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Building Bridges to Moral Reform:

Decreasing the majorities' resistance to a minorities' message in the
face of moral threat

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Abstract

In the field of moral reform, rebellious moral minorities exert substantial effort to gain societal endorsement for their moral message. Going against the grain in the name of their ideals nonetheless demands moral rebels to endure backlash and resistance from an obedient majority. Present research focused on identifying a mechanism that could decrease the majorities' resistance to a minorities' message in the face of moral threat. Research was done by studying the reactions against vegans and the message of their moral rebellion. For that, an online survey (N = 113) was conducted. One factor design was chosen using Target Derogation (rating first versus threat first), as the independent variable, to determine its effect on message endorsement. Feelings of moral threat was added as a mediator. Position of the mediator was altered for each condition to contrast the reactions to the moral rebel (i.e. the messenger) and their message. Present findings suggest that the obedient majority remains resistant to the rebel's message in the face of moral threat. Biting the bullet, moral rebels find their message disregarded. Future research is necessary to identify mechanisms that can determine the endorsement of the moral message and thereby bring moral reform into being.

Keywords: moral rebels, backlash, moral threat, moral rebellion, moral reform, moral message, veganism, nutrition

Introduction

In the field of nutriment and nourishment, rebellious moral minorities dedicate substantial time and effort to address and integrate a vegan lifestyle¹ into our society (Joy, 2010; Larsson, Rönnlund, Johansson & Dahlgren, 2003). In regard to nutrition, the integration can range from small dietary adjustments to major changes in traditional nutrition (Larsson et al., 2003). Moral minorities engaged in encouraging a vegan diet, nonetheless, often feel a tension amongst their agenda and the agenda of omnivorism (Joy, 2010; Piazza et al., 2015). Tension emerges, as these nutritional choices share the same goal, that of nourishing mind and body, but not the same ideology (Joy, 2010; Piazza et al., 2015; Ruby, 2012).

Pragmatically, it is clear that omnivorism is the dominant and therefore most commonly consumed diet (Ruby, 2012). Omnivorism, by definition, designates the human to eat meat, fish, eggs, dairy, fruits, greens, herbs, and legumes. Of these, meat is generally central to the diet (Ruby, 2012). Prominence of meat in the omnivoristic diet is nonetheless greater than nutrition (Allen & Ng, 2003). Eating meat is notably anchored to a firmly embedded sociocultural belief system (Joy, 2010; Piazza. et al., 2015). Characteristic is that eating meat is deemed to be normal, natural, and necessary (Joy, 2010). Pleasure and comfort are also related to enjoying the taste of meat (Piazza et al., 2015). Eating meat, for that reason, is considered to be a given instead of a choice (Joy, 2010).

For moral minorities interested in the broader goals of reform, the meaning of eating meat has changed from factory farming animals to slaughtering conscience and sentient beings (Joy, 2010). Eating meat has thus been recognised to be cruel, immoral, and unethical (Hussar & Harris, 2010). Characteristic of a vegan lifestyle is that farmed animals are neither thought to be objects nor abstractions and are therefore not considered to lack an identity or emotionality (Joy, 2010). It is the mentality that causes moral minorities to see animals as intelligent and social beings that can feel emotions, such as joy, comfort, loneliness, grief, fear, and suffering, akin humans (D'Eath, 2002; Koba & Tanida, 1999; Reimert, Bolhuis, Kemp & Rodenburg, 2014). Moral minorities are therefore unable to dissociate the animal from eating meat and thus refuse to classify animals into rigid categories in both heart and mind (Joy, 2010). Eating a vegan diet, as such, is considered to entail a shift in the ideology of nutrition, as moral and mindful, rather than obedient to cultural dietary norms (Ciocchetti, 2010). The rise of a vegan lifestyle, for that reason, highlights the increasing defiance against traditional nutrition (Joy, 2010).

Challenges to the integration of a vegan lifestyle come from omnivores that feel threatened by a minorities' moral choice (Minson & Monin, 2012). For them, the threat is tied to the rebel's

¹ It should be noted that veganism is not a diet. Veganism is a lifestyle that is based on morals and the belief that animals should not be abused and harmed by humans (Joy, 2010).

digress from the dietary norms on claims of moral ideals (Minson & Monin, 2012). Moral rebels elicit resistance by raising doubt, in their attitude and conduct, about the righteousness and morality of these firmly established norms (Monin, Sawyer & Marquez, 2008) and thereby threaten the legitimacy of these norms (Harper & Le Beau, 1993). By claiming to base their nutrition on moral grounds, omnivores, that obey to these traditional norms, thus feel indirectly indicted and condemned by moral rebels (Minson & Monin, 2012; Monin et al., 2008).

Efforts to mitigate this challenge suggest that backlash, as in derogation, is often imminent (Monin, 2007; Monin et al., 2008; O'Connor & Monin, 2016). Moral indictment, more often than not, stings as most humans are easily offended by criticism about their moral goodness (Minson & Monin, 2012; Monin et al., 2008). Most humans care a lot about their image as good and moral beings (Osgood, Suci & Tannenbaum, 1957; Pronin, 2008). Feeling offended can, therefore, lead them to shun, derogate, harass others that elicit a threat to their moral self (Minson & Monin, 2012; Monin et al., 2008). Yet Minson and Monin (2012) assumed that the backlash could have the ironic effect of making the message of the moral rebellion more unobjectionable. Derogating the messenger, the defendants might feel less urge to also disregard their message (Minson & Monin, 2012). To contribute to these efforts, the focus of this research is to elaborate and identify: Which underlying mechanism can decrease the majorities' resistance to a minorities' message in the face of moral threat?

The moral rebel

By definition, a moral rebel is someone, that out of moral concern, takes an ethical and righteous stand against the existing state of affairs thereby refusing to adhere to, remain silent, go along or share in demands that force them to dishonour their moral ideals (Monin et al., 2008). Characteristic of a moral rebel is that their self is organised around a strong internalised moral foundation (Hardy & Carlo, 2005; Sonnentag & McDaniel, 2013). Morality, therefore, is central to their identity (Gibbs, 2003; Sonnentag & Barnett, 2015). Qualities that further distinguish a moral rebel are those of moral courage, self-esteem, and self-efficacy (Sonnentag & Barnett, 2015; Sonnentag & McDaniel, 2013). Unbridled by moral courage, danger is endured for the sake of commitment to conscience, ethics, and moral ideals (Sonnentag & Barnett, 2015). Possessing a strong moral identity, for that reason, is the catalyst that encourages them to recognise and act against harm, immorality, and injustice (Gibbs, 2003).

Challenges facing moral rebels, nonetheless, exceed steady defiance (Monin et al., 2008). Going against the grain in the name of their ideals demands moral rebels to endure anger and backlash from an obedient majority (Monin, 2007; Minson & Monin, 2012). Backlash against moral rebels is generally reckoned as a matter of moral threat (Monin et al., 2008). Origin of the threat is the

rebel's digression from the firmly established norms on claims of moral ideals (Minson & Monin, 2012). Moral rebels induce backlash by raising doubt, in their attitude and conduct, about the righteousness and morality of these firmly rooted norms (Monin et al., 2008) and thereby threaten the legitimacy of these norms (Harper & Le Beau, 1993). By claiming the moral high ground, the obedient majority, that adheres to these long-established norms, thus feels indirectly threatened and condemned by moral rebels (Monin et al., 2008; O'Connor & Monin, 2016).

Much of the threat for the obedient majority lies in feeling threatened in their moral goodness. Monin (2007) argued that the threat feeds off and is fuelled by feelings of moral confusion. Questioning their moral goodness, moral rebels are detested for highlighting their moral shortcomings and thereby destroying their image as good and moral beings (Monin et al., 2008). Moral rebels, therefore, remind the obedient majority that they had been ignorant and unethical all along (Monin et al., 2008). Brought to attention, Monin (2007) further reasoned that the threat for the obedient majority can be intensified by a fear of moral rejection. Fear of moral rejection feeds off their concern to be condemned and rebuffed for their moral failure (Gausel & Leach, 2011) and is further fuelled by their desire to hide their failure from others (Goffman, 1959). Fear of rejection, therefore, signifies their concern of harm for their moral image in the eyes of moral rebels (Gausel & Leach, 2011). Monin et al., (2008) noted that the obedient majority, akin most humans, cares a lot about their moral image. Being moral is so meaningful that the obedient majority can go far to defend their image as good and moral beings (Minson & Monin, 2012; Monin et al., 2008). Protecting their moral self from further harm can, therefore, bring forth the resentment and derogation of moral rebels (Gausel & Leach, 2011; Monin et al., 2008).

Moral threat is generally handled by derogating the source of the threat (Minson & Monin, 2012; Monin et al., 2008). Tesser (1991) argued that target derogation can range from distancing from, dodging to ultimately ostracising threatening others. Protecting their moral self, the obedient majority can go to great lengths to guard against threatening others and gloat at their failures and humiliation (Smith et al., 1996). Collange, Benbouzyane and Sanitise (2006) similarly reasoned that target derogation can be handled by stigmatising and discriminating against the source of the threat. Bolstering their moral self, moral rebels are not considered to be a symbol of good and altruistic agency (Monin, 2007; Milgram, 1965). Qualities that further distinguish moral rebels, including moral courage (Sonnetag & McDaniel, 2013) and self-esteem (Sonnetag & Barnett, 2015) are similarly denied (Milgram, 1965; Monin et al., 2008). Instead, moral rebels are sanctified as weak, cowardly, unreliable and selfish (Liebrand, Jansen, Rijken, & Suhre, 1986; Milgram, 1965). Patronising them, the obedient majority strikes to infantilise and emasculate moral rebels (Milgram, 1965; Monin, 2007). Monin et al., (2008) noted that handling moral threat also demands the obedient majority to defend and bolster their image as good and moral beings. Bolstering their mo-

ral self, the obedient majority often uses self-affirmation to re-establish their moral image. For them, successful defence relies on redeeming their moral goodness (Monin et al., 2008).

Handling moral threat can nonetheless go far beyond derogating the source of the threat (Bolderdijk, 2018; Zane et al., 2016). For the obedient majority, this confrontation induces an arena not only to defend their moral self but also their ideology (Minson & Monin, 2012). Defending their ideology is not merely a matter of turning a blind eye (Gifford, 2011). It is a matter of deliberately denying all claims of immorality and injustice (Bashir, Lockwood, Chasteen, Nadolny, & Noyes, 2013; Norgaard, 2006). Bolderdijk et al. (2018) noted that the obedient majority can go so far as to blindly obey to and justify their firmly rooted, although, immoral ideology. For them, ideological justification is tied to an existential need to feel a sense of stability and certainty in the legitimacy of their beliefs (Feygina, Jost & Goldsmith, 2009; Gifford, 2011). Instead of recognising the need for change, the obedient majority confides in the goodness and fairness of their ideology (Gifford, 2011). Peril of derogation is that the obedient majority abstains from bolstering such necessary moral reform (Bolderdijk et al., 2018; Zane et al., 2016). Ideological justification can thus be considered a force of stagnation and a barrier to moral reform (Feygina et al., 2009; Thøgersen, 2008).

Backlash against moral rebels can, more often than not, burn the bridges to moral reform. Presuming defeat, Bolderdijk et al. (2018) noted that moral rebels often find their message, notably their beliefs and actions, disregarded. For moral rebels, all efforts to carry out their moral agenda are seemingly disintegrated. Progress in moral reform is therefore seldom. Yet Minson and Monin (2012) assumed that the backlash could have the ironic effect of making the message of the moral rebellion more unobjectionable. Their findings demonstrated moral threat still leads the obedient majority to defend their moral self against rebellious minorities. Target derogation, nonetheless, marginally decreased their urge to also defend and bolster their moral ideology. Together, their findings suggested that target derogation might decrease the majorities' resistance to the rebels' ideology in the face of threat (Minson & Monin, 2012). Derogating the messenger, the majority might feel less urge to also reject their message.

Rationale for this research

Full aftereffect of backlash against moral rebels has nonetheless seldom been examined (Bolderdijk et al., 2018; Minson & Monin, 2012). Former research found that backlash can go far beyond shooting the messenger (i.e. the moral rebel) (Bolderdijk et al., 2018; Zane et al., 2016). These studies had nonetheless solely inferred, yet not examined, that backlash has to also go so far as to hit the message. Path of the bullet has still to be determined (Minson & Monin, 2012). Predominant focus of this research is therefore to lay out a detailed account of the full aftereffect of backlash against moral rebels and the message of their moral rebellion.

Efforts to cast light on the full aftereffect of backlash, further, address an intermediary that could determine the reaction to the moral message and thereby frame moral reform. Plausible is that the endorsement of the moral message is hindered by backlash (Bashir et al., 2013; Bolderdijk et al., 2018). Past research found that backlash is generally reckoned as a matter of moral threat (Minson & Monin, 2012; Monin, 2007; Monin et al., 2008; O'Connor & Monin, 2016). Presumed is, therefore, that threat indirectly hinders the endorsement of the moral message (Minson & Monin, 2012; Monin et al., 2008; O'Connor & Monin, 2016). Presenting a detailed account of this interrelation has, nonetheless, not been done. Past studies had solely inferred, yet not examined, that backlash has to go so far as to hinder the endorsement of the moral message and thereby burn the bridges to moral reform (Bolderdijk et al., 2018; Minson & Monin, 2012). Focus of this research is to cast this matter against an underlying belief of uncertainty. Uncertainty is tied to the inconsistency that backlash seemingly decreases the urge to go further than shooting the messenger (Minson & Monin, 2012). Plausible is that moral threat is fully handled by derogating the source of the threat. Differentiating could be that backlash markedly diminishes feelings of moral threat. Presumed is thus that backlash against moral rebels could be sufficient to defend and bolster the image as good and moral beings. Backlash against moral could, therefore, be enough to fully redeem the moral standing.

Backlash against moral rebels could bring moral reform into being. Biting the bullet, moral rebels could find their message regarded. For moral rebels, all efforts to carry out their moral agenda could be seemingly integrated. Progress in moral reform could thus be likely. Predicted is, first and foremost, that backlash could have the ironic effect of making the message of the moral rebellion more unobjectionable. Presumed is further that this effect is mediated by a diminished feeling of moral threat.

Present research

Building on Minson and Monin (2012), this research relies on a similar methodological grounding (see Figure 1 and 2). Present research, therefore, initially intends to mirror their research results. For that, all participants are randomly assigned to either the Rating First or Threat First condition (see Minson & Monin, 2012). Position of moral threat is controlled for and altered for each condition to contrast the reactions to the moral rebel (i.e. the target or messenger) and the message of their moral rebellion (see Figure 1 and 2). Position of moral threat in the Threat First condition is intended to create the chance to handle the moral threat by reacting to the source of the threat (i.e. the moral rebel, that emits a threat) before reacting to the message of the moral rebellion. Position of moral threat in the Rating First condition is meant to deny this chance (i.e. reacting to a moral rebel, that does not emit a threat) before being threatened and then reacting to the message of the

moral rebellion. Going beyond Minson and Monin (2012), this research adds the documentation of the reaction against the message of the moral rebellion.



Figure 1. Position of moral threat in the Rating First condition.

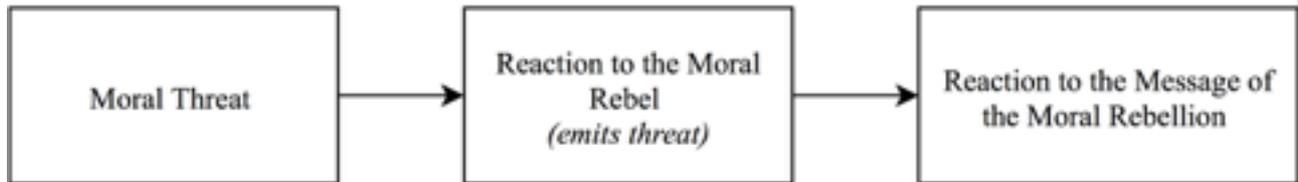


Figure 2. Position of moral threat in the Threat First condition.

Bringing together all elaborations, the following hypothesis can be theorised:

Assumption: Participants assume to be rated as immoral by moral rebels.

H1: Participants like moral rebels, that do not emit a threat (Rating First), more than moral rebels, that emit a threat (Threat First).

H2: Target derogation (Threat First) is related to a higher message endorsement, that is mediated by diminished feelings of moral threat; Target derogation (i.e. reacting to a moral rebel that emits a threat) diminishes the feelings of moral threat. Feeling no longer threatened leads to higher message endorsement.

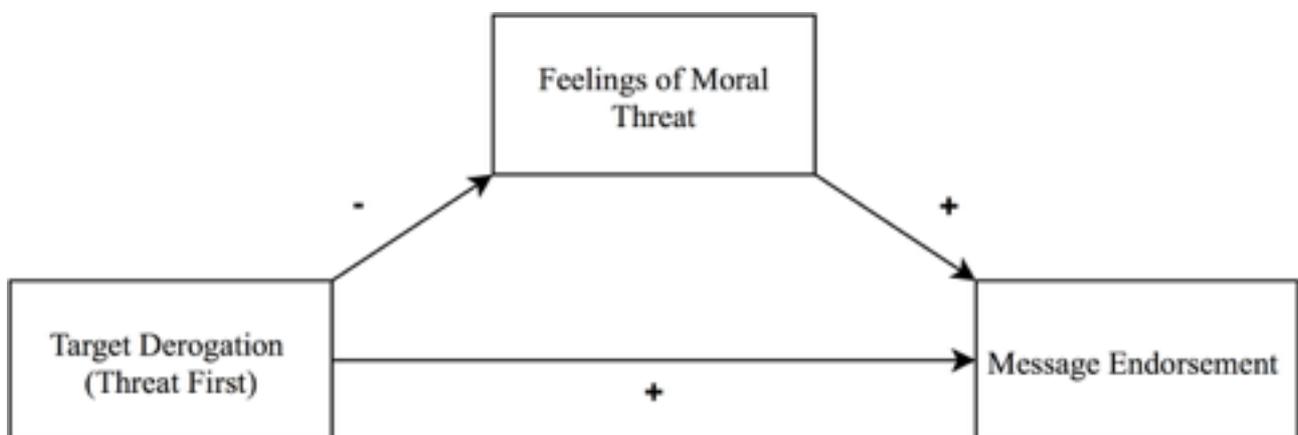


Figure 3. Theoretical model denoting the mediation effect of moral threat between target derogation and message endorsement (see Threat First condition).

Method

Design

This study consisted of a one-factor design using Target Derogation (rating first versus threat first) as the independent variable to determine its effect on message endorsement (i.e. the dependent variable). Moral threat was added as a mediator. This study further consisted of a cross-sectional design.

Participants

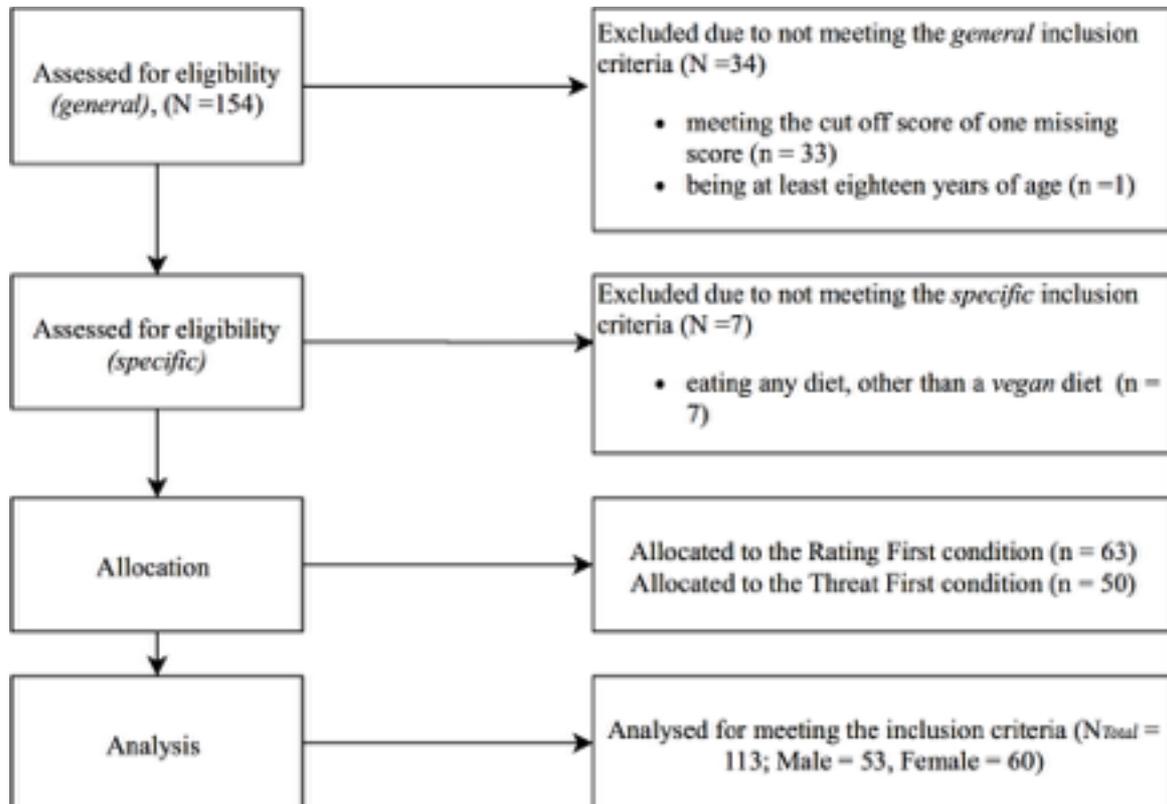


Figure 4. Diagram outlining the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the analysis.

The study consisted of a convenience sample. The participants' mean age was 31.16 ($SD_{age} = 13.53$, $Range_{age} = 19 - 77$). The participants' nationalities were German ($n = 83$), Dutch ($n = 15$) and Other ($n = 16$). Recruitment for participants was mainly done through an institutionally offered test-subject system (SONA). Course credit could be obtained. Other participants were recruited through social media channels of the researcher.

Procedure

First and foremost, all participants were briefed on the underlying intention of this study. Under the guise of studying the relation amidst 'Eating habits and Personality', participants were asked to fill in the information. Prior to filling in the study, all participants had to sign the informed consent form. Easing the participants into the study, information about their eating habits was initi-

ally asked. Then, participants were confronted by the message of the moral rebel. The message denoted the rebel's beliefs based on moral ideals. Each participants was then randomly assigned to either the Threat First or Rating First condition. Based on the assigned condition, participants were introduced to moral threat at a different moment during this study. In the Threat First condition, moral threat was directly introduced by asking the participants to rate the morality of the moral rebel and then to take the rebel's stance to rate their own morality. Then, participants were offered the chance to handle moral threat by reacting to the source of the threat (i.e. moral rebel, that emits a threat). In the Rating First condition, participants were denied this chance but instead reacted to the moral rebel (i.e. moral rebel, that does not emit a threat) before being morally threatened. Personal reactions to the moral rebel (i.e. the messenger) were asked by rating the rebel on a series of character traits. Regardless of the condition, all participants were then asked to continue by filling in a threat measure. Finally, all participants were asked to react to the message of the moral rebellion. Personal reactions were asked by stating their attitude and intention in regards to the message. Prior to the end, participants filled in information regarding their gender, age, nationality, field of study and educational background. By the end, all participants were fully debriefed. Filling in the entire study took roughly fifteen minutes. Present research was authorised by the BMS Ethics Committee.

Measures

Eating Habits. Eating habits were analysed regarding the meat ingestion. Eating meat was first and foremost measured in terms of its regularity and amount. The regularity of meat ingestion was indicated on a 8-point categorical scale (ranging from not at all, one time, two times, three times, four times, times, six times, to daily). Quantity of meat ingestion was indicated on a 5-point categorical scale (ranging from none at all, a little, a moderate amount, a great deal, to a lot). Under the guise of studying all eating habits, filler items targeting other eating habits were also included. In total, eight items were used.

Thoughts and feelings regarding meat ingestion were further determined. Prominence of eating meat was tied to emotional and hedonic sensations (Berndsen & van der Pligt, 2003). Items of the original scale were adjusted to fit this test situation (Berndsen & van der Pligt, 2003). Pro-meat attitudes were assessed on a 6-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree). Test items included "Meat is delicious" or "Meat is a delicacy". Filler items included "Boiled greens are dull" or "Fruit is really yummy". Internal consistency for all test items was moderate (Cronbach's α .57). Yet, the internal consistency for all meat items was good (Cronbach's α .87). In total, 12 items were used.

Physical characteristics including taste, smell and texture, body feel and enjoyment or disgust were similarly bound to meat ingestion (Kubberød, Ueland, Tronstad & Risvik, 2002; Rozin &

Fallon, 1980, 1987). Justification came from far-reaching efforts in nutritional research demonstrating that these determinants strongly affected the meat rejection (Kubberød et al., 2002). Items of the original scale were adjusted to fit this test situation (Kubberød et al., 2002). Pro-meat attitudes were indicated on a 6-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree). Test items included “The smell of meat is delicious”; “Meat tastes of fat” or “Meat smells disgusting”. Internal consistency for all test items was moderate (Cronbach’s α .58). Yet, the internal consistency for all meat items was good (Cronbach’s α .80). In total, fourteen items were used.

Prominence of meat in the diet was further tied to a firmly rooted beliefs (Joy, 2010; Kubberød et al., 2002). Items of the original scale were adjusted to fit this test situation (Kubberød et al., 2002). Pro-meat beliefs were assessed on a 6-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly). Test items included “Eating meat is normal”; “Eating meat is necessary”; “Eating meat is natural” or “Meat constitutes a good dinner”. Under the guise of studying all eating habits, filler items targeting other foods were also included. Internal consistency for all test items was moderate (Cronbach’s α .76). Yet, the internal consistency for all meat items was good (Cronbach’s α .87). In total, fifteen items were used.

Instead of tasting food, this test situation was based on remembering, that included recalling or thinking of, their meat ingestion. Test situations that included recall, were anchored to stimuli, images or sensations that were normally included during the daily food ingestion (Bloom, Engelhart, Furst Hill & Krathwohl, 1956). Difficulties in recall were decreased by featuring different attitudinal, emotional and bodily statements related to meat ingestion. By this reasoning, this test situation was designed to test for recalling and remembering sensory attributes, including taste and smell, body feel and enjoyment or disgust in regards to meat ingestion (Kubberød et al., 2002). Recalling thoughts and feelings related to meat ingestion, albeit being in an online test situation, was assumed to reflect authentic dietary habits. Preference in nutrition could similarly be identified. Distortions and biases, that were tied to a failure in recall, could thereby be decreased (Bloom et al., 1956). The results could thus be used as a reliable indicator of the dietary habits. For this test situation, recall was uninfluenced by the ensuing manipulation in this study.

Moral Message. The message described rebel’s refusal to eat meat. Defining was that the refusal was based on moral grounds. Content of the message was that factory farming animals signifies slaughtering conscience and sentient beings. For them, eating meat was considered to be cruel, immoral and unethical. Content of the message was further that farmed animals are neither thought to be objects nor abstractions and are therefore not considered to lack an identity or emotionality. Justification for the message content was tied to far-reaching efforts in nutritional reform outlining the moral ideology underlying veganism (Joy, 2010; Piazza et al., 2015; Rosenfeld, 2018).

By this reasoning, message was intended to indirectly accuse anyone that was obedient to traditional dietary norms. Prominent was that the message confronted and challenged those in their moral standing.

Morality Measure. Morality was measured using a moral image scale (Minson & Monin, 2012). Items of the original scale were adjusted to fit this test situation (Minson & Monin, 2012). Morality was indicated on a 6-point Likert scale (anchored at -3 = extremely immoral, 0 = neither immoral nor moral, and + 3 = extremely moral). Test items included “I would say I am”, “I think most vegans are”, “Vegans would think that I am” and “Vegans think of my diet as”. Combination of these items was intended as a moral threat. Internal consistency of the test items was bad (Cronbach’s α .46). In total, four items were used.

This test situation addressed morality in terms of moral image. Distinguishing of moral image was its stability (Higgins, 1987; Rosenberg, 2015). Instead of being stable and lasting, moral self were considered to be malleable and dynamic (Higgins, 1987; Rosenberg, 2015). Prominent was further that the moral self, was anchored to stimuli, signals or cues, that were salient and meaningful in a distinct situation (Kernis & Goldman, 2003; Kernis & Johnson, 1990). Performance, including attitude and conduct, was central to the judgement (Kernis & Goldman, 2003). By this reasoning, this test situation was designed to gain insight into the state of the moral self. Judgement, notably anonymous in an online test situation, was thought to account for a higher degree of honesty (Mitchell & Jolley, 2010). Exaggeration, that included thinking too highly of oneself, or underrating, that included making little of another, could thereby be diminished. The results could thus be used as a reliable indicator of the moral image. For this test situation, judgement was influenced by the earlier manipulation.

Messenger. Personal attitude to the messenger was analysed terms of attraction or rejection. Personality of the moral rebel was therefore rated on fifteen semantic differential traits (ranging from 1 = strongly dislike to 6 = strongly like). Items of the original scale were adjusted to fit this test situation (Minson & Monin, 2012). Internal consistency of the test items was really good (Cronbach’s α .93). Characteristics include dumb - intelligent, insecure - confident, immature - mature, dishonest - honest, unfair - fair, immoral - moral, selfish - generous, rude - friendly, cold - warm, weak - strong, obedient - rebellious, timid - courageous, troublemaker - militant, ignorant - educated; cruel - kind. In total, fifteen items were used.

This test situation was based on inferring, that included assuming and concluding, on traits and characteristics. Prominent was that inferences were not anchored to signals or cues, that were extracted from an interaction. Instead, inferences were solely anchored to stimuli deducted from the

fictional message content. By this reasoning, this test situation was designed to gain insight into ascribed traits, such as honesty and morality and characteristics, including kindness and fairness that determine the attraction or rejection of the messenger. Inferring traits and characteristics, notably anonymous in an online test situation, was thought to account for a higher degree of honesty (Mitchell & Jolley, 2010). Discomfort to criticise could be decreased by featuring different attitudinal statements related to traits and characteristics (Lelkes, Krosnick, Marx, Judd & Park, 2012; Mitchell & Jolley, 2010). Biases and distortions, that were tied to social desirability, could similarly be diminished in this test situation (Lelkes et al., 2012). The results could thus be used as a reliable indicator of the attitudes. For this test situation, inference was influenced by the ensuing manipulation in this study.

Threat Measure. Threat was measured using the Challenge and Threat Scale (CAT) (Rossato et al., 2016). Part of the items of the original scale were chosen and adjusted to fit this test situation (Rossato et al., 2016). In this test situation, threat was tied to emotional signals, including anger, anxiety and irritability (Jones, Meijen, McCarthy & Sheffield, 2009). Physical signals including higher heart rate, nausea and headaches were similarly bound to threat (O'Connor et al., 2010). Due to this study design, somatic signals could not be measured². Threat was indicated on a 6-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree). Test items included “I feel like this message is a threat” or “I am concerned that vegans could criticise me”. Internal consistency of the test items was good (Cronbach’s α .79). In total, four items were used.

This test situation relied on disclosure, that included consciously and systematically reflecting on the internal states. Test situations that included reflection, were tied to thoughts, feelings or bodily signs, that were extremely salient, significant and meaningful in a distinct moment (Moon, 2013). Challenges to reflection were diminished by featuring different statements related to these internal states. This test situation was solely meant to gain insight into emotional signals, including anger, irritability or stress, in regards to the internal state. Concerns came from longstanding research claiming that heart rate measures offered a higher degree of guise, neutrality and reliability (Seery, 2011; Turner, Jones, Sheffield, & Cross, 2012). Paralleling these, disclosure has also been recognised to accurately index internal states. Intensity of the internal states could similarly be identified. Distortions, that could normally be diminished by disguise, could nonetheless not be elimina-

² Design of this test situation is framed by regulatory safety measures taken to diminish the Corona Pandemic. Physiological measures had additionally been chosen to more accurately index a unitary state of threat (see Blascovich, Seery, Mugridge, Weisbuch & Norris, 2004). Combining these measures had been thought to guarantee for a satisfactory degree of guise, neutrality, accuracy and reliability.

ted in this test situation. Regardless, the results could be used as a reliable indicator of the internal state. For this test situation, disclosure was influenced by the manipulation in this study.

Message Endorsement. Endorsement of the message was measured using the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1988). Parts of the theory were merely examined.

Endorsement of the message was, first and foremost, tied to the attitude. Personal attitude was indicated on a 6-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = strongly negative to 6 = strongly positive). Items of the original scale were adjusted to fit this test situation (Minson & Monin, 2012). To measure attitudes, six semantic differential items were used including Good - Bad; Enjoyable - Unenjoyable; Delicious- Disgusting; Pleasant - Distasteful; Harmful - Beneficial; Natural - Unnatural; and Necessary - Unnecessary. Test item included "Eating meat is ...". Internal consistency of the test items was really good (Cronbach's α .89). In total, seven items were used.

Endorsement of the message was, further, tied to the intention to change. Justification for analysis came from longstanding research suggesting that intention is the strongest indicator of change (Ajzen, 1988). Intention was similarly indicated on a 6-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree). Test items included "I am going to eat meat" or "I do not intend to eat meat anymore". Items of the original scale were adjusted to fit this test situation (Minson & Monin, 2012). Internal consistency of the test items was really good (Cronbach's α .88). In total, five items were used.

Results

Morality

Preliminary Analysis.

Table 1

Skewness, kurtosis and Shapiro-Wilk Test for all morality items.

	$M_{Skewness}$	$SD_{Skewness}$	$M_{Kurtosis}$	$SD_{Kurtosis}$	W	Df	Sig
<i>I would say I am</i>	-1.31	0.23	3.26	0.45	0.77	113	.00
<i>Vegans would think of me as</i>	0.12	0.23	-0.87	0.45	0.92	113	.00
<i>Vegans would think of my diet as</i>	0.32	0.23	-0.67	0.45	0.92	113	.00
<i>Most vegans are</i>	-0.96	0.23	1.38	0.45	0.86	113	.00

Note. Morality scale ranged from 1 = strongly immoral to 6 = strongly moral.

Morality (H1). Preliminary analysis indicated that the data was not normally distributed (see Table 1). Therefore, non-parametric test were used to analyse the data for morality.

To test if participants imagined to be morally rejected by moral rebels, a Wilcoxon Signed Rank test was conducted to examine if the morality ratings differed from the midpoint (0 = neither immoral nor moral). The results indicated that participants rated own their morality as being significantly higher than the midpoint ($Mdn = +1,5$; $Mode = 5$), Wilcoxon Signed Rank $Z = 8.63$, $p = .00$, $r = .81$. Inferring the rebel's judgement, all participants rated their morality beneath the midpoint ($Mdn = -0.5$; $Mode = 2$), Wilcoxon Signed Rank $Z = -1.67$, $p = .95$, $r = -.16$. Participants, instead, assumed that the morality of their own diet was beneath the midpoint ($Mdn = -0.5$; $Mode = 2$), Wilcoxon Signed Rank $Z = -3.31$ $p = .01$, $r = -.31$. Participants rated the rebel's morality as being significantly higher than the midpoint ($Mdn = +1,5$; $Mode = 5$), Wilcoxon Signed Rank $Z = 7.94$ $p = .00$, $r = .75$. Wilcoxon Signed Rank, $Z = -.57$, $p = .57$. Mann-Whitney U test, further, indicated that the morality ratings did not differ among the conditions $U_s > 1367.00$, $P_s > .19$; $.73$. In sum, the assumption was confirmed.

Messenger (H2). Preliminary analysis indicated that the data was normally distributed ($M_{Skewness} = -0.22$; $SD_{Skewness} = 0.23$) and ($M_{Kurtosis} = 0.22$; $SD_{Kurtosis} = 0.45$). Shapiro-Wilk test of normality, further, signified the symmetrical distribution $W(113) = 0.99$, $p = .46$.

To test (H2) that moral rebels are considered more likeable in the Rating First than Threat First condition, an independent sample t-test was conducted using the conditions (rating first versus threat first) as the independent variable and liking as the dependent variable. Prior to the main analysis, a single mean score of all character traits was calculated. Higher ratings signified greater liking. Results indicated that the moral rebel was considered likeable ($M \geq 4$). Results, further, signified that moral rebels, that did not emit a threat (Rating First), were considered more likeable ($M = 4.51$; $SD = 0.84$) than moral rebels, that emitted a threat (Threat First), ($M = 4.19$; $SD = 0.66$). This difference, -0.32 CI $[-.38; -.61]$, was significant $t(111) = 2.24$, $p = .03$ and indicated by a moderate effect size, $d = 0.43$. In sum, the first hypothesis was confirmed.

Granted that liking for the moral rebel was measured using one construct as intended by Minson and Monin (2012), a factor analyses was further conducted to examine if the items indeed belong to one factor. Prior to further analysis, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using Varimax rotation on sixteen character traits was conducted. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin statistic confirmed the sampling adequacy for this analysis $KMO = .90$ (Kaiser, 1974). Bartlett's test of sphericity $\chi^2(120) = 1136.90$, $p = .00$, indicated that the correlation structure was sufficing for factor analysis. Kaiser's

criterion of eigenvalues greater than 1 (Kaiser, 1974) yielded a two-factor solution as the best fit for the data, accounting for 60.13 % of the variance. Items that cluster the same factor suggested that the first factor reflected a social character dimension (e.g. rude - friendly, unfair - fair, selfish - generous) and the second factor reflected an idealistic character dimension (e.g. obedient - rebellious, timid - courageous, insecure - confident) (see Appendix A). Item Pers_Q15 (troublemaker - militant) had to be excluded from the analysis as it did not load on either factor. Exclusion of this item yielded to a slightly higher internal consistency (Cronbach's α .93). For the first dimension, higher ratings indicated greater liking. For the second dimension, instead, higher ratings indicated higher morality.

For the main analysis, an independent sample t-test was used to determine if moral rebels, that did not emit a threat (Rating First), were considered more likeable than moral rebels, that emitted a threat (Threat First). Results signified that that moral rebels, that did not emit a threat were considered significantly more likeable ($M = 4.29$; $SD = 0.98$) than moral rebels, that emitted a threat ($M = 3.93$; $SD = 0.77$). This difference, -0.36 CI [.02; $-.69$], was significant $t(111) = 2.11$, $p = .04$ and indicated by a large effect size, $d = 0.40$. Prominent was that the rebel was considered unlikeable in the Threat First condition ($M < 4$).

For the main analysis, an independent sample t-test was used to determine if moral rebels, that did not emit a threat (Rating First), were considered more idealistic than moral rebels, that emitted a threat (Threat First). Results, further, signified that moral rebels, that did not emit a threat, were considered more idealistic ($M = 4.71$; $SD = 0.10$) than moral rebels, that emitted a threat ($M = 4.41$; $SD = 0.10$). This difference, -0.30 CI [.01; $-.58$], was significant $t(111) = 2.07$, $p = .04$ and indicated by a large effect size, $d = 0.39$. Qualities ascribed to the moral rebel were therefore more desirable in the Rating First condition than in the Threat First condition.

For further analysis, the character trait dimensions were contrasted. Paired sample t-test was used to determine if the rebel's inferred idealism was higher than their inferred likability. Results signified that moral rebels were generally considered more idealistic ($M = 4.58$; $SD = 0.77$) than likeable ($M = 4.13$; $SD = 0.91$), regardless of the condition $t(112) = -7.77$, $p = .00$. This difference, -0.45 CI [$-.56$; $-.33$], was significant and indicated by a large effect size, $d = 1.08$. Prominent is the moral rebel was altogether considered both likeable and idealistic.

Message Endorsement

Preliminary Analysis.

Table 2

Means, standard deviations and median for the feelings of moral threat, attitude and intention.

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mdn</i>
Feelings of Moral Threat	2.43	0.09	2.25
Attitude	3.78	0.45	3.86
Intention	2.91	0.13	2.60

Note: Feelings of Moral Threat scale ranged from 1 = negative to 6 = positive. The attitude and intention scales ranged from 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree.

Attitude (H3). Prior to the main analysis, a single mean score for each of the variables was calculated (see Table 2). Preliminary analysis further indicated that the data was not normally distributed ($p < .01$). Distribution of attitude, instead, ($M_{Skewness} = -.16$; $SD_{Skewness} = .23$) and ($M_{Kurtosis} = -.29$; $SD_{Kurtosis} = .45$), was markedly symmetrical ($p = .49$). Transforming data to normality yielded ineffectual ($p > .05$).

Main analysis. Mediation analysis was conducted to test if there was an effect of target derogation (Threat First, Rating First; independent variable) on attitude (dependent variable) that was mediated by feelings of moral threat. For this mediation analysis, the regression method of Baron and Kenny (1986) was used.

Building on Baron and Kenny (1986), the results, first and foremost, indicated that target derogation had no significant effect on attitude ($\beta = -0.18$, $t = -0.98$, $p = .33$). Results, further, indicated that target derogation had no significant effect on moral threat ($\beta = -0.00$, $t = -0.02$, $p = .99$). In addition, the results indicated feelings of moral threat had no effect on significant attitude ($\beta = -0.09$, $t = 0.94$, $p = .35$)

In light of these findings, the total variance exhibited by this model did not reach marginal significance ($R^2 = .02$, $F(1, 110) = 0.96$, $p = .33$). Results further indicated that moral threat was no significant mediator in this model ($\beta = 0.09$, $t = 0.94$, $p = .35$). In total, there was no significant indirect effect of target derogation on attitude through a diminished feeling of moral threat CI [-.54; .18]. In sum, the second hypothesis was disconfirmed.

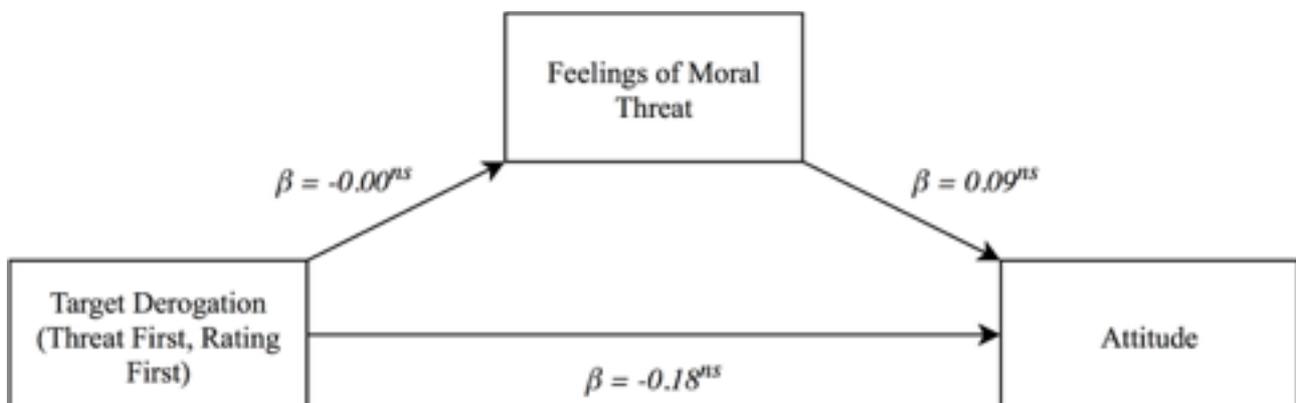


Figure 5. Standardised regression coefficients for the relation amidst target derogation and attitude, as mediated by feelings of moral threat. ns: not significant

Intention (H3). Prior to the main analysis, a single mean score for each of the variables was calculated (see Table 2). Preliminary analysis further indicated that the data was not normally distributed ($p < .01$). Transforming data to normality yielded ineffectual ($p > .05$).

Main analysis. Mediation analysis was conducted to test if there was an effect of target derogation (Threat First, Rating First; independent variable) on intention (dependent variable) that was mediated by feelings of moral threat. For this mediation analysis, the regression method of Baron and Kenny (1986) was used.

Building on Baron and Kenny (1986), the results, first and foremost, indicated that target derogation had no effect on intention ($\beta = 0.31, t = 1.15, p = .25$). Results, further, target derogation had no effect on feelings of moral threat ($\beta = -0.00, t = -0.02, p = .99$). In addition, the results indicated feelings of moral threat had no effect on intention ($\beta = -1.51, t = -1.13, p = .26$).

In light of these findings, the total variance exhibited by this model did not reach marginal significance ($R^2 = .02, F(1, 110) = 1.32, p = .25$). Results further indicated that moral threat was no significant mediator in this model ($\beta = -0.15, t = -1.13, p = .26$). In total, there was no significant indirect effect of target derogation on intention through a diminished feeling of moral threat CI [-.22; .84]. In sum, the second hypothesis was disconfirmed.

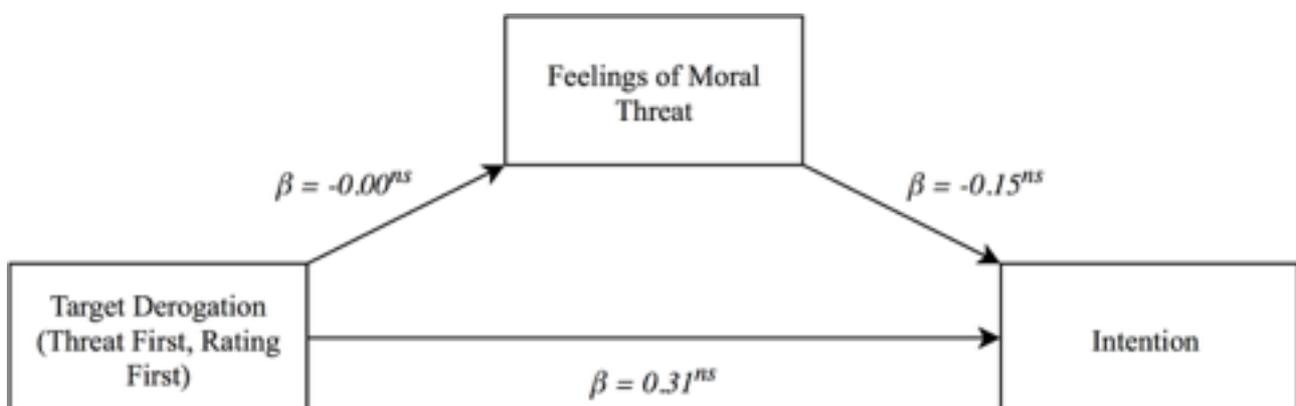


Figure 6. Standardised regression coefficients for the relation amidst target derogation and intention, as mediated by feelings of moral threat. ns: not significant

Discussion

Present research focused on laying out a detailed account of the full aftereffect of backlash against moral rebels. Efforts addressing this aftereffect, therefore, documented the reaction to the message of the moral rebellion and cast light on a mediator, moral threat, that could determine the reaction and thereby frame moral reform. Of interest is, therefore, the knee-jerk reaction against moral rebels and the message of their moral rebellion.

In a nutshell, the findings yielded that backlash against moral rebels can be reckoned as a matter of moral threat. Moral threat is be handled by mildly derogating the source of the threat. Going against the grain in the name of their ideals can demand moral rebels to endure backlash and resistance from an obedient majority. Unbridled by moral courage, moral rebels are similarly be met with admiration, friendliness and gratitude. Present findings, therefore, demonstrated that backlash against moral rebels can go so far as to shoot the messenger.

Present findings, further, yielded that backlash against moral rebels can burn the bridges to moral reform. Biting the bullet, moral rebels seemingly find their message, notably their beliefs and actions, disregarded. Brushed off, the obedient majority remains resistant to the rebel's message in the face of moral threat. For moral rebels, all efforts to carry out their moral agenda are therefore seemingly disintegrated. Presumed is that the obedient majority might remain resistant to change and therefore abstains from bolstering such necessary moral reform. Progress in moral reform seems therefore unlikely.

Roots of Resentment

Premise for this research is based on the occurrence of backlash. Present findings yielded that backlash against moral rebels can be reckoned as a matter of moral threat. Presumed is that backlash stems from a threat to the moral self. Protection of the moral self thereby deducible brings forth the derogation and denigration of the moral rebel. This finding, not only, confirms but further corroborates the results of former research (Bolderdijk et al., 2018; Collange et al., 2006; Minson & Monin, 2012; Monin, 2007; Monin et al., 2008; O'Connor & Monin, 2016; Sinclair & Kunda, 2000).

Present discussion builds directly on Monin (2007), to think through and elaborate on the roots of resentment. In this regard, Monin (2007) denoted that the threat for the obedient majority could arise from feelings of moral inferiority and shame (Gausel & Leach, 2011; Lansky, 1995; Tangney & Dearing, 2002). In the face of moral threat, moral rebels could be detested for highlighting their moral shortcomings and deficiencies. Recognising their shortcomings, the obedient majority could feel ashamed and morally inferior. Pangs of inferiority could beget a concern for their harmed moral self (Gausel & Leach, 2011). Protecting their moral self from further harm could, therefore, bring forth the derogation and denigration of the moral rebel (Monin, 2007; Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Monin (2007) reasoned further that the threat for the obedient majority could arise from

feelings of moral confusion. Questioning their moral goodness, moral rebels could be detested for destroying their moral image (Monin et al., 2008). Moral rebels could, forasmuch, bring their ignorance and immorality to mind (Minson & Monin, 2012; Monin, 2007). In addition, Monin (2007) denoted that the threat for the obedient majority could arise from a fear of moral rejection. Fear of moral rejection could feed off their concern to be condemned and rebuffed for their moral failure and could be fuelled by their desire to hide their failure from others (Gausel & Leach, 2011; Goffman, 1959). Fear of rejection could signify their concern of harm for their moral image in the eyes of moral rebels. Protecting their moral self from further harm could, therefore, bring forth the resentment of the moral rebel (Gausel & Leach, 2011; Minson & Monin, 2012; Monin et al., 2008).

Shooting the Messenger

Present findings, further, suggested that moral threat is handled by derogating the source of the threat. In this regard, target derogation included insulting, stigmatising and discriminating against the moral rebel. Patronising them, moral rebels are denigrated to righteous yet slightly unfriendly, and ultimately delusional idealists. Protecting their moral self, the obedient majority can go to great lengths to guard against threatening others (Maas, 1973; Milgram, 1965; Sinclair & Kunda, 2000; Smith et al., 1996). Present findings, at first glance, confirm and corroborate the results of former research (Bolderdijk et al., 2018; Minson & Monin, 2012; Monin, 2007; O'Connor & Monin, 2016).

Present discussion builds further on Monin (2007), to cast light and elaborate on the defence against moral threat. In this regard, Monin (2007) reasoned that the defence can be handled by denying decency and goodness, altogether. Striking back, the obedient majority defuses the threat by raising doubt, in their attitude and conduct, about the goodness and decency of the rebels' intentions (Ybarra, 2002) and thereby denies the genuineness of their moral deeds and efforts (Monin, 2007). Insinuating a hidden agenda, the obedient majority is keen to ascribe false decency, fakery and sham (Monin, 2007; Ybarra, 2002).

Beyond that, Monin (2007), further, reasoned that the defence against moral threat can be handled through denigration and badmouthing. Settling the score, the obedient majority defuses the threat by raising doubt, in their attitude and conduct, about the rebels' kindness, intelligence and might (Liebrand et al., 1986; Minson & Monin, 2012; Monin et al., 2008) and thereby strikes to infantilise and emasculate the moral rebel (Monin, 2007; Monin & Norton, 2003). Put differently, moral threats are thereby denigrated to unfriendly, foolish and ultimately delusional idealists (Monin, 2007).

Present findings, nonetheless, suggested that moral rebels are largely thought to be friendly, kind and fair. Promising is further that moral rebels are also considered to be a symbol of good and

altruistic agency. Qualities that distinguish moral rebels, including their moral courage (Sonnentag & McDaniel, 2013) and self-esteem (Sonnentag & Barnett, 2015) are similarly ascribed. Put differently, the general reaction to moral rebels tends to fondness and tolerance. Present findings similarly conform to and corroborate the results of former research (Minson & Monin, 2012; Monin, 2007; Monin et al., 2008; O'Connor & Monin, 2016; Sinclair & Kunda, 2000).

Present discussion builds on Gausel and Leach (2011), to clarify and elaborate on the reaction to moral threat. In this regard, Gausel and Leach (2011) argued that the majorities' reaction to moral threat could be framed and moulded by their concern for their moral self. Of interest is that the majorities' concern arises from their judgement of the intensity (Maas, 1973; Minson & Monin, 2012) and the salience (Macrae, Bodenhausen, Milne & Jetten, 1994) of the moral threat. Judgement, nonetheless, lies in the eye of the beholder (Gausel & Leach, 2011; Monin, 2007).

Presumed is that for some members of the obedient majority, the rebel's message formed a threat to their entire moral self (Gausel & Leach, 2011; Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Facing moral threat, moral rebels are detested for highlighting their moral shortcomings and thereby destroying their entire moral image (Monin, 2007; Monin et al., 2008). Moral rebels, forasmuch, bring their immorality and sinfulness to mind (Bolderdijk et al., 2018; Minson & Monin, 2012). Harsh defence could, therefore, stem from a strong threat to their moral confidence (Monin et al., 2008). Priority is, therefore, to guard and defend against moral threat (Gausel & Leach, 2011; Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Handling moral threat further demanded the obedient majority to bolster their image as good and moral beings (Sherman & Cohen, 2002, 2006; O'Connor & Monin, 2016). For them, the successful defence relied on fully redeeming their moral standing (Gausel & Leach, 2011; Minson & Monin, 2012; Sherman & Cohen, 2002).

Presumed is that for other members of the obedient majority, the rebel's message formed a threat to a fragment of their moral self (Gausel & Leach, 2011; Monin et al., 2008). Facing moral threat, the obedient majority can still find comfort in the belief that they are generally good and moral beings (Gausel & Leach, 2011; Monin et al., 2008). Peaceful defence could, therefore, stem from a mild threat to their moral confidence (Gausel & Leach, 2011; Monin et al., 2008). Pressure to guard and defend against moral threat is thereby negligible. Handling moral threat forasmuch demanded the obedient majority to mend and bolster their moral confidence (Monin, 2007; Monin et al., 2008). For them, the successful defence could rely on steadying their moral standing (Gausel & Leach, 2011).

Burning Bridges to Moral Reform

Present findings, further, yielded that backlash against moral rebels burns the bridges to moral reform. Biting the bullet, moral rebels seemingly found their message, notably the their beliefs

and actions, disregarded. Brushed off, the obedient majority remained resistant to the rebel's message in the face of moral threat. For moral rebels, all efforts to carry out their moral agenda are seemingly disintegrated. Problematic is that the obedient majority remains reluctant to change and therefore abstains from bolstering such necessary moral reform. Progress in moral reform is therefore doubtful.

Present discussion builds on Gifford (2011) to cast light and elaborate on the barriers to moral reform. Pertaining to that Gifford (2011) argued that the majorities' resistance could arise from a threat to their ideology. Threat feeds off and is fuelled by a fundamental need to feel a sense of confidence in the rightfulness of their ideology (Feygina et al., 2009; Gifford, 2011). Primary fear attached to this need is the fear of recognising the illegitimacy and injustice of their ideology (Feygina et al., 2009; Gifford, 2011). Protecting their ideology from further damage could thereby bring forth the defence. Defending their ideology is not merely a matter of turning a blind eye (Gifford, 2011). It is a matter of intentionally denying the allegations of immorality and injustice (Bashir et al., 2013; Gifford, 2011; Minson & Monin, 2012). Bolderdijk et al. (2018) argued that the obedient majority can go so far as to fiercely justify their firmly embedded, yet, immoral ideology. For them, ideological justification is tied to the fundamental need to feel a sense of stability and security in the legitimacy of their beliefs (Feygina et al., 2009; Gifford, 2011). Claims and allegations that go against this need for legitimacy are therefore subsidiary. Instead of recognising a need for change, the obedient majority confides in the goodness and righteousness of their ideology (Feygina et al., 2009; Gifford, 2011; Minson & Monin, 2012). Ideological justification could thus be considered a barrier to moral reform.

Present discussion builds further on Bashir et al. (2013), to cast light and elaborate on the reasons to abstain from bolstering moral reform. In this regard, Bashir et al. (2013) argued that the majorities' reluctance could arise from a fear of social rejection. Fear of social rejection feeds off and is fuelled by a fundamental need to belong and fit into society (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). That is to say, the obedient majority is led by a strong need to form and maintain close social ties (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Primary fear attached to this need is the fear of being criticised, stigmatised or discriminated against, being made a subject of humiliation, and of being rejected or ostracised by others (Bashir et al., 2013). Fearing social rejection, the obedient majority can, therefore, go to great lengths to fit in (Bashir et al., 2013; Sonnentag & Barnett, 2015). Bolderdijk et al. (2018) argued that the obedient majority can go so far as to blindly obey to and bolster a firmly rooted, although, immoral ideology. Longing to belong, the obedient majority tends deliberately dismisses all concerns of immorality and injustice (Bashir et al., 2013; Bolderdijk et al., 2018). Concerns that run counter to their need to belong are accordingly subsidiary. Turning a blind eye, the obedient majority can come to find comfort in social conformity (Monin et al., 2008). Pressured by the need to be-

long, obedient majority could, therefore, abstain from bolstering such necessary moral reform (Bashir et al., 2013; Sonnentag & Barnett, 2015). Fear of social rejection could, therefore, be considered a barrier to moral reform.

Directions and Recommendations for Science

The theoretical contribution of this research lies in laying the initial ground for moral reform. That is to say, the theoretical contribution of this research relies on substantial efforts to build the bridges to moral reform. Efforts of this research, therefore, tried to realise the endorsement of the moral message and thereby the fulfilment of the moral agenda. In light of these efforts, it is unfortunate that moral reform could not be brought into being.

Building on this research, numerous directions can be recommended for future studies. Future research should, first and foremost, focus on further laying out a detailed account of the full aftereffect of backlash against moral rebels. Present findings signified that backlash against moral rebels can go far beyond shooting the messenger (also see Bolderdijk et al., 2018; Minson & Moinin, 2012; Zane et al., 2016). Path of the bullet, nonetheless, remains to be determined. Future research should, further, focus on identifying mechanisms that could determine the endorsement of the moral message and thereby the fulfilment of the moral agenda. Put differently, future research should focus on identifying the mechanisms that could decrease the majorities' resistance to a minorities' message in the face of moral threat. Of interest, therefore, remains the knee-jerk reaction against moral rebels and the message of their moral rebellion. Predominantly, future research must, nonetheless, exert all their efforts to disburden and bolster the rebels' demanding undertaking. That is to say, future research has an obligation to be their shield and armour as these rebels courageously act against harm, immorality and injustice.

In light of these directions, a recommendation can be made in regards to the methodological design. Design of this research is framed by regulatory safety measures taken to diminish the Corona Pandemic. Physiological measures had originally been chosen to accurately index a unitary state of threat. Under these circumstances, a self-assessment measure had to be chosen (see Rossato et al., 2018). Future research should additionally include a heart rate measures to more accurately index threat and thereby guarantee for a satisfactory degree of guise, neutrality and reliability (Turner et al., 2012). In light of this, future research should similarly choose a longitudinal research design.

Limitations

Critical remarks can be made regarding this research. In this regard, the first critical remark can be made in regards to the social desirability bias (Maccoby & Maccoby, 1954; Paulhus, 1984). In this research, the social desirability bias could be tied to understating socially undesirable reac-

tions, notably the derogation and denigration of the moral rebel (Zerbe & Paulhus, 1987). Pressured by social taboos, bigotry and intolerance could, therefore, be diminished or ultimately denied (Maccoby & Maccoby, 1954). Predominance of backlash against moral rebels might, therefore, be underestimated (Zerbe & Paulhus, 1987). Future research should include a social desirability measure to identify and control for any inconsistencies among real and self-recorded attitudes (Calder & Burnkrant, 1977; Li & Bagger, 2007; Robertson & Joselyn, 1974).

Furthermore, one remark addresses the design of this research. For this research, a cross-sectional design was chosen. In this regard, a cross-sectional design led to a single recording of internal states, instead of recording these at a different moment in time (Setia, 2016). Problematic is that internal states are dynamic and intricate, rather than fixed and rigid (Nowak, Vallacher & Zochowski, 2005). Post hoc recording, therefore, did not come close to reflect and subsume the dynamics and intricacy of these multimodal internal reactions (Setia, 2016). Future research is therefore urged to choose a longitudinal research design.

Pertaining to that, another remark can be made regarding the design of this research. In this regard, the ecological reliability of this research is rather small. Hence, the online setting, that had been designed for this research, was not entirely congruous to normal situations, that were to be understood by this research. Put differently, the online setting did not fully reflect the dynamics and intricacy of the multimodal stimuli that are embedded in normal life situations. Problematic of small ecological reliability is that it is much harder to generalise the findings from this research to normal life situations (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Promising is that the current findings confirm and further corroborate the results of former research (Bolderdijk et al., 2018; Minson & Monin, 2012; Monin, 2007; Monin et al., 2008; O'Connor & Monin, 2016). Further research should, nonetheless, choose a research design demonstrating a higher ecological validity.

Final remarks can be made concerning the sufficiency of the sample size. In this regard, the sample size was rather small. Preliminary to statistical analysis, an a priori power analysis had been conducted using G*Power3 (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang & Buchner, 2007) to test the difference among means using a two-tailed test, a small effect size ($d = .25$) and Cronbach's α of .05. Result indicated that a total of 179 participants would have been needed to attain a power of .80. Post-hoc power analysis using G*Power3 (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang & Buchner, 2007) solely indicated a power of 0.57 to detect a medium effect size ($d = .50$). Probability of rejecting H_0 albeit H_0 is false is therefore high. Therefore, no statistical unambiguous inferences can be made.

Conclusion

Present research documented the full aftereffect of backlash against moral rebels. Present findings yielded that backlash can go far beyond shooting the messenger. Path of the bullet nonetheless still needs to be determined. Present findings further yielded that backlash against moral rebels can burn the bridges to moral reform. Biting the bullet, moral rebels seemingly found their message disregarded. Put differently, the obedient majority remained resistant to the rebel's message in the face of moral threat. For moral rebels, all efforts to carry out their moral agenda are seemingly disintegrated. Future research is necessary to identify mechanisms that could not only determine but further realise the fulfilment of the moral agenda and thereby bring moral reform into being.

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APPENDIX A

Factor Loadings for Exploratory Factor Analysis with Varimax Rotation of the Messenger Personality Scale



Introduction

Greetings to you!

Focus of this research are Food Preferences and Personality. Partaking in this survey takes roughly 15 to 20 minutes.

Partaking in this research is, first and foremost, entirely voluntary. Partaking is, further, meant for those that are **at least** 18 years of age or older.

Partaking in this research should not elicit any foreseeable discomfort, distress or danger. Possibility of risks are therefore minimal.

Your survey data is generally handled with utmost confidentiality. Personal data is similarly handled with confidentiality and fully anonymised. Personal data can thus not be used to trace back to you. Partaking in this research can be terminated at any moment. Presuming that you terminate this survey, all your data will be fully deleted and omitted from the research results.

Questions or remarks regarding this research can be directly emailed to the researcher in charge: Objections or concerns about this research can instead be emailed to the secretary of the Behavioural Management and Social Sciences Ethics Committee of the University of Twente. (Drs. L. Kamphuis-Blikman, Tel: +31 (0) 53 489 3399, or Email: l.j.m.blikman@utwente.nl).

By continuing, you indicate that you have **fully read and agree to** the terms as described.

APPENDIX B

Thank you for your time and effort!

Please indicate your consent

- I agree
 - I disagree
-

Please indicate your SONA-ID (only UT students) for credits:

Food Preferences - Regularity

Focus of this first block is to address your '**Eating Habits**'. Take your time to read each statement **earnestly and thoroughly!** Please be as accurate and honest as you can be.

How often do you eat ... in a week?

	Not at all	1 Day	2 Days	3 Days	4 Days	5 Days	6 Days	Daily
Greens	<input type="radio"/>							
Fruits	<input type="radio"/>							
Meat	<input type="radio"/>							
Dessert	<input type="radio"/>							

How much do you eat ...

	None at all	A little	A moderate amount	A great deal	A lot
Greens	<input type="radio"/>				
Fruits	<input type="radio"/>				
Meat	<input type="radio"/>				
Dessert	<input type="radio"/>				

Food Preferences - Personal attitudes

Focus of this block is to address your '**Food Preferences**'. Take your time to read each statement **earnestly and thoroughly!** Please be as accurate and honest as you can be.

Please indicate your '**Food Preferences**'.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Dessert is gourmet food	<input type="radio"/>					
Meat is delicious	<input type="radio"/>					
Boiled greens are dull	<input type="radio"/>					
Meat is a delicacy	<input type="radio"/>					
Greens are flavoursome	<input type="radio"/>					
Fruit is really yummy	<input type="radio"/>					
Meat is boring	<input type="radio"/>					
Greens are mouth-watering	<input type="radio"/>					
Meat is disgusting	<input type="radio"/>					
Dessert is a delight	<input type="radio"/>					
Fruit is heavenly	<input type="radio"/>					
Fried meat is really tasty	<input type="radio"/>					

Food Preference - Sensory characteristics

Focus of this block is to address your '**Food Preferences**'. Use your imagination. Take your time to read each statement **earnestly and thoroughly!** Please be as accurate and honest as you can be.

Please indicate your 'Food Preferences'.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Meat tastes of fat	<input type="radio"/>					
Greens are tasteless	<input type="radio"/>					
Fruit tastes sour	<input type="radio"/>					
Meat smells good	<input type="radio"/>					
Dessert tastes sugary sweet	<input type="radio"/>					
Fruit smells fresh	<input type="radio"/>					
Greens taste really gritty	<input type="radio"/>					
Meat tastes juicy	<input type="radio"/>					
Dessert tastes delicious	<input type="radio"/>					
Meat smells disgusting	<input type="radio"/>					
Fruit tastes of sugar	<input type="radio"/>					
The smell of meat is delicious	<input type="radio"/>					
Fruit tastes rather bitter	<input type="radio"/>					
Greens smell refreshing	<input type="radio"/>					

Food Preference - Personal Beliefs

Focus of this block is to address your 'Food Preferences'. Take your time to read each statement **earnestly and thoroughly!** Please be as accurate and honest as you can be.

Please indicate your 'Food Preferences'.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Eating meat is						

normal	<input type="radio"/>					
Fruit is unhealthy	<input type="radio"/>					
Eating greens is necessary	<input type="radio"/>					
Greens are slimming	<input type="radio"/>					
Eating meat is natural	<input type="radio"/>					
Greens are rich in nutrients	<input type="radio"/>					
Eating meat is necessary	<input type="radio"/>					
Eating greens is natural	<input type="radio"/>					
Fruit is good for you	<input type="radio"/>					
Eating meat is healthy	<input type="radio"/>					
Fruit is high in sugar	<input type="radio"/>					
Eating meat is unhealthy	<input type="radio"/>					
Eating fruit is normal	<input type="radio"/>					
Dessert is fattening	<input type="radio"/>					
Meat is good for you	<input type="radio"/>					

Message of the Moral Rebel-Instructions

Read the statement of another Partaker about his 'Eating Habits and Food Preferences'. Please, take your time to read his statement **earnestly and thoroughly!**

Message of the Moral Rebel - Message

Partaker: Personally, I refuse to eat meat. I genuinely think eating meat is cruel and brutal. By my reckoning, factory farming animals literally means slaughtering conscience and sentient beings. Personally, I could not be that unethical and immoral. Beyond doubt, farmed animals are neither objects nor abstractions and

Unethical	<input type="radio"/>	Ethical						
Troublemaker	<input type="radio"/>	Militant						
Cruel	<input type="radio"/>	Kind						

Morality - Threat First

Go ahead and read each of these statement. Take your time to read each statement **earnestly and thoroughly!** Please be as accurate and honest as you can be.

Please indicate your '**Judgement**'.

	extremely immoral	immoral	slightly immoral	slightly moral	moral	extremely moral
I would say I am	<input type="radio"/>					
Most vegans would think that I am	<input type="radio"/>					
Most meat-eaters are	<input type="radio"/>					
Most vegans think that meat-eaters are	<input type="radio"/>					
Vegans would think of my diet as	<input type="radio"/>					
Most vegans are	<input type="radio"/>					

Threat Measurement

Go ahead and read each of these statements. Take your time to read each statement **earnestly and thoroughly!** Please be as accurate and honest as you can be.

By cause of the **Partaker's Message ...**

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I am concerned that vegans will find fault with me	<input type="radio"/>					
I feel like this message is a threat	<input type="radio"/>					
I am worried what vegans will think of me	<input type="radio"/>					
I am concerned that vegans could criticise me	<input type="radio"/>					

Message Persuasion - Intentionality

Focus of this block is to address your '**Eating Habits**'. Go ahead and read each of these statements. Take your time to read each statement earnestly and thoroughly! Please be as accurate and honest as you can be.

By cause of the **Partaker's Message ...**

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I am not going to eat meat anymore	<input type="radio"/>					
I am going to eat meat in the near future	<input type="radio"/>					
I am going to eat meat in the next days	<input type="radio"/>					
I do not intend to eat meat anymore	<input type="radio"/>					
I am definitely going to eat meat	<input type="radio"/>					

Message Persuasion - Attitude

Eating meat is ...

Bad						Good
<input type="radio"/>						
Unenjoyable						Enjoyable
<input type="radio"/>						
Disgusting						Delicious
<input type="radio"/>						
Cruel						Pleasant
<input type="radio"/>						
Harmful						Necessary
<input type="radio"/>						
Unnatural						Natural
<input type="radio"/>						
Unhealthy						Healthy
<input type="radio"/>						

Personal Data

Focus of this last block is to gather some '**General Information**' about you.

What is your age (in numbers)?

What is your gender?

- Male
 - Female
 - Other
 - Prefer not to say
-

What is your nationality?

What is your highest finished degree of education?

- High school degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- P.h.D
- Other

What is your diet?

- Omnivore
- Vegetarian
- Vegan
- Other

Debriefing

Thank you for your time and effort!

Present research addressed the rejection of moral rebels in the field of veganism. Predominant focus of this research is to lay out a detailed account of the aftereffect of rebel rejection and its intermediaries. Efforts to cast light on the full aftereffect intend examine the chain reaction ensuing from rebel rejection and identify intermediaries that could reduce rejection and facilitate moral reform.

Questions or remarks can be emailed to:

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