS with 10,000 bootstraps, we found that perceived leader moral character and perceived acceptability of norm violating behaviors had a serial indirect effect on the relationship between leader hierarchical orientation and subordinate unethical intentions (indirect effect = .06, $CI_{95\%}$ [.026, .106]).

Discussion

By utilizing an experimental design, Study 3 strengthens our causal claims surrounding the impact of a leader's hierarchical orientation on subordinate unethical behaviors at work. Participants exposed to a video simulating an on boarding/introduction to the workplace, with a trained actor depicting a dominance (vs. prestige) orientation resulted in perceptions of lower leader moral character and beliefs that norm-violating behaviors were more acceptable. These moral character and norm perceptions had a serial indirect effect, predicting a greater willingness among participants to engage in unethical behavior under the dominance- (vs. prestige-) oriented leader. Furthermore, surveying a broader U.S.-based population builds on our existing evidence within the professional domain extends the scope of our predictions.

Despite experimentally manipulating leader dominance and prestige, the lack of a control condition limits our ability to make directional claims. We focus on the dominance and prestige comparison because a truly neutral or control condition would entail a condition that provided primarily objective information about a leader instead of about how the leader interacts with others and exerts influence; therefore, our comparison would not provide consistent information across conditions. An alternative approach could be manipulating dominance and prestige orthogonally to assess directional

effects. To accommodate both operationalizations, we ran two pre-registered studies in the SI where we tested the directional effects of dominance and prestige as compared to a neutral control condition (SI Study S2) and where we manipulated dominance and prestige orthogonally to test the extreme variations of our conditions; high dominance low prestige and low dominance high prestige, against a high dominance and high prestige condition (SI Study S3). Supporting our predictions, dominance (prestige) led to perceptions of lower (higher) moral character and higher (lower) perceptions of the acceptability of norm-violating behaviors, as well as support for our serial indirect effect model.

Study 4

Study 4 seeks to provide additional causal evidence for the impact of leader hierarchical orientation on subordinate ethicality by examining *observable* unethical behavior. Moreover, in Studies 2 and 3, by asking subordinates to reflect on their leader's moral character and the acceptability of norm-violating behavior, and in Study 3, where we test our complete model simultaneously, we may have inflated our results, given common method bias concerns. We made two changes to the experimental design for Study 4 to address this limitation. First, because we used the same video manipulation as in Study 3 and found a significant difference in moral character perceptions, we did not ask participants to judge the leader's moral character. Second, we asked respondents to report ethical norm perceptions after engaging in the task to reduce the saliency of the dependent variable's ethical nature.

Sample and Procedure

Participants. We recruited 310 participants to a behavioral lab based in the United Kingdom. Seventeen participants failed to abide by the lab protocol and were excluded. The final sample comprised 293 participants (M = 26.56, SD = 9.08; 65% female).

Procedures. Participants received instructions that they worked for a company called BAC Tech and received name tags with its logo. In addition, the lab had BAC Tech logos marking each room and the lab assistants wore name tags that read "BAC Tech Research Department." It is important to note that while participants completed the study independently, to assess ethical norm perceptions, we introduced the manipulation to all participants based on the hour slots in which they arrived—53 timeslots ($M_{groupsize}$

= 5.85, $SD_{groupsize}$ = 1.43). The lab assistants informed participants that they were all team members at BAC Tech and introduced them to their team leader, Taylor, through the same video used in Study 3. After the video, participants were brought to their cubicles, where they completed the remainder of the study independently.

First, participants filled out the manipulation check questions, participants were told that they had worked successfully for Taylor for over 1 year and were asked to reflect on what their experiences would have been like under Taylor's management. Next, participants received an email from Taylor informing them of their task. For our primary dependent variable, participants were informed that they would detect coding errors for BAC Tech's clients. The coding errors were described as making customer servers run sub-optimally but without harming their overall day-to-day functioning. The coding errors came in matrices, each with 12 three-digit numbers. Participants were told that to solve the coding error, they would need to locate two numbers within the matrix that summed up the number 10. After completing three matrices to ensure they understood the task, participants received an urgent message from Taylor informing them that the company received a substantial number of errors that needed to be fixed. For the second round, participants received 16 matrices and had four minutes to solve as many as possible (i.e., 15 seconds to solve each matrix). Participants were told they would receive £0.10 as a bonus commission for every code they solved, which they would need to indicate before the screen advanced (Kouchaki and Smith 2014). To measure unethical behavior, we adjusted seven matrices so that they did not contain two numbers that equaled 10 and were thus unsolvable. Following the task, participants were asked how likely it was that their team members would misreport the number of matrices solved.

Measures

Independent Variable.

Dominance-Prestige Peer-Report. We used the same 17-item scale as in Studies 1 and 3 ($\alpha_{prestige}$ = .90 and $\alpha_{dominance}$ = .87).

Dependent Variables.

Attributed Unethical Norm Perceptions. We adapted a three-item measure to assess the extent to which participants perceived unethical behaviors as normative (Bauman et al. 2016). A sample item was "I think a lot of people misreport the number of matrices they solved to Taylor." Participants responded on a seven-point scale (α =.85; 1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree).*

Unethical Behavior. Unethical behavior was measured using the number of unsolvable matrices participants indicated as solved, from zero to seven (Kouchaki and Smith 2014).

Results

------Insert Figure 2 about here------

Manipulation Check. An independent-sample two-tailed t-test showed that participants reported Taylor as being higher in dominance in the dominance condition (M = 5.63, SD = 0.78), as compared to the prestige condition ([M = *4*.16, SD = 1.24], t[291] = 12.16, $p < .001$, d = 1.42). Similarly, participants reported Taylor as being higher in prestige in the prestige condition (M = 4.44, SD = 1.08), as compared to the dominance condition ([M = 3.31, SD = 1.16], t[291] = 8.58, $p < .001$, d = 1.00). Thus, the manipulation was effective.

Attributed Unethical Norm Perceptions. In support of our predictions, an independent-sample two-tailed t-test found a significant difference between the dominance and prestige conditions on perceiving norm-violating behaviors as normatively acceptable (t[291] = 2.31, p = .02, d = 0.27). Participants in the dominance condition believed misreporting matrices were more normative (M = 5.19, SD = 1.40) than those in the prestige condition (M = 4.80, SD = 1.48).

Unethical Behavior. Supporting our prediction, an independent-sample two-tailed t-test found a significant difference between the dominance and prestige conditions on unethical behavior (t[291] = 2.29, p = .02, d = 0.27). Participants in the dominance condition indicated they solved more unsolvable matrices (M = 2.46, SD = 2.30) than those in the prestige condition (M = 1.86, SD = 2.16) (Figure 2).

Indirect Effect. We found partial support for our indirect effect prediction using PROCESS macro 4 for SPSS with 10,000 bootstraps. There was a marginal, positive indirect relationship between

dominance and unethical behavior via attributed unethical norm perceptions (indirect effect = .06, $CI_{95\%}$ [-.009, .162], p = .055).

Discussion

We found that participants under a dominance-oriented leader engaged in more unethical behavior than subordinates under a prestige-oriented leader. This study also supports the directional indirect effect of perceiving norm violations as more acceptable. These findings are particularly informative for at least three reasons. First, we strengthen our causal inferences by documenting the impact of a dominant leader on subordinate's observable unethical behavior. Second, our manipulation of leader dominance and prestige offers a conservative test of our predictions; as in Study 3, we detected a difference in unethical behavior after exposing participants to a hypothetical leader for 90 seconds via a video recording. Third, the experimental design allowed us to hold constant past leader unethical behavior, which could influence subordinate ethicality. This allowed us to address the concern that this might have inflated our observed results in our correlational data.

General Discussion

VW offers an exemplary case of a destructive outcome that virtually all organizations eventually confront—workplace unethical behavior. Although the link between Winterkorn's own ethicality and that of his subordinates may be ambiguous, the one between leadership and workplace unethical behaviors was spotlighted by his departure from VW. Drawing on the dual-strategies theory of social rank, dominance and prestige, we explore this relationship further, highlighting the impact of leaders' hierarchical orientation on their subordinates' perceptions of their moral character, perceived acceptability of norm violating behaviors, and subsequent unethical behaviors at work. Across seven studies, four in the main manuscript and three in the SI, we found that even when (as in Winterkorn's case) there is no history of the leaders engaging in unethical behavior, people perceive dominance-oriented leaders as having lower moral character (Studies 3, S1, S2, and S3) and are more likely to engage in unethical behaviors than their prestige-oriented counterparts (Studies 2 and S1). Further, we show that moral character impressions influence the degree to which subordinates perceive norm-violating behavior as

acceptable (Studies 2, 3, 4, S2, S3), subsequently predicting unethical intentions (Studies 3 and S2) and behaviors in a workplace context (Studies 1, 2, and 4). In addition to using organizational surveys of intact teams, time-lagged surveys of working adults, and five experiments to support our predictions, we demonstrate these effects across various cultural samples (WEIRD and non-WEIRD), manipulations of our independent variable, and operationalizations of our key dependent variables (Henrich et al. 2010). Taken together, the results highlight an important negative second-order consequence of how discrete behaviors, unrelated to unethical behaviors, employed by leaders to exert influence and obtain deference, can yield unintended consequences on the ethical behaviors of subordinates.

Theoretical Contributions

The present research offers several theoretical contributions. First, by drawing on the dual-strategies theory of dominance and prestige, we take a discrete behavioral approach to how one of the pillars of leadership, influence, impacts perceived norms and unethical behaviors within organizations (Carton 2022). Our theoretical lens complements the existing ethical leadership literature, which has focused on leadership's social learning function with a primary interest in leaders' ethical behavior, proclamations, and rule enforcement (Brown et al. 2005). Our research extends the inferences that subordinates make based on behaviors related to how leaders exert influence and obtain deference. Specifically, we draw on trait inference theory, showing how trait attributions are made based on relevant—but not exclusively related—behavioral observations (Uleman et al. 2008). We find that subordinates infer their leader's moral character based on the leader's hierarchical orientation. They then extrapolate these inferences to inform their views of what is ethically permissible. These findings broaden our understanding of the behavioral inferences by which subordinates come to view their leader as moral.

Second, we contribute to the impression formation literature by focusing on the importance of moral character impression formation (Brambilla et al. 2021, Fiske et al. 2002, Goodwin et al. 2014). Traditionally, moral character inferences have focused on an individual's trustworthiness and honesty. This paper expands the behavioral inferences used to inform moral character perceptions. We argue that the inherently interpersonal nature of influence is an ideal inferential pathway to understanding how we

come to perceive others' moral character. Informed by trait inference theory, we show how dominance can signal low moral character, due to individual tendencies to extrapolate trait attributions from behaviors that are typically controlling and assertive (Henrich and Gil-White 2001), while prestige can signal higher moral character, due to its association with behaviors that emphasize social cohesion and inclusive leadership practices (Lee et al. 2021). Importantly, we experimentally test our model to control for actual unethical behavior and any history of dishonesty or low trustworthiness. In this way, we extend the impression formation literature by highlighting how hierarchical orientations inform moral character attributions. Finally, we document crucial outcomes associated with moral character inferences, namely their effects on ethical norm perceptions and subsequent unethical behavior (Pagliaro et al. 2013).

Third, our work extends the social learning theory of how leaders act as role models by accounting for inferential processes associated with an often overlooked aspect of the theory, abstract modeling. For example, we found that subordinates infer broader traits of their leaders based on behaviors unrelated to a modeled behavior, which then informs their perceptions of what is acceptable within the team. It must be emphasized that we are not suggesting abstract modeling be applied in all instances. However, the domain of ethics offers a particularly relevant context given its secretive and self-benefiting nature and the primacy of moral inference in personal perceptions (Brambilla et al. 2021). Thus, in contrast to the social learning literature's primary focus on observational and reinforcement processes, we highlight how social learning occurs at the observational and inferential pathways.

Finally, the dual-strategies literature has robustly documented how both orientations offer effective avenues to exert influence and obtain leadership positions (Cheng et al. 2013, Henrich and Gil-White 2001, Kakkar et al. 2020, McClanahan et al. 2021, Redhead et al. 2019). However, little empirical evidence has explored the direct impact of either orientation on subordinates' cognitions or behaviors (Kakkar and Sivanathan 2022). Notwithstanding the benefits that dominance-oriented leaders provide, the same behaviors that make dominant-oriented behaviors effective appear to inadvertently signal to subordinates that norm-violating behaviors are acceptable, thereby creating an almost self-fulfilling prophecy of unethical behavior. Furthermore, social learning and behavioral emulation are theoretically

associated with prestige (Henrich and Gil-White 2001). In this paper, we provide valuable nuance to this understanding by emphasizing the critical role inherent to leadership, by proxy of leaders' high-ranking position, as serving a social learning function. While prestige may be preferred for the direct observational learning traditionally associated with emulation, the fact that dominance-oriented leaders also occupy a position of authority suggests that subordinates will be attuned to what they do and potentially replicate their overt or inferred behaviors (e.g., self-interested unethical behaviors) based on an assessment that they are normatively permissible.

Organizational Implications

During economic distress and uncertainty, people often gravitate toward leaders who signal a sense of control via their dominance (Kakkar and Sivanathan 2017). However, as our findings demonstrate, an organization's choice of dominance-oriented leadership may unintentionally come at the cost of cultivating unethical norms and behaviors. This point is particularly relevant now, as the COVID-19 pandemic both increased and highlighted uncertainty for people and organizations worldwide, presenting many challenges that still lack solutions. Thus, given the extraordinary impact that unethical behavior has on both the financial and social functioning of teams and organizations, we encourage firms to remain cautious and vigilant in their pursuit of leaders who use dominance to cultivate a sense of control during times of uncertainty (Rhee and Haunschild 2006, Victor and Cullen 1988).

Another practical implication of our research is to cultivate an ethical infrastructure (Martin et al. 2014, Treviño et al. 2014). Boards may be aware of leaders they recognize as exerting influence via dominance. While they may be happy with these leaders' work so far, they should take steps to combat potentially unfounded inferences that subordinates make. In other words, organizations may be able to extract the benefit of dominance-oriented leaders while mitigating the associated unethical behaviors with various precautions. For example, organizations employing a dominance-oriented leader should ensure that all employees know the organization's high ethical standards and that the desired norms are strictly enforced (Kish-Gephart et al. 2010, Reynolds 2008). Moreover, how the organization conveys these standards drastically impacts the efficacy of its messaging. Rules should be specific as opposed to general

(Mulder et al. 2015), encourage thoughtful as opposed to urgent action (Kanze et al. 2019), and should not be justified as methods for deterring unethical behavior (Mooijman et al. 2017).

Limitations and Future Directions

As with all research, the current work is not without limitations. One such limitation is that the unethical behaviors that we studied were self-beneficial. Unethical behavior is not, by definition, self-beneficial as people may enact it for altruistic or utilitarian reasons (Conway et al. 2018) or to benefit their organization or group (Thau et al. 2015, Umphress et al. 2010). Therefore, one cannot assume that a leader's dominance orientation predicts all forms of unethical behavior, nor that prestige-oriented leaders do not cultivate unethical behavior. Accordingly, future research should distinguish between self-beneficial versus other-beneficial unethical behaviors.

Another limitation of our findings is the context in which we capture unethical attributions and behaviors. Individuals' attributional processes are influenced by the context in which the behaviors are situated (Kunda and Nisbett 1986, Ross 1977). While we see the wide array of self-reported and experimental evidence as speaking to the prevalence of our predictions, future research can examine the contexts that may exacerbate or mitigate its effects. For instance, given the general preference for dominance during times of uncertainty and threat, subordinates may be less likely to make unethical inferences toward dominant-oriented leaders. Instead, the same behaviors that signal self-interestedness and control can be interpreted as "fighting for the team" and doing what is necessary to ensure survival. Thus, a potentially fruitful avenue for research would be to examine how different contexts impact the relationship between leader dominance and prestige on subordinate ethicality at work.

Further, our paper speaks to the divergence of self-reports and other perceptual reports of an individual's hierarchical orientation. Importantly, we document the effect of leader hierarchical orientation on workplace unethical behavior via leader self-reports (Study 1) and subordinate perceptual reports (Study 2). However, the self-report study found a positive correlation between dominance and prestige and a negative correlation in the other-report study. While prior research has shown that friends and colleagues can accurately perceive others' self-reported dominance (r = .32) and prestige (r = .28),

the relationship remains small (Liu et al. 2021). There is an opportunity for future research to explore when and why accuracy is high and the divergent implications of accuracy and misperception on subordinate judgements and behaviors.

Finally, while our data focused on unethical norm perceptions, many subordinates work in integrated teams where perceptions are confronted with observable behaviors. Furthermore, we know that norm perceptions and adoption are not necessarily restricted to leaders (Dannals et al. 2020, Mayer et al. 2013). In line with our theoretical model, strong ethical norms would likely diminish the impact of a leader's hierarchical orientation. Future research can explore the interactions between strong ethical norms and leader hierarchical orientation. Additionally, it could be that dominance-oriented leaders who combat low moral character concerns foster more ethical teams than their prestige-oriented counterparts; their employees may second-guess engaging in unethical behavior because of a fear of retribution. Lastly, it is important to recognize that our predictions and empirical investigation were limited to the impact of leader hierarchal orientation on subordinate ethicality within a workplace context only. It remains an empirical question if a leader's hierarchical orientation on subordinate behavior and norm perceptions spillover to contexts outside of the workplace.

Conclusion

Subordinate unethical behavior is associated with a broad array of ethically related behaviors employed by leaders. We extend beyond the domain of ethics to focus on how leaders' hierarchical orientation impacts moral character inferences and, in turn, subordinate unethical behavior. While leaders higher in dominance orientation may be preferred for their direct, agentic, and aggressive behaviors, we find evidence that these behaviors lead to perceptions of lower moral character, increase the perceived acceptability of norm-violating behavior, and ultimately increase unethical behavior among subordinates. Our findings suggest that top management should examine leaders' ethical behaviors and hierarchical orientation when attempting to foster and maintain ethical organizational norms, with an emphasis on prioritizing prestige-oriented leadership.

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It could be argued that moral character impressions of dominant and prestige-oriented leaders are not merely perceptions but accurate representations of how the orientations relate to moral character. Specifically, that dominance is negatively related to valuing moral character traits and prestige is positively related. We tested this relationship by sampling participants with managerial experience and having them indicate their hierarchical orientation and moral character.

Sample

Participants. We aimed to recruit 105 U.S. participants with managerial experience via Prolific Academic. A total of 105 participants completed the study (50% female; M_{age} = 40.42, SD_{age} = 12.33; $M_{yearsexp}$ = 6.90, $SD_{yearsexp}$ = 7.21; $M_{avgpeople}$ = 9.34, $SD_{avgpeople}$= 7.99).

Measures

Independent variable

Dominance-prestige self-report. We used the same 17-item scale in study one ($\alpha_{prestige}$ = .86 and $\alpha_{dominance}$ = .84).

Dependent variables

Moral Character. We measured self-reported moral character with eight items used in study three (Goodwin et al. 2014). Participants indicated the extent to which the following traits described them: Courageous, Fair, Principled, Responsible, Just, Honest, Trustworthy, and Loyal (α = .83). Participants responded on a nine-point scale (1 = Not at all to 9 = Extremely).

Control Variables

Years of managerial experience, the average number of people managed at a given time, gender, and age.

Results

Moral Character. An ordinary least squares regression (OLS) indicated dominance was not significantly related to moral character, with (*b* = -.09, *S.E.* = .06, *p* = .18) or without (*b* = -.10, *S.E.* = .06,

p = .09,) the control variables. Prestige was significant and positively related to moral character, with (b = .51, *S.E.* = .09, p < .001) or without (b = .53, *S.E.* = .08, p < .001) the control variables.

Discussion

We find that self-reported dominance orientation was not significantly related to one's expressed moral character. The lack of a significant relationship is important because it concerns misperceiving dominant-oriented leaders as having lower moral character. Regarding prestige orientation, we find a positive relationship with moral character. In line with the results reported in study one, the positive effect of prestige on decreasing unethical behavior may not be independent of ethically related concepts.

Hierarchical Orientation and Acceptability of Subordinate Unethical Behavior- p.12 in the manuscript.

It could be argued that dominant and prestige-oriented leaders are more or less willing to accept unethical behavior within their teams, which can influence the extent to which people believe it is acceptable to engage in norm-violating behavior. Specifically, that dominance would be more accepting of unethical behavior and prestige negatively related. Therefore, this data collection sampled participants with managerial experience and assessed the relationship between hierarchical orientation and their willingness to accept unethical behavior.

Sample

Participants. We aimed to recruit 105 U.S. participants with managerial experience via Prolific Academic. A total of 105 participants completed the study (50% female; M_{age} = 41.42, SD_{age} = 13.25; $M_{yearsexp}$ = 8.42, $SD_{yearsexp}$ = 8.58; $M_{\#managed}$ = 14.53, $SD_{\#managed}$ = 45.91).

Measures

Independent variable

Dominance-prestige self-report. We used the same 17-item scale in study 1 ($\alpha_{prestige}$ = .87 and $\alpha_{dominance}$ = .85).

Dependent variables

Acceptability of Unethical Behavior. Participants indicated how acceptable it would be for their subordinates to engage in 14 different types of unethical behavior, which was used in studies 1 and 3 (1 = Highly unacceptable, 7 = Highly acceptable; α = .80; adopted from Akaah, 1992).

Control Variables

Years of managerial experience, the average number of people managed at a given time, gender, and age.

Results

Acceptability of Unethical Behavior. An ordinary least squares regression (OLS) indicated dominance was not significantly related to accepting unethical behavior within their team, with (b = .03, *S.E.* = .05, p = .57) or without (b = .04, *S.E.* = .05, p = .44,) the control variables. Prestige was not

significantly related to accepting unethical behavior within their team, with (b = -.11, *S.E.* = .06, p = .09) and statistically significant without (b = -.15, *S.E.* = .07, p = .03) the control variables

Discussion

We find that self-reported dominance orientation was not significantly related to accepting unethical behavior within one's team. This is important because it speaks to the concerns surrounding misperceiving dominant-oriented leaders as willing to accept norms within their teams that unethical behavior is OK. Regarding prestige orientation, we detect a trend toward being less supportive of unethical behavior within their teams. Again, we find evidence that the effect of prestige on decreasing unethical behavior may not be independent of ethically related concepts.

Study 1: Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Model	Description	χ^2	*df*	CFI	SRMR	RMSEA	Comparison Model* $\Delta\chi^2$	Comparison Model* Δdf
		Subordinate Survey[a]						
Model 1a*	3 Factor Measurement Model- Original Dominance and Prestige Measures	1836.18	588	.86	.06	.06		
Model 2a	3 Factor Model- Reduced Scale Dominance and Prestige Measures	2546.52	591	.78	.07	.07	710.34	3
Model 3a	2 Factor Model- Combined Dominance and Prestige	3416.78	593	.68	.09	.09	1580.6	5
Model 4a	Single Factor Model	5052.11	594	.50	.12	.11	3215.93	6
		Leader Survey[b]						
Model 1b	4 Factor Measurement Model	359.40	206	.89	.08	.07		
Model 2b*	3 Factor Model- Ethical Leadership and LMX combined	89.89	62	.97	.06	.06		
Model 3b	2 Factor Model- Ethical Leadership and LMX; Employee Deviance and Employee Moral Identity combined.	382.83	64	.61	.19	.18	292.94	2
Model 4b	Single Factor Model	571.94	65	.38	.23	.23	482.05	3

N=600[a], N = 150[b]; † $p \leq .10$ * $p \leq .05$ ** $p \leq .01$ *** $p \leq .001$

Study 1: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlation

Study 1: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1 Leader Prestige	5.59	1.34	-										
2 Leader Dominance	4.06	1.61	.08	-									
3 Unethical Behavior	1.54	0.66	-.15**	.16**	-								
4 Leader Moral Identity	6.04	0.95	.19*	.03	-.20**	-							
5 Employee Moral Identity	5.99	0.91	-.02	-.09*	-.20**	.32**	-						
6 Ethical Leadership	5.76	0.78	.18**	.01	-.41**	.22**	.30**	-					
7 Job Satisfaction	4.07	0.63	.05	-.09*	-.30**	.14**	.16**	.27**	-				
8 LMX	5.28	1.13	.03	-.06	-.26**	.10*	.19**	.56**	.17**	-			
9 Leader Age	37.56	7.07	-.01	.07	-.10*	.03	.04	-.11**	-.05	-.11*	-		
10 Leader Gender	1.12	0.33	.17*	.07	-.11**	.08	-.09*	.08†	.02	.12**	-.10*	-	
11 Employee Age	28.54	5.06	-.03	.09*	-.001	.11**	.11**	-.10*	-.01	-.06	.16**	-.06	-
12 Employee Gender	1.10	0.30	.14**	.13**	-.06	.04	-.06	.07	.000	.06	-.16**	.73**	-.09*

† $p \leq .10$ * $p \leq .05$ ** $p \leq .01$ *** $p \leq .001$; 1- Male 2-Female

Study 2: Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Model	Description	χ^2	*df*	CFI	SRMR	RMSEA	Comparison Model* $\Delta\chi^2$	Comparison Model* Δ *df*
Model 1	6 Factor Model*	1740.49	549	.89	.07	.07		
Model 2	5 Factor Model Dominance and Prestige Combined	2380.07	584	.83	.09	.09	639.58	35
Model 3	4 Factor Model Model 2 & Perceived Leader Unethicality and Perceived Deviance	3094.53	588	.77	.13	.11	1354.04	39
Model 4	3 Factor Model Model 3 including self-reported unethical behavior	3718.04	591	.71	.14	.12	1977.55	42
Model 5	2 Factor Model Model 4 including performance pressure	4556.67	593	.63	.16	.13	2816.18	44
Model 6	1 Factor Model	6040.03	594	.49	.17	.16	4299.54	45

N = 260; † p ≤ .10 * p ≤ .05 ** p ≤ .01 *** p ≤ .001

Study 2: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlation

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Self-Reported Unethical Behavior	1.64	.89											
2. Leader Dominance	3.65	1.40	.24***										
3. Leader Prestige	5.44	1.28	-.20***	-.43***									
4. Perceived Acceptability of Norm Violating Behaviors	2.27	1.11	.57***	.27***	-.22***								
5. Performance Pressure	4.51	1.37	.15**	.35***	-.16**	.06							
6. Anger	1.46	.81	.57***	.38***	-.36***	.45***	.28***						
7. Anxiety	1.91	1.00	.39***	.34***	-.22***	.26***	.38***	.62***					
8. Perceived Leader Moral Character	3.43	1.37	.40***	.52***	-.51***	.37***	.20***	.41***	.34***				
9. Tenure with Manager	46.20	43.94	-.15**	.000	.06	-.16**	.02	-.12*	-.18***	-.06			
10. Number of Employees	2.90	.95	-.01	-.07	-.07	-.02	.04	-.06	.06	-.04	-.14**		
11. Gender	1.43	.50	-.13*	-.05	-.04	-.15**	.04	-.003	.03	.02	.08	-.03	
12. Age	38.97	10.72	-.24***	-.04	.11*	-.22***	.05	-.23***	-.20***	-.17***	.35***	.02	.12*

† $p \leq .10$ * $p \leq .05$ ** $p \leq .01$ *** $p \leq .001$

Video Script (Studies 3 and 4)

Dominance Condition

Hi, my name is Taylor, and I have been Team Leader here at BAC-Tech for more than five years. I want to give you a bit more background about myself and then explain what I expect as the team leader. As a team leader here at BAC-Tech, I occupy a high rank and desirable position within this firm. I was promoted quickly because of my ability to be dominant and assertive in applying my highly valued skills towards company goals. I approach top management to make sure they're aware of my accomplishments, I speak first in meetings and lead discussion wherever possible. As a valued member of the company, I seize every opportunity to take control of the situation, as I know how to take initiative. When making a decision, I rely on my knowledge and I don't need to ask the opinions of others, whether that be clients or stakeholders, especially not from them in the team because I'm the leader and should therefore lead. I have ambitions to grow in this company and know this team can help me achieve my goals. In my team, it is important that you listen to me so that we can accomplish my goals for the team. I can be aggressive to get my own way, I will control members of the team so they produced their best, and I'm not bothered if others are afraid of me. As your team leader, you will report to me. In my capacity as team leader, I do have the ability to allocate team members to different tasks, I'm in control of team member evaluations, have discretion in distributing bonuses, and I can remove team members who are falling short of my expectations. Today you'll be assigned to a task where I will review the performance.

Prestige Condition

Hi, my name is Taylor, and I have been Team Leader here at BAC-Tech for more than five years. I want to give you a bit more background about myself and explain what I expect as team leader. As a team leader here at the BAC-tech I occupied a high rank and desirable position in the firm. I was promoted quickly due to my ability to share my highly valued skills with other employees within the company. Top management often comes to me for my thoughts and I assist with no hesitation. As a valued member of the company, colleagues approached me for advice, guidance, and assistance based on my expertise. In other words, employees have come to respect me. When making a decision, I do make the effort to seek and consider the input from our clients and our stakeholders within BAC-Tech, especially from within our team. I have ambitions to grow within the company I know that as a team, we can all accomplish our goals together in our team it's important that we all work together to accomplish our goal as a team. If there's ever a disagreement and then we will work as a team to try and resolve the issue. I don't often get very aggressive in order to get my own way. I actually try to empower the members of the team to do their best and place an emphasis that team members whom I supervise shouldn't be afraid of me. As a team member, all the members communicate with me, I'm responsible for allocating team members of different tasks, I'm also responsible for team member evaluations, distributing bonuses, and I can make changes in the team if as a team we're not performing up to the expectations. Today you'll be assigned to a task where I will review the performance.

Study S1

Our theoretical model relies on attributions of a leader's moral character via either their dominance or prestige orientation. In Study 2, we provide evidence for our model by asking participants to indicate the perceived likelihood that their leader would engage in various unethical behaviors. While assessing the likelihood of engaging in unethical behavior is conceptually similar to perceptions of one's moral character, they remain theoretically distinct. The purpose of Study S1 was to provide empirical evidence linking the perceived likelihood of engaging in unethical behavior with attributions of an actor's moral character to strengthen the inferential claims from Study 2.

Sample and Procedure

Participants. We pre-registered the sample size, exclusion criteria, hypotheses, and analyses before the data collection (https://aspredicted.org/43T_P2L). We aimed to recruit 220 U.S. participants via Amazon's Mechanical Turk. A total of 228 participants completed the study. In line with our pre-registered criteria, we excluded 25 participants for failing an attention check question and three for using an autocompletion macro. The final sample consisted of 200 participants (49% female; M_{age} = 41.18, SD_{age} = 12.61).

Procedures. The procedures of Study S1 were identical to Study 3. Participants were asked to imagine working for a company where they reported to their leader, Taylor. Participants were randomly assigned to either the dominance or prestige conditions. They received the hierarchical orientation manipulation via a text manipulation:

> **Dominance**: Taylor was promoted within the company quickly as a result of having a dominant and assertive attitude. Taylor has ambitions to continue growing in the company. Taylor ensures that subordinates are aware of who is in charge and is controlling in his interactions with others. Taylor is often described as a manager who is forceful in his behavior toward subordinates. Taylor is an asset to the company.
>
> **Prestige**: Taylor was promoted within the company quickly as a result of having respect and admiration afforded by others. Taylor has ambitions to continue growing in the company. Taylor is keen to share his expertise with subordinates and is granted deference by others. Taylor is often described as a manager who is held in high esteem by his subordinates. Taylor is an asset to the company.

As in Study 3, participants were asked to write a few sentences to describe how they would feel working under Taylor. After completing the manipulation check questions, participants indicated their perceptions of Taylor's moral character before indicating the likelihood that Taylor would engage in the same unethical behavior captured in Study 2.

Measures

Independent variable

Dominance-prestige peer-report. We used the same 17-item scale in studies one and three *(*$\alpha_{prestige}$ = .96 and $\alpha_{dominance}$ = .92).

Dependent variables

Perceived Leader Moral Character. We used the same measure in study three (α =.97).

Perceived Leader Unethicality. We used the same measure in study two (α =.78).

Results

Manipulation check. Supporting the efficacy of our manipulation, an independent-sample two-tailed t-test showed participants reported Taylor as higher in dominance in the dominance condition (*M* = 5.81, *SD* = 0.75), as compared to the prestige condition (*M = 3.17*, *SD* = 1.07), *t*(198) = 20.20, *p* < .001, *d* = 2.86. Similarly, participants reported Taylor as higher in prestige in the prestige condition (*M* = 6.11, *SD* = 0.78) than in the dominance condition (*M* = 3.20, *SD* = 1.14), *t*(198) = 20.97, *p* < .001, *d* = 2.97.

Perceived Leader Moral Character. To assess the directional effect of perceived leader moral character by leader hierarchical orientation, we ran an independent-sample two-tailed t-test. Participants in the dominance condition indicated Taylor has having lower moral character (*M* = 4.65, *SD* = 1.92), as compared to the prestige condition (*M = 7.78*, *SD* = 1.16), *t*(198) = 13.89, *p* < .001, *d* = 1.96.

Perceived Leader Unethicality. To assess the effect of leader hierarchical orientation on the perceived likelihood of engaging in unethical behavior, we ran an independent-sample two-tailed t-test. Participants in the dominance condition indicated Taylor is more likely to engage in unethical behavior (*M* = 4.79, *SD* = 1.14), as compared to the prestige condition (*M = 3.25*, *SD* = 1.06), *t*(198) = 9.85, *p* < .001, *d* = 1.39.

Indirect effect. To test the indirect effect of leader hierarchical orientation on the perceived likelihood of engaging in unethical behavior via perceptions of moral character, we used the PROCESS macro 4 for SPSS with 10,000 bootstraps. We found that perceived leader moral character had a significant indirect effect on the perceived likelihood that the leader would engage in unethical behavior, indirect effect = .54, $CI_{95\%}$ [.709, 1.34].

Discussion

Replicating results found in Study 2, Study S1 found that reading a description of a hypothetical leader described as either dominant or prestigious influenced leader ethical attributions, both in terms of their moral character and the likelihood of engaging in unethical behavior. The leader described as dominant was seen as having lower moral character and being more likely to engage in unethical behavior as compared to the prestige condition. Therefore, Study S1 replicated the effects found in Study 2 using an experimental design to show perceptions of leader hierarchical orientation impacts both perceptions of leader moral character, which helps explain why they are perceived as more likely to engage in unethical behavior.

Study S2

Studies 1 and 2 provide correlational evidence highlighting our model's unique predictive value of leader dominance and prestige orientations. Study 3 utilized an experimental design to provide causal evidence for this effect; however, the design compared dominance against prestige and was unable to make directional claims for the effect. The purpose of study S2 was to provide directional evidence for the positive (negative) relationship between leader dominance (prestige) on subordinate unethical behavior by including a control condition.

Sample and Procedure

Participants. We pre-registered the sample size, exclusion criteria, hypotheses, and analyses before collecting data (https://aspredicted.org/5N5_F8Y). We aimed to recruit 450 U.S. participants via Prolific Academic. A total of 451 participants completed the study. In line with our pre-registered criteria, we excluded seven participants for failing an attention check question, four for having duplicate I.P. addresses, and 12 for using an autocompletion macro. The final sample consisted of 428 participants (51% female; M_{age} = 40.54, SD_{age} = 15.19).

Procedures. The procedures of Study S2 were identical to Study 3. Participants were asked to imagine working for a company where they reported to their leader, Taylor. However, unlike in Study 3, participants were randomly assigned to dominance, prestige, or control conditions. They received the hierarchical orientation manipulation via a text manipulation and not a video [text in the brackets denotes dominance and prestige manipulation, respectively]:

> Taylor was promoted within the company as a result of having [a dominant and assertive attitude/ respect and admiration afforded by others]. Taylor has ambitions to continue growing in the company. [Taylor ensures that subordinates are aware of who is in charge and is controlling in his interactions with others. People do not challenge Taylor because they fear the repercussions/ Taylor is keen to share his expertise and knowledge with subordinates and is granted deference by others. People willingly approach Taylor to learn and develop their professional abilities]. Taylor is often described as a manager who is [forceful in his behavior toward/ held in high esteem by his] subordinates. Taylor is an asset to the company.

In the control condition, participants read that “Taylor was promoted within the company. Taylor has ambitions to continue growing in the company. Taylor is an asset to the company.” Therefore, in all three conditions, Taylor was described as a leader who was promoted within the company, desired to

grow within the company, and was seen as an asset to the company. Differences occurred between the dominance and prestige conditions in how Taylor was described as exerting influence and maintaining deference from others within the organization. As in study 3, participants were asked to write a few sentences to describe how they would feel working under Taylor. After completing the manipulation check questions, participants indicated their perceptions of Taylor's moral character. They then reflected on the work culture within their team before completing the perceived acceptability of norm violation survey and the extent to which they would engage in unethical behavior.

Measures

Independent variable

Dominance-prestige peer-report. We used the same 17-item scale in studies one and three *(*$\alpha_{prestige}$ = .95 and $\alpha_{dominance}$ = .94).

Dependent variables

Perceived Leader Moral Character. We used the same measure in study three (α =.97).

Perceived Acceptability of Norm Violations (PANV). We employed the same measures in Studies 2 and 3 (α =.85).

Unethical Behavioral Intentions. We used the same measure in Study 3 (α =.90).

Results

Manipulation check. A One-Way ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) indicated a significant difference between the hierarchical orientation condition on the extent to which Taylor was seen as dominant, $F(2,425) = 483.30$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .70$. Participants reported Taylor as higher in dominance in the dominance condition ($M = 6.03$, $SD = 0.74$), as compared to the prestige condition ($M = 2.83$, $SD = 0.90$, $t(425) = 29.89$, $p < .001$, $d = 2.90$) and the control condition ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 1.05$, $t(425) = 22.13$, $p < .001$, $d = 2.15$). The control condition was seen as more dominant than the prestige condition, $t(425) = 7.88$, $p < .001$, $d = .76$. Similarly, a One-Way ANOVA indicated a significant difference between the hierarchical orientation condition on the extent to which Taylor was seen as prestigious, $F(2,425) = 311.51$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .59$. Participants reported Taylor as higher in prestige in the prestige condition (*M*

= 5.96, *SD* = 0.84), as compared to the dominance condition (*M* = 3.05, *SD* = 1.19, *t*(425) = 23.70, *p* < .001, *d* = 2.30), and the control condition (*M* = 5.30, *SD* = 1.03, *t*(425) = 5.34, *p* < .001, *d* = .52). The control condition was seen as more prestigious than the dominance condition, *t*(425) = 18.47, *p* < .001, *d* = 1.79. These results suggest we successfully manipulated perceptions of leader dominance and prestige in line with the conditional predictions.

Perceived Leader Moral Character. To assess the directional effect of perceived leader moral character by leader hierarchical orientation, we ran a One-Way ANOVA. Results indicated a significant difference between the three conditions, *F*(2,425) = 204.87, *p* < .001, η^2_p = .49. Participants in the dominance condition perceived their leader to have lower moral character (*M* = 3.97, *SD* = 1.96), as compared to the prestige condition, (*M* = 7.51, *SD* = 1.17, *t*(425) = 19.25, *p* < .001, *d* = 1.87) and the control condition (*M* = 6.70, *SD* = 1.39, *t*(425) = 14.91, *p* < .001, *d* = 1.45). The prestige condition was seen as having higher moral character than the control condition, *t*(425) = 4.43, *p* < .001, *d* = .43.

PANV. We assessed the directional effect of perceived acceptability of norm violations within the team by leader hierarchical orientation with a One-Way ANOVA. Results indicated a significant difference between the three conditions, *F*(2,425) =37.02, *p* < .001, η^2_p = .15. Participants in the dominance condition indicated norm violating behaviors as more acceptable within their team (*M* = 2.97, *SD* = 1.36), as compared to the prestige condition, (*M* = 1.92, *SD* = 0.88, *t*(425) = 8.18, *p* < .001, *d* = .79) and the control condition (*M* = 2.16, *SD* = 0.96, *t*(425) = 6.34, *p* < .001, *d* = .62). The prestige condition indicated norm violating behavior as marginally less acceptable than the control condition, *t*(425) = 1.88, *p* = .06, *d* = .18.

Unethical Behavioral Intentions. We ran a One-Way ANOVA to test the directional effect of leader hierarchical orientation on subordinate unethical intentions. Results indicated a significant difference between the three conditions, *F*(2,425) =23.20, *p* < .001, η^2_p = .10. Participants in the dominance condition indicated they would engage in unethical behavior more often (*M* = 1.93, *SD* = 0.99), than the prestige, (*M* = 1.36, *SD* = 0.43, *t*(425) = 6.65, *p* < .001, *d* = .65) and control conditions (*M*

= 1.54, *SD* = 0.64, *t*(425) = 4.56, *p* < .001, *d* = .44). Intentions to engage in unethical behavior were lower in the prestige condition as compared to the control condition, *t*(425) = 2.11, *p* = .04, *d* = .20.

Serial Indirect effect. To test the serial indirect effect of leader hierarchical orientation on unethical behavior intentions via perceptions of moral character and acceptability of norm-violating behaviors, we used the PROCESS macro 6 for SPSS with 10,000 bootstraps with the multi-categorical independent variable—the control condition was selected as the indicator variable. In support of our predictions, we found that perceived leader moral character and the acceptability of norm-violating behavior within the team had a serial indirect effect on the relationship between leader dominance and subordinate unethical intentions as compared to the control condition, serial indirect effect = .17, $CI_{95\%}$ [.097, .261]. Participants indicated they would engage in more unethical behavior under a dominant leader because they were seen as being lower in moral character, leading to perceptions that norm-violating behavior was more normatively appropriate than the control condition. Additionally, we found that perceived leader moral character and the acceptability of norm-violating behavior had a serial indirect effect on the relationship between leader prestige and subordinate unethical intentions as compared to the control condition, serial indirect effect = -.05, $CI_{95\%}$ [-.086, -.025]. Participants indicated they would engage in less unethical behavior under a prestige leader because they were seen as higher in moral character, leading to perceptions that norm-violating behavior was less normatively appropriate than the control condition.

Discussion

Replicating effects found in Study 3, Study S2 found that merely reading a description of a hypothetical leader described as either high in dominance or prestige influenced leader ethical attributions, normative expectations, and unethical intentions. The leader described as dominant (prestige) was seen as having lower (greater) moral character than the control condition, norm violating behaviors were seen as more (less) acceptable, which culminated in greater (lesser) intentions to engage in unethical behavior. A limitation of the current design is that the control group was constructed without

information—no mention of hierarchal orientations. Study S3 addresses this concern by manipulating hierarchical orientation orthogonally to test the directional effect of high leader dominance and prestige.

Study S3

As mentioned in the manuscript, despite discussing dominance and prestige as theoretically independent constructs, the stable individual differences associated with the two orientations suggest that the ability to be both simultaneously is not possible. In the seminal paper discussing dominance and prestige, Henrich and Gil-White write:

> *What justifies our distinction is not that individuals must always have only one or the other form of status, but that it is possible for humans to have only one or the other because the prototypical stimuli and underlying psychologies are fundamentally different (e.g., Stephen Hawking, for pure prestige, and a high-school bully, for pure dominance). Although acquiring prestige may confer a capacity for force threat, in turn evoking dominance psychology in subordinates, it is the pathway that is relevant here. Some can scare others only if they first excel at something, then gain a large following or an institutional rank. Stephen Hawking may strike fear in graduate students on whom he can inflict real costs with some measure of institutional power, but this is because he first achieved prominence through excellence (and Star Trek fans, over whom he has no institutional power, still respect and adore him). His avenue to status was a pure prestige process, even if in the end it gives him a measure of dominance in a small circle. Finally, prestige-deference evoked by one's great skill or knowledge in inflicting costs (e.g., violence) should not be confused with the dominance-deference created by the fear that one may become a victim of that violence (pp. 171-172).*

Still, we decided to simultaneously test the theoretical implications of being high in dominance and prestige to serve as a control condition. In line with our hypotheses, being high in dominance and prestige should theoretically have a neutralizing effect. To test this, we ran a four-condition design, High Dominance Low Prestige (HDLP), High Dominance and High Prestige (HDHP), Low Dominance and High Prestige (LDHP), and Low Dominance and Low Prestige (LDLP). The LDLP condition was included for exploratory purposes. Theoretically, the dual strategies theory discusses how both strategies effectively accrue deference and high social rank. Therefore, being low in both is antithetical to being in a leadership position.

Sample and Procedure

Participants. We pre-registered the sample size, exclusion criteria, hypotheses, and analyses in advance of the data collection (https://aspredicted.org/TXQ_9WK). We aimed to recruit 600 U.S. participants via Amazon Mechanical Turk. A total of 611 participants completed the study. In line with our pre-registered criteria, we excluded 73 participants for failing either the attention check or manipulation check questions, six for having duplicate I.P. addresses, 14 for having non-U.S. based I.P.

addresses, and nine for using an autocompletion macro. The final sample consisted of 509 participants (59% female; Mage = 40.73, SDage = 13.48).

Procedures. The procedures of study S3 were a modified version of study three. Participants were asked to imagine that they worked for a company where they reported to their leader, Taylor. However, unlike in study three, participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions: HDLP, HDHP, LDHP, and LDLP. The exact manipulations can be found at the conclusion of the study's discussion section—Study S3 Manipulations. After completing the manipulation check questions, participants indicated their perceptions of Taylor's moral character. They then reflected on what the work culture would be like within their team before completing the perceived acceptability of norm violation survey.

Measures

Independent variable

Dominance-prestige peer-report. We employed the same 17-item scale used in study one ($\alpha_{prestige}$ = .96 and $\alpha_{dominance}$ = .96).

Dependent variables

Perceived Leader Moral Character. We used the same measure in study three (α =.97).

Perceived Acceptability of Norm Violations (PANV). We used the same measure in studies two and three (α =.88).

Results

Manipulation check. A One-Way ANOVA indicated a significant difference between the hierarchical orientation conditions on the extent to which Taylor was seen as dominant, $F(2,382) = 1101.53$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .85$. Participants reported Taylor as higher in dominance in the HDLP condition ($M = 6.02$, $SD = 0.79$), as compared to the LDHP condition ($M = 1.84$, $SD = 0.64$, $t(382) = 41.18$, $p < .001$, $d = 4.21$) and the HDHP condition ($M = 5.76$, $S.D. = .93$, $t(382) = 2.59$, $p = .01$, $d = 0.27$). The HDHP condition was seen as more dominant than the LDHP condition, $t(382) = 40.02$, $p < .001$, $d = 4.10$. As expected, the dominance manipulation while stronger in the high dominance conditions as compared to low dominance; however, the high dominance conditions were also significantly different. The impact

of the prestige manipulation seemingly decreased the degree of dominance in the HDHP condition. This effect is in line with both theoretical arguments of the construct's independence and empirical evidence suggesting small to medium negative correlations between dominance and prestige.

Similarly, a One-Way ANOVA indicated a significant difference between the hierarchical orientation conditions on the extent to which Taylor was seen as prestigious, $F(2,382) = 577.07$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .75$. Participants reported Taylor as higher in prestige in the LDHP condition ($M = 6.18$, $SD = 0.81$), as compared to the HDLP condition ($M = 2.09$, $S.D. = .96$, $t(382) = 33.71$, $p < .001$, $d = 3.45$), and the HDHP condition ($M = 4.65$, $SD = 1.07$, $t(382) = 13.10$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.34$). The HDHP condition was seen as more prestigious than the HDLP condition, $t(382) = 21.37$, $p < .001$, $d = 2.19$. As with the dominance manipulation, the high prestige manipulation was significantly higher than the high prestige conditions as compared to the low prestige condition. However, the effect of the high prestige was stronger in the LDHP condition than in the HDHP condition. Thus, suggesting that the presence of high dominance dampened the high prestige. Results suggest we successfully manipulated perceptions of leader dominance and prestige in line with the conditional predictions, yet the ability to do so independently is limited.

Perceived Leader Moral Character. To assess the directional effect of perceived leader moral character by leader hierarchal orientation, we ran a One-Way ANOVA. Results indicated a significant difference between the three conditions, $F(2,382) = 392.58$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .67$. Participants in the HDLP condition perceived their leader to have lower moral character ($M = 2.72$, $SD = 1.60$), as compared to the LDHP condition, ($M = 7.88$, $S.D. = .90$, $t(382) = 27.94$, $p < .001$, $d = 2.86$) and the HDHP condition ($M = 5.72$, $SD = 1.72$, $t(382) = 16.51$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.69$). The HDHP condition was seen as having lower moral character than the LDHP condition, $t(382) = 12.09$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.24$.

PANV. To assess the directional effect of perceived acceptability of norm violations within the team by leader hierarchical orientation, we ran a One-Way ANOVA. Results indicated a significant difference between the three conditions, $F(2,382) = 21.68$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .10$. Participants in the HDLP condition perceived norm-violating behavior to be more acceptable ($M = 2.90$, $SD = 1.55$), as compared

to the LDHP condition, (M = 1.90, SD = 0.77, t(382) = 6.47, p < .001, d = .66) and the HDHP condition (M = 2.54, SD = 1.24, t(382) = 2.37, p = .02, d = .24). The HDHP condition was seen as more acceptable than the LDHP condition, t(382) = 4.29, p < .001, d = .44.

Indirect effect. To test the indirect effect of leader hierarchical orientation on the acceptability of norm-violating behaviors, we used the PROCESS macro 4 for SPSS with 10,000 bootstraps with the multi-categorical independent variable—the HDHP condition served as the indicator variable. In support of the hypothesis, perceived leader moral character had a serial indirect effect on the relationship between HDLP and the acceptability of norm-violating behavior compared to the HDHP, serial indirect effect = .46, $CI_{95\%}$ [.122, .816]. Participants indicated they perceived norm violations as more acceptable under an HDLP leader, given they were seen as having lower moral character than the HDHP condition. Similarly, we found that perceived leader moral character had a serial indirect effect on the relationship between LDHP and the acceptability of norm-violating behavior compared to the HDHP condition, serial indirect effect = -.33, $CI_{95\%}$ [-.574, -.088]. Participants perceived norm violations as less acceptable under an LDHP leader because they had higher moral character than the HDHP condition.

Discussion

Study S3 tested the theoretical prediction of being high in dominance and prestige to assess the potentially equalizing effect on moral inferences and norm perceptions. In support of our theorizing, we found that leaders described as HDHP were seen as having higher moral character than HDLP, but not as high as LDHP. Furthermore, we found similar directional effects for the acceptability of norm-violating behaviors within the teams led by such leaders. Specifically, we found people found norm-violating behaviors to be less acceptable under HDHP as compared to HDLP, but more acceptable when compared to an LDHP leader. Despite the limitations associated with the practical interpretations, the theoretical exercise provided additional support for our directional hypotheses. Specifically, we found that high dominance (prestige) leads to a higher (lower) endorsement of the acceptability of norm-violating behaviors via attributions of low (high) moral character.

Study S3 Manipulations

High Dominance High Prestige

Taylor was promoted within the company quickly. He is considered to be a very dominant and assertive leader. Team members also hold him in high regard and thus respect and admire him.

Taylor is known for having a high degree of expertise and as someone who shares his valued skill set and knowledge with the team. Team members hold him in high esteem because of his expertise, his desire to help the team, supportive nature, and because he wants team members to be happy.

Taylor is a leader who is forceful in his behavior toward team members. It is important to Taylor that team members are aware of who is in charge and is very controlling in his interactions with others. If needed, he will leverage his resources to maintain influence.

Therefore, team members defer to Taylor because of his high degree of expertise and helpfulness, which garners respect and admiration. Team members also defer to him because of his dominant and controlling nature, which induces a sense of fear. Taylor remains an asset to the company.

High Dominance Low Prestige

Taylor was promoted within the company quickly. He is considered to be a very dominant and assertive leader. Team members do not hold him in high regard and thus do not confer respect and admiration to him.

Taylor is not known for having a high degree of expertise and therefore cannot share valued skill sets and knowledge with the team. Team members do not hold him in high esteem because he lacks expertise, a desire to help the team, a supportive nature, and a care if team members are happy or not.

Taylor is a leader who is forceful in his behavior toward team members. It is important to Taylor that team members are aware of who is in charge and is very controlling in his interactions with others. If needed, he will leverage his resources to maintain influence.

Therefore, team members do not defer to Taylor because he lacks a high degree of expertise and helpfulness. Instead, team members defer to Taylor because of his dominant and controlling nature, which induces a sense of fear. Taylor remains an asset to the company.

Low Dominance High Prestige

Taylor was promoted within the company quickly. He is not considered to be a very dominant and assertive leader. Team members hold him in high regard and thus respect and admire him.

Taylor is known for having a high degree of expertise and as someone who shares his valued skill set and knowledge with the team. Team members hold him in high esteem because of his expertise, his desire to help the team, supportive nature, and because he wants team members to be happy.

Taylor is a leader who is not forceful in his behavior toward team members. It is not important to Taylor that team members are aware of who is in charge and is not very controlling in his interactions with others. He does not leverage his resources to maintain influence.

Therefore, team members do not defer to him because he lacks a dominant and controlling nature. Instead, team members defer to Taylor because of his high degree of expertise and helpfulness, which garners respect and admiration. Taylor remains an asset to the company.

Low Dominance Low Prestige

Taylor was promoted within the company quickly. He is not considered to be a very dominant and assertive leader. Team members do not hold him in high regard and thus do not confer respect and admiration to him.

Taylor is not known for having a high degree of expertise and therefore cannot share valued skill sets and knowledge with the team. Team members do not hold him in high esteem because he lacks expertise, a desire to help the team, a supportive nature, and a care if team members are happy or not.

Taylor is a leader who is not forceful in his behavior toward team members. It is not important to Taylor that team members are aware of who is in charge and is not very controlling in his interactions with others. He does not leverage his resources to maintain influence.

Therefore, team members do not defer to Taylor because he lacks high degree of expertise and helpfulness. Team members do not defer to him because he lacks a dominant and controlling nature. Taylor remains an asset to the company.

Dominance and Prestige Scales

Original 17-item scales: Cheng, J. T., Tracy, J. L., & Henrich, J. (2010). Pride, personality, and the evolutionary foundations of human social status. Evolution and Human Behavior, 31, 334-347

Bolded Items indicate reduced 8-item scale: Witkower, Z., Tracy, J. L., Cheng, J. T., & Henrich, J. (2020). Two signals of social rank: Prestige and dominance are associated with distinct nonverbal displays. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, *118*(1), 89.

Dominance score is computed by averaging items: 3, 5, 7, 9, 10 (reversed), 11, 12 (reversed), 16.

Prestige score is computed by averaging items: 1, 2 (reversed), 4, 6 (reversed), 8, 13, 14, 15, 17 (reversed)

Self-Report Scale

1. **____ Members of my peer group respect and admire me.**
2. ____ Members of my peer group do NOT want to be like me.
3. **____ I enjoy having control over others.**
4. ____ Others always expect me to be successful.
5. **____ I often try to get my own way regardless of what others may want.**
6. ____ Others do NOT value my opinion.
7. **____ I am willing to use aggressive tactics to get my way.**
8. ____ I am held in high esteem by those I know.
9. **____ I try to control others rather than permit them to control me.**
10. ____ I do NOT have a forceful or dominant personality.
11. ____ Others know it is better to let me have my way.
12. ____ I do NOT enjoy having authority over other people.
13. **____ My unique talents and abilities are recognized by others**
14. **____ I am considered an expert on some matters by others**
15. **____ Others seek my advice on a variety of matters**
16. ____ Some people are afraid of me.
17. ____ Others do NOT enjoy hanging out with me.

Peer-Report Scale

1. **____ Members of your group respect and admire him/her.**
2. ____ Members of your group do NOT want to be like him/her.
3. **____ He/she enjoys having control over other members of the group.**
4. ____ Members of your group always expect him/her to be successful.
5. **____ He/she often tries to get his/her own way regardless of what others in the group may want.**
6. ____ Members of your group do NOT value his/her opinion.
7. **____ He/she is willing to use aggressive tactics to get his/her way.**
8. ____ He/she is held in high esteem by members of the group.
9. **____ He/she tries to control others rather than permit them to control him/her.**
10. ____ He/she does NOT have a forceful or dominant personality.
11. ____ Members of the group know it is better to let him/her have his/her way.
12. ____ He/she does NOT enjoy having authority over other members of the group.
13. **____ His/her unique talents and abilities are recognized by others in the group**
14. **____ He/she is considered an expert on some matters by members of the group**
15. **____ Members of your group seek his/her advice on a variety of matters.**
16. ____ Members of your group are afraid of him/her.
17. ____ Others do NOT enjoy hanging out with him/her.