Mirrors with Unflattering Reflections: Moral Rebels as Fuel for Social Inertia or Social *Change*?

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Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful,

committed citizens can change the world;

indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.

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Margaret Mead

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ASBTRACT

Individuals who deviate from majority practices based on moral objections can be crucial catalyzers of social change. However, according to prior work, these "moral rebels" are commonly met with defensiveness. Therefore, ironically, they may slow down social change. This reasoning implies that rebels should avoid triggering defensiveness for the benefit of social change, for example, by downplaying the moral nature of their objections to the status quo. The present thesis, however, argues that covering up one's moral objections can impede social change. First (CH1), I explain that defensiveness is not necessarily detrimental to change, but can signal potential for future change: it is a symptom of observers experiencing ethical dissonance. I then discuss how rebels could 'talk' about change in ways that maximizes the chances of observers translating dissonance into change. Second (CH2), I empirically test a communication strategy that may aid rebels to reduce defensiveness in others – signaling compassion. And finally (CH3), I empirically show why previous research may have mistaken a lack of immediate behavior change for a lack of influence: moral rebels do change others' behavior, but often in indirect ways.

Keywords*: moral rebels, social change, defensiveness, ethical dissonance, guilt*

Abstract (Castellaño)

Los individuos que se desmarcan de las prácticas mayoritarias por objeciones morales pueden ser catalizadores decisivos de cambio social. A pesar de ello, las posturas disidentes que formulan suelen chocarse con actitudes defensivas, lo que, irónicamente, puede llevar a frenar el cambio social. Esa observación sugiere que los disidentes, con tal de no obstaculizar el cambio social que abogan, deberían procurar no provocar tal reacciones defensivas, por ejemplo, al restarle importancia a la naturaleza moral de sus objeciones al statu quo. Este trabajo, sin embargo, sostiene que el encubrimiento de las objeciones morales puede llegar a perjudicar el cambio social. En primer lugar (CH1), se sostiene que las actitudes defensivas no son necesariamente perjudiciales para el cambio social, sino que más bien pueden señalar el potencial para futuros cambios: se trata de un síntoma de disonancia ética experimentada por los observadores. A continuación, se abordan las vías por las que los disidentes podrían abordar cuestiones de cambio social con tal de favorecer la conversión de la disonancia en cambio social por parte de los observadores. En segundo lugar (CH2), se examina una estrategia comunicativa mediante la cual, al manifestar compasión, los disidentes pueden mitigar las reacciones defensivas que provocan en los demás. Por último (CH3), se matizan las conclusiones de investigaciones previas, sugiriendo que pueden haber confundido la falta de cambio inmediato en el comportamiento con falta de influencia: los disidentes morales sí alteran el comportamiento de los demás, aunque de forma indirecta.

Abstract (Catalan)

Els individus que es desmarquen de les pràctiques majoritàries arran d'objeccions morals poden ser catalitzadors decisius del canvi social. Tot i així, les posicions dissidents que sostenen es troben més aviat amb actituds defensives, la qual cosa, irònicament, pot portar a frenar el canvi social. Aquesta observació suposa que els dissidents, per tal de no obstaculitzar el canvi social que recolzen, haurien de procurar no provocar reaccions defensives, per exemple, en treure-li importància a la natura moral de les seves objeccions al statu quo. Aquest treball, però, sosté que l'encobriment de les objeccions morals pot portar a perjudicar el canvi social. El primer looc (CH1), s'hi avança que les actituds defensives no necessàriament perjudiquen el canvi social, sinó que poden assenyalar el potencial per a canvis futurs: es tracta d'un símptoma de dissonància ètica experimentada pels observadors. A continuació, s'hi aborden les vies per les quals els dissidents podrien abordar qüestions de canvi social per tal que es maximitzin les possibilitats que els observadors converteixin dissonància en canvi social. En segon lloc (CH2), s'hi examina una estratègia comunicativa mitjançant la qual, en manifestar compassió, els dissidents poder mitigar les reaccions defensives que provoquen en altres. Finalment (CH3), s'hi matisen les conclusions de recerques anteriors i se suggereix que es pot haver confós la manca de canvi immediat en el comportament amb manca d'influència: els dissidents morals sí que alteren el comportament dels altres, encara que solen fer-ho indirectament.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Many of today's societal issues (e.g. climate change, animal cruelty, and third-world labor exploitation) can be attributed to individual and collective - especially in affluent societies - consumption behaviors (S. R. Smith, 2017; Williamson, Satre-Meloy, Velasco, & Green, 2018). The industrial production of meat, for instance, causes greenhouse gas emissions (Steinfeld et al., 2006) and animal suffering (Alvaro, 2017). As part of the solution for such societal problems, individuals need to change everyday consumption behaviors (Hindriks, 2019). In spite of a growing consensus that change is needed (Jamieson, 2006) and an increasing availability of sustainable consumption alternatives on the market place (Fleith de Medeiros & Duarte Ribeiro, 2013), the collective uptake of more sustainable consumption patterns remains slow (Carrington, Neville, & Whitwell, 2010). Rather, people continue to eat industrialized meat, buy fast fashion, consume single-use plastic products, and drive and fly (too much).

In contrast, a minority of people (referred to as "moral rebels"), make themselves the exception to the rule by refusing to settle for the status quo, based on moral principles (Monin, 2007). They challenge current norms by deviating from what most people do, out of ethical concerns, and provide an example for others to imitate. Examples of moral rebels include those who opt for a meat-free diet out of animal- and/or environmental welfare concern, who only buy local products rather than mass produced ones, people who recycle, boycott airtravel or cycle to work rather than by car in a bid to minimize their carbon footprint. The most striking examples include Greta Thunberg's school strike, and, most recently, climate activists gluing themselves to famous oil paintings.

At the bedrock of moral rebels' motivation for deviance lie the values of care and fairness (Joy, 2018) that are shared by most others (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009). Animal welfare, for instance, is a value that many people subscribe to (Bastian & Loughnan, 2017; Joy & Pedersen, 2012). Logic would hold that moral rebels should function as inspirational role models for others to take after, and should receive praise and admiration for their principled stance. However, research suggests that moral rebels who, unlike others, translate their values into action are oftentimes met with defensive reactance and opposition from those who remain in a state of inaction: people tend to dislike, ridicule, discriminate, and reject moral rebels, and dismiss the ethical choices they advocate (Bolderdijk, Brouwer, & Cornelissen, 2018; Cramwinckel, van Dijk, Scheepers, & van den Bos, 2013; Monin, Sawyer, & Marquez, 2008; Zane, Irwin, & Reczek, 2016). Change advocates - policy-makers and practitioners - may interpret this response as a sign that moral rebels might make matters worse when their morally motivated deviance triggers defensive reactance in others. This could lead to the conclusion that defensiveness should be avoided at all costs for the benefit of stimulating social change (e.g. Leenaert, 2017). In other words, this observation might suggest that morally motivated rebels, if anything, function as fuel for social inertia rather than as catalyzers of social change.

Yet, social change is almost always initiated by minority groups, like moral rebels, and, importantly, research describes how defensiveness and opposition is a natural *part* of the social change process (Moscovici, 1980; Moscovici & Zavalloni, 1969; Wood,

Lundgren, Ouellette, Busceme, & Blackstone, 1994). Thus, this suggests that moral rebels may actually be doing something right when they trigger symptoms of defensiveness. Defensiveness in majority members might be interpreted as a sign of *progress* rather than regress, and that initial opposition is merely that: *initial* opposition. But how does this exactly work? My dissertation aims to clarify how rebels, by expressing their moral objections to the status quo, can plant the seed for change in others.

In three chapters, I will examine *why* moral rebels are typically met with defensiveness in the first place, and *how* they can impact social change. Specifically, I will focus on how moral rebels can effectively 'talk' about change, and how their moral message leaves a positive trace of influence, *in spite* of triggering defensiveness. The thesis is structured as following:

CHAPTER 1. Communication strategies for moral rebels: how to talk about change in order to inspire self-efficacy in others

In a first conceptual paper, we reviewed prior literature, which offers conflicting views on whether moral rebels ultimately inhibit or facilitate social change. Here, we highlight that defensive reactance need not be exclusively regarded as a negative phenomenon, because it may be the very symptom of the fact that moral rebels struck a *nerve* in their observers: the fact that observers take the effort to ridicule a rebel suggest they feel bad about their own moral shortcomings – they experience *ethical dissonance*. Based on our review of the literature, we conclude that moral rebels can be catalyzers of social change precisely because they evoke ethical dissonance in others. Specifically, ethical dissonance may offer the fuel that is needed for observers to engage in self-improvement, provided observers feel capable of changing after being exposed to moral rebels. Whether or not observers feel capable of changing, we argue, however, depends on how rebels communicate their moral choices to others – how they 'talk' about change. To that end, our review informs moral rebels how they should speak about their morally motivated choices in ways that will inspire their audience to consider change and adopting the same choices.

CHAPTER 2. Sticking to Moral Convictions Without Offending Omnivores - Reducing Perceived Judgment by Signaling Self-compassion

Defensive responding can undermine observers' ability to listen and feel inspired by a rebel's message, and can discourage rebels from voicing their moral convictions. In a second paper, an empirical one, we examine whether moral rebels can reduce (rather than avoid) defensive responses by others through strategic communication. Observers spontaneously assume that rebels, who voice a moral objection to the status quo, *judge* them as morally inadequate. This anticipated judgment can trigger defensiveness. In this chapter, we test whether moral rebels can avoid eliciting the assumption that they would judge others. Specifically, we tested whether rebels could suppress perceptions of being judgmental in others by signaling compassion towards their own past self. We test our

reasoning in the specific context of vegetarians/vegans (i.e. veg*ns) communicating with omnivores.

CHAPTER 3: Doing 'Good' without Feeling Immoral

A final empirical chapter explores how a rebel's moral message - albeit not in the apparent form of behavior change - does create a positive impact on others. We argue and demonstrate that downplaying the moral reasons for change can undermine a rebel's influence on others, precisely because articulating moral objections to majority practices can trigger guilt in observers who conform to such practices – an emotion that can fuel behavior change. However, we argue their influence of moral arguments on observers is not always visible. Observers who feel guilty may not immediately change their behavior, because doing so would equate to admitting they were morally wrong all along. Instead, we propose that observers resort to the psychologically 'safer' option of moral compensation instead, i.e. acting ethically in an alternative moral domain.

Table of contents

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1. COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES FOR MORAL REBELS: HOW TO TALK ABOUT CHANGE IN ORDER TO INSPIRE SELF-EFFICACY IN OTHERS

Abstract

Current carbon-intensive lifestyles are unsustainable and drastic social changes are required to combat climate change. To achieve such change, moral rebels (i.e., individuals who deviate from current behavioral norms based on ethical considerations) may be crucial catalyzers. However, the current literature holds that moral rebels may do more harm than good. By deviating from what most people do, based on a moral concern, moral rebels pose a threat to the moral self-view of their observers who share but fail to uphold that concern. Those observers may realize that their behavior does not live up to their moral values, and feel morally inadequate as a result. Work on "do-gooder derogation" demonstrates that rebel-induced threat can elicit defensive reactance among observers, resulting in the rejec- tion of moral rebels and their behavioral choices. Such findings suggest that advocates for social change should avoid triggering moral threat by, for example, presenting nonmoral justifications for their choices. We challenge this view by arguing that moral threat may be a necessary ingredient to achieve social change precisely because it triggers ethical dissonance. Thus, instead of avoiding moral justifications, it may be more effective to harness that threat. Ethical dissonance may offer the fuel needed for observers to engage in self-improvement after being exposed to moral rebels, provided that observers feel capable of changing. Whether or not observers feel capa- ble of changing, however, depends on how rebels communicate their moral choices to others—how they talk about change.

Keywords: *ethical dissonance, moral rebels, perceived self-efficacy, self-defense responses, self- improvement, social change*

1.1 Introduction

Bob and his friend are booking a trip. His friend proposes cheap plane tickets. However, Bob prefers to avoid flying because he values minimizing his carbon footprint. He feels uncomfortable telling his friend that he prefers taking the train out of his concern for the environment. From past experiences, he has learned that people appear to take personal offense and get defensive when he does so. As a result, Bob steers clear of talking about his environmental stewardship to others. Instead, Bob tells his friend that he prefers travelling by train because he has a fear of flying.

Responses like this are common among moral rebels like Bob (i.e., individuals who deviate from the status quo based on ethical considerations; Monin, 2007). Vegans, for instance, tend to avoid moral arguments when justifying their meat-free preferences

(e.g., by referring to the health benefits instead), to avoid that meat-eaters feel judged and lash out against vegans in retaliation (Greenebaum, 2012). However, are moral rebels correct in assuming that using moral arguments for their uncommon choices will elicit mere defensiveness in their peers? In this paper, we argue that, to facilitate societal change, it is essential that moral rebels articulate the morally troublesome nature of practices currently performed by the majority of people, while being strategic about how they talk about change when interacting with a member of that majority.

1.1.2 Rebel-induced dissonance as fuel for social change

Climate change is one of the major global challenges of today (Williamson et al., 2018). Global net human-caused emissions of carbon dioxide ($CO2$) need to fall by about 45% from 2010 levels by 2030, reaching 'net zero' around 2050 (IPCC, 2018). Achieving such targets, among others, requires individuals to adopt more sustainable consumption patterns (Smith, 2017; Williamson et al., 2018). Such behavioral changes can only have a profound impact if embraced by the broad collective (Hindriks, 2019). This implies that societal change needs to occur, and less carbon-intensive behavior needs to become the social default.

Fortunately, most people agree that it is their moral obligation to combat climate change (Jamieson, 2006); a personal norm that could directly influence behavior (Schwartz & Howard, 1981). However, reality often demonstrates that such personal norms are pushed beneath the surface. Most people's behavior runs counter to that concern (Carrington et al., 2010), and rarely discuss climate change as an issue (Maibach, Leiserowitz, Rosenthal, Roser-Renouf, & Cutler, 2016). How is it possible to promote sustainable behavior that is endorsed by most people, when such behavior is not common (e.g. Klöckner, 2015; Kraft-Todd, Bollinger, Gillingham, Lamp, & Rand, 2018)?

Moral rebels could play an important role here: they challenge existing norms by publicly advocating for more socially responsible behavior, which may bring others' espoused personal norms (back) to the surface. Doing so can inspire others to follow their example consistent with personal norms (Amel, Manning, Scott, & Koger, 2017; Bandura, 1991; Heald, 2017; Manning, 2012).

Moreover, research on social change processes finds that individuals and social movements function as crucial starting points of large-scale societal and institutional change (e.g. American civil Rights movement of the 1960s, East German peace movement of the 1980s, "Fridays for Future" climate movement in the making; Dunlap & Brulle, 2016; Smith, Christie, & Willis, 2020). In order to achieve such change, a sufficiently large enough group of people (i.e. a 'critical mass') must gather around a common cause (e.g. combating climate change) in order to create a momentum for change (Centola, Becker, Brackbill, & Baronchelli, 2018; Leach & Scoones, 2015), such that policymakers, businesses, politicians, and governments will feel pressure to facilitate that change (The Green Alliance, 2018). Thus, moral rebels could function as catalyzers of change.

However, challenging norms often comes at a social cost. Moral rebels face derogation from peers who share the same values but fail to live up to them (Bolderdijk, Brouwer, & Cornelissen, 2018; Cramwinckel, van Dijk, Scheepers, & van den Bos, 2013; Monin, Sawyer, & Marquez, 2008; Zane, Irwin, & Reczek, 2016). This is the case because moral rebels' virtuous choices are often founded on principles of care and justice shared by most others (Joy, 2018). People tend to compare themselves with others whom they perceive to share similar beliefs (i.e., what one values) and capabilities (i.e., one's competencies) in order to assess their status in self-important domains such as morality (Festinger, 1954; Monin, 2007). Observing someone who goes the extra mile on behalf of a value that observers also find important may make those observers question the moral appropriateness of their own behavior and may painfully suggest that they may not be the good and moral person they aspire to be (Ellemers, 2017; Monin, 2007). In other words, moral rebels evoke ethical dissonance in observers who share the same values and are capable of making the same choices as the rebel but neglect to do so (Abele & Wojciszke, 2014; Cramwinckel et al., 2013; Festinger, 1954; Monin & O'Connor, 2011; O'Connor & Monin, 2016; Woodyatt, Wenzel, & De Vel-Palumbo, 2017). This ethical dissonance poses a *threat* to one's moral-social identity: the need to see oneself and be seen by others as a good and moral person (Sherman & Cohen, 2002, 2006; Steele, 1988).

This can mobilize self-defensive responses, oftentimes involving "do-gooder derogation": disliking, diminishing or ridiculing the moral rebel, and rejecting the moral standards they advocate (Bolderdijk et al., 2018; Cramwinckel et al., 2013; Monin et al., 2008; Zane et al., 2016). One common example is to accuse the rebel of engaging in "virtue signaling": passing off the rebels' virtuousness as a strategic act just for the purpose of enhancing their moral reputation (Levy, 2021). Ultimately, the widespread derogation of moral rebels has led to the stigmatization of social minority groups that they belong to (Bashir, Lockwood, Chasteen, Nadolny, & Noyes, 2013; Kurz, Prosser, Rabinovich, & O'Neill, 2020; MacInnis & Hodson, 2017).

Based on this observation, work on "do-gooder derogation" suggests that moral rebels may hamper social change because their public advocacy produces defensive processing in observers. This suggests that the goal of achieving social change could be better served by avoiding activating defensiveness in others; in essence, that rebel-induced threat should be *mitigated* at all costs (e.g. Leenaert, 2017). Moral rebels could avoid defensive processing in others by providing pragmatic, rather than moral, justifications for their uncommon behavior that do not risk making others feel and look comparatively 'wrong' (Bolderdijk et al., 2018; Cramwinckel et al., 2013; Monin et al., 2008; Rothgerber, 2014; Zane et al., 2016). For instance, Cramwinckel and colleagues (2013) demonstrated that vegetarians are liked better by their peers when justifying their diet based on their dislike for the taste of meat rather than their belief that killing animals for food is wrong. Bob's intuition in our introduction thus appears on point: talking openly about his ethical motivations can upset others. Thus, for the sake of avoiding social backlash, it might be wiser to hide one's moral motivations.

However, we challenge this view that rebel-induced threat necessarily slows down social change. We argue that rebel-induced threat may be the active ingredient required to stimulate significant social change, precisely because it triggers a state of *ethical*

dissonance among those who subscribe to the same values by making the discrepancy between observers' behavior and their personal values salient (Cramwinckel et al., 2013; Festinger, 1954; Monin & O'Connor, 2011; O'Connor & Monin, 2016; Rothgerber, 2014). Specifically, that people go to the trouble of derogating moral rebels, we argue, illustrates two important and potentially positive features of rebel-induced ethical dissonance. First, ethical dissonance forces people to resolve an inconsistency between their behavior and their values (Festinger, 1954). This requires individuals to (re)consider their personal role in a societal issue and, one way or another, to act in response to that consideration (Heald, 2017; Joy & Pedersen, 2012). Second, that people engage in derogation shows us that a nerve may have been struck: observers seem to feel bad about their own choices such that they feel the need to defend themselves (Leach, 2017; Leach & Spears, 2008; Smith, Webster, Parrott, & Eyre, 2002). For example, disparaging humor, common to do-gooder derogation, is humor that puts others (often minorities) down (Joy, 2018). Such humor might be an attempt to camouflage the fact that one's behavior may be morally questionable and to minimize the problem in case one's inadequate behavior does get recognized (Joy, 2018). Thus, observers lashing out may signal that, privately, they might be experiencing emotional discomfort on account of not living up to moral values (Leach, 2017). Crucially, this emotional discomfort mobilized by ethical dissonance can act as motivational *fuel* to improve one's behavior (Bandura, 1991; Crompton, 2008), albeit following time for reflection.

Thus, we argue that by choosing to avoid threatening the moral self-view of others, moral rebels might forgo their potential to inspire others to follow their example and contribute to the broader diffusion of more sustainable behaviors (Bandura, 1991; Crompton, 2008; Heald, 2017). Therefore, we suggest that change advocates should not avoid moral arguments out of a desire to avoid defensiveness. Rather, observers' defensiveness may be regarded as the very symptom of the existence of ethical dissonance required for change to occur. Thus, rather than engaging in careful social interactional strategies to avoid presenting a threat to people's moral self-view, it may be more effective to fan the flames of the potential conflict between others' espoused values and behavior in order to produce a response and *harness* that threat. However, caution is warranted. We argue that whether moral threat may translate into (future) improved behavior, rather than mere defensiveness, depends on how moral rebels *talk* about change (i.e. their communication strategy; see Klöckner, 2015, for a broader discussion).

1.2 Talking about change: inspiring self-efficacy

In order to make more constructive responses to rebel-induced dissonance plausible, such as self-improvement, observers need to acknowledge their perceived moral flaws and accept personal responsibility for their consequences (Bandura, 1991; Bastian, 2018; De Groot & Steg, 2009; Schwartz, 1977; Wenzel, Woodyatt, & McLean, 2020). Recognition of moral inadequacies and personal responsibility activates self-conscious emotions (e.g. guilt and pride) that have a self-regulatory function: they motivate people to act in line with their moral standards (i.e. defining one's personal do's and dont's; Bandura, 1991; Schwartz, 1977). For example, people who hold pro-environmental

standards feel motivated to act in line with those standards to avoid feelings of guilt (if they do not live up to their standards) and to attain feelings of pride (if they do; Adams, Hurst, & Sintov, 2020; Onwezen, Bartels, & Antonides, 2014).

However, acknowledging one's perceived moral failure and accepting personal responsibility is psychologically challenging because it likely increases psychological threat (Bastian, 2018; Fisher & Exline, 2010; Hall & Fincham, 2005; Woodyatt, Worthington, Wenzel, & Griffin, 2017a). People are only willing to do so when they hold *perceived self-efficacy*: they must consider themselves capable of improving on their perceived moral failure (Baldwin, Baldwin, & Ewald, 2006; Bandura, 1991, 1994; Gausel & Leach, 2011; Gausel, Leach, Vignoles, & Brown, 2012; Hall & Fincham, 2005; Heald, 2017; Leach, 2017).

Moral rebels may thus play an additional role here. They could foster perceived self-efficacy in others, i.e. cultivate others' confidence in being capable of self-improvement, through showing that it *can* be done, and *how* (Bandura, 1994). However, we argue, moral rebels should be careful when choosing the words to communicate their morally charged message, such that observers will feel encouraged (rather than discouraged) to believe that they too can do better at meeting their moral standards. We highlight three important principles for increasing the likelihood that self-efficacy, and thus possible future self-improvement, will be inspired in others when talking about change (Table 1).

Table 1

Three communication strategies to cultivate perceived self-efficacy and possible self-improvement in others when challenging others' behaviors based on moral considerations

Communication Strategy	Mechanism fostering perceived self-efficacy	How to incorporate?
1. Challenge others' actions, not their character	People feel better capable of changing when it involves changing their actions rather than who they are as a person.	• Encourage others to distinguish between their actions and themselves as a person. • Express that today's normal practices often involve habitual choices that incidentally cause harm to others, and avoid the suggestion that these choices are a product of bad intentions. • Signal self-compassion rather than self-judgment towards past self that engaged in the same harmful behavior.
2. Emphasize that	People feel better capable of	• Include a personal

capabilities can be developed and are not fixed traits	changing when they believe that they can develop the capabilities needed to do so, rather than when they believe that capabilities are fixed traits they are born with and cannot change.	narrative explaining how you have made a change too in the past. • Avoid using labels (e.g. 'meat-eaters' vs 'vegetarians') but rather focus on the steps you have made yourself to develop your capabilities in service of reaching a goal.
3. Promote maximal, rather than minimal, moral standards	People feel better capable of changing when the change involves incremental adaptations to their behaviors, rather than radical alterations to their lifestyles.	• Explain to not pressure oneself to make changes in service of a goal all at once, but rather to take pride in each effort made in meeting that goal. • Give praise to others' efforts made towards a goal, rather than condemning any violation of meeting that goal.

1.2.1 Challenge others' actions, not their character: trigger self-compassion

Whether observers respond defensively versus constructively to rebels may depend on how they appraise their own perceived moral failures (Cohen, Wolf, Panter, & Insko, 2011; Gausel & Leach, 2011; Leach, 2017; Leach & Spears, 2008). Personal moral shortcomings can be seen as a specific shortcoming (e.g., my meat consumption contributes to climate change, therefore, I *act* irresponsibly) or as an overall shortcoming (e.g., my meat consumption contributes to climate, therefore, I *am* irresponsible). Research demonstrates that people are more likely to hold perceived self-efficacy (i.e., the belief that they are capable to achieve something) when they appraise their perceived shortcoming as a specific one because it is perceived as more reparable than an overall shortcoming (Cohen et al., 2011; Gausel & Leach, 2011; Leach, 2017; Leach & Spears, 2008). In other words, if one feels bad about a specific *action*, one can alleviate the negative emotions through reparations and making amends; but if one feels bad about the *self*, it is more difficult to make up for an overall sense of being a "bad person" (Tangney, Boone, & Dearing, 2007). As a result, individuals could be more motivated to solve the ethical dissonance via behavioral change (e.g., reducing their meat intake) when they consider their perceived moral shortcoming to reflect poor behavior. In contrast, they may act more defensively (e.g., derogate vegans) when they view their perceived moral shortcoming as reflecting poor moral character.

It is crucial to encourage observers to distinguish between their actions and who they are as a person, by which they come to understand that a personal choice or habit that is collectively harmful does not necessarily mark them as a bad person (Braithwaite, 2000; Maruna, 2001). One way to curb observers' appraisal of their moral failure as an overall shortcoming, is by cultivating *self-compassion* in observers (Leary, Tate, Adams, Allen, & Hancock, 2007). This involves "... experiencing feelings of caring and kindness toward oneself, taking an understanding, nonjudgmental attitude toward one's inadequacies and failures, and recognizing that one's experience is part of the common human experience" (Neff, 2003; p.224). Research shows that individuals who deal with their perceived moral failure with self-compassion, rather than self-judgment, are more likely to hold perceived self-efficacy (Iskender, 2009; Leary et al., 2007; Magnus, Kowalski, & McHugh, 2010), to acknowledge and accept personal responsibility for that moral failure (Wang, Chen, Poon, Teng, & Jin, 2017), and feel more motivated to self-improve (Breines & Chen, 2012).

Therefore, the choice of words used by moral rebels is crucial. Moral rebels could cultivate self-compassion in others by signaling self-compassion towards their past selves that engaged in the morally inappropriate behavior at hand (e.g., a committed vegetarian being at peace with their prior meat consumption). Showing compassion towards oneself may simultaneously signal compassion towards *others*, and may facilitate those others to adopt a self-compassionate approach towards their own moral failures. For instance, meat-eaters may feel more motivated to reduce their meat-intake when confronted with vegetarians who point out to have eaten meat in the past, but do not harbor negative feelings towards their past selves because they understand that their meat consumption was a result of their upbringing (i.e. self-compassionate), compared to those who dwell on their past selves and criticize themselves for not having changed their diet sooner (i.e. self-judgmental).

1.2.2 Emphasize that capabilities can be developed and are not fixed traits

Whether observers will hold perceived self-efficacy (i.e., feel confident in their ability to change) may also depend on their beliefs regarding their own individual capabilities (Dweck, 2006). Whereas some believe they can develop their capabilities (i.e., they see their capabilities as adaptable), and thus can change, others tend to see such abilities as fixed traits they are born with and cannot change (Bandura & Lopez, 2008; Dweck, 2006; Seligman, 2006). Those who consider their capabilities as adaptable, as opposed to fixed, may be more likely to constructively approach their moral failure and respond less defensively. Since they believe they can learn from failures, develop their capabilities and grow as a person, they are more likely to believe that they can repair their moral failure and should feel more motivated to improve themselves when experiencing moral threat (Dweck, 2006).

Importantly, whether people hold a dynamic view of their capabilities may also depend on social learning (Bandura, 1994): whether they have witnessed others who changed as well. This implies that moral rebels may be more capable of inspiring others by

explaining how they have *made a change too* in the past (Sparkman & Walton, 2019). For example, a vegetarian could highlight that they previously also ate meat, and chose to avoid viewing their meat-eating as a characteristic they could not change (e.g., by avoiding identifying as a 'meat-eater'), but instead made adaptations to their diet by seeking out alternative meal options to make cutting out meat gradually an easier task.

1.2.3 Promote maximal, rather than minimal, moral standards

A third way for moral rebels to inspire self-efficacy and potential self-improvement in observers is by advocating maximal, instead of minimal, moral standards (Kessler et al., 2010). A maximal moral standard is one where actions in a domain (e.g., reducing one's carbon footprint) are seen as aspiring to a maximal standard (e.g., vegetarianism), with any movement in that direction (e.g., trying "meat-free Mondays") being viewed as commendable and morally appropriate. A minimal moral standard, in contrast, is one that focuses on an absolute cutoff point (e.g., excluding meat entirely from one's diet) to be considered as moral, with *any* violation of this minimum threshold (e.g., eating meat Tuesday to Sunday) rendering one equally immoral.

Motivating behavioral change using maximal moral standards may be advantageous because observers are more likely to hold perceived self-efficacy when the implied behavioral change is considered an incremental change to their behaviors instead of a radical alteration to their lifestyles (Bastian, 2018; Kurz et al., 2020; Sparkman, Macdonald, Caldwell, Kateman & Boese, 2021). Requesting others to take smaller steps towards achieving a higher goal may make people feel more motivated to adopt a new behavior as the image of themselves doing so is more mentally accessible compared to the 'all or nothing' approach that minimal moral standards imply (Levav & Fitzsimons, 2006), especially when that goal is focused and specific (Kanfer & Goldstein, 1975; Loke, Bryan, & Kendall, 1968). Moreover, the development of the competency associated with making incremental changes promoted by maximal standards strengthens one's sense of self-efficacy, making a person more willing to seek out more demanding challenges (Bandura, 1994; Goleman, 1996).

Thus, moral rebels could foster perceived self-efficacy in others by means of focusing on maximal moral standards. Focusing repeatedly on smaller steps and giving moral credit for one's efforts in doing so can ultimately culminate in the achievement of a higher goal (Gal & Mcshane, 2012). One way for rebels to do so is by incorporating their personal narrative. They can explain that they too had to start from somewhere, and took one small step at a time. For instance, a vegan could indicate that they did not pressure themselves to exclude animal-products from their consumption all at once, but rather took pride in each effort made in meeting that goal, for instance by starting to cut out red meat but still consuming fish. This facilitates others to not only feel capable in making adaptations to their own behavior, but also signals that any such adaptations are morally 'worth it'.

1.3 Conclusion

The present paper argues that rebel-induced threat is not necessarily harmful, but rather could function as a crucial ingredient for social change, precisely because it activates ethical dissonance. We have argued that change advocates should not feel discouraged by observers' immediate defensive reactions to rebel-induced threat, but rather should view these initial displays of reactance as positive indicators that change could occur. Emotional discomfort produced by conflicts between one's behavior and one's values can provide the necessary motivational fuel for self-improvement. However, the likelihood that observers respond with future positive change to rebel-induced dissonance, rather than derogation, may depend on how change advocates communicate.

The theories reviewed point to the crucial importance of people feeling confident about their capabilities to change when they are confronted with their own perceived shortcomings. That is, rebel-induced dissonance must be accompanied by perceived self-efficacy (i.e., the belief that one is capable of change). Thus, rather than avoiding presenting a threat to others' moral self-views by, for example, using morally-neutral justifications, we proposed that moral rebels should harness that threat, provided they talk about change using words of encouragement that helps inspire perceived self-efficacy in others.

To that end, we recommended that moral rebels should ensure that observers can preserve their belief in being a good person, despite their moral hick-ups, and not discourage them in their capabilities needed for self-improvement. They should make those observers become more aware that their habitual choices incidentally produce harmful outcomes, and avoid suggesting that morally sub-optimal actions are the result of having bad intentions, for instance through signaling self-compassion. Second, moral rebels could inspire self-efficacy by focusing on the fact that one's abilities can be developed in the pursuit of self-improvement and are not fixed traits that render one either born to succeed or doomed to fail. Finally, it may be more fruitful to focus on the 'baby steps' it takes to reach a higher self-defining goal by promoting maximal moral standards (e.g., praising the incremental changes to observers' behaviors), rather than promoting minimal moral standards (e.g., a requirement for observers to make radical lifestyle changes to gain any moral cache). In sum, these strategies are focused on avoiding observers lapsing into a debilitating state of harsh self-criticism and/or feeling overwhelmed by the required change, but instead making them believe they too have the capabilities required for self-improvement.

2. STICKING TO MORAL CONVICTIONS WITHOUT OFFENDING OMNIVORES - REDUCING PERCEIVED JUDGMENT BY SIGNALING SELF-COMPASSION

Abstract

Vegetarians and vegans (i.e. veg*ns) are spontaneously perceived as judgmental by omnivores. Such anticipated judgment triggers defensive responses towards veg*ns. This defensiveness is problematic for the broader diffusion of meat-free principles: it undermines omnivores' ability to listen and feel inspired by a veg*n's message, and can discourage veg*ns in further voicing their moral convictions. We explored a communication strategy that may aid veg*ns to communicate their moral convictions without risking coming across as judgmental and thus triggering defensiveness. Specifically, we tested whether veg*ns could suppress perceptions of being judgmental in others by signaling compassion towards their own past meat-eating self. Across two experimental studies, we show that, even though veg*ns can convince omnivores that they do not judge their past meat-eating selves by signaling self-compassion, omnivores still perceive the veg*n as being judgmental of them. These results imply that anticipated judgment mainly exist in omnivores' own imagination, rather than is specifically caused by the morally-motivated veg*n's choice of words.

Keywords: *veg*ns, moral rebels, projection, self-compassion, perceived judgment*

2.1 Introduction

"*Why don't you eat meat?*" - A question vegetarians and vegans (henceforth, 'veg*ns') are frequently asked by omnivores (more than once accompanied by a lyrical description of the pleasure provided by consuming meat). A veg*n might find themselves somewhat uncomfortable in addressing this question, and thus, uncertain about how to talk about their dietary choice to meat-eating peers. People who cite moral reasons for their meat-free diet, such as environmental- and especially animal welfare concerns, oftentimes find themselves at the business end of defensive reactance: they can be ridiculed, rejected, discriminated and put down by omnivores (Bolderdijk et al., 2018; Cramwinckel et al., 2013; Monin et al., 2008; Zane et al., 2016).

Research informs us that omnivores can feel threatened by veg*ns, because they spontaneously infer *moral judgment* and superiority from a veg*n's moral motivation to refrain from a meat-based diet (Cramwinckel et al., 2013; Minson & Monin, 2012; Rothgerber, 2014; Weiper & Vonk, 2021). Moral convictions are perceived to reflect what a person believes to be morally right and wrong, thereby stipulating what everyone 'ought' to or 'should' do to be considered a good and moral person (Skitka, 2010; Skitka, Bauman, & Sargis, 2005; Skitka & Morgan, 2010). Thus, by motivating one's refusal to

eat meat with moral concerns (i.e. animal welfare), veg*ns may (unintentionally) signal that they think others should refuse to eat meat too.

Being prompted to justify their meat-free diet therefore puts veg*ns in a difficult position: being frank about the motives of their behavior - providing moral reasons – allows veg*ns to be sincere but appears to telegraph a message of superiority and judgment, which invites negative responses by omnivores (Cole & Morgan, 2011). The fear of defensive responses can make veg*ns shy away from further voicing their meat-free principles (Bolderdijk & Cornelissen, 2022; Joy & Pedersen, 2012; Markowski & Roxburgh, 2019). Indeed, omnivores feel less threatened by and take a greater liking to veg*ns who base their diet choice on morally-neutral grounds (e.g. "don't like the taste of meat") compared to veg*ns presenting moral arguments (e.g. "killing animals for food is wrong"; Cramwinckel et al., 2013; Rothgerber, 2014): such non-moral arguments do not imply judgment of others' character who continue to eat meat. However, hiding one's moral motivations may undermine veg*ns' potential to inspire change in others: underscoring the morally troublesome nature of others' eating habits might provide the necessary motivational fuel for omnivores to consider breaking those habits (Brouwer, Bolderdijk, Cornelissen, & Kurz, 2022).

The present paper therefore explores how veg*ns can strategically communicate their moral principles in a way that does not make omnivores feel judged. In other words, how might veg*ns be able to be honest about their moral principles without appearing judgmental?

2.1.1 Why omnivores spontaneously assume morally-motivated veg*ns to be judgmental

Before identifying how veg*ns may avoid coming across as feeling morally superior and passing judgment, it is important to understand *why* omnivores spontaneously assume that veg*ns take such a self-righteous position.

In social interactions, individuals imagine how they appear to others (Cooley, 2017; Shaffer, 2005). When people cannot assess the mental life of the other person, e.g. when they lack knowledge regarding how the other typically thinks and evaluates others, they *project* their own mental states onto the other (Ames, 2004; Nickerson, 2001; Waytz, 2011). Projection involves individuals assessing how the other person must perceive them by means of imagining how people *themselves* would, if they were in the other person's position (Van Boven & Loewenstein, 2003). The further implicit assumption is that others think like oneself.

Next, let us consider what limited information omnivores have at their disposal to make their estimations regarding what the veg*n thinks of them. First, unlike the self, the veg*n excludes meat entirely from their diet, and secondly, does so motivated by moral convictions. Given the difference in consumption behavior between the omnivore and the veg*n together with the fact that moral convictions are perceived to reflect what one thinks that defines one as a good or bad person (Skitka & Morgan, 2010), we propose

that omnivores are likely to imagine, if they were to evaluate themselves from the morally-motivated veg*n's perspective, that the veg*n must regard them in a negative light. Being exposed to the veg*n's morally-motivated behavior (i.e. their refusal to eat meat out of concern for moral reasons) forces omnivores to draw an upward moral comparison with the veg*n (Ellemers, 2017; Joy, 2019; Monin, 2007). The upward moral comparison that omnivores draw between themselves and the veg*n, makes omnivores voluntarily but unwittingly place *themselves* at a morally inferior position. Accordingly, through projection, they may assume the moral rebel to share their line of relating, meaning they assume veg*ns perceive omnivores as being morally inferior (O'Connor & Monin, 2016).

Considering that omnivores may draw their own conclusions about how veg*ns must perceive them, leaves us with the question: how should morally-motivated veg*ns talk about their dietary choice in a way that does not imply a judgment call on omnivores' worthiness?

2.1.2 Reducing perceived judgment by signaling compassion

The present paper proposes that veg*ns can avoid defensive responses in others, by strategically communicating that their perceived 'doing better' does not mean that they consider themselves as 'being better'. Specifically, we propose that, through communicating *compassion*, veg*ns can counter the (possibly erroneous) belief that a veg*n's refusal to eat meat for moral reasons automatically implies a negative judgment of the moral worthiness of omnivores.

Compassion is a frame that allows people to evaluate oneself and others without putting individuals' worthiness on trial via moral comparisons (Brown, 1998). Specifically, compassion involves an understanding, *nonjudgmental* attitude towards individuals' shortcomings and failures (Neff, 2003). Contrary to subjecting one's worth to how well or poor one compares to others, compassion completely disregards social comparison as a means to determine an individual's worthiness, but instead recognizes that one's worth as a human is an inherent aspect to being human (Neff & Vonk, 2009), that is independent of how well one does relative to others.

Thus, we expect that signaling that one evaluates others with *compassion* provides veg*ns with the antidote to coming across as superior and judgmental (i.e., counters omnivores' assumption that veg*ns would draw a threatening downward moral comparison with them).

2.1.3 Compassion towards one's past self also signals compassion towards others

So how should veg*ns express compassion? Simply denying judgment may not work. For instance, O'Connor and Monin (2016) showed that participants who had just completed an ostensibly perceived 'racist' task anticipated judgment from another alleged participant who refused to complete the task based on moral grounds. When the moral refuser expressed to 'respect others' who did not take such a principled stance,

participants still anticipated judgment from the moral refuser. Thus, directly denying judgment of others may be taken by those others for an empty pledge.

Considering that directly expressing non-judgment seems to fail to sincerely convey non-judgment, we propose that conveying non-judgment may be better achieved by communicating a lack of judgment indirectly. Specifically, we propose that, rather than explicitly telling omnivores that they are treated with compassion, veg*ns may be more convincing when they communicate compassion indirectly by means of *signaling self-compassion* towards their past meat-eating self. By demonstrating a self-compassionate approach towards one's past meat-eating self may effectively convey that the veg*n would also treat other omnivores with compassion. For example, a veg*n can signal self-compassion by means of explaining to have understood the external factors that led to their meat-consumption (e.g. "my parents always prepared me meat-based dishes, I never questioned it before"), and therefore, reflect self-acceptance rather than a tainted view of having been a morally adequate person of worth (Neff, 2003).

In sum, we argue that signaling self-compassion may prove an effective communication tool for veg*ns to communicate a lack of judgment over omnivores. Specifically, we expect that a veg*n's signal of self-compassion helps transform omnivores' expectation that the rebel would judge and devalue their worthiness based on their dietary differences towards one where veg*ns consider them on equal planes of worth, *in spite* of their dietary differences (i.e. compassionately). In sum, we hypothesize that:

H1: Veg*ns are perceived as more judgmental by omnivores when providing moral, as opposed to morally-neutral, justifications for their meat-free diet.

H2: Morally-motivated veg*ns are perceived as less judgmental by omnivores when they couple their moral motivations with a signal of self-compassion.

2.1.4 The current research

The present paper explores a communication strategy for veg*ns that may help them to convince omnivores that their morally swayed refusal to eat meat does not necessarily mean that they view themselves as superior and would judge omnivores as inferior.

Across two studies we tested our predictions. We used two slightly different paradigms in which participants either saw a video recording (Study 1) or read a written survey answer (Study 2) provided by an alleged previous participant (a self-declared veg*n) who, we informed participants, was instructed to share the personal changes they had made over the lockdown that was enforced in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We thus varied the self-declared veg*n's argumentation regarding why they had decided to stop eating meat (see Table 1). First, we created two baseline conditions in which participants are exposed to either a *morally-neutral* (e.g. the veg*n target discovered that they preferred to cook with vegetables; Cramwinckel et al., 2013; Rothgerber, 2014), or a *morally-motivated* veg*n (e.g. the veg*n target stopped eating meat out of animal welfare concern). We expect that the veg*n target would only be perceived as judgmental when they are motivated by moral convictions (Hypothesis 1). We created 2

additional versions of the morally-motivated veg*n. Participants were either exposed to a *morally-motivated & self-judgmental veg*n* (e.g. a veg*n driven by animal welfare concern being self-critical for not having changed their diet sooner) or a *morally-motivated & self-compassionate veg*n* (e.g. a veg*n driven by animal welfare concern who explains to have understood the external factors that led to their prior meat-consumption). These conditions allowed us to 1) explore the degree to which omnivores naturally perceive a morally-motivated veg*n to be judgmental and 2) to test self-compassion as a strategy to neutralize perceptions of judgment. We expect a self-compassionate veg*n to be perceived as less judgmental than a morally-motivated veg*n (Hypothesis 2).

Table 1

Manipulation of target's elaboration on their decision to stop consuming meat[1]

Target Condition	Manipulated target's text
Morally-neutral veg*n	"... I never knew how much I preferred vegetables to meat. There's just so much more variety and flavor. So now I cook only with vegetables and actually prefer vegetarian meals."
Morally-motivated veg*n	"... Trying out the vegetarian meals really got me thinking about the meat industry and how sad it is what actually happens to the animals. It just made me feel really uncomfortable to continue eating meat."
Morally-motivated & Self-judgmental veg*n	"text morally-motivated" + "... That I usually ate meat in the past is something I don't understand. How I didn't connect the dots before. I feel really bad about that and I know I can't make up for it but I'm definitely not making the same mistake of eating meat again."
Morally-motivated & Self-compassionate veg*n	"text morally-motivated" + "... That I usually ate meat in the past is not something I beat myself up about because it's something I grew up with and it was just so normal that I never questioned it, like I think is the case for most people."

2.2 Study 1

In order to test whether morally-motivated veg*ns are perceived as more judgmental than morally-neutral veg*ns (Hypothesis 1), and whether a signal of self-compassion would reduce perceived judgment (Hypothesis 2), we measured the extent to which participants perceive veg*ns to be judgmental based on to which type of veg*n they had been exposed to.

Additionally, we gauged participants' level of anticipated respect from the respective veg*n, their liking of the target, their self-regard and their interest in meat-free diets. By doing so, we aimed to test whether prior findings would replicate. Previous work

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[1] Please note that the manipulation content described in this table refers to the specific written text used in study 2, because the script read by the address in Study 1 was specifically designed to be appropriate for speech rather than for writing. We aimed for the content to be as similar as possible across studies.

informs us that perceived judgment should threaten omnivores' self-regard, undermines anticipated respect, a veg*n's likeability (Minson & Monin, 2012; Monin et al., 2008; O'Connor & Monin, 2016), and discourage omnivores from emulating the veg*n's example (e.g. Zane et al., 2016).

2.2.1 Participants

Using Qualtrics, we created a link to an online survey, and recruited participants from the participant recruitment platform Prolific. Participants were blind to the hypotheses. Data were collected on the 17th of June, 2021. 600 Participants started the survey used. The Institutional Committee for Ethical Review of Projects of the Faculty of Economics and Business (Universitat Pompeu Fabra) provided approval for this study. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants.

2.2.2 Materials and procedure

As a cover story, we informed participants that we were interested in understanding what type of changes people have made over the lockdown that was enforced in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, we explained that we were interested in how people form impressions of others based on what personal changes another person shares to have made over the lockdown.

In support of our cover story, we first asked participants to indicate from a list of activities (e.g. "reading/learning", "trying out vegetarian/vegan recipes") whether and to what extent they have engaged in those activities over the lockdown that was enforced in light of the pandemic COVID-19 compared to before.

Manipulation – Target exposure. Next, participants were told that they would be presented with a video recording from an ostensible 'previous participant' who had been instructed to explain what personal changes they had made during the lockdown and why they had made such changes. In reality, a Dutch amateur actress volunteered to record 4 videos exclusively for our research purpose.

The actress first explained: "*I learned to play poker so I could play with my roommates, I started painting, and tried out some new recipes. Quite a few vegetarian ones actually, so I think the biggest change is that I actually stopped eating meat.*" Following general introduction to their decision to stop consuming meat, the video content differed based on the way in which the veg*n justified their decision to have stopped consuming meat.

We randomly assigned participants to one of 4 videos. Participants either watched a video of a veg*n explaining to have stopped eating meat because they discovered 'how much they preferred cooking with vegetables' (i.e. morally-neutral veg*n[2]) or because of their concern for 'animal cruelty' (i.e. morally-motivated veg*n[3]; see Table 1 for manipulation content, and Figure 1 for an example). The videos of the morally-motivated veg*n subsequently varied in whether the script ended with a statement of (1)

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[2] video morally-neutral veg*n: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xx4IN5okIaE
[3] video morally-motivated veg*n: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0DWfmj6UZDs

self-compassion versus (2) self-judgment. The morally-motivated & self-compassionate veg*n[4] explained to 'not beat herself up for eating meat in the past because she grew up eating meat and therefore, never questioned it before'. The morally-motivated & self-judgmental veg*n[5] claimed to still, to this day, not to understand why she had not 'connected the dots before, for which she feels bad about and made a firm resolution to not make the same mistake of eating meat again'.
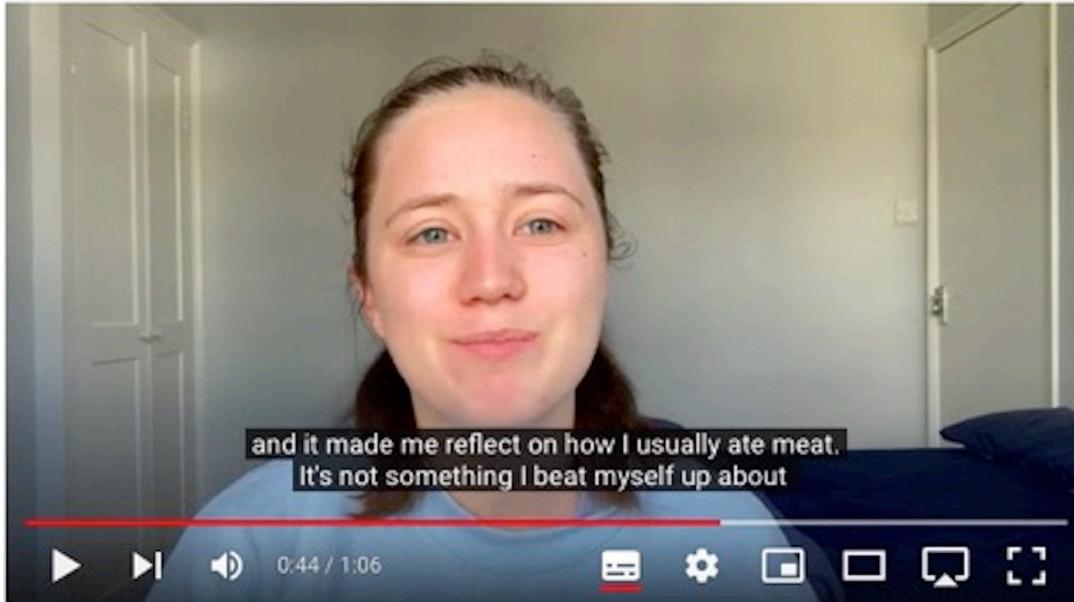
Figure 1. Manipulation material: 'morally motivated & self-compassionate veg*n'

Attention checks. After watching the video, all participants completed three separate attention checks. We first asked them which personal change the person featured in the video recording had made (i.e. 'stopped eating meat' as opposed to e.g. 'stopped consuming alcohol' or 'watching series/movies'), why they made the change (i.e. morally-neutral: 'discovered they like cooking with vegetables better'; morally-motivated: 'animal welfare concern' as opposed to 'health reasons' and the option 'didn't specify'). We excluded participants who misremembered what personal change the target in the video explained to have made, and/or the reason underlying that change from our analyses.

Manipulation check – Perceived self-judgment. In order to explore the degree to which omnivores anticipate the veg*n to judge their past meat-eating self, and whether our manipulation of signaling self-compassion proved successful, we asked participants to indicate how they perceived the participant featured in the video to feel about themselves for having consumed meat in the past (1= *very bad*; 7= *very much at peace; reverse-coded; M* = 4.64, *SD* = 1.95).

Target liking. Next, participants reported how likeable they perceived the target to be ranging (1= *very unlikeable*; 7= *very likeable; M* = 5.72, *SD* = 1.15).

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[4] video morally-motivated & self-compassionate veg*n:https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2lujVezhvbY
[5] video morally-motivated & self-judgmental veg*n: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gbOikerdGqc

Self-regard. Participants completed a measure of self-regard (adapted from Cramwinckel et al., 2013). Specifically, we asked participants to report to what extent they felt happy with themselves, satisfied with themselves, good, happy, comfortable, confident, determined, disappointed with themselves (reverse-coded), annoyed with themselves (reverse-coded), disgusted with themselves (reverse-coded), angry with themselves (reverse-coded), dissatisfied with themselves (reverse- coded), self-critical (reverse-coded), guilty (reverse-coded), and defective in some way (reverse-coded; 1= *totally not* applicable; 7= *totally* applicable). Answers to these questions were averaged to form one scale ($\alpha = 0.94$, $M = 4.92$, $SD = 1.16$).

Dependent variable – Perceived other-judgment. Then, for our main variable of interest, we measured the extent to which participants perceived the respective veg*n to be other-judgmental (adapted from Minson & Monin, 2012; Monin et al., 2008). Here, participants are asked: "If the participant in the video saw what I normally eat, he/she would think I am...,", and "If people like the participant in the video saw what I normally eat, they would think I am..." using a response on a 7-point scale ranging from (1) 'extremely immoral' to (7) 'extremely moral'. These two items formed a reliable scale for perceived other-judgment ($\alpha = 0.85$, $M = 4.55$, $SD = 1.12$; *reverse-coded*).

Anticipated respect. Participants also indicated to what extent they expected the respective veg*n to respect them as a person (1= *despise a great deal*; 7= *respect a great deal; M = 4.98, SD = 1.28*).

Inspiration. In order to gauge the extent to which a veg*n is capable at inspiring omnivores to reduce their meat-intake based on the way in which a veg*n presents their past personal choice to exclude meat, we asked participants how likely they would be to participate in the 'ProVeg Veggie Challenge[6]' (international food awareness organization that provides people with a supporting platform to accomplish a Veggie challenge, e.g. eating vegetarian food for 30 days; 1= *very unlikely*; 7= *very likely; M = 4.51, SD = 2.10*). In order to make the purpose of our study less obvious, and thus, to minimize response biases, we also asked participants on the same response-format to report how likely they were to participate in an 'Alcohol Experiment[7]' (challenge to abstain from alcohol for 30 days*; M = 3.77, SD = 2.47*) and a 'Digital Detox Challenge[8]' (challenge to minimize unnecessary technology use for 30 days*; M = 3.41, SD = 2.05*).

Own meat consumption. Finally, in order to assess participants' current level of meat consumption, and to identify our main sample of interest (i.e. omnivores), we asked participants how often they ate meat (1= *never; 7= every day; M = 5.10, SD = 1.44*). Participants who indicated to never eat meat were excluded from our analysis.

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[6] https://proveg.com/veggie-challenge/
[7] https://learn.thisnakedmind.com/the-alcohol-experiment-registration.
[8] https://hellobrownlow.com/2019/10/01/best-digital-detox-30-day-challenge/

2.2.3 Results study 1

From the 600 participants that started the survey, 9 did not finish, 19 spent less time watching the video than its duration, and 77 failed at least one manipulation check that asked what personal change the target had made and why. These participants were excluded. Given that we are particularly interested in the responses of participants who eat meat, we additionally excluded 37 veg*n participants – those who indicated currently to never eat meat. Hence, 456 participants were included in the analysis. Next, we will focus our analysis on whether our manipulation of signaling self-compassion was successful, and on the main effects of the veg*n target type onto perceptions of other-judgment (see Figure 2). As the other variables do not pertain to our hypotheses, the results are not discussed below, but instead are their descriptive statistics included in Table 2[9].

Table 2

Means and standard deviations of items by target in Study 1

Item	Morally-neutral veg*n	Morally-motivated veg*n	Morally-motivated & Self-judgmental veg*n	Morally-motivated & Self-compassionate veg*n
	($n = 112$)	($n = 117$)	($n = 110$)	($n = 117$)
Perceived Self-judgment	3.26 (1.54)[a]	5.37 (1.56)[b]	5.98 (1.55)[c]	3.97 (1.83)[d]
Target Liking	5.98 (.90)[a]	5.79 (1.06)[a]	5.31 (1.425)[b]	5.79 (1.07)[a]
Self-regard	4.92 (1.13)[a]	4.98 (1.08)[a]	5.02 (1.26)[a]	4.77 (1.17)[a]
Respect	5.53 (1.06)[a]	4.97 (1.18)[b]	4.48 (1.31)[c]	4.94 (1.33)[b]
Inspiration	4.53 (1.99)[a]	4.57 (2.14)[a]	4.25 (2.16)[a]	4.68 (2.12)[a]

Note. Cells with different superscripts connote significantly different means at $p < .05$ using post-hoc pairwise

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[9] Exploratory results. In parallel with participants' perceptions of other-judgment, participants perceived a morally-motivated veg*n to respect them less as a person, compared to a morally-neutral veg*n ($p = .004$, 95% CI [-.97, -.13]; see Table 2). Participants expected similar levels of respect from a self-compassionate veg*n as well as a morally-motivated veg*n ($p = .997$), and expected a morally-motivated veg*n to respect them the least when confronted with a self-judgmental veg*n ($p = .014$, 95% CI [-.91, -.07]). Inconsistent with prior research, however, for likeability, it did not matter whether the veg*n provided morally-neutral or morally-motivated reasons to stop consuming meat: participants took an equal liking to a morally-neutral veg*n and a morally-motivated veg*n ($p = .591$). Moreover, the way in which a self-declared veg*n elaborates on their decision to refrain from eating meat did not affect participants' levels of self-regard ($F_{(3,452)}= .978$, $p = .403$) nor their levels of inspiration to reduce their meat-intake ($F_{(3,452)}=.857$, $p =.463$); on average, participants reported to feel relatively content with themselves after their confrontation with the respective veg*n ($M = 4.92$, $SD = 1.16$) and indicated to be rather indifferent ($M = 4.51$, $SD = 2.10$) about their willingness to partake in the 'ProVeg Veggie challenge'.

Manipulation check – perceived self-judgment Independent samples t-test reveal that participants rated the self-compassionate veg*n to be less self-judgmental of their past meat-eating self than the morally-motivated veg*n ($p < .001$, 95% CI = [-1.95, -0.85], $d = .82$; see Table 2 for means per cell). This different suggests that our manipulation of self-compassion was successful.

Perceived other-judgment. In line with Hypothesis 1, an independent samples t-test informs us that participants perceived the morally-motivated veg*n ($M = 4.65$, $SD = 1.04$) to be more other-judgmental than a morally-neutral veg*n ($M = 4.06$, $SD = 1.02$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-.95, -.22], $d = .60$; see Figure 2). Participants perceived a self-judgmental veg*n ($M = 5.02$, $SD = 1.14$) to be more other-judgmental compared to a morally-motivated veg*n ($p = .05$, 95% CI [-.74, -.00], $d = .34$). Though a significant difference, this difference is very small, suggesting that a self-judgmental veg*n confirms omnivores' gut feeling: that the morally-motivated veg*n disapproves of their meat-consumption and judges them as a person by extension.

In spite of the fact that our self-compassion manipulation was successful, participants perceived a self-compassionate veg*n ($M = 4.49$, $SD = 1.09$) to be just as much judgmental as a morally-motivated veg*n ($p = .654$).
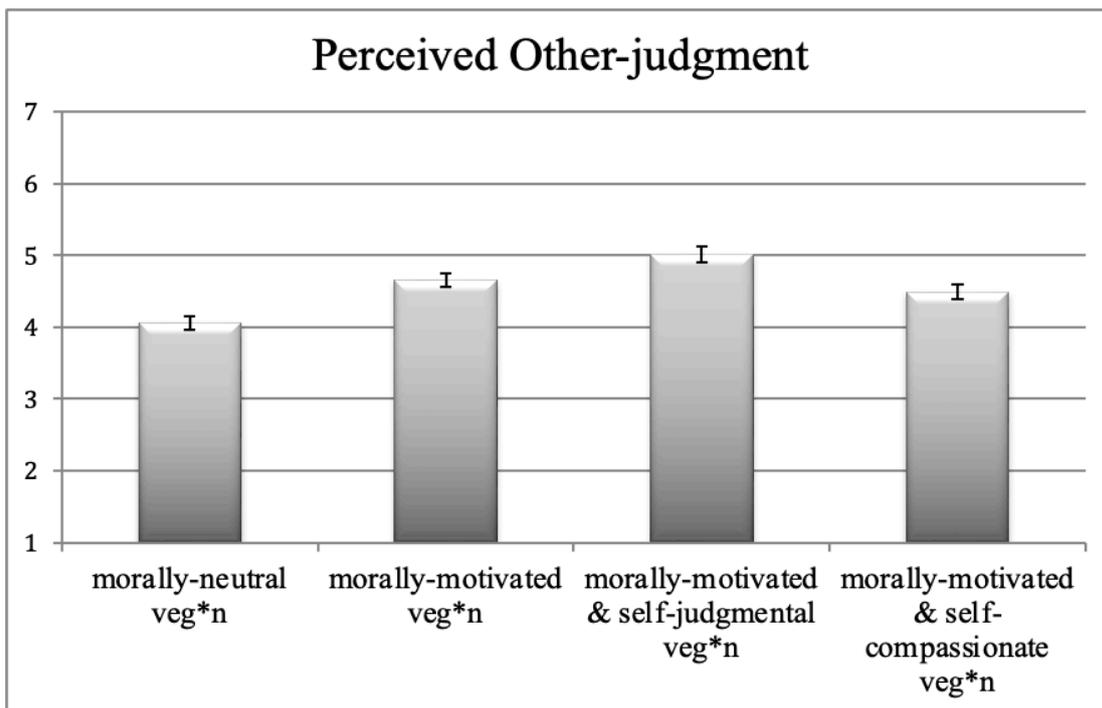
Figure 2. Omnivores remain to perceive a morally-motivated veg*n as judgmental, *regardless* of the veg*n's signal of self-compassion. Error bars denote 95% confidence intervals.

2.2.4 Follow-up Analyses

We find no evidence for Hypothesis 2: merely communicating a non-judgmental perspective over one's past meat-eating self may not be enough to pre-empt the perception that veg*ns would be judgmental. In other words, signaling self-compassion did not seem powerful enough to overthrow pre-existing assumptions about morally-motivated veg*ns being judgmental. Our theory dictates that perceived judgment is a projection made by omnivores: those who eat more meat should expect more judgment. To test this cause directly, we looked at participants' own level of meat consumption: a larger deviation (i.e. higher level of own meat consumption) from the veg*n's moral standard (i.e. excluding meat from diet) implies a greater upward moral comparison. Subsequently, a greater upward moral comparison should, via projection manifest in larger perceptions of other-judgment.

Indeed, across all three morally-motivated veg*n conditions, a regression analysis informs us that participants perceive the veg*n to be more other-judgmental when they themselves consume more meat ($F(1,342)= 47.78$, $p < .001$, $\beta = .27$), suggesting that omnivores' perceptions of morally-motivated veg*ns being other-judgmental is a direct outcome of moral comparison.

Interestingly, a multiple regression analysis ($R^2 = .12$, $F(2,231) = 15.31$, $p < .001$) further revealed that participants' own level of meat consumption ($\beta = .334$, $p < .001$) plays a more dominant role in predicting perceived other-judgment than whether or not the veg*n complements their moral motivation with a signal of self-compassion ($\beta = -.081$, $p = .191$)[10]. In other words, it matters more whether and how much participants consume meat in predicting the extent to which they feel judged by a morally-motivated veg*n, than whether or not the veg*n signals compassion.

2.2.5 Discussion

So far, the results demonstrate that our manipulation of signaling self-compassion appeared to be successful: participants perceived the self-compassionate to be less self-judgmental of their past meat-eating self compared to a morally-motivated veg*n. However, successfully conveying a compassionate outlook on one's past meat-eating self did not appear to make omnivores feel exonerated from moral judgment. Instead, omnivores still rated a morally-motivated veg*n to be judgmental of them, in spite of the veg*n's signal of self-compassion.

Considering our observation that omnivores' own level of meat consumption takes the upper hand in determining the extent to which they perceived the morally-motivated veg*n to be other-judgmental, *regardless* of the veg*n's signal of self-compassion, suggests that this perception may be mainly a product of their own projection.

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[10] Morally-motivated veg*n coded as '0' and the morally-motivated & self-compassionate veg*n coded as '1'.

2.3 Study 2

We find that signaling self-compassion, although effective in conveying that a veg*n is not self-judgmental, did not abate concerns among omnivores that the veg*n would be other-judgmental. It is possible that this effect is caused by the fact that perceived judgment is mainly in the eye of the beholder, rather than due to the choice of words: those who ate meat more frequently perceived the veg*n to be more judgmental of them.

Another possibility, however, is that signaling self-compassion simply did not help to lower perceptions of other-judgment, given that those perceptions were low to begin with: participants rated our actress, across all conditions, as quite likeable and not likely to be judgmental (see Figure 1). Specifically, when the actress merely articulated moral motivations, participants may not have felt intimidated by her modesty and sympathetic appearance, which may explain why they reported relatively low and similar levels of judgment from her as well as in the case where she coupled her moral principles with a self-compassionate narrative.

The second study therefore employed a different type of manipulation material, where the actress' appearance would have no influence. Specifically, we decided to employ text-based material only instead: the words read by the actress in Study 1 were now presented in hand-written text format (see Table 1 and Figure 3 for an example).

Question 3. Please describe below in 1-6 sentences what personal changes you have made during the lockdowns that was enforced in light of the pandemic COVID-19, and why you have made such changes if applicable.

I learned to play poker so I could play with my roommates, I started painting, and tried out some new recipes. Quite a few vegetarian ones actually, so I think the biggest change is that I actually stopped eating meat. Trying out the vegetarian meals really got me thinking about the meat industry and how sad it is what actually happens to the animals. It just made me feel really uncomfortable to continue eating meat. That I usually ate meat in the past is not something I beat myself up about because it's something I grew up with and it was just so normal that I never questioned it, like I think is the case for most people.

Figure 3. Manipulation material: 'morally motivated & self-compassionate veg*n'

2.3.1 Participants

Using Qualtrics, we created a link to each online survey, and recruited participants from the participant recruitment platform Prolific. Participants were blind to the hypotheses. Data were collected on the 5th of November, 2021. 600 Participants started the survey. The Institutional Committee for Ethical Review of Projects of the Faculty of Economics and Business (Universitat Pompeu Fabra) provided approval for this research. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants.

2.3.2 Materials and procedure

The procedure and materials used for Study 2 were identical to that of Study 1: participants again were exposed to one of four conditions, in which a supposedly 'previous participant' explained why they had stopped eating meat over the lockdown. We again included a morally neutral (1), morally motivated (2), morally motivated & self-compassionate (3) and a morally motivated & self-judgmental veg*n (4; Please see Table 1). Using the same scale as in Study 1, we measured to what extent participants perceived the veg*n to be other-judgmental. Study 2 was different of a few dimensions, as explained below. For our cover story, we informed participants that we were interested in understanding 'people's impression of another person based on the other person's written text, how people feel while reading others' written text and to what extent the writing is expressive of its content (see Figure 3 for example).

Discomfort. As an alternative proxy for experienced threat to self-regard, participants completed a measure of discomfort (Rothgerber, 2014; study 5). Specifically, we asked participants to report how much they experienced 8 emotions while reading the target's text (1= *not at all*; 7= *a great deal*). Four of the emotions were distracters ('sadness', 'excitement', 'pleasure', and 'boredom'); the four emotions relating to possible threat-induced discomfort included 'anxiety', 'nervousness', 'tension', and 'discomfort'. These items were combined into a single measure of discomfort (α = 0.82, M = 2.03, SD = 1.25).

Moral disengagement. Instead of measuring participants' willingness to reduce their meat-intake, we included a less direct measure of inspiration. Specifically, participants completed a measure of moral disengagement (Rothgerber, 2014; study 3), which measures participants' attitudes towards their perceived choice in eating meat and the level of suffering imposed onto animals used for meat-consumption (Loughnan, Haslam and Bastian, 2010; Bastian, Loughnan, Haslam, and Radke, 2012). Participants reported to what degree they denied animal pain by means of indicating how much they agreed with the statements: "Animals don't really suffer when being raised and killed for meat," "Animals do *not* feel pain the same way humans do," and "Meat is processed so that animal pain and discomfort is minimized and avoided" (1= *strongly disagree*; 7= *strongly agree*; α = 0.71, M = 2.56, SD = 1.32). Additionally participants indicated to what degree they perceived eating meat as a choice rather than a necessity, by means of indicating to what degree they agreed with the statements: "Meat is essential for strong muscles," "We need the protein we can only get in meat for healthy development," and "We need meat for a healthy diet" (1= *strongly disagree*; 7= *strongly agree;* α = 0.85, M = 3.91, SD = 1.68).

2.3.3 Results study 2

From the 600 participants that started the survey, 6 did not finish, 128 failed at least one of the manipulation checks that asked what personal change the target had made and why and 20 were excluded from analysis because they reported never to eat meat. Ultimately, 446 participants were included in the analysis. Just like in Study 1, we will focus our analysis on whether our manipulation of signaling self-compassion worked, and on the main effects of the type of veg*n onto perceptions of other-judgment (see

Figure 4). Considering that the other variables do not pertain to our hypotheses, the results are not discussed below, but instead are their descriptive statistics included in Table 3[11].

Comparing the overall means of perceived other-judgment from Study 1 and 2 (see Figures 2 and 4), it seems that our switch to text-based material had the intended effect: overall, participants perceived a veg*n to be more judgmental in Study 2. This might suggest that the lower ratings observed prior in Study 1 may have been in part due to the sympathetic appearance of our actress featured in the videos used in Study 1.

Table 3

Means and standard deviations of items by target in Study 2

Item	Morally-neutral veg*n (n = 118)	Morally-motivated veg*n (n = 108)	Morally-motivated & Self-judgmental veg*n (n = 111)	Morally-motivated & Self-compassionate veg*n (n = 109)
Perceived Self-judgment	3.11 (1.60)[a]	5.97 (1.16)[b]	6.66 (0.77)[c]	3.19 (2.29)[a]
Target Liking	5.75 (1.27)[a]	5.52 (1.08)[a,b]	5.37 (1.27)[a,b]	5.14 (1.42)[b]
Discomfort	1.47 (.93)[a]	2.20 (1.24)[b]	2.05 (1.21)[b]	2.45 (1.38)[b]
Respect	5.43 (1.28)[a]	4.24 (1.50)[a]	4.95 (1.59)[b]	3.70 (1.61)[c]
Moral Disengagement	3.12 (1.14)[a]	3.35 (1.25)[a]	3.33 (1.28)[a]	3.14 (1.33)[a]

Note. Cells with different superscripts connote significantly different means at $p < .05$ using post-hoc pairwise

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[11] Exploratory results. In line with participants' levels of perceived judgment, participants anticipated lower levels of respect from a morally-motivated veg*n compared to a morally-neutral veg*n ($p < .001$, 95% CI [-1.71, -.68]). However, unlike in study 1, participants now reported to anticipate greater levels of respect from a self-compassionate veg*n compared to a morally-motivated veg*n ($p = .003$, 95% CI [.19, 1.24]). In fact, participants anticipated similar levels of respect from a self-compassionate veg*n as from a morally-neutral veg*n ($p = .077$), suggesting that signalling self-compassion aided a morally-motivated veg*n to convey respect towards omnivores in spite of being perceived as judging their diet. Consistent with prior research, we found that a morally-motivated veg*n aroused higher levels of discomfort in participants compared to a morally-neutral veg*n ($p < .001$, 95% CI [.69, 1.93]). Contrary to past research, however, we again find that participants rated a morally-motivated veg*n as just as likeable as a morally-neutral veg*n ($p = .50$), even though participants did anticipate judgment and lower levels of respect from a morally-motivated veg*n. Moreover, participants' experience of discomfort and perceptions of judgment did not appear to trigger the need to defend their diet by means of moral disengagement. On average, participants were readily able to admit that animals do suffer ($M = 2.56$, $SD = 1.32$), which simultaneously shows participants being in agreement with the moral principle endorsed by the veg*n, and that eating meat concerns rather a personal choice than a vital necessity for human functioning ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 1.68$).

Manipulation check – perceived self-judgment. As in Study, 1 the results of an independent samples t-test show that participants perceived the self-compassionate veg*n to be less self-judgmental than the morally-motivated veg*n ($p < .001$, 95% CI [-3.33, -2.23], $d = 1.53$; see Table 3 for means per cell). In fact, participants viewed a self-compassionate veg*n to be lacking just as much self-judgment as a morally-neutral veg*n ($p = .979$). Thus, our text-based manipulation of self-compassion proved effective.

Perceived other-judgment. Consistent with Study 1, participants perceived the morally-motivated veg*n ($M = 5.07$, $SD = 1.37$) to be more other-judgmental than the morally-neutral veg*n ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 1.30$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.63, 1.54], $d = .82$; see Figure 4). Participants attributed somewhat higher perceptions of other-judgment to the self-judgmental veg*n ($M = 5.68$, $SD = 1.18$) than to the morally-motivated veg*n ($p = .003$, 95% CI [1.56, 1.07]), $d = .48$).

In spite of successfully conveying self-compassion, participants still perceived the self-compassionate veg*n ($M = 4.77$, $SD = 1.42$) to be just as much judgmental as the morally-motivated veg*n ($p = .327$).
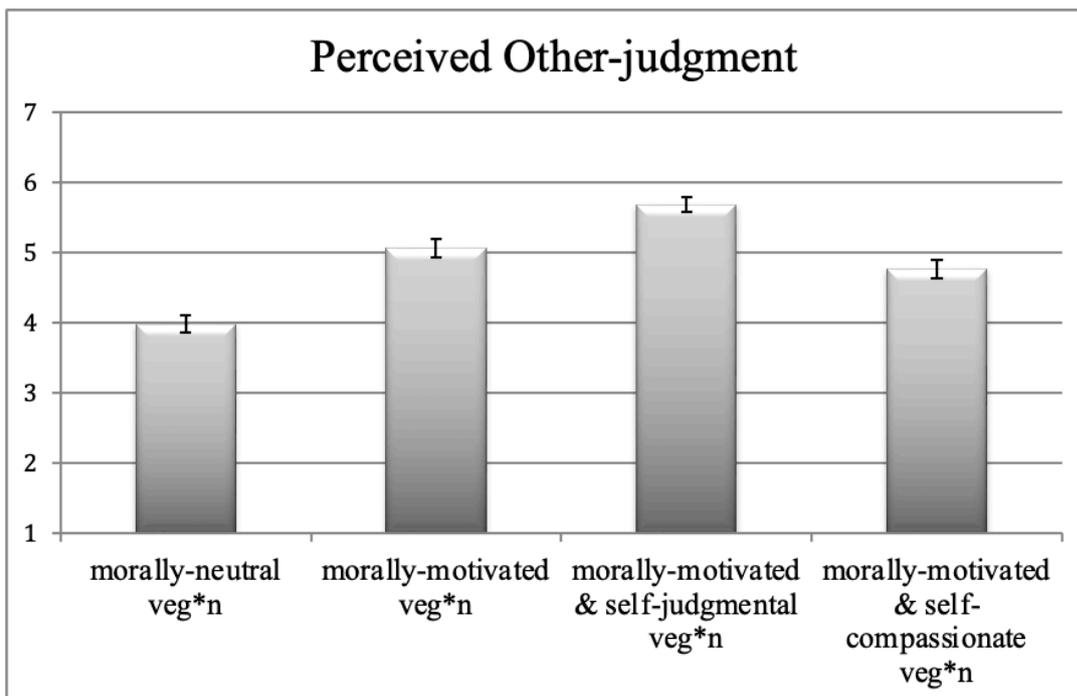
**Figure 4.** Omnivores spontaneously assume a morally-motivated veg*n to be other-judgmental, *regardless* of perceiving them as less self-judgmental of their past meat-eating self. Error bars denote 95% confidence intervals.

2.3.4 Follow-up Analyses

We repeated the same follow-up analyses as in Study 1 in order to explore to what extent perceptions of other-judgment are likely to reflect projection, rather than being

the product of a morally-motivated veg*n's choice of words. As before, a regression analysis shows that across conditions that feature a morally motivated veg*n, participants' level of own meat-consumption strengthens the degree to which they perceived the veg*n to be other-judgmental ($F(1,326)= 39.17$, $p < .001$, $\beta = .317$).

Results of a multiple regression analysis ($R^2 = .15$, $F(2,214) = 18.20$, $p < .001$) reveal that participants' own level of meat consumption ($\beta = .366$, 95% CI [.235, .478], $p < .001$) had a more decisive influence on perceived other-judgment than whether or not the morally-motivated veg*n signaled self-compassion ($\beta = -.136$, 95% CI [-.730, -.032], $p = .033$). These results again suggest that perceptions of other-judgment are strongly driven by a moral comparison process, and are not so much the result of the morally-motivated veg*n's signal of self-compassion.

2.3.5 Discussion

Consistent with the results of study 1, using a different format that increased overall levels of perceived judgment (i.e. text-based instead of video-based), we again find that morally-motivated veg*ns remain being perceived as other-judgmental, in spite of successfully conveying self-compassion.

The fact that omnivores' own level of meat-consumption has a stronger influence on the extent to which they perceive a morally-motivated veg*n as other-judgmental than the veg*n's signal of self-compassion, again suggests that perceptions of other-judgment may be more likely to capture omnivores' own projection rather than the result of what the veg*n actually communicates.

2.4 General discussion

"*No one can make you feel inferior without your consent*" - Eleanor Roosevelt (Blank, 2016). With this statement, she referred to the notion that individuals themselves may have the feeling of inferiority precisely because they view the other person as superior. We believe that this principle might ring specifically true within our context: omnivores may feel inferior and judged precisely because they *view* veg*ns as superior and in a position to judge.

Across two studies, we consistently find that, even though omnivores do interpret a veg*n's signal of self-compassion to meaning that the veg*n went easy on themselves for past meat consumption, they do not to feel exonerated from judgment themselves by the veg*n. Instead, merely communicating one's moral motivation to avoid eating meat triggers omnivores - especially those more heavily committed to eating meat - to believe that veg*ns accuse anyone else consuming meat of poor moral character.

Taken together, we believe that our findings provide evidence for the notion that omnivores likely project their own mental state onto veg*ns: by drawing an upward moral comparison between their own consumption behavior and the veg*n's, omnivores feel in an inferior position and the 'appropriate' target of judgment, from which they can only conclude that the rebel is in a superior position endowed with the leverage to

judge. This suggests that individuals are deeply conditioned to assess their worthiness based on social comparisons, making them specifically sensitive to judgments on their character whenever faced with a morally outperforming other - even if that judgment merely lies in the eye of the beholder themselves.

2.4.1 Future research

The lessons we draw are based on the particular case of veg*ns versus omnivores, but the same lessons may apply to a broader context. Defensive responses are a common reaction to individuals who depart from mainstream practices based on moral grounds, i.e. 'moral rebels' (Bolderdijk et al., 2018; Monin, 2007; Monin et al., 2008; O'Connor & Monin, 2016; Zane et al., 2016), such as individuals who stand up to racism (Monin et al., 2008; O'Connor & Monin, 2016), individuals who refuse to remain ignorant about unethical production standards (Zane et al., 2016), and individuals who promote more environmentally-friendly packaging procedures (Bolderdijk et al., 2018).

Our implications are quite disheartening for anyone merely wanting to behave in ways that feels right to them and be openly honest about it, and for those who additionally wish to see their moral principles adopted by others: it appears that no matter how a rebel sugar-coats their morally-motivated decision to refuse to go along with the current norm, others (especially those more committed to the morally questionable behavior in question) may still perceive judgment and thus take offense. Therefore, our recommendations for future research, as discussed next, apply to the broader context of moral rebels and their audience, rather than exclusively to the context of veg*ns interacting with omnivores.

We found no evidence that signaling self-compassion can prevent perceived judgment. But that does not mean that words have no impact. Moral rebels may be able to pre-empt perceptions of judgment by communicating that their own morally-motivated behavioral change (e.g. their switch to a meat-free diet, or their decision to boycott flights) is not conclusive and allows some room for imperfections; (e.g. mention that one still has the occasional temptation to eat meat, or has trouble resisting cheap flight tickets for a fun weekend get-away). In line with this, Weiper and Vonk (2021) found that veg*ns who communicate about their meat-free diet as being dynamic rather than static (i.e. as a continuum rather than a dichotomy, an ongoing process rather than the result of having found the only 'right' answer, and with doubt rather than with confidence), were perceived as less judgmental and arrogant (Weiper & Vonk, 2021). Another way in which moral rebels could pre-empt judgment, is by communicating that they consider moral convictions to be personal and that they differ over individuals. For example, within the domain of health, Howe and Monin (2017) demonstrated that overweight patients who normally feared devaluation from fitness-focused physicians no longer did so when the same physician claimed health to be "personal and multifaceted" (in effect expressing non-judgment).

While both strategies proved effective in assuaging perceived judgment, we argue that such downplaying may marginalize the morally troublesome nature of those practices and thereby undermine others' sense of urgency and motivation for change (for a review, see: Brouwer et al., 2022). So instead of finding ways for moral rebels to dilute

their message, we recommend future research to redirect its focus to the *observer*, instead of the rebel: it may be fruitful to start identifying *which* observers are less likely to take offense, and *when* observers may be less likely to do so.

Self-compassion as a trait in observers, or as an intervention to be applied over observers, seems a prime candidate for future research to explore, as it may buffer against perceptions of judgment (e.g. Leary, Tate, Adams, Allen, & Hancock, 2007; Neff & Vonk, 2009). Research shows that self-compassionate individuals who are confronted with a personal shortcoming are less likely to engage in defensive and self-serving responses such as boosting their self-worth by putting others down or outperforming others (Neff & Vonk, 2009). They are also less likely to interpret others' neutral feedback as negative such that they hold more realistic self-appraisals (Leary et al., 2007), and are rather more likely to acknowledge and rectify mistakes and willing to improve themselves (Breines & Chen, 2012). Therefore, we propose that observers higher in trait self-compassion or those who have received a self-compassion induction will show greater resilience and constructive responses to their confrontation with a moral rebel.

Moreover, prior research documenting observers' responses to moral rebels has exclusively documented observers' responses to hypothetical rebels, i.e. strangers. Research informs us that people are particularly sensitive to judgments on their character, and therefore, their perceived worthiness is particularly vulnerable, when social acceptance is uncertain (like in the case of strangers; Wenzel et al., 2020). Therefore, we suggest that observers may feel more psychologically safe when confronted with a moral rebel who has formerly secured them of social acceptance – when the moral rebel is a friend or family member. Specifically, defensive reactance may be less likely when the moral rebel is a particular person whom the observer perceives to hold them in *unconditional positive regard* (e.g. a family member or close friend rather than a stranger or acquantaince; Rogers, 1959; Sheldon & Kasser, 2008). Unconditional positive regard refers to the acceptance and support of a person regardless of what the person says or does (Rogers, 1959). Thus, observers may be less likely to interpret a rebel's moral motivation to refrain from a behavior the observer shows as a signal of judgment and devaluation of their character when they feel secured in the knowledge that the rebel values them as a person *regardless* of their perceived imperfections. Therefore, we welcome future research that impacts how people respond to moral rebels that are, for instance, friends or family members.

2.4.2 Conclusion

Omnivores often spontaneously assume that morally-motivated veg*ns would judge them, and anticipation of this judgment may prevent plant-based diets from diffusing widely through society.

Our data suggest that the moral judgment observers spontaneously infer from a rebel's moral persuasion to make different choices, is hard to mitigate with words alone, and may be mainly borne out of observers' projection of their own mental state: placing oneself in the moral rebel's shoes, observers would judge their own choices and character as less morally adequate and assume moral rebels to share that view.

3. DOING 'GOOD' WITHOUT FEELING IMMORAL

Abstract

Moral rebels - individuals who refuse to conform to majority practices based on moral objections, such as those refusing to eat meat in objection to animal suffering - appear to inspire little behavior change in members of the majority. If anything, their moral position often elicits defensiveness in others. Anticipating such defensive responses, rebels may be tempted to cover up moral arguments for their choices, and use morally neutral ones instead. However, we argue and demonstrate that such moral downplaying can undermine rebels' influence on others, precisely because articulating moral objections can trigger guilt in observers – an emotion that can fuel change of behavior. However, the influence of rebels' moral arguments on others may not always manifest in obvious ways. Observers who experience guilt may be hesitant to change their behavior immediately, because doing so would equate to admitting that they were morally wrong all along. Instead, we propose that observers resort to moral compensation, i.e. acting ethically in an alternative moral domain. Across 2 studies we demonstrate that rebels indeed elicit guilt in observers when they present moral as opposed to neutral justifications. Rebel-induced guilt does not manifest itself in observers directly modifying their behavior in the same domain (Study 1), it does manifest itself in the psychologically 'safer' form of moral compensation (Study 2). We believe that our findings shed light on the importance for rebels to keep articulating the moral imperative for change, and advance our understanding of why a lack of immediate change should not be mistaken for a lack of influence.

Keywords: *moral rebels, guilt, behavior change, moral compensation, social change*

3.1 Introduction

Jane and Brian are out for lunch. Brian recommends Jane to join him in ordering the restaurants' infamous beef burger. Jane, however, already had her eye on the plant-based burger, as she considers it morally troublesome to eat beef, given its environmental impact. In declining Brian's recommendation, Jane feels hesitant to share her true reasons with Brian. She foresees making Brian feel uncomfortable by sharing her moral objections to beef. Besides, she figures it would not change Brian's mind about ordering the beef burger anyway. So she decides to opt for peace: rather than bringing up the environmental impact of beef, she tells Brian she prefers the plant-based burger because she simply doesn't like the taste of meat. Is Jane correct that she would not have any impact on Brian if she would voice her true, moral objections?

Current literature on moral do-gooder derogation suggests that the likely answer to this question is: yes, Jane's intuition is valid that sharing her moral concerns about the status quo would not make Brian change his order of the beef burger. Indeed, prior studies commonly find that moral rebels (i.e., individuals refusing to conform to majority

practices based on moral objections), like Jane, often exert little influence in making majority members change their current practices, and if anything, are commonly met with opposition and defensive responses instead (Bolderdijk et al., 2018; Cramwinckel et al., 2013; Monin et al., 2008; Zane et al., 2016).

However, just because observers typically do not immediately change their behavior in response to a moral does not mean that rebels create no positive impact at all (Moscovici, 1980; Moscovici & Zavalloni, 1969; Wood et al., 1994). Specifically, while we agree that Jane's communication of her environmental values would likely not influence Brian to change his mind about the beef burger, we argue that rebels like Jane may still have an impact: the discomfort her moral arguments raises in Brian can plant the seed of doubt in Brian whether eating beef is the morally adequate choice (Brouwer et al., 2022), and may thus accommodate Brian's motivation to do 'good' in another moral domain (Ding et al., 2016). Thus, Jane would lose an opportunity to inspire change in others if she were to keep the moral reasons to her meat-free diet to herself.

In sum, the present paper aims to demonstrate *why* moral rebels are more effective agents of change when, instead of downplaying their moral objections to the status quo, they keep articulating their moral objections to the status quo. We do so by showing *how* their moral message - albeit not in the apparent form of making others change their current choices - does create a positive impact on others.

3.1.1 Morally motivated rebels elicit guilt in others

The belief that one is a good, and moral person is an important aspect to most people's self-view and general wellbeing (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Avison & Rosenberg, 1981; Shirk & Allport, 1957). In order to assess the accuracy of their moral self-image, most people tend to compare themselves with others whom they consider to share similar beliefs (i.e., what one values) and capabilities (i.e., one's competencies; Festinger, 1954; Monin, 2007).

The choices made by moral rebels, however, incidentally provide their observers with an unwanted reality check. Being able to directly compare one's choices to those made by a moral rebel, may make observers question the moral appropriateness of their own behavior (Ellemers, 2017). Importantly, realizing the negative and harmful implications of one's choices can elicit the feeling of *guilt* (Tangney, 1990; Zhong & Liljenquist, 2006). Coming back to our opening example; imagine Brian agrees with Jane's environmental stewardship and Jane chooses to voice her moral objections to ordering a beef burger. Brian likely feels uncomfortable about his decision to order beef, because he experiences guilt over the environmentally harmful implications of his decision to order beef.

Thus, rebels may induce feelings of guilt in their observers, as their morally-motivated choices highlight the morally troublesome nature of others' everyday behaviors (Bolderdijk et al., 2018; Cramwinckel et al., 2013; Rothgerber, 2014). This implies that rebels are more likely to raise feelings of guilt among observers when they choose to publicly express (rather than downplay) their moral objections to the status quo. For instance, omnivores experienced greater discomfort over eating meat when they were

confronted with a vegetarian who provided moral justifications for their meat-free diet (e.g. animal welfare concern) instead of neutral reasons (e.g. dislike for the taste of meat or restrictions caused by allergies; Cramwinckel et al., 2013; Rothgerber, 2014): neutral justifications do not shed light on the morally questionable implications to eating meat. Formally put:

H1: Rebels are more likely to elicit the emotion of guilt in their observers when they provide moral as opposed to neutral justifications for their alternative choices.

3.1.2 Does rebel-induced guilt motivate change in behavior?

Guilt is an unpleasant emotional feeling that helps individuals realize they did something they privately deem morally wrong (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1994). Guilt can play a productive role in mobilizing behaviors aimed at making amends (Gino, Gu, & Zhong, 2009; Sheikh & Janoff-Bulman, 2010; Xu, Bègue, & Bushman, 2014), because it triggers the need to redeem oneself by means of demonstrating one's sense of moral adequacy (Bandura, 1999; De Groot & Steg, 2009; Schwartz, 1977). Thus, rebel-induced guilt could provide the necessary motivational fuel for people to change their current behavior (Bandura, 1999; Brouwer et al., 2022).

However, such constructive responses are not commonly documented in response to a moral rebels. Instead, literature on moral do-gooder derogation suggests that morally motivated rebels are unlikely to mobilize behavioral change in their observers, but rather, defensiveness (Bolderdijk et al., 2018; Cramwinckel et al., 2013; O'Connor & Monin, 2016; Zane et al., 2016). What specifically seems to stand in the way of observers translating rebel-induced guilt into changing the current behavior they feel guilty about?

We argue that observers who experience guilt may be hesitant to modify their behavior immediately, because doing so would equate to admitting that they were morally wrong all along. The idea of scoring below one's moral standards paints an unflattering image of oneself that people do not wish to see, let alone, acknowledge (Barkan, Ayal, & Ariely, 2015; Bastian, 2018; Festinger, 1993; Monin, 2007). Admitting that one has not lived to their own standards poses a threat to observers' moral self-worth (Fisher & Exline, 2010; Hall & Fincham, 2005; Loughnan et al., 2010; Woodyatt, Worthington, Wenzel, & Griffin, 2017b). Modifying one's earlier behavior would involve the recognition that one is a morally flawed person for having engaged in the behavior at all, which may prove a bridge too far for those who interpret their shortcomings as a mark of a 'bad' person.

In sum, we argue that self-defense mechanisms may stand in the way of observers translating guilt over past choices into revised actions. This barrier may prove especially high in cases where individuals' shortcomings pertain to longstanding and frequently performed behaviors, such as environmentally harmful behaviors (e.g. eating red meat, frequent car- and airtravel, unnecessary plastic use). Acknowledging the morally troublesome nature of such behaviors, and correcting for them would not only equal admitting to being morally inadequate today, but to having been morally inadequate *all*

along. This is specifically painful, because not only is it important to preserve the belief in being a good person, so too is it important to hold the belief one has always been a good person (Effron, Miller, & Monin, 2012; Ross, McFarland, & Fletcher, 1981; Shu & Gino, 2012).

In the opening example, for instance, imagine Brian grew up eating meat and has done so for as long as he can remember. The unflattering comparison Brian draws with Jane shakes his confidence in being a decent and harmless person he liked to believe to be, coloring him as a 'lesser' person. The idea that his meat-based choice marks him as morally inadequate, compounded by the alarming thought that his lifelong habit of eating meat might turn out to be a sign of a flawed character bears a psychological cost Brian cannot afford. These threatening implications fuel Brian's reluctance to swith his order of the beef burger to the plant-based burger: doing so would not only imply admitting being morally wrong for eating beef today, but that he has been morally wrong all along.

In sum, we argue that rebel-induced guilt *can* motivate observers to change their current behavior, but observers typically refrain from doing so in order to avoid a compromised moral self-image. Put formally:

H2: In spite of triggering more guilt, rebels are *not* more likely to influence observers to change their current behavior when providing moral as opposed to neutral justifications.

3.1.3 Rebel-induced guilt motivates moral compensation

However, we argue that a lack of influence in motivating observers to change their current choices does not mean that moral rebels have no influence at all. By articulating moral objections to mainstream behaviors, rebels may elicit guilt in observers who conform to such behaviors (H1). However, guilt is unlikely to manifest in observers changing their current practices, as that would equate to admitting they were morally wrong in the first place (H2). Yet, this option leaves guilt unaddressed.

As an alternative appealing outlet, we argue that rebel-induced guilt, instead, motivates observers to engage in *moral compensation*: demonstrating their sense of moral adequacy in an *alternative* moral domain (Barkan et al., 2015; Ding et al., 2016; Sachdeva, Iliev, & Medin, 2009; Shalvi, Gino, Barkan, & Ayal, 2015; Zhong & Liljenquist, 2006). Previous work has demonstrated that guilt can trigger people to make up for past transgressions by doing 'good' in another domain, such as volunteering to fill out more surveys after recalling times in which they violated personal values (Ding et al., 2016). Similarly, we argue that rebel-induced guilt can motivate observers to show their good virtue in another moral domain, as doing so allows observers to redeem their moral worth without having to admit they were morally wrong previously.

Applying our reasoning to the case of Brian: while Brian would refuse to revise his choice and now opt for a plant-based burger, the suddenly bittersweet taste of his beef burger prompts Brian to be extra generous in his tips for the waiter, or, for instance, makes him more likely to extend an extra helping hand on one of his colleague's project.

In sum, we hypothesize that rebel-induced feelings of guilt can motivate observers to change their previous behavior, but is rather more likely to be visible in alternative forms of moral compensatory behaviors:

H3: Rebels are more likely to elicit moral behavior in an alternative domain than the one in which guilt is triggered (i.e. moral compensation) when providing moral as opposed to neutral justifications.

3.1.4 The current research

The present research explores whether rebels exert more influence on others who engage in majority practices when they do not downplay, but voice, their moral objections to the status quo. Specifically, we test whether rebels are more likely to elicit feelings of guilt among their observers when presenting moral as opposed to neutral justifications for their alternative choices (H1), and whether the resulting guilt indeed does not manifest in the visible form of observers immediately changing their current choices (H2) but in moral compensation instead (H3).

We tested our predictions across two studies. Participants who had just indicated to prefer eating meat (Study 1) or to travel by plane (Study 2) were confronted with a rebel: a fictitious other person who refused to eat meat (Study 1) or to travel by plane (Study 2). We systematically varied whether the rebel based their refusal on moral versus neutral justifications. We examined whether reading moral justifications evoked higher levels of guilt among participants, and whether the resulting guilt motivated participants to change their current choices (Study 1), or instead redeem their worth by 'making up' in another domain: reduce their plastic waste (Study 1) or to reduce their meat-intake (Study 2), i.e., to engage in moral compensation.

3.2 Study 1: Are omnivores more interested in reducing their plastic waste after being confronted with a morally motivated veg*n?

We tested whether omnivorious participants experience more guilt when presented with 'another participant' (i.e., a self-declared veg*n) who, unlike them, refused to eat meat based on moral instead of neutral grounds (using an experimental procedure adapted from Weiper and Vonk, 2021). We expected that participants who felt guilty about their meat-based choices would not immediately change their current meat-based choices, but rather morally compensate by doing 'good' in another moral domain: partaking in the Plastic-Waste Free challenge.

3.2.1 Participants

Using Qualtrics, we created a link to an online survey, and recruited participants from the participant recruitment platform Prolific Acadmic. Participants were blind to the

hypotheses. Data were collected on the 18th of November, 2022. An a priori power analysis (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007) informs us that a minimum sample size of 210 participants is required to achieve 80% power for detecting a medium effect at a significance criterion of α = .05 (parameters used are based on Rothgerber, 2014; study 5). We recruited 300 participants. The Institutional Committee for Ethical Review of Projects of the Faculty of Economics and Business (Universitat Pompeu Fabra) provided approval for this study. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants.

3.2.2 Materials & Procedure

As a cover story, participants read we were interested in understanding which emotions people experience when learning about others' preferences and in their impression of others. We only included omnivores: participants who indicated to eat meat. We confronted participants with a self-declared veg*n after they expressed and described their preference for meat in a 'food choice task' (adapted from Weiper and Vonk, 2021). We varied whether 'another' participant refused to eat meat due to moral ('animal welfare') or neutral ('a tick bite made me allergic') reasons. Afterwards, participants completed a manipulation check, as well as measures of guilt, liking of the rebel, behavioral change, moral compensation, and self-compassion. The self-compassion scale included an attention check asking participants to select "7".

3.2.3 Manipulation and main measures

Dietary preferences. In order to identify which participants eat meat and how often they typically eat meat on a weekly basis, participants were asked to indicate on a 8-point Likert-scale how many days of the week (1 = *never*, 8 = *every day*) their meals typically include: carbs, vegetables, meat (M = 5.59, SD = 1.72), fish, legumes, and sauces.

Manipulation - Rebel Justification Type. During the food choice task, participants saw 12 pairs of food options, and indicated for each pair which of the two food options they preferred most at the moment (see Appendix A. Supplementary Materials). Importantly, in 3 of the 12 food pairs, no plant-based options were offered, so here participants were encouraged to select which *meat* option they preferred (e.g. 'chicken' vs. 'steak'). They could also tick 'neither'. The food choice task facilitated participants to express their preference for eating meat, while offering us a credible cover to later introduce a rebel: participants were later confronted with the response of an ostensible fellow participant refused to choose between chicken or steak, and instead opted for 'neither' (Weiper & Vonk, 2021). Specifically, participants read they would be matched with the response from 'another participant' (i.e., a self-declared veg*n) who, like them, was also asked to explain their preference on the same food pair of chicken versus steak. Unlike them, however, they read that the 'other participant' chose 'neither' either because they '*don't eat meat because they don't support the way animals are being treated for their meat and the environmental damage meat production causes*' (i.e. moral justification; see Figure 1), or because they '*can't eat meat because a tick bite had made them allergic to meat*' (i.e. neutral justification; see Figure 2).

Figure 1. Manipulation material: moral justification

Figure 2. Manipulation material: neutral justification

Mediator - Guilt. Participants indicated to what extent reading the other participants' explanation made them feel (1) remorseful, (2) guilty, and (3) regretful about their dietary choices (1= *strongly disagree* ; 9= *strongly agree*; $M = 2.06$, $SD = 1.66$, $\alpha = .95$; adapted from Wenzel, Woodyatt & McLean, 2020). To make it less obvious that we were interested in participants' experience of guilt, we blended the items with filler items including (1) moved, (2) uplifted, and (3) optimistic about humanity.

Dependent variable – Changing current behavior. To test whether observers would be unlikely to resolve rebel-induced guilt via an immediate change of their current choices (H2), participants completed a *second* round of the same food choice task. We subtracted the number of meat-based preferences participants selected in the first round of the food choice task by the number of meat-based preferences participants selected in the second round (thus, ranging from -7= *increase in meat-based preferences, 0= no modification, to +7= decrease in meat-based preferences*). This allowed us to measure the extent to which participants changed their initial meat-based choices ($M = .21$, $SD = .94$).

Dependent variable - Moral compensation. Next, we asked participants to indicate the extent to which they would (a) consider, and (b) be willing to participate in the 'Plastic-

waste free' challenge[12] (1= *Not at all*; 7= *Totally; M* = 5.79, *SD* = 1.39, α = .88). We expected that participants who were exposed to the moral justifications provided by the veg*n would be most likely to sign up for the Plastic-waste free challenge, as it allows them to redeem their moral worth, without having to admit they were wrong previously.

3.2.4 Exploratory moderators & measures

Trait self-compassion. We measured individual differences in trait self-compassion (Neff, 2003) using the short form of the self-compassion scale (SCS-SF; Raes, Pommier, Neff, & Van Gucht, 2011). Participants indicated completed 12 items, such as: "I try to be understanding and patient towards those aspects of my personality I don't like," "I'm intolerant and impatient towards those aspects of my personality I don't like," (reverse-coded), and "I try to see my failings as part of the human condition" (1= *Almost never* - 7= *Almost always* ; *M* = 4.07, *SD* = .88, α = .81). We expected those lower in self-compassion, i.e. who are more likely to take their moral shortcomings to meaning that they are morally inadequate and therefore, whose moral self-image warrants greater protection, to be more likely to resolve rebel-induced guilt via moral compensation than those scoring higher on self-compassion.

In addition to exploring whether self-compassion would act as a moderator, we also included some additional dependent variables.

In order to make the purpose of our study less obvious, we also asked about participants' interest in some other challenges, including the 'No Spend Month' challenge[13] (challenge to minimize unnecessary or extra expenditures on services and goods for 30 days*; M* = 5.51, *SD* = 1.72, α = .96), the 'Digital Detox Challenge'[14] (challenge to minimize unnecessary technology use for 30 days*; M* = 3.96, *SD* = 1.91, α = .92) and the 'ProVeg Veggie Challenge'[15] (a campaign by an international food awareness organization that provides people with a supporting platform to accomplish a Veggie challenge by, for example, adding 'meat-free' days to one's week for 30 days ; *M* = 4.44, *SD* = 2.08, α = .94). Although not our primary focus, we explored whether the type of justification participants read affected their interest in the ProVeg Veggie challenge (see Table 1 for the cell means).

Liking of the moral rebel. We asked participants to indicate to what extent they would (a) be open to being friends with the other participant, (b) respect the other participant as a person, and (c) like the other participant as a colleague (1= *Not at all; 7= Very much* ; adapted from Bolderdijk et al., 2018; Monin et al., 2008; *M* = 5.72, *SD* = 1.23, α = .80).

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[12] https://www.plasticfreejuly.org
[13] https://www.lifewithlessmess.com/no-spend-january/
[14] https://hellobrownlow.com/2019/10/01/best-digital-detox-30-day-challenge/
[15] https://proveg.com/veggie-challenge/

3.2.5 Results

From the 300 participants that started the survey, 6 failed the attention check and 6 failed the manipulation check. Given that we are particularly interested in the responses of participants who, in contrast to the veg*n, eat meat and expressed their preference for either chicken or steak, we additionally excluded 14 participants who reported to 'never' eat meat, and 5 participants who indicated to prefer neither chicken nor steak[16]. Hence, 269 participants were included in the analysis. See Table 1 for descriptive statistics of our measures.

Participants
Half of the respondents identified as male (50.2%), and the majority of respondents were between the ages of 18-25 (50.2%), followed by 26-35 years old (31.6%), 36-45 years old (10.4%), and 46-60 years old (6.7%).

Table 1

Means and standard deviations of items by justification type

Focal measures	Neutral justification	Moral justification	Cohen's d
	($n = 133$)	($n = 136$)	
Guilt	1.48 (1.06)[a]	2.62 (1.92)[b]	.74
Changing current behavior	.11 (.78)[a]	.30 (1.08)[a]	
Plastic-Waste Free challenge (moral compensation)	4.53 (1.99)[a]	4.57 (2.14)[a]	
Exploratory measures			
Liking of the rebel	5.73 (1.26)[a]	5.72 (1.21)[a]	
ProVeg Veggie challenge	4.32 (2.02)[a]	4.56 (2.13)[a]	

Note. Cells with different superscripts connote significantly different means at $p < .05$ using post-hoc pairwise

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[16] The overall pattern of results is similar when inclusing the 5 participants who, like the veg*n, also expressed to neither prefer chicken nor steak, but, unlike the veg*n, do eat meat, and thus, could be subject to rebel-induced guilt in response to reading the veg*n's moral ($N= 139$) as opposed to neutral justification ($N= 135$). A simple mediation analysis reveals no total effect of justification type on participants' behavioral change motives ($\beta = .18$, $SE = .11$, 95% CI [-.04, .41]), but a significant indirect effect only via feelings of guilt ($\beta = .25$, $SE = .09$, 95% CI [.09, .45]). Participants felt more guilty about their dietary choices when learning about the veg*ns' moral as opposed to neutral reasons ($\beta = 1.12$, $SE = 0.19$, 95% CI [.75, 1.49]). Feelings of guilt, in turn, were associated with diminished preferences for meat ($\beta = .23$, $SE = 0.03$, 95% CI [.16, .29]). Repeating the same procedure with moral compensation as outcome variable, we find no effect of justification type on participants' willingness to sign up for the Plastic Waste free challenge ($\beta = -.20$, $SE = 0.17$, 95% CI [-.54, .14]), nor did raised feelings of guilt in response to the moral justification provided by the veg*n increase participants' interest to partake in the Plastic Waste Free challenge ($\beta = .08$, $SE = 0.06$, 95% CI [-.03, .19]).

When do rebels elicit more guilt, and does this make observers change their current behavior? We performed a simple mediation analyses, employing model 4 (bias-corrected, 5000 bootstrap samples) of the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2018; all continuous variables are mean-centered). We tested whether the veg*n's type of justification (moral justification coded as '1'; neutral justification coded as '0') influenced feelings of guilt (H1), and how those feelings of guilt, made participants more likely to change their current meat-based choices: switch to more plant-based options and/or select neither of two meat-options in a second round of the food pair task.

Participants felt more guilty about their dietary choices when learning about the veg*n's moral as opposed to neutral justification to their meat-free choices ($\beta = 1.15$, $SE = 0.19$, 95% CI [.77, 1.52]), confirming H1. Feelings of guilt, in turn, were associated with diminished preferences for meat ($\beta = .39$, $SE = 0.03$, 95% CI [.16, .29]). Consistent with H2, we however find no total effect of justification type on changing of current behavior: participants who read the veg*n's moral as opposed to neutral justifications for not eating meat were not more likely to change their initial meat-based preferences ($\beta = .19$, $SE = .11$, 95% CI [-.04, .41]). Instead, we find an indirect-only mediation: a significant indirect effect via feelings of guilt in absence of a total effect ($\beta = .26$, $SE = .10$, 95% CI [.09, .46]; see Figure 3).

Accordingly, we find the same pattern of effects for participants' interest in partaking in the ProVeg Veggie challenge; justification type did not impact participants' willingness to sign up for the ProVeg Veggie challenge ($\beta = .25$, $SE = .25$, 95% CI [-.25, .75]), but only indirectly via raised feelings of guilt ($\beta = .46$, $SE = .11$, 95% CI [.26, .67]). Feelings of guilt induced by the veg*n's moral justification made participants more likely to sign up for the ProVeg Veggie challenge ($\beta = .32$, $SE = 0.08$, 95% CI [.24, .55]).

In sum, while veg*ns make observers feel guilty over eating when presenting moral as opposed to neutral justifications to not eat meat (in line with H1), morally motivated veg*ns are not more likely than morally neutral veg*ns to make omnivores instantly change their meat-based choices (confirming H2).
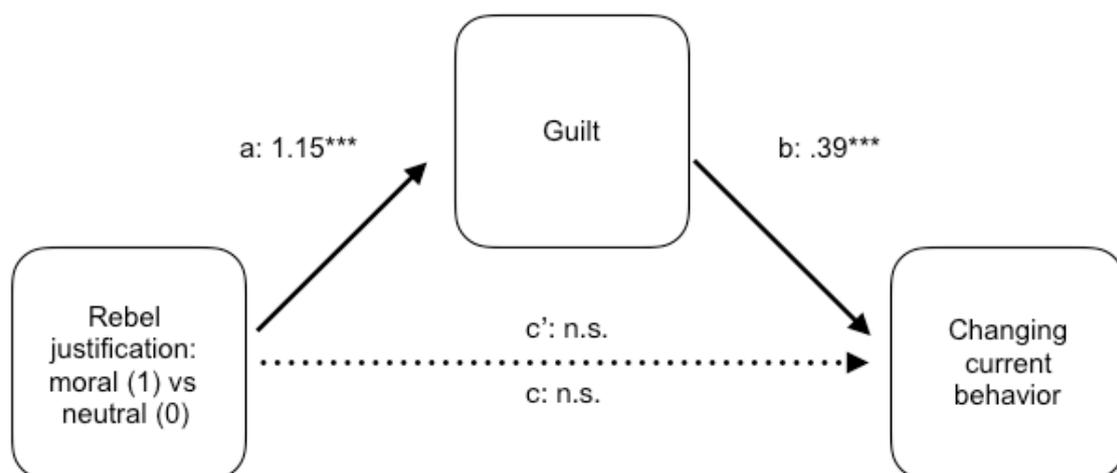
Figure 3. Indirect effect only of rebel justification on change of current behavior via feelings of guilt

Does rebel-induced guilt motivate moral compensation? Next, we tested moral rebels would be more likely to trigger moral compensation when providing moral as opposed to neutral justifications (H3). Contrary to our expectations, we found no difference between both groups in terms of their willingness to sign up for the Plastic Waste free challenge (β = -.19, *SE* = 0.17, 95% CI [-.52, .15]), nor did raised feelings of guilt in response to the moral justification provided by the veg*n increase participants' interest to partake in the Plastic Waste Free challenge (β = .09, *SE* = 0.05, 95% CI [-.04, .17]).

3.2.5.1 Exploratory results

We explored whether individual differences in self-compassion moderated the results. A A moderation analyses employing model 1 (bias-corrected, 5000 bootstrap samples) of the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2018; all continuous variables are mean-centered) suggest that predisposed levels of self-compassion impact the degree to which participants feel guilty (β = -.63, *SE* = 0.21, 95% CI [-1.05, -.21]) when reading the veg*n's moral as opposed to neutral justification. Specifically, participants scoring lower on self-compassion (-1SD) experienced higher levels of guilt (β = 1.71, *SE* = 0.26, 95% CI [1.19, 2.23]) compared to those scoring higher on self-compassion (+1SD; β = .60, *SE* = 0.26, 95% CI [0.08, 1.12]) when reading the veg*n's moral as opposed to neutral justifications.

In order to explore whether observers respond differently to moral rebel-induced guilt based on their level of self-compassion[17], we performed separate moderated mediation analyses (model 14; bias-corrected, 5000 bootstrap samples; PROCESS macro Hayes, 2018; all continuous variables mean-centered) with changing previous choices and moral compensation as outcome variables and self-compassion as the moderator on the b-path. Participants' level of self-compassion did not affect how participants resolved moral rebel-induced guilt: not in terms of changing their current behavior (β = .19, *SE* = .11, 95% CI [-.04, .41]) nor moral compensation (β = .08, *SE* = .07, 95% CI [-.05, .21]).

3.2.6 Discussion

So far, the results support our hypothesis that moral rebels are more likely to raise feelings of guilt among their observers when providing moral as opposed to neutral justifications (H1), but that rebel-induced guilt is unlikely to manifest in observers change their current behaviors (H2).

The fact that we don't observe a total effect of justification type on willingness to change one's initial choices in the food task, but only indirectly via raised feelings of guilt, suggests that the guilt experienced by participants in response to the moral

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[17] Independent samples t-test reveals that our manipulation of justification type did not affect participants' reported levels of self-compassion (*p* = .78).

justification is counteracted by some negative effect that we have not measured – a suppressor variable (Rucker, Preacher, Tormala, & Petty, 2011). We can only speculate about the nature of this complementary process. Our theory however proposes one candidate: participants may find it uncomfortable to switch to plant-based foods in the second round of the food choice task in response to a morally-motivated justification, because doing so equates to admitting to have been morally inadequate earlier.

However, in contrast to our expectations (H3), we do not find evidence that observers translate guilt instead into moral compensation: doing "good" in an alternative domain than the one in which guilt was triggered. One possible explanation for this is that our measure of moral compensation was the last in a sequence of measures that preceded it. It is possible that by the time our participants received the opportunity to resolve rebel-induced guilt via moral compensation (i.e. partaking in the Plastic-Waste Free Challenge), their feelings of guilt had already dissipated. Indeed, although increased guilt was associated with diminished meat-based preferences following participants' exposure to a veg*n providing moral as opposed to neutral justifications, it was not associated with participants' interest in the Plastic-Waste free challenge.

Instead, in Study 2, the moral compensation measure was introduced earlier in the procedure. Here, we did not ask participants whether they wanted to change their current behavior. Instead, participants immediately got the chance to indicate their willingness to do 'good' in another domain (i.e. partaking in the ProVeg Veggie Challenge) after being exposed to the moral rebel – someone who, unlike them, refused to fly.

3.3 Study 2: Are frequent flyers more interested in reducing meat consumption after exposure to a morally motivated flight refuser?

In Study 2 we tested whether rebel-induced guilt motivates moral compensation in the context of 'flight shaming', i.e. the feeling of guilt over the environmental impact of flying (Wormbs & Söderberg, 2021). We measured the extent to which participants, after being exposed to a rebel who refused to fly for moral reasons, feel guilty over their future airtravel plans, and whether their guilt motivates them to morally compensate by doing 'good' in an alternative domain (e.g. reducing meat-consumption).

3.3.1 Participants

Using Qualtrics, we created a link to an online survey (in English, Dutch and in Italian), and data was collected within the context of two Master thesis projects. The link was posted on the Master students' Facebook, and Instagram pages and distributed via Whatsapp. Participants were blind to the hypotheses. Data were collected between the 23rd and 29th of April, 2020. Using a snowball procedure, 238 participants started the survey, which exceeds the minimum required sample size of 210 participants to achieve 80% power for detecting a medium effect at a significance criterion of $\alpha = .05$ (Faul, (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007). The Ethical Committee of the Faculty of Business and Economics (University of Groningen, the Netherlands) provided ethical

approval for this study.

3.3.2 Procedure

After measuring individual differences in values and fixed-growth mindset, we asked participants about their travel habits, and their favorite mode of transport for traveling long distances ("car," "train," plane," or "boat"). Next, we presented participants with a fictitious person named 'Mark' who explains his decision to stop flying based on either moral or neutral grounds. Next, participants completed measures of guilt, moral compensation, liking of the moral rebel and self-regard, as well as a manipulation check. Finally, participants indicated whether they eat meat, as well as their gender and age.

3.3.3 Main manipulation and measures

Manipulation - Rebel justification type. As a cover story, participants read that the COVID-19 pandemic had a huge impact on air transport, causing lots of flights to be cancelled due to travel restrictions and health considerations, followed by the question whether they intended to fly again for their holidays as soon as travel restrictions had lifted ("yes" or "no"). Next, we applied our manipulation of the rebel's justification type. Participants were presented with a Facebook post provided by 'Mark L.'. In that post, Mark explains that his flight to Barcelona got cancelled due to the corona crisis, and decided to travel by Eurostar trains instead of buying another plane ticket (adapted from Bolderdijk et al., 2018). Here, we varied Mark's justification for his decision and randomly distributed participants to either one of two conditions in which Mark either explains to stop flying, but travel by train instead, because it "*is extremely less polluting than taking cheap flights*" (i.e., moral justification; see Figure 4), or because "*the total travel duration is the same (travelling to the airport, security checks, boarding, etc.), the seats are more comfortable and there are no limits for the luggage size*" (i.e., neutral justification; see Figure 5). We expected participants to report higher levels of guilt over their own decision to keep flying when Mark offered a moral justification for his decision to discontinue flying (H1).

**Figure 4.** manipulation material: moral justification

Figure 5. Manipulation material: neutral justification

Mediator - Guilt. Participants completed a guilt measure by indicating the extent to which they (1) experienced remorse, and (2) felt guilty about their decision to fly again on a 11-point scale (0 = *not at all*; 10 = *very intensely*; $M = 5.82$, $SD = 4.37$, $\alpha = 0.89$).

Dependent variable - Moral compensation. Participants indicated how likely they would be to (a) sign up and start the ProVeg Veggie challenge, and (b) encourage other people to sign up and start the challenge (1= *extremely unlikely; 7= extremely likely ; M* = 3.06, *SD* = 1.76, α = 0.87*)*. We expected participants reading Mark's moral reasons to discontinue flying to experience more guilt over their future airtravel plans (H1), making them more likely to morally compensate in another domain: resolve their feelings of guilt via partaking in the ProVeg Veggie challenge (H3).

Manipulation check & dietary preferences. Participants indicated the reason why Mark decided to stop traveling by plane (i.e. moral justifications: 'He thinks it is better for the environment'; neutral justifications: 'He wants to travel more comfortably and save time', as opposed to 'Now he is afraid of flying'). We also asked participants to indicate whether they considered themselves as either "omnivorous (eat meat and fish)", "flexitarian (mostly vegetarian but occasionally eat meat and/or fish)," "vegetarian," "vegan," or "pescetarian (eat fish instead of meat)".

3.3.4 Exploratory moderators & measures

Growth versus Fixed mindset. We measured individual differences in trait fixed versus growth mindset (Dweck, 2006). We expected participants with a fixed mindset, i.e. who are more likely to interpret their shortcomings to meaning that they themselves are morally inadequate, to be in particular motivated to resolve guilt via moral compensation (Dweck, 2006; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Participants indicated to what extent they agreed on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *completely disagree*, 7 = *completely agree*) with the following statements: (a) 'The kind of person someone is, is something inherent about them, and it can't be changed very much,' (b) 'People can do things differently, but the important parts of who they are can't really be changed,' (c) 'Everyone is a certain kind of person, and there is not much that they can do to really change that,' (d) You can't teach an old dog new tricks. People can't really change their deepest attributes' (fixed mindset: $M =$ 4.08, $SD = 1.01$, α = .63), (e) 'Everyone, no matter who they are, can significantly change their basic characteristics', (f) 'People can substantially change the kind of person they are', (g) 'No matter what kind of person someone is, they can always change very much', and (h) 'People can change even their most basic qualities' (growth mindset: $M = 4.15$, $SD = 1.14$, α = .75).

Shared Values. Participants also indicated the relative importance of 12 values as important guiding principles in their life (-1 = *opposed to my principles*, 0 = not important - 7= *extremely important*) on a 9-point Likert scale. Items measuring biospheric values included: "Preventing pollution (Protecting natural resources)," "Respecting the earth (harmony with other species)," " Unity with nature (fitting into nature)," and "Protecting the environment (preserving nature)" ($M = 7.28$, $SD = 1.08$, α = 0.85). Moreover, participants indicated the relative importance of altruistic values (M = 7.68, SD = .95, α = 0.70), hedonic values $M = 7.28$, $SD = 1.08$, α = 0.82), and egoistic values ($M = 5.54$, $SD = 1.33$, α = 0.81). We expected that participants who placed greater importance on biospheric values to exhibit greater levels of guilt when confronted with a rebel's environmental stance, as the rebel's morally-motivated refusal

to fly would remind these individuals of their own moral inadequacy (Festinger, 1954; Monin, 2007).

In addition to exploring whether mindset and shared values would act as moderators, we also included some additional dependent variables.

Liking of the moral rebel. Like in Study 1, the current study explored whether the rebel's justification type impacted observers' liking of the rebel. Participants were asked to indicate on a 7-point Likert scale (1= *strongly disagree*; 7= *strongly agree*) to what extent they would (a) like Mark as a friend, (b) like Mark as a colleague, and (c) respect Mark as a person ($M = 5.22$, $SD = .92$, $\alpha = 0.80$). In addition, we included a measure of do-gooder derogation, which involves giving credit to a morally motivated rebel's sense of agency, while diminishing the rebel on their sense of communion (Monin et al., 2008). Participants completed fourteen 7-point bipolar items (Monin et al., 2008), evaluating Mark in terms of: stupid–intelligent, weak–strong, insecure–confident, passive–active, dishonest–honest, dependent–independent, immature–mature, and having low self-esteem–high self-esteem (capturing perceived agency: $\alpha = 0.93$, $M = 4.96$, $SD = 1.45$), cruel–kind, awful–nice, cold–warm, unfair–fair, unpleasant–pleasant, and stingy–generous (capturing perceived communion: $M = 4.63$, $SD = 1.55$, $\alpha = 0.80$).

Self-regard. In order to explore whether prior findings would replicate by examining whether the rebel's moral as opposed to neutral justifications negative impacts observers' self-regard, participants completed a measure of self-regard (Bolderdijk et al., 2018; Cramwinckel et al., 2013). Specifically, we asked participants to report to what extent they felt happy with themselves, satisfied with themselves, good, happy, comfortable, confident, determined, disappointed with themselves (reverse-coded), annoyed with themselves (reverse- coded), disgusted with themselves (reverse-coded), angry with themselves (reverse-coded), dissatisfied with themselves (reverse-coded), self-critical (reverse-coded), and guilty (reverse-coded), on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (totally not applicable) to 7 (totally applicable ; $M = 5.06$, $SD = .82$, $\alpha = 0.88$).

3.3.4 Results

From the 238 participants that started the survey, 7 did not finish, and 28 participants were filtered out because they failed manipulation check. Given that we are particularly interested in the responses of participants who, unlike Mark, indicated their intent to fly again after the COVID-19 pandemic, we additionally excluded 37 participants who expressed their intent to discontinue flying. Moreover, since we gauge participants' interest in partaking in the 'ProVeg Veggie Challenge' as a proxy for moral compensation, we excluded 2 participants who indicated to identify as 'vegan': for them to partake in the Veggie Challenge could be considered as obsolete ($M = 7.0$, $SD = 0.00$). Note that we did include participants who indicated to identify as 'vegetarian', because we observe that these participants' interest in the challenge varied ($M = 2.90$, $SD = 1.67$), which could be possibly fueled by feelings of guilt, and be interpreted as a

bolstered commitment to their meat-free diet. Hence, 162 participants were included in the analysis. Please see Table 3 for descriptive statistics[18].

Participants

Half of the participants (50.3%) were between the ages of 22 and 25, 53.6% were female. Half of the participants completed the survey in Italian (52.2%), followed by English (28.7%), and Dutch (19.1%). The majority identified as omnivorous (78.4%), followed by flexitarians (20.4%), vegetarian (3.1%), and pescetarian (2.5%). Almost half of the participants indicated to travel 1-2 times per year (46.9%), followed by 3-4 times (24.7%), less than once per year (17.9%), and more than 4 times per year (10.5%). Finally, regarding participants' favorite mode of transport for long distances, the majority chose by plane (72.2%), followed by train (17.3%), and car (10.5%).

Table 3

Means and standard deviations of items by justification type

Focal measures	Neutral justification	Moral justification	Cohen's *d*
	(*n* = 67)	(*n* = 95)	
Guilt	2.17 (1.81)[a]	3.33 (2.20)[b]	.56
ProVeg Veggie challenge (moral compensation)	2.72 (1.61)[a]	3.30 (1.83)[b]	.34
Exploratory measures			
Liking of the rebel	5.01 (.95)[a]	5.37 (.88)[b]	.40
Self-regard	5.15 (.86)[a]	5.00 (.79)[a]	

Note. Cells with different superscripts connote significantly different means at $p < .05$ using post-hoc pairwise

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[18] The overall pattern of results is similar when excluding these 5 participants who identified as 'vegetarian'. Simple mediation analysis shows a significant indirect effect of justification type on moral compensation via feelings of guilt ($\beta = .24$, *SE* = 0.11, 95% CI [.07, .47]). Participants reported to feel more guilty over their intent to continue flying when reading Mark's moral (*N*= 92) as opposed to neutral (*N*= 65) justifications to discontinue flying ($\beta = 1.05$, *SE* = .33, 95% CI [.40, 1.71]), which heightened their interest in the ProVeggie challenge ($\beta = .23$, *SE* = .07, 95% CI [.10, .36]). We observe a significant total effect ($\beta = .58$, *SE* = 0.28, 95% CI [.02, 1.14]), which becomes insignificant when we include the role of guilt in our model ($\beta = .34$, *SE* = 0.28, 95% CI [-.22, .90]). This implies, also in the case where we exclude the responses from vegetarians, that guilt fully mediates the extent to which Mark's moral justifications increases participants' interest to partake in the ProVeg Veggie challenge.

When do rebels elicit most guilt, and does this invite compensation? In order to test whether guilt mediated the impact of Mark's moral justifications onto participants' moral compensation motives (i.e. interest in the ProVeg Veggie challenge), we performed a simple mediation analysis employing model 4 (bias-corrected, 5000 bootstrap samples; all continuous variables mean-centered) of the PROCESS macro (Preacher, Rucker, & Hayes, 2007).

Mark provoked greater feelings of guilt in participants when providing moral as opposed to neutral justifications ($\beta = 1.15$, *SE* = .33, 95% CI [.51, 1.80], confirming H1. Guilt, in turn, increased participants' interest in the ProVeg Veggie challenge ($\beta = .22$, *SE* = .07, 95% CI [.10, .35]): participants who felt guilty about flying were more likely to compensate for their guilt by signing up for the ProVeg Veggie Challenge. The indirect effect of moral justifications on interest in the ProVeg Veggie challenge via their feelings of guilt is significant ($\beta = .26$, *SE* = 0.10, 95% CI [.09, .50]; see Figure 6). The total effect ($\beta = .58$, *SE* = 0.28, 95% CI [.03, 1.13]), becomes insignificant when we include guilt in our model (i.e. direct effect: $\beta = .32$, *SE* = 0.28, 95% CI [-.23, .88]). This implies that guilt fully mediates the extent to which Mark's type of justification (i.e. moral versus neutral) impacts participants' interest to partake in the ProVeg Veggie challenge.
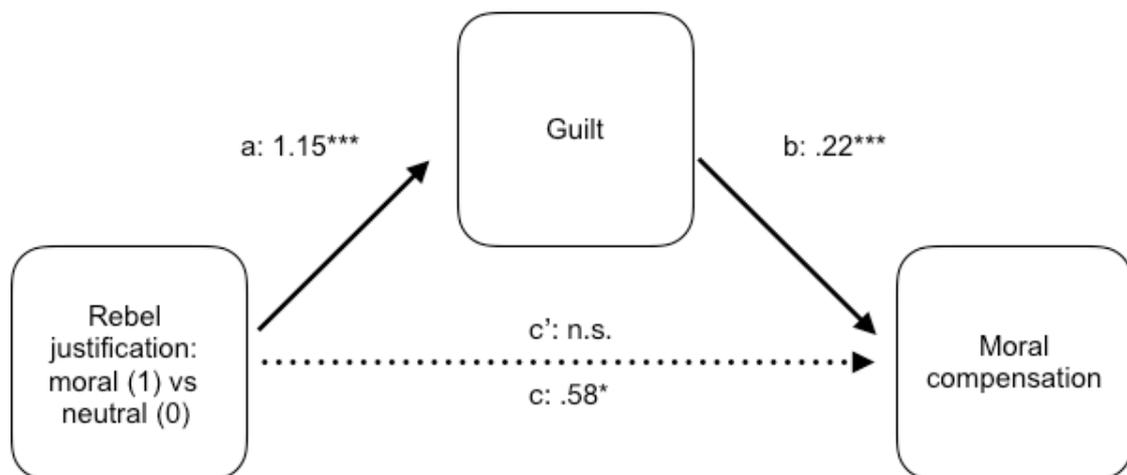
Figure 6. Full mediation of rebel justification type on moral compensation via feelings of guilt

3.3.4.1 Exploratory results

We explored whether participants who share the same biospheric values with Mark would experience higher levels of guilt after learning about Mark's moral objection to flying. We performed a moderated-mediation analysis employing model 7 (bias-corrected, 5000 bootstrap samples) of the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2018; all continuous variables are mean-centered). Participants holding biospheric values in higher regard (+1SD) reported higher levels of guilt after their exposure to Mark providing moral as opposed to neutral justifications, ($\beta = 1.70$, *SE*= .47, *t* = 3.65, *p*

<.001). This effect was absent among those who considered biospheric values as relatively less important (-1SD; β = .58, *SE*= .45, *t* = 1.28, *p* = .20), but the overall interaction effect was only marginally significant (β = .52, *SE*= .30, *t* = 1.72, *p* = .08).

Second, we explored our expectation that observers holding a fixed as opposed to a growth mindset would be more likely to resolve rebel-induced guilt via moral compensation. We performed two separate moderated mediation analyses, in which we tested whether participants' (1) fixed versus (2) growth mindset moderated the relationship between rebel-induced guilt and moral compensation employing model 14 (bias-corrected, 5000 bootstrap samples) of the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2018; all continuous variables are mean-centered).

In line with expectations, results reveal that whether participants hold a fixed (β = .14, *SE*= .06, *t* = 2.46, *p* = .02, 95% CI [.03, .26]) or a growth mindset (β = -.11, *SE*= .05, *t* = -2.02, *p* = .05, 95% CI [-.21, -.01]) impacts their motivation to resolve rebel-induced guilt via moral compensation. Participants holding a fixed mindset (+1SD) indeed exhibit a stronger tendency to resolve rebel-induced guilt by means of signing up for the ProVeg Veggie challenge, i.e. compensate for their feelings of guilt over flying (β = .33, *SE*= .08, *t* = 4.30, *p* <.001, 95% CI [.82, .49]). Contrarily, participants holding a growth mindset (+1SD) were not more or less likely to channel their feelings of guilt into moral compensation (β = .11 , *SE*= .09, *t* = 1.27, *p* = .20, 95% CI [-.03, .35]), but, in line with our finding for those holding a fixed mindset, participants with a weaker growth mindset did show a greater motivation to do so (-1SD; β = .35 , *SE*= .09, *t* = 3.99, *p* = .00, 95% CI [.14, .73]).

3.3.5 Discussion

Consistent with the results of study 1, we again find that rebels raise feelings of guilt in their observers when they present moral as opposed to neutral justifications for their alternative choices. Feelings of guilt are most pronounced among those who subscribe to the same values. And, now the moral compensation measure is not the last in a sequence of measures like in Study 1, we find that rebel-induced guilt increases observers' motivation to redeem their worth by engaging in moral behavior in another green domain than the one in which guilt was triggered, i.e. morally compensate - especially among those whose moral self-image warrants greater protection against threat (i.e. holding a fixed mindset).

3.4 General Discussion

Moral rebels appear to exert little influence on majority members when they voice their moral objections against majority practices. We find that a rebel's influence indeed proves hard to detect in terms of observers emulating the ethical choices put forth by a rebel (i.e. immediate change of previous behavior), but that this does not mean that a rebel's morally charged message does not have any impact on them at all.

Across 2 studies we demonstrated that moral rebels instill feelings of guilt in their observers when they voice, rather than downplay, the moral reasons to their alternative choices - especially among those rating lower in trait self-compassion (Study 1) and those subscribing to the same values (Study 2). Overall, rebels are not more likely to facilitate observers' motivation to change their earlier choices when they voice either the moral or neutral reasons for their alternative choices (Study 1). Instead, rebel-induced guilt is rather more likely to manifest in the psychologically 'safer' alternative of moral compensation - especially among observers for whom a behavioral change may pose too high of a risk to their past and present moral self-image (e.g. those holding a fixed mindset; Study 2).

3.4.1 Limitations and Future Research

Prior research has demonstrated that a restored sense of moral self-worth following rebel-induced threat can accomodate observers to 'own' up to their moral shortcomings (e.g. Monin et al., 2008), and subsequently make amends (Wenzel et al., 2020). We invite future research to explore whether moral compensation can act as an intervention producing similar effects as well. Specifically, it may be interesting to examine whether offering observers the opportunity to resolve rebel-induced guilt via moral compensation may prove as an effective intervention technique for observers to restore their positive moral self-image, and facilitate behavioral change motives in due course.

Moreover, Study 2's exploratory results inform us that especially observers whose moral self-image warrants greater protection from further threat (i.e. holding a fixed mindset) are in particular the ones feeling most motivated to resolve rebel-induced guilt via alternative moral behaviors. However, whether a behavioral change in response to rebel-induced guilt is more likely to hold among observers holding a growth mindset) has not been established since Study 2 did not measure participants' likelihood of changing their prior behavior. Future research could address this open question.

In order to relieve observers from the psychological burden associated with a behavioral change in response to a rebel, and thus, facilitate behavioral change responses, we recommend future research to look for ways in which observers can be facilitated to engage in *genuine self-forgiveness*. In addition to acknowledging one's moral shortcomings, and accepting personal responsibility for generating harm needed for self-improvement motives to mobilize (Bandura, 1999), genuine self-forgiveness involves a 'positive attitudinal shift in the feelings, actions, and beliefs about the self following a self-perceived transgression or wrongdoing committed by the self' (Wohl, DeShea, & Wahkinney, 2008; p.2). In other words, genuine self-forgiveness may aid observers to stop dwelling on their past failures and start looking beyond their past selves.

To that end, future research could explore whether observers may be more likely to resolve rebel-induced guilt via a change of behavior following the intervention *value reaffirmation* (Wenzel, Woodyatt, & Hedrick, 2012; Wenzel, Woodyatt, & McLean, 2020). Value reaffirmation involves individuals who committed a personal transgression (i.e. acted in ways that violates their values) acknowledging the values they violated by their actions, reaffirming the importance of the violated values, and recalling times

when they have acted in line with those values in the past (Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2014). Value affirmation helps assure individuals of their fundamental morality, such that they are less likely to defend or deny their transgression, and feel more motivated to correct for the transgression (Woodyatt, Wenzel, & Ferber, 2017). For instance, Wenzel and colleagues (2020) showed that omnivorous participants who watched a guilt-eliciting documentary about meat production practices were less likely to react defensively after receiving a value affirmation intervention compared to those who did not, and were more likely to donate to an animal welfare organization as a way of making amends.

Finally, one limitation to current reseach on documenting observers' responses to moral rebels is that it merely documented observers' *immediate* responses to rebel-induced threat, and not its long-term effects onto observers' behaviors. We suggest that observers' immediate self-defensive responses taking place in the heat of the moment where emotions run high does not necessarily preclude the possibility of future behavioral change, once the dust has settled. Therefore, we recommend future research to empirically test the downstream consequences of rebel-induced threat beyond immediate defensive reactance. That could be done using a longitudinal experimental design (e.g. including a measure of a behavioral change more distant in time after exposure to a moral rebel), in order to establish whether self-defense responses exclusively produce negative long-term outcomes.

3.4.2 Conclusion

We believe that the present research makes a compelling case for our main message: downplaying the moral reasons for change by offering observers with neutral arguments foregoes a rebel's potential to impact change. At the surface, it indeed appears that moral rebels do not exert influence because observers do not typically change their previous choices immediately. Yet, below the surface, we observe that moral rebels do have an impact on their observers' emotional life (i.e. trigger guilt), which indirectly *can* mobilize observers to change their current behavior, but at the immediate level, is more likely to manifest in other forms of moral behavior.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The main objective of my thesis has been why observers' defensiveness in response to moral rebels need not be regarded as detrimental for social change, but rather as promising signals of future change. Below, I discuss the findings of each of the chapters.

CHAPTER 1. Communication strategies for moral rebels: how to talk about change in order to inspire self-efficacy in others

Current literature seems inconsistent as to whether moral rebels play a productive role in stimulating social change. One stream suggests morally motivated rebels may fuel social inertia. Because threat their ethical choices challenge observers' self-view, they trigger defensiveness in observers. But another, less vocal research stream implies that moral rebels fuel social change precisely because of this moral self-threat: observers may experience ethical dissonance - a necessary ingredient to mobilizing change. Based on this latter view, we put forth that a rebel foregoes their inspirational potential if they were to silence their moral convictions. In other words, rather than tip-toeing around people's egos by avoiding presenting a threat to their moral self-image, rebels may be more influential if they doe step onto others toes occasionally. Yet, whether or not observers will subsequently channel their dissonance into change depends, we argue, on how rebels communicate – how they 'talk about change'. The theories reviewed in this essay point to the crucial importance people needing to feel confident in their capabilities to change their ways when they are confronted with their own shortcomings, in order to feel motivated to do something about it. To that end, w identify three communication strategies aimed at optimizing their moral message in a fashion that cultivates perceived self-efficacy in observers. To maximize influence, our review suggests moral rebels should (1) challenge others' actions, not their character, (2) emphasize that capabilities can be developed and are not fixed traits, and (3) promote maximal, rather than minimal, moral standards. Ultimately, we conclude that moral rebels may be more effective in creating change provided they keep articulating the moral reasons for change: at the very least rebels plant seeds of doubt among majority members whether it's morally 'worth' it to stick to majority practices, creating the motivational fuel needed to mobilize change.

CHAPTER 2. Sticking to Moral Convictions Without Offending Omnivores – Reducing Perceived Judgment by Signaling Self-compassion

Chapter 2 investigated whether moral rebels could stick to their moral convictions without offending others, focusing on the specific case of veg*ns communicating to omnivores. More precisely, we tested whether veg*ns could reduce perceptions of judgment in omnivores by means signaling *self-compassion* when expressing the moral reasons to their meat-free diet. Across two experimental studies, we show that, even though veg*ns can convince omnivores that they do not judge their past meat-eating selves by signaling self-compassion, omnivores still perceived the veg*n as being judgmental of them. These results imply that anticipated judgment may mainly exist in omnivores' own imagination, rather than is specifically caused by the morally-motivated veg*n's choice of words.

CHAPTER 3: Doing 'Good' without Feeling Immoral

Based on chapter 2's finding that it may prove difficult for rebels to mitigate observers' feelings of inadequacy and judgment with words alone, as it may mainly exist in observers' own imagination, chapter 3 sought to demonstrate how rebels may still create a positive impact, in spite of these dynamics.

Prior work has demonstrated that rebels voicing their moral objections to majority practices are unlikely to make majority members change their practices. However, rebel's moral objections do still create an impact on others: observers are made to feel guilty - an emotion that can fuel the motivation to make amends. We proposed that the reason why rebel-induced guilt is unlikely to manifest in observers changing their current behavior is because doing so would involve observers' recognition they were morally inadequate for performing the behavior in the first place. So rather than influencing observers in changing their current choices, we argued that rebels would be more likely to motivate observers to engage in moral compensation, i.e. doing 'good' in an alternative domain than the one in which their shortcoming is exposed. Moral compensation provides observers with a more psychologically 'safe' outlet to resolve their feelings of guilt without compromising their self-image, i.e. to do 'good' without feeling immoral.

Across 2 studies we demonstrated that rebels indeed elicit guilt in observers when they present moral as opposed to neutral justifications - especially among those with low levels of self-compassion and those who share the same values with the rebel. Subsequently, we showed that rebel-induced guilt *can* motivate observers to change their current behavior, but is more likely to manifest in the psychologically 'safer' form of moral compensation - in particular among observers who interpret their shortcomings as a mark of a 'bad' person (e.g. with a fixed mindset). We believe that the findings of chapter 3 shed light on the importance for rebels to keep articulating the moral imperative for change if they wish to impact change, and advance our understanding of why a lack of immediate behavioral change should not be mistaken for a lack of influence.

CONCLUSION

The general aim of this thesis was to analyse the potentially positive nature to defensiveness by observers in response to moral rebels. Though change advocates can feel discouraged by such reactions, I have put forth that defensiveness can actually yield a promising signal of future change. Specifically, when observers react defensively towards a rebel's moral stance, it may be seem as though observers do not care for what the rebel stands for. However, the fact that they go through the trouble of defending their position and put rebels down could, ironically, show that they *do* care, but have a hard time dealing with the fact that their choices do not reflect that care.

APPENDIX

Appendix A. *Supplementary Materials*

Table 3

Pair food choices as presented in the food choice task

Type of food pair	Choice 1	Choice 2
Filler	Sweet potato fries	French fries
Meat-based	Hamburger	Chicken
Meat vs plant-based	Chicken ceasar salad	Avocado and chickpea salad
Meat vs plant-based	Spaghetti bolognese	Creamy mushroom Spaghetti
Plant vs meat-based	Tomato vegetable soup	Chicken soup
Filler	Green salad	Lentil curry
Meat-based	Chicken	Steak
Filler	Green salad	Sweet potato fries
Meat-based	Kebab	Spare ribs
Filler	French fries	Tomato vegetable soup
Plant vs meat-based	Lentil curry	Beef curry
Filler	Avocado and chickpea salad	Green salad

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