

UNEXPECTED BLAME: BELIEFS, JUDGMENTS, AND INFERENCES

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Applications of theories of interpersonal blame to consumer behavior have largely focused on understanding when consumers blame companies for their misbehavior. The current research moves beyond past work by shedding new light on the processes underlying consumer blame. In Essay 1, a pilot study and five experiments—in contexts of both fictitious and actual high-profile product failures—show that blame may be incorrectly directed toward the victim. The findings show that (1) consumers exaggerate blame for a victim possessing negative (especially immoral) dispositional traits because (2) that individual is seen as deserving of suffering in general and, as a result, (3) consumers are less likely to take punitive action against the company. The experiments support a “moral dominance” effect whereby victim blame is driven more heavily by perceived differences in the victim’s morality than sociability (or competence), because only morality leads consumers to judge the victim as deserving of suffering in general. In Essay 2, a new line of inquiry is proposed pertaining to consumer inferences of company blame and attitudes when the company engages in cause marketing. By engaging in socially responsible behavior, consumers may infer that the company is signaling a (1) negative attitude, (2) moral judgement, and (3) blame judgement toward the perpetrator of that harm. Each predicts the amount of praise the company receives—depending on consumers’ own attitudes, judgments,

and blame toward the perpetrator—but blame inferences predict praise most strongly. This is because blame provides a unique signal about the company’s stance on an issue. Two studies support these blame inference predictions.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Modern theories of blame take one of two general approaches to explaining blame judgments. So-called “stage-models” (e.g., Malle, Guglielmo, & Monroe, 2014; Shaver, 1985) focus on the cognitive processes and rational decisions that underlie the formation of a blame judgment. Conversely, a separate line of theory (e.g., Alicke, 2000, 2008; Knobe, 2003) posits that a more spontaneous, emotion-laden process influences blame judgments to fit the personal biases and worldview of the individual forming the blame judgment (henceforth the “blame agent”). The present research draws from both perspectives to explain two previously unexplored consumer phenomena across two essays.

Essay 1 demonstrates that consumers may blame victims of harmful product failure—even when the company is responsible for the harm—based on the victim’s dispositional traits. In particular, consumer blame for relatively immoral victims is exaggerated due to a belief that the victim deserves to suffer generally. That is, consumers are motivated to believe that victims in such cases deserve suffering because it maintains their belief in a just world (BJW; Lerner, 1980), and these deservingness beliefs in turn bias blame toward the victim and away from the company. The experiments in Essay 1 further show that victim blaming may create inefficiencies in the free market by stunting warranted consumer punitive action against the culpable producer or service provider.

Essay 2 explores a more nascent blame phenomenon concerning consumer inferences of blame in response to cause marketing (CM). Specifically, the studies in

Essay 2 show that when companies publicly engage in prosocial behavior, consumers may infer that the company is signaling a (1) negative attitude, (2) moral judgement, and (3) blame judgement toward a visible perpetrator of the harm. These inferences in turn predict the amount of praise the company receives, depending on consumers' own attitudes, judgments, and blame toward the perpetrator. Blame inferences in particular may provide unique predictive ability of praise for the company. This is because blame provides a unique signal about the company's stance on an issue. Two studies support these blame inference predictions.

In the remainder of this dissertation, the conceptual background and empirical testing are presented separately for each of the two proposed blame phenomena, categorized by essay. Following this, a generalized summary is provided that threads the two essays together into a unified body of research and extends existing theories of blame, along with a discussion of implications of each essay in turn. In establishing these nascent consumer phenomena and explaining the mechanisms driving them, this research extends the theoretical foundations of the psychology of blame and suggests practical implications for consumer well-being and cause marketing.

CHAPTER II

ESSAY 1 – VICTIM BLAME FOR PRODUCT FAILURE

David Dao boarded a United Airlines flight at O'Hare International Airport on April 9, 2017 in full accordance with Federal Aviation Administration regulations. Once fully boarded, a crew member announced that the flight was overbooked and that four passengers must give up their seats. With no volunteers, the crew randomly selected four passengers, one of whom was Dr. Dao. When Dao refused to exit, security police entered the aircraft and forcibly dragged him off the plane. As a result, Dao suffered a broken nose and a concussion.

The United incident exemplifies a product (specifically a service) failure that resulted in consumer harm. Although the case was settled out of court, the evidence suggests that the company was to blame for the incident¹. Consumer outrage against United was widespread initially, but a number of reports later surfaced detailing an unrelated prior incident in which Dao had lost his medical license for trading prescription drugs for sex (e.g., Bhatia, 2017, April 11; Nicer Days, 2017). Although Dao's past behavior bore no logical connection to the United incident, the online reports and reader comments implied that the victim, not the company, was blameworthy for the incident because he was seen as a bad person (Spring, 2017, April 11).

Do consumers in general engage in this same, seemingly irrational line of character-based victim blaming? If so, it illustrates a flaw in the self-regulating aspect of the free-market system in which consumers take punitive action against a company for its blameworthy actions (Hansen, 1993; Traynor, 1965). Any deserved blame that gets directed away from the company and toward the victim threatens the system and,

ultimately, consumer well-being. Yet in the literature there has been little consideration of victim blaming and its relation to consumer punitive action toward an offending company. In response, this essay investigates how and why consumers might blame the victim on the basis of irrelevant information pertaining to the victim's dispositional traits.

In particular, this essay focuses on the victim's dispositional "warmth," consisting of both moral and social warmth dimensions (Leach, Ellemers, & Barreto, 2007). Moral warmth (henceforth "morality") consists of traits that facilitate *ethical* relations with others, whereas social warmth (henceforth "sociability") facilitates *affectionate* relations with others (Brambilla & Leach, 2014; Goodwin, Piazza, & Rozin, 2014; Leach et al., 2007). Synthesizing research from social cognition, moral psychology, and Just World Theory, a moral dominance effect is proposed in which consumer perceptions of the victim's morality dominates sociability in affecting blame judgments. This occurs because immoral (but not unsociable) victims are seen as deserving of suffering more generally. This essay also considers how consumer punitive action against the offending company may be impeded as a result of victim blaming.

Further, supporting this theorizing and providing practical insights, the current research tests two actionable interventions (boosting perceptions of moral goodness and priming compassion) for attenuating judgments of deservingness and victim blame while increasing consumer punitive action. Lending ecological validity to the current research, the psychological process underlying victim blaming and its consequences are examined through several actual, recent high-profile product failures, including the United Airlines incident. Adding both internal and external validity, the findings are replicated within a fictitious product failure instance.

In sum, this research makes both consumer-related and general theoretical contributions to the ongoing discourses around victim blaming that have emerged in other disciplines (Brown, Hamilton, & O’Neill, 2007; Ryan, 1976; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). Extending earlier research on product failure attributions (e.g., Folkes, 1984; Folkes & Kotsos, 1986) and disposition-based blame (e.g., Alicke, 1992, 1994; Laurent, Nuñez, & Schweitzer, 2015), the current research shows *when* badly behaving victims are blamed by consumers (victim morality is salient), provides a mechanism for *why* this effect occurs (deservingness), and demonstrates the downstream impact on consumer punitive action. In so doing, this research extends understanding of how victim blame may threaten consumer and societal well-being and how it might be prevented.

Theoretical Background

Blame and attribution for product failure. Recent consumer research has demonstrated the robustness of biases in forming blame judgments (Moon, 2003; Xie, Yu, Zhou, Sedikides, & Vohs, 2014). Following a product failure, irrelevant information (e.g., the company’s record of social responsibility; Klein & Dawar, 2004) and ego-protective motivations (e.g., self-serving bias; Dunn & Dahl, 2012) have been shown to influence observers’ judgments of blame toward either the consumer or company. Even early work (Folkes, 1984; Folkes & Kotsos, 1986) acknowledged that consumers’ attributions for product failure may be biased or inaccurate. Although consumers may rationally base their blame judgments on the various dimensions of attribution (e.g., stability, control) for a product failure (Folkes, 1984), judgments of these dimensions are themselves subject to bias. This logic is extended by arguing that a victim’s dispositional

warmth (i.e., morality and sociability) might also exert undue influence on how other consumers blame victims in product failure situations.

Because blame is predicated on a belief about who caused a negative event to occur (Malle et al., 2014), it would be irrational to use information about a victim's disposition to assess blame when it is unrelated to the negative event (Alicke & Zell, 2009). Yet, a growing body of work suggests that irrational blame may be commonplace (Alicke, 2000, 2008; Niemi & Young, 2014; Winterich, 2011). Indeed, a number of vignette-based experiments from extant literature suggest that individuals who possess negative (vs. neutral or positive) dispositional warmth traits typically receive greater blame for harmful events.

In Alicke's (1992, Study 1) classic study, participants read about a man (John) who caused a car accident while speeding. John's morality was manipulated via his reason for speeding: to hide either an anniversary present or a vial of cocaine from his parents. In the latter condition, participants exaggerated John's causal role in the accident. Similarly, work by Alicke (1994) and Alicke and Zell (2009) showed across a series of scenario-based studies that sociability manipulations influenced perceptions of both blameworthiness and the causal role of the blame target. More recently, Laurent et al. (2015, Experiment 1) presented participants with a vignette about a woman (Julia) who got sick after eating a meal prepared by her friend (Annie). Annie, unaware of Julia's allergy, used peanut oil in preparing the meal. The authors manipulated Annie's desire to harm Julia, showing that when Annie secretly resented (vs. cared deeply for) Julia, participants blamed Annie more *because* she was perceived as more immoral.

The current research builds on these past findings in several ways. First, contrary to the studies outlined above in which the blame target was described as reckless or incompetent (e.g., John was speeding, Annie was unaware of her friend's allergy, etc.), contexts are considered in which the evidence implicates the company in causing the harm. This should absolve the victim of blame regardless of dispositional warmth, but it is predicted that even in such cases dispositional warmth will bias others' judgments of victim blame. Also, in contrast to previous research, effects attributable to the victim's morality are distinguished from other traits in ascribing blame. It is hypothesized that perceptions of the victim's morality, rather than sociability (or competence), has a dominant effect on victim blaming, and a mechanism (deservingness) for this effect is tested.

The dominance of morality. One's dispositional warmth refers to that person's collection of traits relevant to forming relations with others (Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007). Warmth is comprised of two dimensions: morality and sociability (Leach et al., 2007). Morality facilitates ethical relations with others, whereas sociability facilitates affectionate relations (Brambilla & Leach, 2014). Although some specific traits may cut across both dimensions (e.g., kind, helpful), others can be classified as either predominantly moral (e.g., honest, trustworthy) or sociable (e.g., easy-going, agreeable; Goodwin et al., 2014). Both morality and sociability are important to interpersonal judgments, but recent work suggests that the former is *most essential* in terms of defining another's identity (Strohinger & Nichols, 2014) and forming global impressions of others (Goodwin et al., 2014). Recent research has also shown the dominance of morality in terms of consumers' self-perceptions (Liu & Lin, 2018) and perceptions of companies

(Kirmani, Hamilton, Thompson, & Lantzy, 2017). These moral dominance effects occurs because one's moral character serves as the strongest signal of that person's intentions (Brambilla & Leach, 2014).

Sociability, on the other hand, may influence blame judgments in certain circumstances (see Alicke & Zell, 2009), but its effect may be eliminated in the presence of information about the victim's morality. A "moral dominance" effect is therefore hypothesized whereby observers' perceptions of the victim's morality, as opposed to sociability, will have a greater effect on blame judgments. In the following section, a novel mechanism for this effect is offered.

Deservingness and victim blame. Deservingness has traditionally been viewed as "the adhesive that connects an actor to an event" (Schlenker, Britt, Pennington, Murphy, & Doherty, 1994, p. 635). Similarly, consumer research has conceptualized deservingness as a synonym for one's causal responsibility for their own plight (Lee, Winterich, & Ross, 2014; White, MacDonnell, & Ellard, 2012) or entitlement to benefits (Olson, McFerran, Morales, & Dahl, 2016). An alternative and orthogonal conceptualization is offered here based on one's deservingness of suffering more generally. Just World Theory (Lerner, 1980) would suggest that individuals hold a belief in a just world (BJW): a belief that people who deserve to suffer do in fact suffer. Because undeserved suffering threatens one's BJW (Lerner & Simmons, 1966; Rubin & Peplau, 1973), people are sensitized towards information that may suggest the victim deserves to suffer (White et al., 2012).

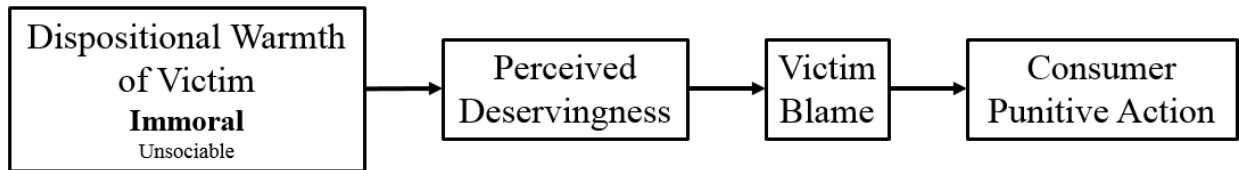
This line of thinking is consistent with a moral dominance hypothesis because observers may assume that morally corrupt people are more deserving of suffering more

generally. If this is true, then observers may be more apt to rely on information about a victim's morality rather than sociability (or competence) when ascribing blame for the suffering. By believing that a victim is deserving of suffering on moral grounds, even though that individual did not contribute to the harm, an observer maintains a BJW. That is, blaming an immoral victim maintains a motive to see justice served in a way that blaming an unsociable victim does not.

Consequences of victim blame. Finally, it is plausible that perceptions of victim morality—through its influence on judgments of deservingness and blame—might obstruct free-market functioning by reducing consumers' desire to take punitive action against a company responsible for creating a harmful product or service. Research suggests that people are less likely to blame other alternative targets when a high level of blame is focused on a single target (Alicke, 1992; Folkes & Kotsos, 1986). Accordingly, it follows that consumers who blame the victim of a product failure will be less likely to blame the offending company and in turn less likely to take action against it (Klein & Dawar, 2004; Romani, Grappi, & Bagozzi, 2013; see Figure 1 for complete conceptual model). Consistent with the boycott literature (Braunsberger & Buckler, 2011; Hoffmann, 2011; Romani et al., 2013) and common consumer boycott campaigns (Ethical Consumer, 2018; Murtagh & Lukehart, 1994) petition signing is used to operationalize “consumer punitive action.”

Figure 1.

Conceptual model.



Overview of experiments. One pilot study and five experiments support the above theorizing across several product failure contexts, both actual and fictitious. The pilot study employs a correlational design to test moral dominance in victim blame and its potential to impact consumer punitive action. A pair of experiments are then conducted, one online (Experiment 1a) and one in a field setting (Experiment 1b), to test whether manipulating actual dispositional warmth information about the victim of the United Airlines incident translates into changes in consumer punitive action (petition signing) through deservingness and victim blame judgments. Experiment 2 further tests moral dominance and the deservingness mechanism by manipulating both sociability and morality within a hypothetical product failure situation. Finally, Experiments 3 and 4 further test this theorizing and provide practical insights for how organizations may shift focus toward reducing victim blame and enhancing consumer punitive action. Whereas Experiment 3 tests a manipulation to enhance perceptions of the victim’s moral goodness, Experiment 4 employs a compassion prime to reduce blame for the immoral victim.

Pilot Study – Honda Airbags

As a test of concept, the respective roles of morality and sociability were examined in predicting victim blame in response to a scenario based on an actual product failure. Participants read a scenario about a Honda driver who was injured by exploding

shrapnel from a faulty airbag (see CBS, 2018, January 7). Perceptions of the victim's morality and sociability were measured. Also included was a measure of victim competence because research has shown that a lack of warmth may imply a lack of competence due to a reverse halo effect (Fiske et al., 2007; Judd, James-Hawkins, Yzerbyt, & Kashima, 2005). This study used a correlational design to test whether and to what extent these three facets of victim disposition might impact victim blame and, in turn, intentions to sign a petition against Honda. Perceptions of victim morality (but not sociability or competence) are expected to predict intentions to sign the petition indirectly through victim blame.

Method and measures. One hundred thirteen undergraduate participants were recruited from a public university and compensated partial course credit for their participation ($N = 97$ after attention check exclusions; $M_{\text{age}} = 21.53$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 2.09$; 46.4% female). The online study was introduced as a study about product use and experience. Participants read a scenario about a college student named Caitlin who, under circumstances of a heavy course load, cheated on her economics final. The stimulus was designed to describe a victim who was morally ambiguous and had cheated due to mitigating circumstances. The scenario then described her drive back to campus after winter break where icy roads led to a low-impact collision with another vehicle on the highway, which caused the airbag to deploy. Participants were told that “the crash was not severe, but a defect in the airbag caused a hot piece of shrapnel to spray into the cab, hitting Caitlin in the shoulder.”

Participants were asked three attention check questions about factual details of the scenario. To ensure that responses reflected reactions to the details of the stimuli used,

only participants who answered all attention checks correctly were retained for analyses in this and subsequent experiments. Next, in counterbalanced order, participants rated Caitlin's morality, sociability, and competence. A scale was then administered assessing participants' judgments of victim blame, followed by a single-item measure of intentions to sign a petition against Honda. Consistent with actual details from the incident (CBS, 2018, January 7), this item described Honda's complicity in knowingly using faulty airbags in their cars such as the one Caitlin was driving. Participants concluded the study by responding to basic demographic questions.

Morality. Borrowing from Goodwin et al. (2014), four traits relevant to morality but not sociability were selected. Participants rated their perceptions of Caitlin using these four traits ($\alpha = .92$): "Caitlin is... honest/trustworthy/principled/loyal" (1 = *Not at all*, 7 = *Very much*).

Sociability. Similarly, four traits identified by Goodwin et al. (2014) as relevant to sociability but not to morality were selected ($\alpha = .82$): "Caitlin is... sociable/easy-going/agreeable/happy" (1 = *Not at all*, 7 = *Very much*).

Competence. Four additional traits reflecting competence (but neither sociability nor morality) were also drawn from Goodwin et al. (2014) ($\alpha = .89$): "Caitlin is... intelligent/organized/logical/clever" (1 = *Not at all*, 7 = *Very much*).

Victim blame. An ad hoc victim blame scale asked participants to rate the extent to which they agreed with three statements ($\alpha = .74$): "Caitlin should be held responsible for her own fate," "Caitlin's shoulder injury was her own fault," and "Caitlin deserves to be blamed for what happened to her" (1 = *Completely disagree* to 11 = *Completely agree*).

Petition intentions. Participants were asked “Would you sign a petition supporting a lawsuit against Honda for its use of faulty airbags?” (1 = *Definitely not*, 9 = *Definitely yes*).

Results and discussion.

Discriminant validity. Because this study tested interrelationships between several multi-item measures (see the Appendix for correlation tables regarding all studies across both essays), the discriminant validity of the measures was first tested by comparing the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct to the squared correlation between each construct pair (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Results suggest satisfactory discriminant validity between the four constructs (all AVEs > .70, all r^2 s < .38). This finding supports the critical assumption that morality and sociability are distinct dimensions of dispositional warmth (Brambilla & Leach, 2014; Goodwin et al., 2014; Leach et al., 2007).

Descriptives and preliminary analyses. As intended, the stimulus produced perceptions of morality ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 1.31$), sociability ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 1.02$), and competence ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 1.23$) that were moderate on average and associated with substantial variation. Participants were relatively unlikely to blame the victim ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 2.21$) and relatively likely to sign the petition ($M = 7.60$, $SD = 1.55$). The relationships among these variables are considered next.

Primary analysis. In line with the moral dominance hypothesis, it is anticipated that (1) morality (but not sociability or competence) would predict victim blame when the three trait categories were considered simultaneously, and (2) victim blame would in turn reduce intentions to sign a petition aimed at punishing Honda. A mediation model was

specified using the PROCESS macro (model 4) with 5,000 bootstrapped samples in which morality, sociability, and competence were treated as simultaneous independent variables (see Hayes, 2013, pp. 193-197), victim blame as the mediator, and intention to sign the petition as the outcome variable.

Results support this theorizing via a significant indirect effect of morality on intentions to sign a petition through victim blame ($ab = .08$, $SE = .05$, 95% $CI [.01, .22]$) such that perceiving the victim as less moral led to greater victim blame ($b = -.44$, $SE = .20$, $p = .032$, $f^2 = .05$) which in turn reduced intentions to sign the petition ($b = -.18$, $SE = .07$, $p = .012$, $f^2 = .06$). No such indirect effect was observed for sociability or competence (both 90% CI s include 0). The data suggest that this is due to null partial effects of sociability and competence on victim blame ($ps > .347$). Together, the results of the pilot study provide initial evidence that morality has a dominant effect over sociability in victim blame judgments, which in turn reduced consumer desire to take punitive action against the offending company. Next, experimental designs that manipulate victim disposition and test the deservingness mechanism are considered.

Experiment 1 – United Airlines

As an initial test of the complete conceptual model (Figure 1), a pair of interrelated experiments (1a/1b) were conducted in the context of the United Airlines incident described earlier. The notoriety of the incident and the victim provided a highly ecological valid context for testing the model, thus enhancing experimental realism (Morales, Amir, & Lee, 2017).

Experiment 1a tested the psychological response to this incident and desire to take action against United among an online sample of consumers. The experiment contained

two conditions. For the “bad victim” condition, actual information about the victim’s negative dispositional warmth was provided (i.e., that he had traded drugs for sex), whereas this detail was replaced with a more mundane fact (i.e., that he lives in Kentucky) in the “neutral victim” condition. Measures of perceived morality, sociability, deservingness, victim blame, and intentions to sign a petition against United were assessed. Because the manipulation operationalizes victim dispositional warmth in general, it was expected that the “bad” (vs. “neutral”) victim would be rated as less sociable *and* less moral. In addition, both morality and sociability were expected to predict deservingness perceptions, victim blame judgments, and intentions to sign the petition. However, consistent with moral dominance, only morality was expected to carry the effect of the manipulation to downstream outcome variables when both morality and sociability perceptions were included in the same model.

Experiment 1b was a field experiment using a nearly identical manipulation and stimuli as in Experiment 1a. Rather than measuring psychological response and intentions to act, however, participants in Experiment 1b were offered the opportunity to actually sign a petition condemning United. It was expected that participants would be less willing to sign the petition when presented with negative information concerning the victim’s disposition, even though this information was irrelevant to the product failure situation.

Experiment 1A – Online experiment.

Method and measures. Two hundred one US residents were recruited from Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (MTurk) as participants ($N = 194$ after attention check exclusions; $M_{\text{age}} = 36.52$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 10.88$; 58.8% female). Participants were initially informed that they were participating in a study about how individuals judge events in the

news. Participants were then randomly assigned to one of two conditions (“bad victim” vs. “neutral victim”). Participants in each condition read a short description of the United Airlines incident and then indicated their awareness of the event. This was followed by three seemingly mundane details about the incident (e.g., “Did you know that the passenger, David Dao, was a medical doctor?” etc.). The manipulation occurred in the fourth and final question. In the (bad) [neutral] victim condition, this question read, “Did you know that the passenger, David Dao, (had lost his medical license in 2005 for trading prescription drugs for sex with one of his patients) [lives in Louisville, Kentucky]?” To maintain ecological validity, all background information and preliminary questions were drawn directly from factual details of the incident.

Participants next responded to a series of measures. Two scales, presented in counterbalanced order, assessed perceptions of the victim’s sociability and morality. Measures assessing deservingness and victim blame judgments were then administered, again in counterbalanced order. Participants next completed a single item asking how likely they would be to sign a petition against United Airlines. Finally, an attention check was presented checking participants’ memory of a detail from the stimulus, which was then followed by basic demographics. The AVE method used earlier suggested discriminant validity between the multi-item measures (all AVEs > .77, all r^2 s < .42). The details of each measure are listed below.

Morality. The identical four-item morality scale ($\alpha = .95$) as used in the Pilot Study was used here.

Sociability. The identical four-item sociability scale ($\alpha = .93$) as used in the Pilot Study was used here.

Deservingness. An ad hoc deservingness scale asked participants to rate the extent to which they agreed with three statements ($\alpha = .97$): “David Dao seems like the type of person who... deserves to have bad things happen to him/deserves to suffer/deserves bad luck” (1 = *Completely disagree*, 11 = *Completely agree*).

Victim blame. The identical three-item victim blame scale ($\alpha = .94$) as used in the Pilot Study was used here.

Petition intentions. The identical single-item petition intentions measure as used in the Pilot Study was used here.

Results and discussion. It was predicted that when negative (vs. neutral) dispositional warmth information about David Dao was included, participants would perceive him as less moral and sociable, and more deserving of suffering in general and blameworthy for the product failure in particular. The “bad victim” (vs. “neutral victim”) condition was also expected to reduce participants’ willingness to sign a petition against United Airlines, and that this effect would be mediated by the aforementioned differences in morality, deservingness, and victim blame in sequence (see Figure 1). Preliminary analyses testing the total effects of the manipulation were first conducted, followed by mediation analyses to test moral dominance within the full model.

Preliminary analyses. A series of *t*-tests (degrees of freedom [df] were 192; see Table 1 for means and standard deviations) revealed significant total effects of the manipulation on both morality ($t = 10.987, p < .001, d = 1.58$) and sociability ($t = 3.343, p = .001, d = .48$) such that the victim was perceived as less sociable and less moral in the bad (vs. neutral) condition. The bad (vs. neutral) victim was also seen as more deserving of suffering ($t = 3.725, p < .001, d = .53$) and more blameworthy for the incident ($t =$

2.463, $p = .015$, $d = .35$). Finally, in support of the proposed free-market effect, participants in the bad (vs. neutral) victim condition were marginally less likely to sign a petition condemning the company ($t = 1.777$, $p = .077$, $d = .25$). Also, as predicted, both sociability ($r_s > .15$, $p_s < .040$) and morality perceptions ($r_s > .31$, $p_s < .001$) were correlated with the remaining outcome measures, as well as with each other ($r = .63$, $p < .001$). Mediation analysis was used to test for moral dominance effects and their influence on consumer punitive action through deservingness and blame.

Table 1.

Experiment 1a: Means (standard deviations) within each experimental cell for dependent variables.

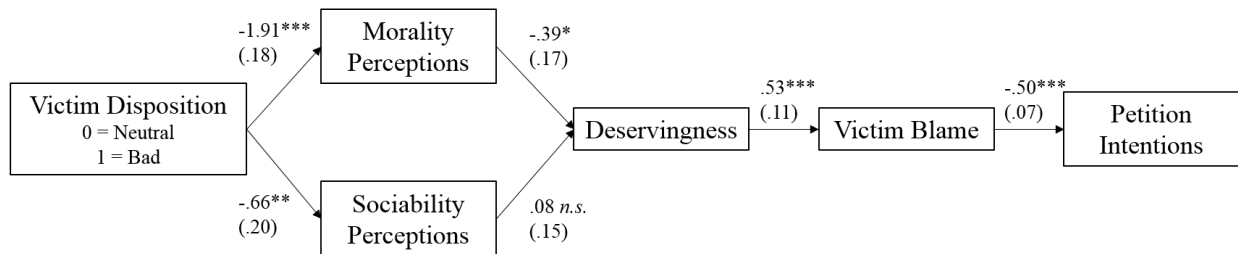
	Neutral	Immoral
Sociability Perceptions (seven-point scale)	3.69 (1.48)	3.03 (1.24)
Morality Perceptions (seven-point scale)	5.03 (1.14)	3.12 (1.27)
Deservingness (11-point scale)	1.90 (1.91)	3.05 (2.35)
Victim Blame (11-point scale)	2.96 (2.75)	3.94 (2.79)
Petition Intentions (nine-point scale)	6.63 (2.52)	5.96 (2.75)

Mediation analyses. The theorizing suggests that a dispositionally “bad” (vs. “neutral” or “good”) victim will be blamed more for a product failure because he is seen as more deserving of suffering in general, and that blaming the victim will in turn attenuate consumer punitive action against the company. It is expected that the process will be driven by perceptions of the victim’s morality rather than sociability because morality is more crucial to consumers’ consideration of whether a victim is deserving of suffering. To test these predictions, Mplus was used to set up a parallel serial mediation

model as depicted in Figure 2. The model treats morality and sociability as parallel mediators of the effect of the manipulation on deservingness, victim blame, and intentions to sign the petition, in that sequence. If this theorizing is correct, then a significant serial indirect effect through morality but not sociability should emerge.

Figure 2.

Experiment 1a: Parallel serial mediation model with unstandardized *b* coefficients (standard errors). **Notes:** For ease of interpretation, only direct paths are depicted; **p* < .05, ***p* < .01, ****p* < .001, *n.s.* = not significant (*p* > .10)



Consistent with this theorizing, the results support both moral dominance in victim blaming and its resultant effects on consumers' desire to punish the offending company. The serial indirect effect of *condition* → *morality* → *deservingness* → *victim blame* → *petition intentions* was significant (*indirect* = -.19, *SE* = .10, 95% *CI* [-.44, -.05]), whereas the serial indirect path through sociability (rather than morality) was not (90% *CI* [-.02, .07]; see Figure 2 for individual path coefficients). As hypothesized, this pattern occurs because when considered jointly as in the full model, only morality (and not sociability) influences perceptions that the victim deserves to suffer (see Figure 2).

The findings reported in this study support the theorizing around moral dominance and the mechanism (deservingness) through which perceptions of the victim's morality influences victim blame and consumer desire to take punitive action against the company that produced the faulty product. When information about the victim's past bad

behavior was made salient (vs. omitted), he was seen as both less moral and less sociable. However, when considered simultaneously, only morality perceptions influenced deservingness judgments, which led to greater victim blame and diminished intentions to punish the company. However, as conceptualized, victim disposition should influence punitive *action*, not merely intentions to act. This was tested in Experiment 1b using an actual petition signing behavior in a field setting.

Experiment 1b – Field experiment.

Procedure. Two research assistants (RAs) blind to the hypothesis stood outside on opposite ends of a university bookstore to collect data. Both were instructed to approach nearby adults and ask if they would be willing to participate in a public opinion poll in exchange for a piece of candy. The RA verbally provided basic background information about the United Airlines incident to consenting participants. The RA then instructed participants that they would be asked several yes/no questions about the incident and that they were to respond verbally. Several fillers were then included as in Experiment 1a.

Similar to Experiment 1a, victim disposition was manipulated via the final factual question in the poll. Participants were assigned to one of two conditions in a two-cell design with each RA collecting responses in only one of the two conditions. Participants in the “bad victim” condition were primed with the question, “Did you know that the passenger, David Dao, had lost his medical license in 2005 for trading prescription drugs for sex with one of his patients?” In the “neutral victim” condition, this question was omitted. After the final item, participants reported their age and participant gender was observed and recorded by the RA.

Participants in both conditions were then informed of an ostensibly real lawsuit (but actually created by the researchers) being drafted by the Bureau of Consumer Protection against United Airlines and that the lawsuit would proceed only if there was a sufficient number of signatures collected. The RA explained that the polling agency was unaffiliated with the lawsuit, but had agreed to offer them an opportunity to sign the petition. It was reiterated that the poll was concerned only with the aggregate proportion of citizens willing to sign the petition. The RA then provided a separate sheet of paper to the participant detailing the petition, providing them with the opportunity to sign the petition confidentially and insert it into an opaque envelope. The instructions on the petition form directed participants to check either “Yes” or “No,” and to only sign the petition if “Yes” was selected. This served as the main dependent variable. After data collection, the petition forms were matched to the public poll forms for each participant using a unique numeric identifier placed inconspicuously on each sheet of paper.

Sampling. Participant recruitment was confined to two days at set time periods (1:00 pm to 5:00 pm). Each RA was instructed to recruit as many participants as possible, with a goal of reaching 40 participants per condition (80 total). At the end of the pre-determined data collection period, 90 community members had been recruited to participate (44 and 46 in the bad and neutral condition, respectively; $M_{\text{age}} = 28.10$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 12.78$; 53.3% female).

Results and discussion. The experiment tested whether participants would be less likely to take action against an offending company when negative information about the victim’s dispositional warmth was present. The results supported this prediction. Specifically, in the neutral condition only 15.2% of participants declined to sign the

petition, whereas in the bad condition 34.1% of participants declined to do so ($\chi^2(1) = 4.337$, $p = .037$, $\phi = .22$, *odds ratio* = 2.88). This means that participants in the bad (vs. neutral) victim condition were nearly three times more likely to decline signing the petition.

The results of this experiment suggest that information negatively portraying a victim's disposition has an attenuating effect on actual punitive actions taken against a company in a realistic setting. When consumers were merely provided an opportunity to sign a petition against United Airlines for a clear violation, the vast majority did so (84.8%). However, this percentage was reduced to 65.9% when participants were informed of the victim's past negative behavior. Especially noteworthy is that the victim's moral transgression occurred 12 years prior to the product failure incident. Nonetheless, the mere presence of this information dissuaded a substantial portion of consumers from taking a simple action against the company. Combined with results from Experiment 1a, this supports the theorizing that consumers incorporate irrelevant dispositional (especially morality) information into blame judgments via deservingness perceptions, and that doing so may attenuate both intended and actual consumer punitive action.

Experiment 2 – Faulty Travel Mug

Experiments 1a and 1b found that, in response to factual details from an actual product failure situation, consumer punitive action against the offending company may be attenuated when the victim has a negative disposition. The results from Experiment 1a also provide empirical evidence of the dominant role of morality (over sociability) in predicting these outcomes through deservingness judgments. Experiment 2 seeks to

expand these findings to a fictitious product failure situation, mitigating the potential influence of pre-existing attitudes toward the victim or company. In addition, Experiment 2 builds on the moral dominance findings by independently manipulating (rather than measuring) victim morality and sociability. As in Experiment 1, participants rated their judgments of deservingness and victim blame. Consistent with moral dominance (Brambilla & Leach, 2014; Goodwin et al., 2014), it is expected that a morality manipulation will have a greater influence on deservingness and blame judgments than a sociability manipulation when both are jointly presented. Also, as an alternative test of the deservingness mechanism, individual differences in Belief in a Just World (BJW; Lerner, 1980) were measured as a potential moderator of morality's direct effect on victim blame. If the above theorizing is correct, then victim morality should have a heightened effect on victim blame among consumers with a strongly held BJW, but attenuated among those with a weak BJW.

Method and Measures. Two hundred one US residents were recruited from MTurk as participants ($N = 183$ after attention check exclusions; $M_{\text{age}} = 37.16$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 12.53$; 51.4% female). Participants were initially informed that they were participating in a study concerned with how individuals judge information concerning product experiences and that a real situation using false names was to be presented. A 2 (morality: immoral vs. moral) \times 2 (sociability: unsociable vs. sociable) full factorial between-participants design was used.

All participants read a scenario about a bank employee named Kevin. The unsociable (sociable) conditions introduced Kevin as “a(n) unsociable (sociable) bank employee” who could be described as “unenthusiastic, boring, and disagreeable

(enthusiastic, humorous, and agreeable”). These non-moral elements of sociability were drawn from Goodwin et al. (2014). The scenario explained that Kevin noticed the balance in his register was \$200 higher than it should have been due to another employee’s error. In the immoral (moral) conditions, Kevin took the \$200 for himself (told his manager about the \$200). The scenario concluded in all conditions by describing Kevin’s next day at work, during which a ZEVO-brand travel mug full of hot coffee spilled all over him due to faulty threading on the mug. Thus, the final statement made explicit that the harm was due directly to a product failure.

All participants then answered three attention checks asking them to recall factual details from the scenario. Next, the same measures of deservingness and victim blame used earlier were presented. These two scales were counterbalanced and a test of discriminant validity indicated that they were distinct constructs ($AVEs > .80$, $r^2 = .43$). Participants next responded to two items checking the effectiveness of the morality and sociability manipulations. To be used as a potential moderator of morality’s effect on victim blame, BJW was measured subsequently using Lipkus’ (1991) Global Belief in a Just World scale. Recent psychometric research has shown this scale to be a short but valid instrument for measuring BJW (Reich & Wang, 2015). Lastly, participants completed a set of demographic questions. The details of each measure are presented below.

Morality. A single item was used to check the morality manipulation: “To what extent do you think Kevin is a(n) immoral or a moral person?” (1 = *Very immoral*; 9 = *Very moral*).

Sociability. A single item was used to check the sociability manipulation: “To what extent do you think Kevin is a(n) unsociable or a sociable person?” (1 = *Very unsociable*; 9 = *Very sociable*).

Deservingness. The identical three-item deservingness scale ($\alpha = .98$) as used in prior studies was used here.

Victim blame. The identical three-item victim blame scale ($\alpha = .84$) as used in prior studies was used here.

BJW. Lipkus’ (1991) seven-item scale ($\alpha = .89$) was used to measure BJW: e.g., “I feel that people get what they deserve,” 1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 7 = *Strongly Agree*).

Results.

Manipulation checks. The influence of both manipulations was checked first using a 2×2 MANOVA (df for F -tests were [1, 179]; see Table 2 for means and standard deviations across experimental cells) with the two manipulation checks as dependent variables. Results showed that Kevin was perceived as less sociable in the unsociable (vs. sociable) conditions ($F = 245.884, p < .001, \eta^2 = .58$), but morality perceptions were unaffected by the sociability manipulation ($p = .424$). Further, Kevin was perceived as less moral in the immoral (vs. moral) conditions ($F = 1163.347, p < .001, \eta^2 = .87$). Unexpectedly, sociability perceptions were also affected by the morality manipulation ($F = 30.816, p < .001, \eta^2 = .15$). However, this effect was eliminated in a separate ANOVA that controlled for morality perceptions as a covariate ($p = .564$), suggesting that the morality manipulation primarily influenced morality (and not sociability) perceptions. Together, these results suggest that both manipulations were effective. This pattern is also consistent with moral dominance. An unsociable person is not necessarily seen as

immoral, but an immoral person is considered both immoral and unsociable. Regardless, manipulating morality influences morality perceptions over and above sociability perceptions.

Table 2.

Experiment 2: Means (standard deviations) within each experimental cell for manipulation checks and dependent variables.

	<i>Moral</i>			<i>Immoral</i>		
	<i>Sociable</i>	<i>Unsociable</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Sociable</i>	<i>Unsociable</i>	<i>Total</i>
Sociability Check (nine-point scale)	7.74 (1.48)	3.21 (1.88)	5.48 (2.83)	5.95 (2.47)	2.00 (1.33)	3.91 (2.79)
Morality Check (nine-point scale)	8.36 (0.79)	8.06 (1.36)	8.21 (1.12)	2.14 (1.54)	2.15 (1.01)	2.15 (1.28)
Deservingness (11-point scale)	1.34 (0.81)	1.57 (1.37)	1.45 (6.98)	7.22 (2.26)	6.75 (2.31)	6.98 (2.28)
Victim Blame (11-point scale)	2.59 (1.93)	2.53 (2.04)	2.56 (1.98)	6.54 (2.58)	5.48 (2.45)	5.99 (2.55)

Main effects. In the presence of both dimensions of dispositional warmth, a moral dominance effect was predicted such that morality but not sociability will influence judgments of deservingness and blame. To test this prediction, a 2×2 MANOVA with deservingness and victim blame as dependent variables was conducted. As predicted, main effects of morality on deservingness ($F = 439.521, p < .001, \eta^2 = .71$) and victim blame ($F = 106.522, p < .001, \eta^2 = .37$) were observed such that the immoral (vs. moral) victim was seen as more deserving of suffering and more blameworthy for the harm. In contrast, no main effects of sociability on either outcome were found ($ps > .098$), and no two-way interactions were observed ($ps > .136$).

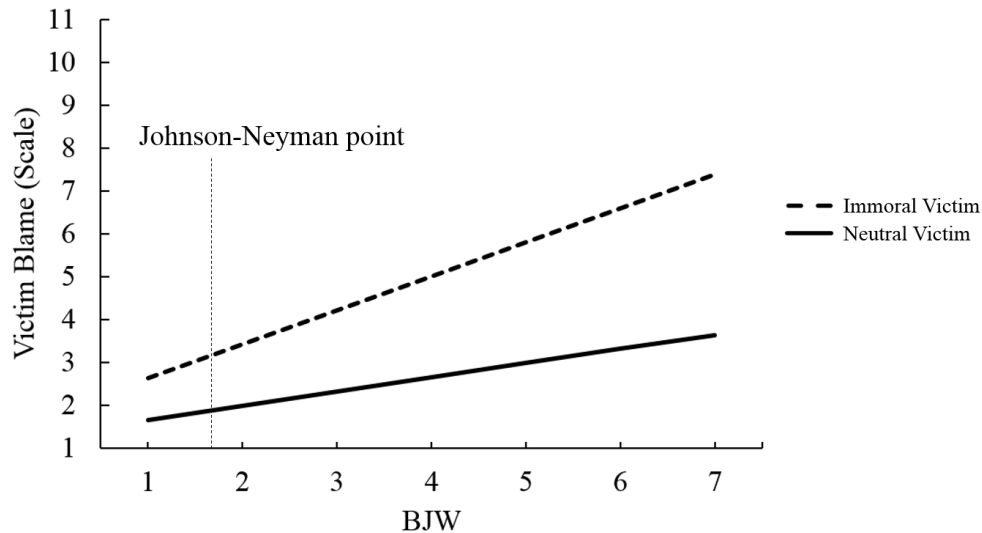
Mediation through deservingness. A mediation model using PROCESS (model 4) was specified in which morality and sociability were treated as two simultaneous independent variables. Deservingness was included as the mediator and victim blame was

the outcome. Results lend additional support to moral dominance and the associated deservingness explanation. A significant indirect effect of morality on victim blame through deservingness ($ab = 1.55$, $SE = .55$, $95\% CI [.45, 2.65]$) was observed such that the immoral (vs. moral) victim was seen as more deserving of suffering ($b = 5.53$, $SE = .26$, $p < .001$, $f^2 = 2.42$) which, in turn, led to greater victim blame ($b = .28$, $SE = .09$, $p = .003$, $f^2 = .03$). In further support of moral dominance, no significant effects (direct or indirect) were observed for sociability as the independent variable (all $90\% CIs$ included 0).

Moderation by BJW. Recall that the theorizing around deservingness is drawn from Just World Theory (Lerner, 1980). The need to view the world as a just place may sensitize consumers to moral information about a victim and lead them to use that information in forming blame judgments. If so, then individuals high in BJW should be more likely to blame an immoral (vs. moral) victim for the harm. Results of a regression analysis supported this prediction via a marginally significant morality \times BJW interaction on victim blame ($b = .53$, $SE = .28$, $p = .062$, $f^2 = .01$; see Figure 3) such that the effect of morality on victim blame was stronger among high- (vs. low)-BJW individuals. A follow-up floodlight analysis (Spiller, Fitzsimons, Lynch, & McClelland, 2013) showed that the victim-blame difference was not significant at lower levels of BJW ($JN\text{-}point_{\alpha=.05} = 1.16$). This suggests that, absent a worldview that only those who deserve to suffer do in fact suffer, a victim's morality does not influence victim blame. However, as this worldview becomes stronger, so too does the effect of the victim's morality on the blame he receives when harmed by a product failure. In line with moral dominance, no sociability \times BJW interaction on victim blame was observed ($p = .712$).

Figure 3.

Experiment 3: Morality \times BJW interaction on victim blame.



Discussion. Experiment 2 tested a scenario in which an explicit statement of company fault was made clear following a harmful product failure. Yet, as hypothesized, results suggest that victim characteristics influenced consumer judgments of blame via deservingness perceptions. Consistent with moral dominance, it was the victim’s morality (rather than sociability) that primarily affected these outcomes. In addition, further supporting the deservingness explanation, morality’s effect on victim blame was moderated by individual differences in BJW such that those with a strongly held belief that the world is a fair and just place were more likely to exhibit heightened levels of blame for the immoral (vs. moral) victim.

Experiment 3 – PetSmart

The experiments thus far have shown how and why consumers might use information about a victim’s dispositional warmth to blame her for a product failure and how this attenuates consumer punitive action. In Experiment 3, a more pragmatic question is asked: how can victim blame be reduced (and punitive action increased)

relative to some baseline level? If judgments of deservingness and victim blame are truly due to morality perceptions, then emphasizing the moral goodness of the victim should attenuate these judgments. However, simply adding morally positive adjectives to the description of the victim may not be compelling to consumers, nor does it reflect the reality of how consumers receive information about victims. Thus, to test this intervention while maintaining ecological validity, a real product failure situation involving PetSmart was used as a context with content from an actual online petition serving as a control condition. Moreover, only a mild adjustment was made to the online petition for the treatment condition by adding incidental information about the victim's involvement in gun control advocacy. Gun control is a morally charged and contentious issue in modern American politics (Spitzer, 2015). A victim described as a gun control advocate may be judged as being more moral, less deserving of suffering, and less blameworthy for a product failure among consumers who support gun control, and this should lead to an increased likelihood of these consumers signing a petition against PetSmart.

Method and Measures. Participants were 200 US voters recruited through MTurk. MTurk's qualification service was used to recruit only individuals who voted in the 2016 presidential election because gun regulation was a highly divisive issue among voters (Pew Research Center, 2016, August 26). Thus, the politically charged nature of the manipulation should be morally relevant to participants. Seven participants reported that they did not vote in the 2016 election and were thus excluded², leaving 193 valid responses ($N = 161$ after attention check exclusions; $M_{\text{age}} = 42.07$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 13.54$; 65.2% female). Participants were first presented with an excerpt from an actual online news

article describing an incident in which a woman brought her bulldog (Scruffles) to PetSmart for grooming. Upon arriving at PetSmart to pick up her dog, she discovered that Scruffles had died while in their care. The article alleges that PetSmart employees did not follow proper protocol while drying Scruffles and, as a result, Scruffles had suffocated. After reading the article, participants responded to two attention checks and were then informed that a circulating petition demanded that PetSmart take responsibility for the incident.

On the next page, victim morality was manipulated through the petition content. In the control condition, the text was taken verbatim from an actual online petition from a popular petition-hosting website. It reviewed the incident and called for signatures demanding that PetSmart take responsibility for Scruffles' death. In the treatment condition, the petition was identical except for a brief addition to the beginning, explaining that the petition writer knew the victim personally from spending "countless hours together doing volunteer work for the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence." Participants were then presented with the choice to anonymously sign by entering their zip code or to decline to sign the petition. This consequential choice served as the measure of consumer punitive action.

The same deservingness and victim blame scales as used in prior experiments were included as process measures. However, in this study these scales were placed on 101-point sliders to increase variability in each measure, addressing potential floor effects that may have occurred in previous studies. These two scales were counterbalanced and were statistically discriminant ($AVEs > .80$, $r^2 = .29$). Participants were then presented with the same single-item morality and sociability checks as used in Experiment 2,

followed by a third attention check question. Lastly, embedded within the demographics, attitudes toward gun control were assessed. This served as the key moderator variable.

The details of each measure are presented below.

Morality. The identical single item as used in Experiment 2 to check the morality manipulation was used here.

Sociability. The identical single item as used in Experiment 2 to check the sociability manipulation was used here.

Deservingness. The identical three-item deservingness scale ($\alpha = .93$) as used in prior studies was used here, except that in this study this scale was placed on a 101-point slider (0 = *Completely disagree*, 100 = *Completely agree*).

Victim blame. The identical three-item victim blame scale ($\alpha = .77$) as used in prior studies was used here, except that in this study this scale was placed on a 101-point slider (0 = *Completely disagree*, 100 = *Completely agree*).

Gun control attitudes. Attitudes toward gun control were assessed with a single item: “I am _____ gun control” (1 = *passionately and strongly against*, 9 = *passionately and strongly for*).

Petition signing. A single item assessed petition signing as a dichotomous choice: “Sign on to demand that PetSmart release all the information on what happened to Scruffles and change any policies that need to be changed to protect the pets in their care” (0 = *Click this button to DECLINE to sign the petition*, 1 = *Click this button to SIGN the petition (please enter your zip code)*).

Results and discussion.

Preliminary analyses. The manipulation should not affect any of the measured variables on its own because perceptions of the victim in the treatment condition depend on participants' own attitudes toward gun control. Supporting this assumption, no significant total effects of the manipulation on morality perceptions, deservingness, victim blame, or petition signing ($ps > .170$; see Table 3 for means and standard deviations) were observed. There was an unexpected effect on sociability such that the victim was perceived as more sociable in the treatment (vs. control) condition ($t(159) = 1.986, p = .049, d = .31$). This may be because the victim was described in more socially active terms in the treatment condition.

Table 3.

Experiment 3: Means (standard deviations) within each experimental cell for dependent variables.

	Control	Gun Control Advocate
Sociability Check (nine-point scale)	6.30 (1.34)	6.76 (1.60)
Morality Check (nine-point scale)	6.53 (1.42)	6.87 (1.66)
Deservingness (100-point scale)	3.65 (7.17)	3.86 (8.81)
Victim Blame (100-point scale)	8.46 (13.41)	10.92 (17.66)
Gun Control Attitudes (nine-point scale)	5.60 (2.81)	5.80 (2.66)
Petition Signature (proportion)	.58 (.50)	.63 (.49)

However, moderation analyses showed no condition \times gun control attitudes interaction on sociability perceptions ($p = .164$). Thus, sociability was disregarded in remaining analyses. In contrast, supporting the effectiveness of the manipulation and

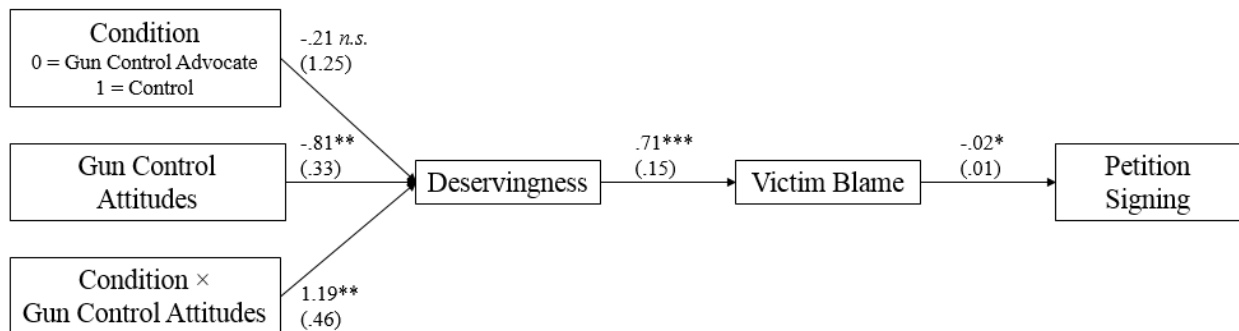
consistent with moral dominance, a significant interaction effect on morality perceptions ($b = .18, SE = .09, p = .046, f^2 = .03$) was observed. A floodlight analysis revealed that among gun control supporters (JN-point $_{\alpha=.05} = 6.67$), the victim in the treatment (vs. control) condition was perceived as significantly more moral, whereas gun control opponents displayed a nonsignificant trend in the reverse direction. This suggests that the manipulation functioned as intended by enhancing the perceived morality of the victim only among a specific segment of consumers.

Interaction effects. The central prediction was that deservingness and victim blame would be reduced and consumer punitive action enhanced when the victim was described as a gun control advocate (vs. control) among consumers who support gun control. To test this prediction, a condition \times gun control attitudes interaction (with follow-up floodlight analyses) was tested for each of the three outcome variables. A significant interaction was found in the expected direction on deservingness ($b = 1.19, SE = .46, p = .011, f^2 = .04$), victim blame ($b = 2.39, SE = .90, p = .009, f^2 = .04$), and petition signing ($b = -.47, SE = .13, p < .001, Exp(b) = 1.58$). Specifically, gun control supporters judged the victim to be marginally less deserving of suffering (JN-point $_{\alpha=.10} = 8.35$) and were significantly more likely to sign the petition (JN-point $_{\alpha=.05} = 6.81$) in the treatment (vs. control) condition, whereas the reverse was true of gun control opponents (JN-points $_{\alpha=.05} = 2.93$ and 3.26 for deservingness and petition signing, respectively). Similarly, gun control opponents (JN-point $_{\alpha=.05} = 4.55$) blamed the victim more in the treatment (vs. control) condition, whereas gun control supporters displayed a nonsignificant trend in the opposite direction.

Mediation analyses. The interactions were consistent with the theorizing. As a more complete test, the indirect effect of the condition \times gun control attitudes interaction on petition signing through deservingness and victim blame, in sequence, was examined. Using PROCESS (model 6), a model was specified treating condition and gun control attitudes as covariates, the condition \times gun control attitudes interaction term as the independent variable, deservingness and victim blame as serial mediators, and petition signing as the outcome (see Figure 4). The results support the theorizing via a marginally significant serial indirect effect of *condition \times gun control attitudes* \rightarrow *deservingness* \rightarrow *victim blame* \rightarrow *petition signing* (*indirect* = -.02, *SE* = .02, 90% *CI* [-.07, -.001]; see Figure 4 for individual path coefficients).

Figure 4.

Experiment 3: Serial moderated mediation model with unstandardized *b* coefficients (standard errors). **Notes:** For ease of interpretation, only direct paths are depicted; **p* < .10, ***p* < .05, ****p* < .001, *n.s.* = not significant (*p* > .10)



The findings of Experiment 3 suggest that consumer punitive action against an offending company can be encouraged by incorporating incidental information about the victim’s moral goodness into the petition content. This occurs because the morally good victim is seen as less deserving of suffering and is thus blamed less for the harm compared to a victim described in morally neutral terms. Notably, the direction of these

effects is dependent on consumers' perceptions of the victim's "moral" behavior. To enhance realism in this experiment (Morales et al., 2017), a manipulation of morality was used that would be perceived differently across individuals. Gun control supporters perceived the victim in the treatment (vs. control) condition as morally good, whereas gun control opponents trended towards the reverse. Moreover, the sequence of theorized variables leading to petition signing followed this pattern. Accordingly, if the goal is to reduce victim blame and encourage consumer punitive action, then the petition content presented in this experiment produced the desired effects only among a specific (though substantial) segment of consumers. In the final experiment, these findings were expanded by testing an intervention that might reduce blame for a victim when she is perceived as *immoral*.

Experiment 4 – Honda Airbags Revisited

The findings thus far have shown the unique effect of morality (vs. sociability) on victim blame and the mechanism (deservingness) carrying this effect, as well as the resulting reduction in consumer punitive action. Experiment 3 results also suggested that the petition content might be used to attenuate victim blame by enhancing moral perceptions of the victim. In this final experiment, the faulty Honda airbag scenario used in the Pilot Study—adjusted to create a manipulation of the victim's morality—is used to test a possible intervention for attenuating morality's effects on deservingness and its downstream consequences. Specifically, the moderating effect of compassion for the victim (vs. control) was tested.

Compassion refers to a brief emotional state that arises in response to viewing others' suffering, which in turn motivates a desire to help (Goetz, Keltner, & Simon-

Thomas, 2010). It is distinct from empathy in that it does not rely on sharing another's emotional state, but rather is shaped by the observer's own personal feeling of distress at another's suffering (Lazarus, 1991). Because compassion is most likely to arise in response to witnessing *undeserved* suffering (Haidt, 2003), an inverse effect is predicted such that feeling compassion might lead one to see suffering as undeserved. Specifically, if instilled with a general sense of compassion beforehand, consumers might view the immoral victim as less deserving of suffering and therefore less blameworthy, even if these consumers still view the victim as immoral. In other words, a compassion (vs. control) prime should "soften" the lens through which consumers might judge an immoral victim in terms of deservingness and blame. Accordingly, when induced to feel compassion, it is predicted that the previously observed effects of morality on deservingness and victim blame will be attenuated.

Method and measures. Participants were 205 US residents recruited from MTurk ($N = 196$ after attention check exclusions; $M_{\text{age}} = 35.72$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 11.52$; 59.7% female). They were informed that they would be participating in two short, unrelated surveys. The first survey would consist of viewing a slideshow and rating their viewing experience, whereas the second survey would involve evaluating a product scenario. Participants were randomly assigned to conditions in a 2 (prime: compassion vs. control) \times 2 (morality: immoral vs. moral) full factorial between-participants design. In the compassion condition, participants began by viewing 15 images developed and validated in prior research to elicit feelings of compassion (Oveis, Horberg, & Keltner, 2010). In the control condition, participants viewed 15 images of people in parks³. Like the compassion images, the control images depicted people of varying genders, ages, and

ethnicities. In both conditions, the images were counterbalanced and each was held on the screen for five seconds.

After the slideshow, participants were presented with a three-item compassion index ($\alpha = .87$): “While viewing the slides, to what extent did you feel... sympathy/moved/compassion” (1 = *Did not feel at all*, 9 = *Felt very intensely*; Oveis et al., 2010). This served as both a reinforcement and a check of the manipulation. As intended, those viewing the compassion slides ($M = 7.46$, $SD = 1.49$) reported feeling more compassion than those viewing the control slides ($M = 5.04$, $SD = 1.81$, $t(194) = 10.225$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.46$).

Participants were then presented with the second survey that detailed the product failure scenario. The scenario was based closely on the one used in the Pilot Study that described a college student named Caitlin who cheated on an exam. As in the Pilot Study, Caitlin was later injured due to shrapnel from a faulty Honda airbag following a minor accident. Victim morality was manipulated such that Caitlin either felt no remorse about cheating and chose to tell nobody of the incident (i.e., immoral condition) or felt so guilty that she confessed to her professor and took the failing grade (i.e., moral condition). The remainder of the study proceeded similarly to the previous experiments. Participants responded to the deservingness ($\alpha = .94$) and victim blame ($\alpha = .82$) scales in counterbalanced order (AVEs $> .64$, $r^2 = .42$), followed by the single-item petition intentions measure used in the Pilot Study. Lastly, single-item measures of morality and sociability perceptions were presented, followed by an attention check question. The details of each measure are presented below.

Morality. The identical single item as used in prior studies to check the morality manipulation was used here.

Sociability. The identical single item as used in prior studies to check the sociability manipulation was used here.

Compassion index. A three-item index ($\alpha = .87$) was used to check the compassion manipulation: “While viewing the slides, to what extent did you feel... sympathy/moved/compassion” (1 = *Did not feel at all*, 9 = *Felt very intensely*).

Deservingness. The identical three-item deservingness scale ($\alpha = .94$) as used in prior studies was used here.

Victim blame. The identical three-item victim blame scale ($\alpha = .82$) as used in prior studies was used here.

Petition intentions. The identical single-item petition intentions measure as used in prior studies was used here.

Results.

Manipulation check. The morality manipulation was checked using a 2 (morality) \times 2 (prime) MANOVA (df for *F*-tests were [1, 192]; see Table 4 for means and standard deviations across experimental cells) with morality and sociability perceptions as dependent variables. Supporting moral dominance and the effectiveness of the manipulation, the results yielded a main effect for the morality manipulation on perceptions of morality ($F = 50.193, p < .001, \eta^2 = .21$) such that Caitlin was perceived as more moral in the moral (vs. immoral) condition. No effect on sociability perceptions was observed ($p = .986$). In addition, no main effects of the compassion prime ($ps > .331$) or interactions ($ps > .221$) were observed.

Table 4.

Experiment 4: Means (standard deviations) within each experimental cell for manipulation checks and dependent variables.

	<i>Moral</i>			<i>Immoral</i>		
	Control	Compassion	Total	Control	Compassion	Total
Compassion Index (nine-point scale)	5.09 (1.80)	7.25 (1.68)	6.29 (2.03)	5.00 (1.83)	7.72 (1.18)	6.21 (2.08)
Sociability Check (nine-point scale)	6.37 (1.73)	6.46 (1.56)	6.42 (1.63)	6.42 (1.10)	6.41 (1.77)	6.41 (1.43)
Morality Check (nine-point scale)	6.49 (1.74)	7.00 (1.61)	6.77 (1.68)	5.13 (1.41)	5.07 (1.73)	5.10 (1.56)
Deservingness (11-point scale)	1.45 (1.25)	1.84 (1.92)	1.67 (1.66)	2.35 (2.00)	1.64 (1.27)	2.03 (1.74)
Victim Blame (11-point scale)	2.50 (1.89)	2.65 (2.16)	2.59 (2.03)	3.33 (2.34)	2.58 (2.01)	3.00 (2.22)
Petition Intentions (nine-point scale)	7.88 (2.08)	7.93 (1.84)	7.91 (1.94)	7.16 (2.32)	8.39 (1.13)	7.71 (1.97)

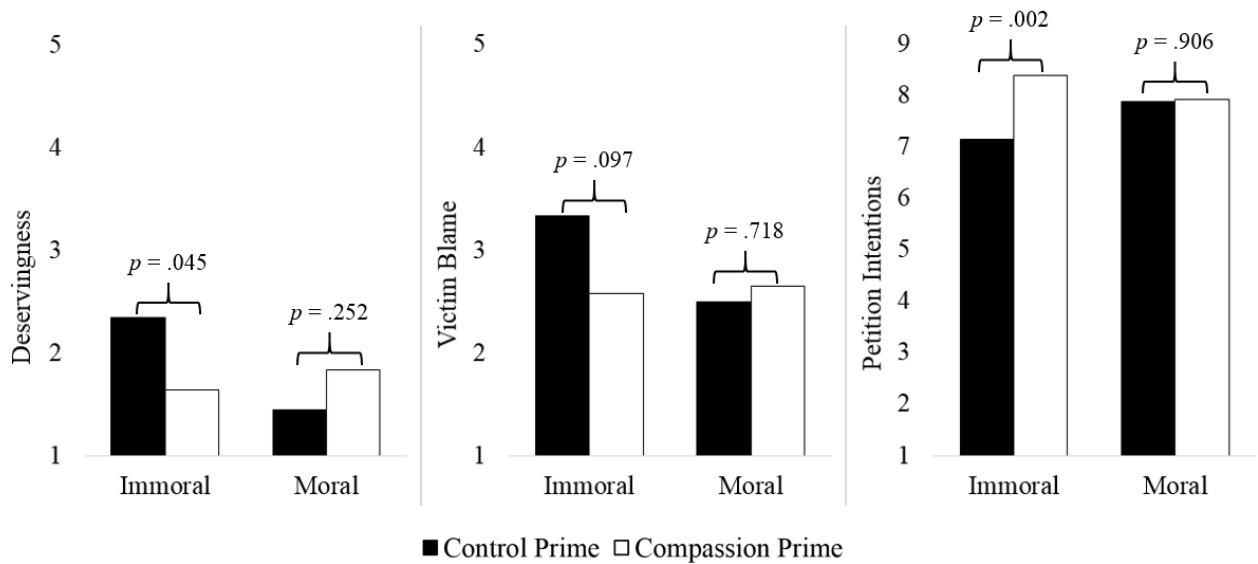
Main effects and interactions. The purpose of this study was to test whether priming compassion might reduce the effects of morality on deservingness, victim blame, and consumer punitive action. Thus, these three outcomes were treated as dependent variables in a 2 (morality) \times 2 (prime) MANOVA. No main effects of morality were observed ($ps > .150$). A main effect of the compassion prime on petition intentions emerged ($F = 5.262, p = .023, \eta^2 = .03$). Those in the compassion (vs. control) condition indicated greater intentions to sign the petition. However, the compassion prime had no main effect on deservingness or victim blame judgments ($ps > .332$).

More crucial to this study, a morality \times prime interaction was found on deservingness ($F = 5.081, p = .025, \eta^2 = .03$) and intention to sign the petition ($F = 4.583,$

$p = .034, \eta^2 = .02$). Although the interaction effect of morality and prime on victim blame was null ($p = .144$), the pattern of simple effects was consistent with the other outcomes and the theorizing. Specifically, for the immoral victim, the compassion (vs. control) prime reduced judgments of deservingness ($F(1, 97) = 4.113, p = .045, \eta^2 = .04$) and victim blame ($F(1, 97) = 2.803, p = .097, \eta^2 = .03$) and increased intentions to sign the petition ($F(1, 97) = 10.306, p = .002, \eta^2 = .10$). In contrast, the compassion (vs. control) prime had no effects for the moral victim ($ps > .252$; see Figure 5).

Figure 5.

Experiment 4: Morality \times prime interactions on deservingness, victim blame, and petition intentions. **Note:** p -values represent tests of simple effects.



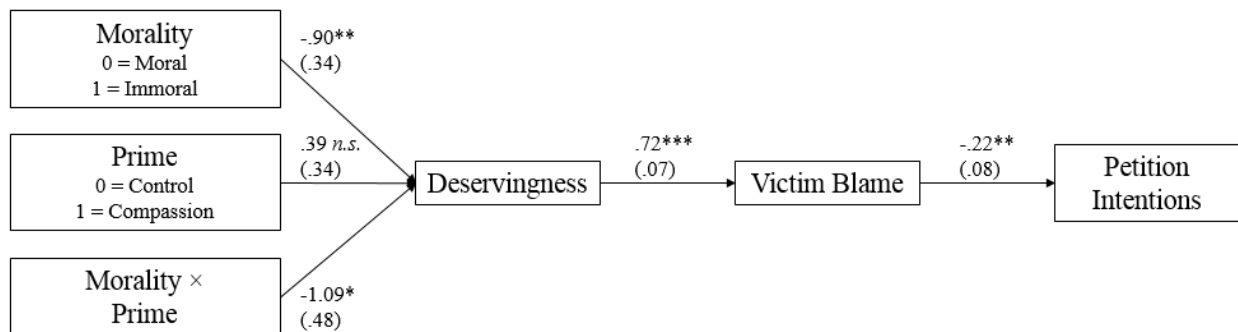
Looked at another way, in the control prime condition, the effects of the morality manipulation were mostly replicated: the immoral (vs. moral) victim was judged to be significantly more deserving of suffering ($F(1, 95) = 6.632, p = .012, \eta^2 = .07$) and marginally more blameworthy for the product failure ($F(1, 95) = 3.541, p = .063, \eta^2 = .04$). Participants in the immoral (vs. moral) condition also reported reduced intentions to sign the petition, although this difference was nonsignificant ($p = .114$). Conversely,

when compassion was primed, the effects were attenuated such that there were no longer morality effects on any of the three outcomes ($p > .150$). In sum, the interactions and pattern of simple effects were consistent with the theorizing that compassion would attenuate morality's effects on deservingness, victim blame, and consumer punitive action. Mediation analyses were used to further examine the theorized process and indirect effects of this interaction.

Mediation analyses. Similar to Experiment 3, the indirect effect of the morality \times prime interaction on petition intentions through deservingness and victim blame was tested. A serial mediation was performed using PROCESS (model 6). The model treated the two manipulated factors as covariates, the morality \times prime interaction term as the independent variable, deservingness and victim blame as serial mediators, and petition intentions as the outcome (see Figure 5). The results provide further support for the theorizing via a significant serial indirect effect of *morality \times prime* \rightarrow *deservingness* \rightarrow *victim blame* \rightarrow *petition intentions* (*indirect* = .17, *SE* = .12, 95% *CI* [.02, .52]; see Figure 6 for individual path coefficients).

Figure 6.

Experiment 4: Serial moderated mediation model with unstandardized b coefficients (standard errors). **Notes:** For ease of interpretation, only direct paths are depicted; * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, *n.s.* = not significant ($p > .10$)



Discussion. The final experiment tested whether priming consumers with generalized feelings of compassion might reduce morality-based judgments of deservingness and blame for an immoral victim, thereby increasing intentions to punish the company. Results of this experiment generally support this approach while replicating earlier findings. The compassion (vs. control) prime reduced deservingness and victim blame while increasing petition intentions in response to the immoral victim scenario, while perceptions of morality were unaffected, supporting the effectiveness of compassion priming procedure as a means to reduce blame for an immoral victim. Although the proposed interaction did not have a significant effect on the victim blame measure, the pattern of simple effects as well as the significant serial indirect effect of the interaction on petition intentions through victim blame are consistent with the theorizing.

An alternative analysis of the interactions showed that, absent the compassion prime, consumers judged the immoral (vs. moral) victim as more deserving of suffering in general and more blameworthy for the product failure. Although this analysis failed to show the expected simple effect on petition signing, it is worth noting that the morality manipulation in the control prime condition did exhibit a marginally significant *indirect* effect on intention to sign through deservingness and victim blame (*indirect* = -.11, *SE* = .10, *90% CI* [-.37, -.01]). The null *direct* simple effect on petition intentions might be due to a lack of statistical power.

General Discussion

A self-regulating free market rests on the assumption that a company will be held accountable for its faulty products and misdeeds. The current work shows this assumption may be violated when irrelevant information about a victim's dispositional

warmth leads blame to be deflected away from the company and toward the victim. As a result of blaming the victim, consumer punitive action against the company is impeded. Rationally, perceptions of the victim's dispositional warmth traits should not influence assessments of blame or consumer punitive action, yet the theorizing and findings presented here suggest otherwise.

One pilot study and five experiments using a range of product failure contexts (actual and fictitious), company types, operationalizations of morality, and measures of consumer punitive action (hypothetical and behavioral) converge to show that consumers rely on irrelevant information about a victim's disposition when assigning blame for a product failure that caused consumer harm. These experiments show a "moral dominance" effect whereby morality information dominates sociability (and competence) information in blame judgments based on the belief that immoral victims deserve bad outcomes generally. The mechanism was shown through both a mediating effect of deservingness (Experiments 1a, 2, 3, and 4) and a moderating effect of BJW (Experiment 2). Experiment 3 also showed how modifying petition content to include morally positive information about the victim can reduce victim blame and enhance consumer punitive action among certain consumers. Experiment 4 extended this finding to reducing deservingness and blame judgments for an *immoral* victim by inducing feelings of compassion. Importantly, the results of these experiments suggest that victim blaming may limit market self-regulation by attenuating a form of consumer punitive action (petition signing).

CHAPTER III

ESSAY 2 – BLAME INFERENCES FROM CAUSE

MARKETING

In the first essay, blame was considered from the perspective of consumers judging other consumers. In Essay 2, consumer inferences of a company's blame are considered. In particular, this essay hypothesizes and shows that companies may be seen as implicitly blaming someone or something when the company engages in ostensibly prosocial activities aimed at addressing a social issue.

Should brands and for-profit companies be involved in social change in the first place? The Marketing Science Institute (2016) has classified this as one of the seven critical issues emerging as research priorities in the near future. The efficacy of such social involvement remains uncertain, yet companies continue to donate to charity, take public stances on social issues, and engage in a variety of other prosocial activities. These actions are in turn communicated to consumers through cause marketing (CM)—an umbrella term comprising a company's socially involved activities—with the hopes of earning consumer praise. The present research adds to current theoretical explanations for why CM achieves its goal in some cases and backfires in others.

A substantial literature is dedicated to exploring how and when prosocial corporate behavior produces positive consumer outcomes (Peloza & Shang, 2011). Contemporary research in this area (e.g., Armstrong Soule & Reich, 2015; Reich & Armstrong Soule, 2016; Sen, Du, & Bhattacharya, 2016) has emphasized the role of consumers' inferences of the company's motives in predicting these outcomes. The present research diverges from extant research in this regard, examining a less intuitive

set of consumer inferences around blame. It is proposed and shown that CM may be unintentionally communicating to consumers the company's (1) negative attitude, (2) moral judgement, and (3) blame toward the party responsible for creating the harm that the CM activity is meant to address. These inferences in turn predict the amount of praise the company receives, depending on consumers' own attitudes, judgments, and blame toward the perpetrator. However, blame inferences are expected to predict praise beyond other inferences. This is because blame provides a unique signal about the company's desire to hold the perpetrator accountable (Lerner & Tetlock, 1999) and therefore signals something unique about the company's social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Thus, the benefits of blame inferences may be primarily driven by consumers' enhanced sense of membership in an identity category that is also perceived to be occupied by the company. Identification in this case takes the form of having overlapping values with the company. As a result of this shared membership, it is expected that consumers' reactions toward the company's actions will be positively biased due to ingroup favoritism (Turner, Brown, & Tajfel, 1979).

To illustrate, consider a company's charitable sponsorship of a gun control event. By sponsoring such an event, the company is explicitly communicating its support for the cause, but implicitly signaling its attitude, moral judgment, and blame judgment toward the most visible opponent of the cause (in this case, the NRA). All of these signals, both explicit and implicit, are likely to please consumers who support gun control, but the inferred blame is a unique determinant of consumer praise. Likewise, for consumers who oppose stricter gun control, blame inferences provide a powerful motive for withholding praise from the company.

In establishing these effects, this research makes the following contributions to several relevant literatures. First, this essay examines a novel type of consumer inference around blame and shows that prosocial activity may produce this effect, irrespective of a company's intent to blame anyone. Second, it is shown that consumer response to CM is more complex than previously understood, as blame inferences may predict consumer praise for the company beyond other surface-level inferences (e.g., inferred support for the cause).

Relatedly, this research contributes to social identity theory in demonstrating that blame may be used as a signal or expression of one's social identity. Last, the present research extends the scope of theoretical models of blame. In both social psychology (e.g., Alicke, 2000; 2008; Knobe, 2003; Malle et al., 2014) and consumer behavior (Folkes, 1984; 1988; Klein & Dawar, 2004; Moon, 2003), blame is considered only from the perspective of the blame agent. Only a handful of isolated studies have measured perceived blame from others, and these studies are restricted to contexts of clinical depression (e.g., Phelan et al., 2013) and psychological maladjustment among cancer patients (Else-Quest et al., 2009). The present research goes beyond these contexts, showing that an observer (e.g., consumer) may infer blame from another blame agent (e.g., company) and the process of translating these inferences into favorable views of the company.

Theoretical Background

CM and shared social identity. One's social identity refers to a facet of one's self-concept comprising the set of social categories to which he or she belongs (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This may include a political, moral, racial, or professional identity, or any

combination of these or other socially relevant categories (Hogg, 1992). People vary in the extent to which they feel they belong to these categories, and that sensed strength of membership reflects the importance of a given social identity to one's self-concept (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995).

A core element of social identity theory is the concept of ingroup bias (Turner et al., 1979), which is concerned with the extent to which people display favorable treatment toward other members within one of their own social categories relative to individuals outside of that category. Although this phenomenon has typically been applied toward explaining prejudice (Tajfel, 1969) and stereotyping behavior (Taylor et al., 1978), a substantial body of research documents the tendency of individuals to evaluate members of an ingroup more positively, assuming membership in that group is salient, self-relevant, and associated with high social status (Mullen, Brown, & Smith, 1992). This tendency is generally understood to be driven by self-enhancement motives (i.e., if the group is seen in a positive light, and I belong to the group, then I also see myself in a positive light; Hogg et al., 1995).

Applied to consumer behavior and marketing, ingroup biases may lead consumers to evaluate a company more favorably when that company is perceived as sharing one or several of their social identities. Consumer research involving social identity theory has largely focused on the tendency for consumers to avoid products associated with undesirable outgroups (Ferraro, Bettman, & Chartrand, 2009; White & Dahl, 2007; Wilk, 1997) while pursuing brands that enhance a sense of membership within a desirable ingroup (Berger & Heath, 2007; 2008; Chan, Berger, & Van Boven, 2012; Escalas & Bettman, 2003, 2005; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). However, research in management and

marketing has also shown that companies may signal their own social identities to employees and consumers (Kärreman & Alvesson, 2004; Rao, Davis, & Ward, 2000) in part through their CM activities (Turban & Greening, 1997; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). If this signal communicates membership in a social category shared with the consumer (e.g., through a sense of overlapping values), then a sense of consumer-company identification results (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Homburg, Wieseke, & Hoyer, 2009). Consequently, an ingroup bias may take effect in this case, increasing positive evaluations of the company across a variety of domains.

Although several facets of CM may signal a shared social identity, this essay focuses on the specific role of inferred blame. It is proposed that by engaging in CM, the company may be signaling blame toward the most visible perpetrator of the issue they are attempting to address. The following section reviews key literature in social cognition, leading to the propositions that CM may signal blame through a connection to morality, and that an inferred blame judgment may act as a signal of the company's social identity.

CM signals blame. As reviewed in Essay 1 above, a substantial body of research in social cognition suggests that blame judgments may be driven less by a deliberate assessment of who or what caused a negative event to occur, and more by a spontaneous affective reaction to a potential blame target's moral character. Consequently, philosophers (Cogley, 2014) and moral psychologists (Guglielmo, Monroe, & Malle, 2009; Pizarro & Tannenbaum, 2011; Uhlmann, Pizarro, & Diermeier, 2015) often conceptualize blame in moral terms. Negative events or situations are only considered morally wrong when the existence of a blameworthy causal agent is possible (Malle et al., 2014). For instance, it makes little sense to say that earthquakes are morally wrong

because it is not possible to blame an agent for causing an earthquake. Inversely, claiming that pollution is morally wrong implies that an agent may be blamed for causing it.

Engaging in CM prompts consumers to form moral judgments of the company (Creyer & Ross, 1997; Peloza & Shang, 2011) because it acts as a signal of the company's moral character (Brown & Dacin, 1997) and moral identity (Bennett & Chakravarti, 2009). That is, CM may communicate to consumers information concerning what the company believes is morally right or wrong. Because moral judgments are tied to blame judgments (Cogley, 2014; Guglielmo et al., 2009), blame may also be communicated through CM. In other words, CM may signal the company's support for a cause (that which is morally right) but also the company's blame for a perpetrator (that which is morally wrong). When Lyft sponsors a gun control organization, for instance, the company explicitly communicates a belief that the organization is morally just but it may also be signaling a judgment of blame toward the gun control organization's most visible opponent (i.e., the NRA). Likewise, consumers may infer that Lyft is communicating a more general moral judgment and negative attitude toward this opponent. However, as argued below, blame inferences may serve as a powerful and unique predictor of praise and identification with the company beyond the effects of other inferences.

Blame as a unique signal of social identity. In assigning blame, an agent makes a judgment of the moral goodness or badness of a given target (Cogley, 2014). These moral judgments, along with morally-relevant emotions and behaviors, comprise one's moral identity (Kihlstrom & Klein, 1994), which is itself a facet of one's social identity

(Aquino & Reed, 2002). Indeed, recent research has shown that moral identity may be what people consider the *most essential* part of one's identity (Goodwin et al., 2014; Strohming & Nichols, 2014). Thus, who or what an agent blames for a harmful event may communicate an essential component of their social identity to others. Blame is unique in this regard because it signals an agent's desire to hold the perpetrator accountable for a harmful event (Lerner & Tetlock, 1999), whereas general moral judgments and negative attitudes toward a perpetrator do not. Blame inferences should therefore act as a strong and unique predictor of identification with the company, resulting in a favorable evaluation of that company's CM assuming consumers also blame that target for the harm. Conversely, when the inferred blame target differs from the consumer's blame target, a negative evaluation (i.e., outgroup bias) is applied toward the company's CM.

Returning to the previous example, this suggests that consumers who blame the NRA for gun violence may praise Lyft for their support of a gun control organization because they infer that the company also blames the NRA. Conversely, consumers who do not believe the NRA is to blame are more likely to withhold praise from the company. This is because in the former case, the consumer shares a social identity with the company and thus treats it as an ingroup entity, whereas in the latter the company is considered a member of an external social category and is treated as an outgroup entity.

In sum, a general blame inference hypothesis is proposed that comprises three predictions: (1) consumers may infer blame from a company's CM, (2), these blame inferences uniquely predict praise for the company beyond the effects of other inferences, and (3) the reason inferred blame leads to praise is because it represents a shared social

identity between the consumer and the company. This generalized blame inference hypothesis is tested through two studies. Study 1 shows that a strong (vs. weak) form of CM leads to stronger blame inferences (prediction 1) which in turn uniquely predict praise (prediction 2). Study 2 shows that identification with the company is the mechanism driving the effect of blame inferences on praise (prediction 3).

Study 1 – Imprimis Pharmaceuticals

The first study was designed to test the basic prediction that engaging in CM leads to a number of inferences (including blame) and that blame inferences predict praise beyond the effects of other inferences. Participants read an excerpt about an actual high-profile news event involving a pharmaceutical company raising the price of an AIDS drug and a competitor that responded with a prosocial action. The strength of the competitor's prosocial action was manipulated to show that CM plays a causal role in predicting praise through blame inferences.

Participants and procedure. Data were collected from 200 US residents through MTurk, 26 (13.0%) of whom were excluded from the analyses for incorrectly answering an attention check question (final $N = 174$; $M_{Age} = 35.95$, $SD_{Age} = 11.97$, $Range = 20 - 73$; 39.7% female). Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions in a 2-cell (strength of prosocial action: weak vs. strong) between-participants design. In both conditions, participants were shown an excerpt from a news article, ostensibly real but actually created by the researcher, summarizing a recent controversy involving Turing Pharmaceuticals founder Martin Shkreli ("pharma bro"). The article reported an actual event in which Shkreli purchased the rights to Daraprim, a drug used to treat the AIDS virus, and hiked the price of the drug from \$13.50/pill to \$750.00/pill overnight. In

response, a competing pharmaceutical company, Imprimis Pharmaceuticals, developed a similar drug and offered it at a more affordable price. In the [weak] (strong) prosocial action condition, the article reported that Imprimis offered the new drug [at \$13.50/pill] (free of charge).

After reading the article, participants responded to two attention check questions about details from the article. Next, presented separately and in counterbalanced order, participants reported their inferences of Imprimis' (1) attitudes toward, (2) moral judgment of, and (3) blame for Martin Shkreli. Participants then rated their degree of praise for Imprimis, followed by basic demographic questions.

Measures.

Attitude inference. A single item asked: "What is the CEO of Imprimis' attitude towards Martin Shkreli? The CEO of Imprimis has a(n) _____ attitude towards Martin Shkreli" (1 = *extremely negative*, 11 = *extremely positive*).

Moral inference. A single item asked: "What is the CEO of Imprimis' moral judgment of Martin Shkreli? The CEO of Imprimis believes that Martin Shkreli is a morally _____ person" (1 = *bad*, 11 = *good*).

Blame inference. A single item asked: "To what extent does the CEO of Imprimis blame Martin Shkreli for the price hike? The CEO of Imprimis _____ for the price hike" (1 = *does not blame Shkreli at all*, 11 = *blames Shkreli very much*).

Praise. Participants rated praise with a single item: "For its response to the price hike, Imprimis Pharmaceuticals deserves..." (1 = *no praise at all*, 9 = *a lot of praise*).

Results and discussion. One aim of this study was to test whether a company's CM would influence inferences that the company was blaming the perpetrator (prediction

1). Independent samples *t*-tests ($df = 172$ for all *t*-tests; means and standard deviations summarized in Table 5) supported this prediction, showing greater blame inferences in the strong (vs. weak) prosocial action condition ($p = .027, d = .34$). Similarly, the strong (vs. weak) prosocial action condition produced greater attitude inferences ($p = .002, d = .48$) and moral inferences ($p = .031, d = .33$). Further, participants provided more praise to the company in the strong (vs. weak) prosocial action condition ($p < .001, d = .67$).

Table 5.

Study 1: Means (standard deviations) within each experimental cell for dependent variables.

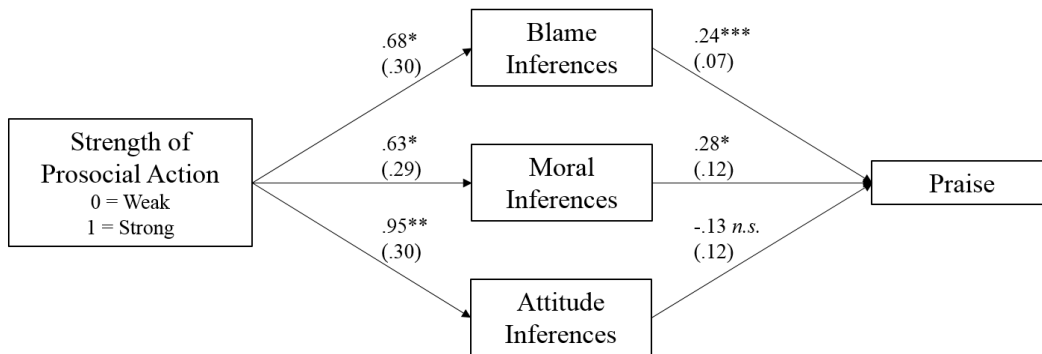
	Weak Prosocial Action	Strong Prosocial Action
Blame Inference (11-point scale)	9.48 (2.37)	10.16 (1.56)
Attitude Inference (11-point scale)	9.18 (2.16)	10.14 (1.84)
Moral Inference (11-point scale)	9.49 (1.93)	10.13 (1.91)
Praise (nine-point scale)	7.20 (2.18)	8.40 (1.26)

A more nuanced prediction was that a unique component of CM's effect on praise would be driven by blame inferences beyond effects of other inferences (prediction 2). To test this, a parallel mediation model was analyzed using the PROCESS macro (model 4; Hayes, 2013) with 5,000 bootstrapped samples. The analysis included the strength of prosocial action manipulation as the predictor (0 = weak; 1 = strong), the three inference measures as parallel mediators, and praise as the outcome (see Figure 7 for individual path coefficients). Consistent with prediction 2, the manipulation's effect on praise was mediated by blame inferences ($ab = .17, SE = .12, 95\% CI [.01, .49]$). Conversely, no

indirect effects were observed through the other two inference measures (both 95% CIs include 0). This suggests not only that blame inferences may have a unique effect on praise (as per prediction 2), but also a *more potent* one relative to other inferences. In Study 2, the proposed mechanism for this effect, identification with the company, is tested.

Figure 7.

Study 1: Parallel mediation model with unstandardized *b* coefficients (standard errors).
Notes: For ease of interpretation, only direct paths are depicted; **p* < .05, ***p* < .01, ****p* < .001, *n.s.* = not significant (*p* > .10)



Study 2 – Lyft

Study 2 aimed to replicate and extend the findings of Study 1 in several ways. First, the proposed mechanism (identification with the company) was measured and tested as a mediator of the effect of blame inferences on praise (prediction 3). Second, the CM context in this study was more politically controversial, permitting a test of when blame inferences do and do not lead to praise. Specifically, the study materials described Lyft’s support for a gun control organization and inferences of Lyft’s blame for the NRA were measured. Blame inferences in turn may differentially lead to praise depending on consumers’ own attitudes toward gun control. Third, inferences of Lyft’s support for the cause were also measured and ruled out as an alternative explanation for the previously

observed effects. This suggests that inferring blame predicts praise beyond a more straightforward inference of company support for the cause. Finally, an additional dependent variable, change in attitude towards Lyft, was measured in addition to praise, showing that blame inferences might have more generalized effects for consumers.

Participants and procedure. Participants were 204 US residents recruited from MTurk, 21 (10.3%) of whom were excluded from analyses for incorrectly answering an attention check question (final $N = 183$; $M_{Age} = 35.72$, $SD_{Age} = 11.65$, $Range = 20 - 84$; 48.1% female). Participants first rated their pre-existing attitudes toward Lyft (among other brands) to permit a later calculation of attitude change as a dependent variable.

All participants then viewed the same stimulus. Similar to Study 1, participants read an excerpt from an ostensibly real news article about Lyft's support for the gun control organization March for Our Lives. Although the stimulus was created by the researcher, the details indicated in the content were factual. The excerpt described a CM instance in which Lyft provided free rides to attendees of the March for Our Lives rallies in March 2018. Next, participants responded to two attention checks concerning the details of the article. Following this, the same three inference items used in Study 1 were administered, with modifications to item wording to fit the context. As an additional control, a fourth inference item was included assessing inferences of Lyft's support for stricter gun control. A two-item measure of identification with the company was also assessed and counterbalanced with the inference items as a potential mediator, followed by a measure of praise and a post-measure of attitude toward Lyft. Finally, embedded within the demographics was a single item assessing attitude toward passing stricter gun control laws, which served as the key moderator.

Measures.

Inferences. The identical three items used in Study 1 were included here to measure inferences of the company's attitude, moral judgment, and blame toward the perpetrator. Modifications to item wording were made to describe Lyft as the agent and the NRA as the target of Lyft's attitude, moral judgment, and blame. A fourth item, assessing inferences of Lyft's support for the cause, asked: "To what extent does Lyft support passing stricter gun control laws? Lyft _____ support(s) passing stricter gun control laws" (1 = *does not at all*, 11 = *very much*).

Identification. Two items assessed the extent to which participants identified with Lyft in terms of overlapping values. Both were based off of the same question stem: "How closely do your values overlap with Lyft's values?" The first item was adapted from the Inclusion of Other in the Self (IOS) Scale (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992) and asked participants to select a pair of overlapping circles among seven choices of increasing overlap. The second item asked participants to rate the overlap on a scale from 1 (*Our values do not overlap at all*) to 7 (*Our values overlap very closely*). The two items were combined into a single composite ($r = .82$).

Praise. A single item assessed praise for Lyft: "For its support of the March for Our Lives rally, Lyft deserves..." (1 = *no praise at all*, 9 = *a lot of praise*).

Change in attitude towards Lyft. Attitude change was assessed by subtracting a pre-measure (i.e., before the manipulation) of attitude towards Lyft from a post-measure (i.e., after the manipulation). Both pre- and post-measures asked participants to rate their attitude towards Lyft on a scale from 1 (*Extremely negative*) to 9 (*Extremely positive*).

Gun control attitude. A single item embedded within the demographics asked: “I am _____ passing stricter gun control laws” (1 = *passionately and strongly against*, 9 = *passionately and strongly for*).

Results and discussion. It was expected that blame inferences, over and above other inferences, would positively (negatively) predict identification, praise, and attitude change towards Lyft among consumers who support (oppose) stricter gun control laws (see Table 6 for means and standard deviations of all measured variables). To test this, a blame inference \times gun control attitude interaction was analyzed on these three outcomes. The remaining inferences (attitudes, moral judgment, and support) were treated as covariates. Results show the expected interactions on identification ($b = .04$, $SE = .01$, $p = .013$, $f^2 = .02$), praise ($b = .05$, $SE = .02$, $p = .008$, $f^2 = .02$), and attitude change ($b = .05$, $SE = .02$, $p < .001$, $f^2 = .03$). Specifically, for gun control opponents, blame inferences were *negatively* associated with identification (JN-point $_{\alpha=.05} = 1.43$), praise (JN-point $_{\alpha=.05} = 3.88$), and attitude change (JN-point $_{\alpha=.05} = 5.23$). Conversely, for gun control advocates, blame inferences were *positively* associated with identification (JN-point $_{\alpha=.05} = 8.82$), praise (JN-point $_{\alpha=.10} = 8.98$), and attitude change (JN-point $_{\alpha=.10} = 8.80$). Thus, the unique predictive ability of blame (vs. other) inferences (prediction 2) was further supported in this study.

Table 6.

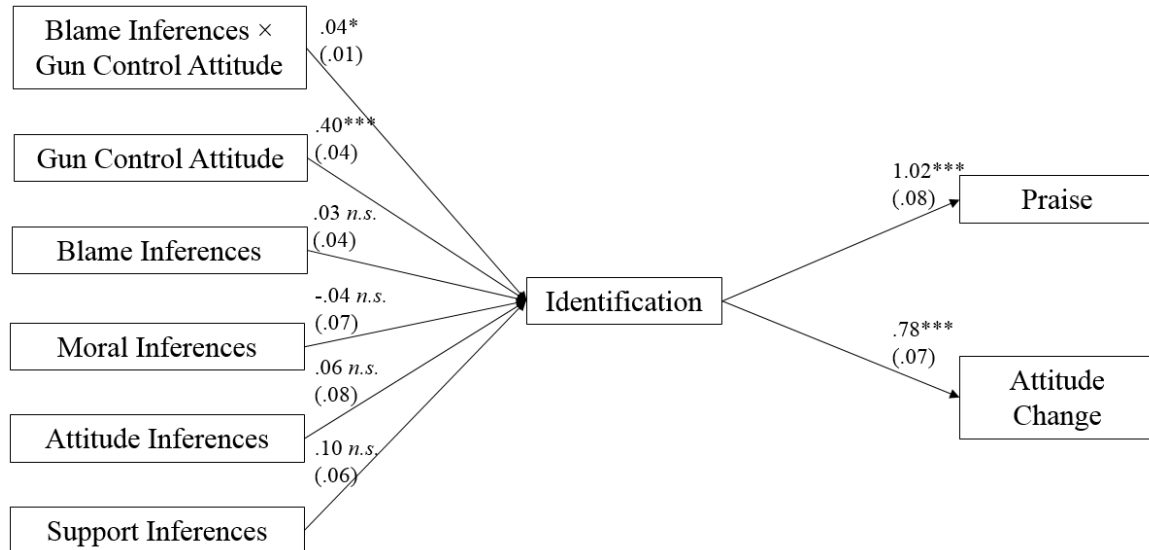
Study 2: Means (standard deviations) of all measured variables.

Blame Inference (11-point scale)	6.22 (2.82)
Attitude Inference (11-point scale)	8.64 (2.10)
Moral Inference (11-point scale)	8.45 (2.26)
Support Inference (11-point scale)	8.94 (2.09)
Gun Control Attitude (nine-point scale)	6.57 (2.58)
Identification (seven-point scale)	3.73 (1.80)
Praise (nine-point scale)	6.36 (2.62)
Attitude Change (post- minus pre-measure)	0.09 (2.20)

Consistent with prediction 3, it was also expected that the blame inference \times gun control attitude interaction would predict both praise and change in attitude towards Lyft *indirectly* through identification with Lyft. This was tested via a moderated mediation model in PROCESS (model 7). Blame inferences were treated as the predictor, gun control attitude as the moderator, identification as the mediator, praise as the outcome, and the three remaining inferences as covariates (see Figure 8 for individual path coefficients). Results support the core prediction via a significant index of moderated mediation on praise as the outcome variable ($index = .04, SE = .01, 95\% CI [.01, .07]$). The same pattern was observed when treating change in attitude towards Lyft (rather than praise) as the outcome variable ($index = .03, SE = .01, 95\% CI [.01, .05]$).

Figure 8.

Study 2: Moderated mediation model with unstandardized *b* coefficients (standard errors). *Notes:* For ease of interpretation, only direct paths are depicted; * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, *n.s.* = not significant ($p > .10$)



In sum, Study 2 showed that blame inferences following CM may enhance or detract from consumer identification with the company, depending on whether consumers share in that blame judgment. Identification in turn predicts both consumer praise for the company and improvement in attitude towards it. Importantly, these effects were shown over and above the effects of three other common consumer inferences. In particular, by controlling for support inferences, results suggest that the effects of blame inferences on identification, praise, and attitude improvement cannot be explained simply by consumers and the company supporting the same cause. Rather, as suggested by the theorizing above, identification with the company (and its consequents) results in part from inferences that the company is blaming a common enemy.

General Discussion

Two studies showed that, when a company engages in CM, consumers may infer that the company is blaming a visible perpetrator of the harm. These blame inferences may lead to praise for the company's CM activity and improve consumer attitude toward the company, beyond the effects of other consumer inferences concerning the company's attitude, moral judgment, and support for the cause. It was also theorized that blame inferences led to praise because they provided a unique means of identifying with the company, and Study 2 supported this proposed mechanism. Importantly, blame inferences may act as either a benefit or a detriment to the company, depending on consumers' own attitudes toward the cause. Thus, in sum, this essay shows that CM may be unknowingly communicating a blame judgment to consumers in addition to more surface-level signals such as support for the cause.

CHAPTER IV

OVERALL DISCUSSION AND SYNTHESIS OF ESSAYS 1 AND 2

Consumer researchers have long been interested in understanding how and why consumers form blame judgments of companies in response to corporate malfeasance and product failure scenarios. The present research extends existing findings in the literature by shifting the focus of either the blame agent or blame target beyond what has been previously studied. In particular, Essay 1 considers a novel blame target (consumers harmed by product failure) whereas Essay 2 considers a novel blame agent (a company communicating its CM activities). Furthermore, each essay contributes a unique extension to theories of blame via the demonstrated mechanisms and outcomes. In Essay 1, the underlying role of perceived deservingness explains irrational blame for immoral targets and how this misattribution of blame may stunt market self-regulation. In Essay 2, the company's blame is inferred and translated into varying levels of praise and attitudes toward the company depending on the extent to which it enhances identification with the company. In both instances, an existing theoretical perspective (just world theory and social identity theory in Essay 1 and 2, respectively) is applied to explaining an unexplored blame phenomenon in a novel way. Together, these essays extend the way consumer researchers might conceptualize blame and apply it to addressing questions of consumer and societal well-being. In the remainder of the dissertation, the theoretical and practical implications of each essay are outlined more explicitly in turn.

Theoretical Implications (Essay 1)

Essay 1 demonstrates how and when consumers might blame other consumers for a harmful product failure in spite of evidence that the harm was not due to misuse of the

product. Within the arena of product failure attribution (e.g., Dunn & Dahl, 2012; Folkes, 1984; Folkes & Kotsos, 1986; Lei, Dawar, & Gürhan-Canli, 2012; Moon, 2003; Xie et al., 2014), the phenomenon of consumer-to-consumer blame for harmful product failures (i.e., victim blaming) has been largely ignored. Applying victim blame toward this novel, consumer-based system may itself be considered an important contribution to consumer psychology (Lynch, Alba, Krishna, Morwitz, & Gürhan-Calni, 2012). The findings extend beyond this application, showing not only that victim blaming *does* occur following a product failure for which the company was responsible, but also demonstrating how and why it occurs. In so doing, this research extends theoretical accounts of consumer reactions in response to corporate malfeasance to include features of the victim (i.e., morality) and the observer (i.e., beliefs about deservingness) and answers calls for research into consumer judgment when the immorality of the victim is unrelated to the reason for their suffering (Lee et al., 2014). The findings might also be useful for theories of boycotting (e.g., Braunsberger & Buckler, 2011; John & Klein, 2003; Klein & Dawar, 2004; Sen, Gürhan-Canli, & Morwitz, 2001) that have previously focused on consumer traits and perceptions of the company rather than on characteristics of the victim(s).

The current research makes a more nuanced and unique contribution with respect to moral dominance. Research in social cognition (Alicke, 1992, 1994; Alicke & Zell, 2009; Laurent et al., 2015) has shown that bad people receive more blame, but “bad” has been defined in multiple ways. Researchers typically operationalize bad actors as those who possess some combination of unsociable and immoral traits. The present research, inspired by recent work in social cognition (Brambilla & Leach, 2014; Leach et al.,

2007), moral psychology (Goodwin et al., 2014; Strohminger & Nichols, 2014), and consumer behavior (Kirmani et al., 2017; Liu & Lin, 2018), isolates these dimensions of dispositional warmth and shows that blame is primarily a function of morality and not sociability. Either might influence blame in isolation, but morality dominates when both are presented jointly.

The research also identifies deservingness as a mechanism for the moral dominance effect in victim blame, extending beyond heuristic-based explanations of disposition-based blame (Alicke, 2000) and expanding understanding of how people blame in general. In addition to mediation evidence, this mechanism is demonstrated through moderation by individual differences in BJW, addressing calls for research into situations in which BJW might apply to prosocial consumer behavior (White et al., 2012) and have a maladaptive effect on consumer well-being (Wilson & Darke, 2012).

The current research also contributes to the compassion literature, which has shown that compassion arises in response to undeserved suffering (Haidt, 2003). The present research tests a reverse proposition and shows that compassion may reduce perceptions that suffering is deserved, leading to a reduction in blame and bolstering punitive action against the company. In addition, whereas prior research has shown compassion to reduce punitive tendencies toward wrongdoers (cf. Goetz et al., 2010), the current research shows that compassion actually *increases* this tendency toward an offending company via a main effect of compassion on intentions to sign a petition against it (Experiment 4). Exploring this finding further is beyond the scope of the present research but presents an interesting avenue for additional research into compassion and punishment.

Practical Implications (Essay 1)

Consumer research is not meant to benefit just marketing professionals, it should also enhance consumers' lives (Herr, 2003; McGill, Peracchio, & Luce, 2011; Mick, 2005; Ozanne & Saatcioglu 2008; Zhong & Mitchell, 2010). Organizing actions that hold companies accountable for their misdeeds is fundamental to regulating marketplace behavior. As noted by Green America, an organization dedicated to ethical consumerism, "This is marketplace democracy in action – consumers voting with their dollars for social and economic change" (Murtagh & Lukehart, 1994, p. 2). These organizations may therefore wish to reduce the incidence of victim blaming following harmful product failures. The current research has implications for the way their calls to action may be most effectively framed toward achieving this aim.

Given the findings around moral dominance, a cause-related message may be most efficiently framed to minimize consumer inferences of victim immorality, rather than perceptions of the victim's unsociability or incompetence. As Experiment 3 shows, this may be achieved by highlighting morally positive information about the victim but should consider the audience and the extent to which that information will align with their moral compass. If consumers perceive the victim as immoral and little can be done to alter this perception, then inducing generalized feelings of compassion may prompt consumers into action (Experiment 4). In practice, this may be accomplished through imagery of vulnerable individuals suffering (Oveis et al., 2010).

Further, given the role of BJW in strengthening the effects of morality on victim blame (Experiment 2), cause-related marketers might do well to include message content that "primes" consumers into a low BJW. Following this logic, a preliminary test was

conducted of this intervention in a Post Study in which participants were primed into either a low or high BJW mindset and then separately presented with a scenario about either an immoral or neutral victim of a car accident caused by faulty brakes. This revealed a significant 2 (morality) \times 2 (BJW) interaction on victim blame ($F = 6.711, p = .010, \eta^2 = .04$) such that morality's effect on victim blame was strong in the high-BJW condition ($F = 28.464, p < .001, \eta^2 = .25$) but attenuated in the low-BJW condition ($F = 4.014, p = .048, \eta^2 = .04$). Thus, future strategies around altering BJW through message content may prove to be an effective tool for practitioners wishing to reduce victim blame.

It should be noted that competitors of the offending company might also benefit from this research. Competitors, such as boycott organizers, have an interest in reducing victim blame. For instance, Delta Airlines may benefit from United's public product failure and might therefore wish to minimize any interfering victim blame. Although the motive in this case may be less altruistic, the outcome of holding guilty companies responsible would nonetheless help mitigate a major threat to consumer well-being. The extent to which consumers will embrace or reject this type of messaging from a guilty company's competitors may also be a ripe avenue for future research.

Theoretical Implications (Essay 2)

This research expands theories of blame in several ways. First, unlike existing models of blame, the studies herein examine inferred blame from an observer's perspective. To this researcher's knowledge, this is the first analysis of one's inferences about another's blame judgments and how these inferences lead to further judgments and evaluations. In particular, the findings suggest that behaving altruistically might signal a

blame judgment, which may help explain observers' evaluations of others' altruistic behaviors. If a prosocial behavior signals a blame judgment that consumers agree with, then they may be more likely to praise the prosocial actor. Thus, this research contributes to theories of altruism and empathy as well as blame.

Relatedly, the present research introduces a novel construct, inferred blame, and shows its role in predicting praise as well as other outcomes directed at the company. This finding suggests that blame may be considered a praiseworthy action under certain circumstances. These findings also contribute to social identity theory by demonstrating that blame acts as a signal of one's social identity. In demonstrating this pattern of effects, this research helps provide a more complete explanation of why CM produces praise (beyond more surface-level inferences that result) as well as when it can backfire.

Practical Implications (Essay 2)

Pragmatically, this research suggests that companies communicate more than they intend through their CM, and may wish to tailor their messages carefully to diverse audiences. Rather than leaving perceptions of blame open to consumers' inferences, companies may benefit from explicitly blaming one target or another, depending on the target audience. This is especially true when the issue being addressed involves a possible causal agent, and so companies may wish to "play it safe" and tackle social causes that cannot be controlled by human forces (e.g., natural disaster relief).

Limitations and Future Directions (both Essays)

Though the studies reported across both essays provide support for the theorizing and predictions proposed herein, this research contains several limitations. First, although the stimuli and cover stories were designed to evoke reactions to real events, and Essay 1

included field data, all participants had foreknowledge that they were participating in a research study. Future research should examine these blame phenomena when consumers are witnessing a harmful product failure first-hand or observing an instance of CM in a more naturalistic setting, rather than evaluating a written scenario or news event. Conducting such an experiment would undoubtedly be challenging given the nature of the context, but learning consumers' reactions to ostensibly real victims and real CM actions would shed additional insights into what was reported here.

Regarding Essay 1, future research may investigate alternative mechanisms for morality's effects on blame and petition signing. For example, alternative system-justifying ideologies specific to this context (e.g., fair market ideology, economic system justification, etc.) or general to any context (e.g., power distance, social dominance orientation, etc.; for a review, see Jost & Hunyady, 2005) may explain consumers' willingness to blame immoral victims of product failure. An interesting research direction would be to test some of these alternative mechanisms and compare their moderating effects on victim blame to that of BJW.

With respect to Essay 2, future research should examine the process through which blame inferences are formed. The current research shows that blame inferences arise in response to CM, but the process leading to the formation of these inferences is still uncertain. It may be the case that certain individuals are more predisposed to infer blame, or that situational factors might make such inferences more or less likely to occur. In addition, these factors might influence *who* consumers perceive as the target of inferred blame.

As with all cross-sectional research, the present research represents only a snapshot of consumer behavior. It would be interesting to find out the extent to which victim blaming changes over time as more becomes known about the victim's disposition, or how blame inferences may be altered by repeated exposure to different CM messages. Will consumers remember the details of the product failure and associated blame attributions long enough to affect future purchase decisions, and if so, to what limit? Does the CM message influence consumer blame for the issue, and will repeated exposures affect inferences of the company's blame? These open questions should be addressed in future research employing a longitudinal design.

APPENDIX A

CORRELATION TABLES FOR ALL STUDIES WITH MULTIPLE MEASURES (ESSAYS 1 AND 2)

For each table: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$; all other coefficients not significant ($p > .10$).

Pilot Study Bivariate Correlations (Essay 1)

	1	2	3	4	5
Sociability Perceptions (1)	1.00				
Morality Perceptions (2)	.37***	1.00			
Competence Perceptions (3)	.46***	.56***	1.00		
Victim Blame (4)	-.09	-.31**	-.24*	1.00	
Petition Intentions (5)	.26*	.16	.14	-.28**	1.00

Experiment 1a Bivariate Correlations (Essay 1)

	1	2	3	4	5
Sociability Perceptions (1)	1.00				
Morality Perceptions (2)	.63***	1.00			
Deservingness (3)	-.15*	-.31***	1.00		
Victim Blame (4)	-.40***	-.39***	.49***	1.00	
Petition Intentions (5)	-.37***	-.37***	-.27***	-.59***	1.00

Experiment 2 Bivariate Correlations (Essay 1)

	1	2	3	4
Sociability Perceptions (1)	1.00			
Morality Perceptions (2)	.32***	1.00		
Deservingness (3)	-.23***	-.82***	1.00	
Victim Blame (4)	-.14	-.57***	.61***	1.00

Experiment 3 Bivariate Correlations (Essay 1)

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Sociability Perceptions (1)	1.00					
Morality Perceptions (2)	.60***	1.00				
Deservingness (3)	-.22**	-.22**	1.00			
Victim Blame (4)	-.19*	-.30***	.39***	1.00		
Gun Control Attitudes (5)	.07	.02	-.07	-.04	1.00	

Petition Signature (6)	.15	.23**	-.25***	-.24**	.06	1.00
Experiment 4 Bivariate Correlations (Essay 1)						
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Compassion Index (1)	1.00					
Sociability Perceptions (2)	.09	1.00				
Morality Perceptions (3)	.07	.24***	1.00			
Deservingness (4)	-.01	-.07	-.15*	1.00		
Victim Blame (5)	-.09	-.07	-.11	.58***	1.00	
Petition Intentions (6)	.21**	.10	.19**	-.26***	-.32***	1.00

Study 1 Bivariate Correlations (Essay 2)

	1	2	3	4
Blame Inference (1)	1.00			
Attitude Inference (2)	.49***	1.00		
Moral Inference (3)	.43***	.84***	1.00	
Praise (4)	.37***	.29***	.33***	1.00

Study 2 Bivariate Correlations (Essay 2)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Blame Inference (1)	1.00							
Attitude Inference (2)	.34***	1.00						
Moral Inference (3)	.25***	.75***	1.00					
Support Inference (4)	.36***	.40***	.29***	1.00				
Gun Control Attitude (5)	-.23**	-.11	-.16*	-.01	1.00			
Identification (6)	-.07	.01	-.07	.11	.62***	1.00		
Praise (7)	-.19*	-.14*	-.20**	.03	.74***	.71***	1.00	
Attitude Change (8)	-.20**	-.11	-.19*	.01	.71***	.66***	.74***	1.00

APPENDIX B

ENDNOTES

1. In contrast to standard practice, the company erroneously boarded all passengers *prior* to its attempts to remove and reroute them (Horowitz & Ostrower, 2017, April 10). In addition, the flight was technically not overbooked because the number of tickets sold did not exceed the number of available seats (Than, 2017, April 12). Thus, United violated administrative law 14 CFR 250.2a (Cornell Law School, 2017) by giving preference to its employees over passengers with reserved and confirmed seats.

2. Retaining these seven participants did not change the direction or significance of the interaction effects (all interaction $ps < .011$) or mediation effects (serial mediation of interaction on petition signing through deservingness and victim blame: *indirect* = $-.02$, $SE = .02$, 90% *CI* $[-.06, -.001]$).

3. The compassion slides may be downloaded from <http://www.oveislab.com/publications/>.

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