Building Trust by Tearing Others Down:

When Accusing Others of Unethical Behavior Engenders Trust

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We demonstrate that accusations harm trust in targets, but boost trust in the accuser when the accusation signals that the accuser has high integrity. Compared to individuals who did not accuse targets of engaging in unethical behavior, accusers engendered greater trust when observers perceived the accusation to be motivated by a desire to defend moral norms, rather than by a desire to advance ulterior motives. We also found that the accuser's moral hypocrisy, the accusation's revealed veracity, and the target's intentions when committing the unethical act moderate the trust benefits conferred to accusers. Taken together, we find that accusations have important interpersonal consequences.

Keywords: Ethics; Morality; Accusations; Trust; Impression Management

Leaders and co-workers play a crucial role in establishing ethical norms in organizations (Flynn & Wiltermuth, 2010; Pillutla, 2011; Smith-Crowe, Tenbrunsel, Chan-Serafin, Brief, Umphress, & Joseph, 2014; Thau, Derfler-Rozin, Pitesa, Mitchell, & Pillutla, 2015; Wiltermuth, Bennett, & Pierce, 2013). In addition to articulating formal rules and modeling ethical behavior (Mayer, Nurmohamed, Trevino, Shapiro, & Schminke, 2013; Gino, Gu, & Zhong, 2009), one way leaders and coworkers can communicate ethical norms is by accusing others of ethical violations.

Although accusations have been largely ignored by management scholars, accusations may be prevalent within organizations. Investigative reports have documented coworkers accusing others of falsifying hours, undermining another person's reputation, cheating in sales contests, and covering up low quality work (Cohen, 2006; Lucas, 2011). In this investigation, we break new ground by considering how accusations convey information not only about the accused, but also about *the accuser*. Accusations may profoundly influence interpersonal perceptions, and we consider how accusations may be used strategically within organizations. As one corporate executive explained, "You can put the damper on anyone…very easily…There's not enough objective information about people. When you really want to do somebody in, you just say, well, he can't get along with people…he can't manage" (Jackall, 1988, p. 65).

Across five studies, we investigate the consequences of making an accusation. We focus on accusations of unethical behavior and consider how accusations influence observers' perceptions of the accuser. In our investigation, we focus on the relationship between accusations and a construct that has particular relevance for organizations: trust (Crossley, Cooper, & Wernsing, 2013; Lount, Zhong, Sivanathan, & Murnighan, 2008; Pillutla, Malhotra, & Murnighan, 2003). Trust is essential for effective collaboration, effective leadership, and

efficient organizational functioning (Bhattacharya, Devinney, & Pillutla, 1998; Dunn & Schweitzer, 2005; Golembiewski & McConkie, 1975; Lount, 2010; Lount & Pettit, 2012; Lount et al., 2008; Malhotra & Lumineau, 2011; Malhotra, 2004; Malhotra & Murnighan, 2002), and our investigation offers new insight into how a potentially prevalent organizational behavior, making an accusation, can impact trust. According to Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995), individuals trust those who demonstrate high levels of ability, benevolence, and integrity. We postulate that accusing someone of unethical behavior can signal high integrity, because accusations communicate that accusers have high ethical standards and are willing to incur costs (e.g., retaliation from the target; reputational risk) to uphold those standards. That is, an accusation can serve as a costly signal of integrity.

Accusations

Accusations have received remarkably scant attention from organizational scholars. The lone exception is an article by Bradford and Garrett (1995) that offers a model to guide corporate responses to accusations of unethical behavior. Bradford and Garrett (1995) argue that an appropriate response to an accusation — one that admits to falling short and offers a concession — may mitigate the harmful effects of an accusation on a corporation's image. In spite of the importance of accusations for both managers and organizations, no further research has explored accusations or their consequences.

The lack of organizational research investigating accusations is puzzling. Accusations are likely to be both prevalent and impactful. Norm negotiation and conflict pervade group interactions (Bettenhausen & Murnighan, 1985; Murnighan & Conlon, 1991), individuals frequently violate others' expectations (Lount et al., 2008), and people are quick to find fault with others (Barkan, Ayal, Gino, & Ariely, 2012).

In contrast to organizational scholars, linguistics scholars have recognized that accusations influence impressions of targets (Fillmore, 1969; Fillenbaum & Rapoport 1974; Orpin, 2005). Informed by research in linguistics, we expect accusations to play a significant role in organizations. If accusations are common and they shift interpersonal perceptions, they are likely to profoundly influence organizationally relevant constructs, such as trust.

In this paper, we introduce and define the construct of accusations. We then establish links between accusations and trust. We find that accusations diminish trust in the accused (see Study 2), but we focus our attention on how accusations influence perceptions of the accuser.

We define an accusation as *an assertion that another party's behavior or character has failed to meet a standard that the party was responsible for meeting*. The failure may reflect a specific behavior or a broader character flaw. Importantly, accusations do not need to be true or even well-founded. In our studies, we investigate individual targets and individual accusers. Targets and accusers can, however, be groups and institutions as well as individuals. Irrespective of whether accusations involve individuals or groups, every accusation has the following three elements: an accuser, a target, and a negative claim.

We distinguish accusations from whistle-blowing. Whistle-blowing is "the disclosure by organizational members (former or current) of illegal, immoral, or illegitimate practices under the control of their employers, to persons or organizations that may be able to effect action" (Near & Miceli, 1985, p. 4). We conceptualize whistle-blowing as one specific type of accusation. In contrast to whistle-blowing, accusations may be communicated to many different people (e.g., they can be levied directly at targets) and accusations can address many different forms of undesirable behavior (e.g., incompetence).

Accusations often communicate blame. Blame involves two components: assigning responsibility to someone for having caused harm and holding those deemed blameworthy accountable for their perceived transgressions (Hamilton, Blumenfeld, & Kushler, 1988; Skarlicki, Kay, Aquino, & Fushtey, 2017). The act of blaming others can be self-protecting or self-promoting (Bell & Tetlock, 1989; Crant & Bateman, 1993). In our investigation, we focus on the self-promoting role of making accusations. In addition to harming accused targets, we expect accusations to impact perceptions of the *accuser*. How third-party observers perceive accusers can profoundly influence the consequences of accusations and the nature of accusations in organizations. The impressions people make at work impact their social and material outcomes (Anderson & Kennedy, 2012; Pfeffer, 2010) and individuals within organizations actively manage their images (Goffman, 1959; Murnighan, Oesch, & Pillutla, 2001; Pillutla & Murnighan, 1995; Tetlock, 2002). By investigating observers' perceptions of the accuser, we provide important insight into the role of accusations as an *impression management tool*.

Our focus on *observers'* perceptions affords insight into the influence of accusations on interpersonal outcomes. Whereas targets might react negatively to accusations and the accusers who level them, observers' reactions are likely to be influenced by the inferences observers make regarding the accuser's motives.

Trust

Across our studies, we investigate the influence of accusations of unethical behavior on trust. We define trust as the willingness to be vulnerable to another party based upon positive expectations of their behavior (Mayer et al., 1995), and we conceptualize trust as situation- and person-specific (Bhattacharya et al., 1998). We focus on trust because it is a critical aspect of social and organizational life. Trust is essential for cooperation within organizations (Dirks &

Ferrin, 2001, 2002; Kramer, 1999; Malhotra & Lumineau, 2011); trust improves efficiency

(Granovetter, 1985) and enables managers to lead effectively (Dirks, 2000; Dirks & Ferrin,

2002). Some scholars have even argued that no variable influences interpersonal and group

behavior as much as trust does (Golembiewski & McConkie, 1975, p. 131).

Though early research conceptualized trust as a unidimensional construct, a growing

stream of research has disentangled affect-based trust from cognition-based trust (Dirks &

Ferrin, 2002; Johnson-George & Swap, 1982; Lewis & Weigart, 1985; Malhotra & Lumineau,

2011; McAllister, 1995; Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985). This distinction separates the

emotional dimension of trust from the intellectual dimension of trust (Dunn, Ruedy, &

Schweitzer, 2012).

Cognition-based trust is rooted in beliefs about the trusted party's reliability (McAllister,

1995). Cognitive trust reflects beliefs about a counterpart's ability and integrity (Butler, 1991),

and it is characteristics such as consistency and dependability that instill cognitive trust. Integrity

is the extent to which an individual's behavior adheres to a set of acceptable principles (McFall,

1987; Simons, 2002), even in the face of social or emotional pressures to violate these principles

(Becker, 1998).

Affect-based trust is rooted in an emotional bond between two parties (Mayer et al.,

1995; Williams, 2007). Affective trust reflects feelings of emotional security. People instill

affective trust in others who respond to them in supportive, considerate, and benevolent ways

(Dunn et al., 2012). Beliefs about benevolence undergird affective trust (Dunn et al., 2012;

Mayer et al., 1995), and although affective-trust can develop in longstanding relationships, prior

work has found that people develop inferences about affective trust even in emerging and

transactional relationships (Dunn et al., 2012).

In our investigation, we consider how accusations of unethical behavior influence perceptions of integrity. As a result, we focus on the link between accusations and cognitive trust. However, both cognitive and affective trust are closely related, and the two constructs are typically investigated in concert (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Dunn et al., 2012). For completeness, we measured both cognitive and affective trust in each study. To streamline our exposition, we focus our discussion on cognitive trust, and we report our findings for affective trust in Appendix B.[1]

The Critical Role of Inferred Motives

The relationship between accusations and trust is likely to be influenced by the inferences observers make about the accuser's motives. Tetlock (2002) introduces a framework for considering motives relevant to our investigation. In particular, he describes two metaphors: the intuitive prosecutor and the intuitive politician. Intuitive prosecutors are motivated to punish targets who threaten important values, whereas intuitive politicians seek to manage their image and build social support for themselves (Tetlock, 2002). Both motives could lead individuals to accuse others of engaging in unethical behavior, and prior work has found that individuals often struggle to infer the motives that drive others' behavior (Mitchell & Tetlock, 2011).

In our work, we conceptualize accusations as signals, costly actions that communicate information about unobservable motives and traits (Connelly, Certo, Ireland, & Reutzel, 2011; Galinsky & Schweitzer, 2015). We propose that accusations can signal two broad categories of unobservable traits about an accuser: integrity (a desire to defend moral norms) and ulterior motives (such as gaining an advantage over a competitor). We expect the relationship between accusations and trust in the accuser to be influenced by perceptions of the accuser's integrity and perceptions of the accuser's motive for making an accusation. In our investigation, we focus particular attention on this second perception, the accuser's motive for making an accusation,

and its role in moderating the relationship between accusations and trust in the accuser. In the following sections, we consider how accusations might signal information about both integrity and ulterior motives.

We focus our investigation on accusations of unethical behavior. However, it is important to note that different types of accusations, such as accusations of incompetence, are likely to signal different information, such as information about the accuser's competence.

Accusations and Perceptions of Integrity

Effective accusations of unethical behavior signal a desire to defend moral norms. Accusations transmit accountability by making norm violations salient and drawing attention to the accused person's behavior (see Smith-Crowe & Warren, 2014; Warren & Smith-Crowe, 2008). By making an accusation, accusers let others know that they are paying attention to the target's behavior and that they consider the target's actions to be inappropriate and potentially worthy of sanction (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1996). In so doing, accusers can demonstrate integrity (Jordan, Sommers, Bloom, & Rand, 2017).

Integrity reflects adherence to a set of acceptable principles (McFall, 1987; Simons, 2002), and it is a trait that individuals assess from observing others' behavior (Simons, 2002; Simons, Leroy, Collewaert, & Masschelein, 2015). An especially important type of integrity is behavioral integrity, the correspondence between an individual's statements (e.g., stating that it is important to treat people fairly) and an individual's actions (e.g., actually treating people fairly). Accusers who make well-founded accusations to uphold their ethical standards can communicate behavioral integrity and build trust.

Accusations can boost perceptions of the accuser's integrity in two ways. First, accusations might communicate the accuser's values, enabling observers to assess the

congruence between the accuser's values and their own. Even when congruence is imperfect, knowledge of the accuser's values could enable better prediction of the accuser's future behavior. Consequently, the accuser may seem more reliable after making an accusation than when their values are unknown. Importantly, both value congruence and reliability inspire cognitive trust (Jordan, Hoffman, Bloom, & Rand, 2016; Lewicki & Bunker, 1996; McAllister, 1995; Sitkin & Roth, 1993).

Second, making an accusation could demonstrate behavioral commitment to values. That is, accusers may demonstrate behavioral integrity if their accusation is perceived to reflect both a statement about their values and an action that is consistent with their stated values. Accusations, however, are risky. In addition to risking retaliation (from the target or the target's allies), accusation that are unfounded, inaccurate, or hypocritical may harm the accuser's reputation.

Consistent with our conceptualization of accusations of unethical behavior as signals of integrity, making an accusation is likely to be less costly for individuals with high ethical standards than it would be for individuals with low ethical standards. Individuals committed to upholding high ethical standards are likely to assess the benefits of making an accusation to be greater and the costs of making an accusation to be lower than individuals who are not committed to upholding high ethical standards. Importantly, we expect perceptions of integrity to mediate the relationship between accusations and perceptions of trust.

Building on this logic, we propose the following hypotheses:

Cognitive Trust in the Accuser (Hypothesis 1). Individuals who make accusations will
    engender greater cognitive trust than individuals who make no statement or make a non-
    accusatory moral statement.

Integrity (Hypothesis 2). Perceptions of an accuser's integrity will mediate the relationship between making an accusation and cognitive trust in the accuser.

Accusations and Ulterior Motives

Although many accusations reflect integrity and the desire to defend moral norms, some accusations reflect other motives. Individuals often seek to understand why people behave as they do (Kelley, 1967, 1973), and prior work has found that individuals routinely seek to develop causal explanations for significant events (Heider, 1958; Kelley & Michela, 1980; Martinko, 1995). In our setting, we expect individuals who observe an accusation to draw inferences from cues in their environment regarding the accuser's underlying motives.

One motive individuals could infer from an accusation is self-interest. Self-interest is often understood to be the primary driver of human behavior (Miller, 1999) and in fact, observers over-estimate the influence of self-interest on others' attitudes and behaviors (Miller & Ratner, 1998). To the extent that accusations might be used to advance the accuser's impression management motives, observers may infer that accusers are motivated, not by integrity, but by the desire to advance their own interests. Alternatively, making an accusation could help an accuser achieve a goal such as damaging the reputation of a competitor. Observers' perceptions of the accuser are likely to be moderated by the motives they attribute to the accuser. We expect accusations to build trust when observers believe that the accuser was motivated to defend moral norms rather than to advance self-interested goals.

We expect the inferences observers make about the accuser's motives to be influenced by three factors. First, we expect moral hypocrisy to harm perceptions of an accuser's integrity. When accusers act unethically in a fashion similar to those they accuse, observers are likely to infer ulterior motives rather than motives to defend moral norms. Second, we expect the revealed

veracity of an accusation to moderate perceptions of an accuser's integrity. Observers could be more likely to infer that the accuser had ulterior motives when an accusation is revealed to be false than when the accusation was either revealed to be true or when the veracity of the accusation is uncertain. Third, we shift to consider the impact of the *target's* intentions. When the target is known to have acted with bad intentions, accusations may be especially powerful signals of the accuser's desire to defend moral norms. Collectively, we expect these three factors to inform perceptions and influence trust in the accuser.

The moderating role of moral hypocrisy. According to our theory, accusations will boost cognitive trust only when accusers signal that they have integrity. When the accuser is known to have acted in a similar unethical fashion, accusations cannot credibly signal integrity and accusations should not increase cognitive trust.

When individuals act unethically but hold high ethical standards for others, they demonstrate moral hypocrisy (Batson, Kobrynowicz, Dinnerstein, Kampf, & Wilson, 1997). Moral hypocrites are motivated by a desire to appear moral without having to incur the costs of acting morally (Batson & Thompson, 2001). Moral hypocrites, however, lack the psychological standing to make effective accusations. Psychological standing, like credibility, is the subjective legitimacy an actor has to speak up (Effron & Miller, 2015). Some personal characteristics and past behaviors deprive people of psychological standing in the eyes of observers (Barden, Rucker, & Petty, 2005; Effron & Miller, 2015; Sherf, Tangirala, & Weber, 2017), and we expect accusers who are known to have acted unethically to fail to engender trust when they make accusations. Instead, hypocritical accusers are likely to be seen as motivated to merely appear moral, to lack integrity, and to be trusted less following an accusation. Thus, we predict that moral hypocrisy will moderate the positive effect of making an accusation on cognitive trust.

The Moderating Role of Moral Hypocrisy (Hypothesis 3). Moral hypocrisy moderates the effect of making an accusation on trust, such that making an accusation elevates trust in accusers who have not acted in a fashion similar to the target and diminishes trust when they have done so.

The moderating role of veracity. Often, the veracity of an accusation is uncertain. Though people generally presume that what they hear is true (Grice, 1975), perceptions about the veracity of an accusation are likely to be moderated by the nature of the accusation, knowledge about the accuser, and knowledge about the relationship between the accuser and the accused. When the veracity of the accusation is uncertain, the revealed veracity of the accusation is likely to moderate how observers judge the accuser. When accusations are revealed to be true, we expect observers to be more likely to believe that the accuser acted to defend moral norms and that the accuser has integrity. When accusations are revealed to be false, however, accusers are likely to derive little benefit from having made an accusation. In this case, observers must reconcile the accusation with the revealed truth and make an attribution with respect to the accuser's intentions. It is possible that the accuser was well-intentioned, but made a mistake or acted incompetently. Alternatively, the accuser may have acted to merely advance their self-interest. As a result, false accusations may dampen trust in accusers by harming perceptions of at least one of the three antecedents of trust: ability, benevolence, and integrity (Mayer et al., 1995).

The Moderating Role of the Accusation's Truth (Hypothesis 4). The veracity of an accusation moderates its influence on trust in the accuser, such that accusations revealed to be true elevate trust in accusers whereas accusations revealed to be false do not.

The moderating role of the target's intentions. In addition to characteristics of the accuser and the accusation, we expect characteristics of the target to influence trust in the accuser. To begin, we focus on the potential moderating role of the *target's* intentions, contrasting the consequences of accusations when the target is and is not well-intentioned. For instance, consider an individual who accuses an executive of engaging in unethical behavior. In one case, the executive gave a government official a gift with the intention of bribing the official to make a favorable decision. In the other case, the executive gave a government official a gift because the two have become close friends. We postulate that when the target's ethical violation reflects bad intentions, an accusation will clearly signal a desire to defend normal norms (McFall, 1987; Simons, 2002). In contrast, when the target acted with good intentions, accusations provide a murky signal of the accuser's desire to enforce moral norms. As a result, we expect information about the target's intentions to moderate the influence of accusations on observers' trust in the accuser.

> *The Moderating Role of the Target's Intentions (Hypothesis 5).* Information about the target's intentions will moderate the influence of an accusation on trust in the accuser; when the target intends to commit an unethical act, accusations will boost trust in the accuser more than when the target's actions are well-intentioned.

Our research breaks new ground in three ways. First, we introduce and define an important but understudied construct: accusations. By doing so, our work builds a foundation for future research to study accusations, a pervasive and consequential phenomenon in organizations. Second, our research documents how accusations of unethical behavior influence interpersonal perceptions. Our findings reveal that accusations can benefit accusers, potentially at the expense of targets and groups (see Study 2 and Footnote 6). And third, our research

identifies an effective approach for communicating integrity—an important but unobservable personal attribute. Accusations can signal integrity, and represent an effective—but costly—tool to manage impressions. Figure 1 proposes a model of accusations' interpersonal impact.

Throughout our studies, we compare the impact of making an accusation to providing no response. This comparison reflects the quotidian choice individuals encounter to either speak up or remain silent in the face of bad behavior (Morrison, 2011). Individuals have many reasons to remain silent, such as a desire to be polite, a preference for avoiding confrontation, or the fear of consequences for speaking up. We expect that making an accusation confers trust benefits relative to silence. In addition, to explore whether accusations uniquely impact trust, we compare their effects to those of non-accusatory moral statements and true factual statements.

Overview of Studies

Across a pilot study and five experiments, we investigate the influence of accusations on interpersonal perceptions. Our pilot study explores whether accusations of unethical behavior are common within organizations. Study 1 examines whether accusations boost cognitive trust in the accuser relative to three different control conditions. Additionally, it tests perceptions of the accuser's integrity as a mediator of the beneficial effects of making an accusation. Study 2 replicates these findings in the richer context of a face-to-face experiment involving groups with two confederates. Every participant in Study 2 observed a confederate cheat. Half of the time, the second confederate accused the cheater of acting unethically. The in-person accusations boosted both cognitive trust and behavioral trust in the accuser. In Studies 3, 4, and 5, we explore moderators of the relationship between accusations and trust in the accuser. Specifically, in Studies 3, 4, and 5, we identify moral hypocrisy, the veracity of an accusation, and the target's intentions as important moderators of this relationship. Across studies, rules for terminating data

collection were set before data collection began and all manipulations and measured variables are disclosed, in line with the recommendations of Simmons, Nelson, and Simonsohn (2011).

Pilot Study

We began our investigation with a pilot study exploring the prevalence and nature of accusations in organizations.

Method

We aimed to collect 100 observations at a train station located in the Northeastern United States. Most participants (91%) were currently employed and 54% were female. Participants' ages ranged from 19 to 75 years ($M = 38.23$, $SD = 15.33$).

We asked participants to recall and describe an accusation they heard at work. We also asked participants to report how easy it was to recall an accusation, using a scale from 1 (*very difficult*) to 7 (*very easy*), and indicate how long ago the accusation occurred. The recalled accusations were printed onto notecards and provided to three independent coders. Each coder read the accusation and rated whether or not the accusation concerned ethics ($ICC = .75$), coding it "1" if it did and "0" otherwise. We excluded accusations of incompetence and laziness from our set of ethics accusations. Though sloth may violate an ethical norm in some cases, we excluded these cases to use a conservative approach to assess the frequency of accusations about ethics in organizations. For example, we coded the following accusation as not related to ethics: "My coworker was accused of laziness."

Results

Ninety-five percent of participants recalled an accusation. Most of the accusations concerned ethics; the three coders found that 66% involved ethics, on average (min = 55%, max = 70%). Examples of accusations concerning ethics included, "A superior was accused of

making a sexual request to subordinate," "A manager was accused of using education level as a justification to cover favoritism," and "I was accused of being dishonest. My boss told me I was trying to make her look bad." (See Table 5 in the Online Supplement for further detail on the types of accusations recalled by participants.)

Participants also reported how easy it was to recall an accusation using a scale from 1 (very difficult) to 7 (very easy). Nearly half (45%) of participants found it slightly-to-very easy to recall an accusation. Sixteen percent said it was "slightly easy," 18% said it was "easy," and 10% said it was "very easy." Accusations concerning ethics were as easy to recall as other accusations, $F(1, 96) = 0.00$, $p = .95$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$. Forty-one percent of accusations occurred within the last month and 78% occurred within the prior year.

Discussion

These data reveal that accusations about ethics are common in organizations. In the following experiments, we manipulate the use of accusations of unethical behavior and we investigate how accusations influence perceptions.

Study 1

In Study 1, we explore the interpersonal effects of making an accusation. We investigate how accusations influence cognitive trust in the accuser (Hypothesis 1) and we contrast the influence of an accusation with the influence of a distinct type of non-accusatory moral statement. This contrast enables us to test whether accusations can uniquely elevate trust more than other types of moral pronouncements. We also include a no-information control condition. In addition, we test the hypothesis that making an accusation elevates trust by signaling integrity (Hypothesis 2).

Method

Participants. We aimed to collect 600 observations (150 per cell) from Amazon Mechanical Turk. Of the 603 respondents who completed the study, eleven (2%) failed an attention check question[2], and we excluded these participants from further analysis. We report results from the remaining 592 participants (248 women) with a mean age of 34.5 years (*SD* = 9.9).

Design and procedure. Study 1 utilized a 4-condition, between-participants design (Accusation, Moral Pronouncement, No Response – with Presenter B, and No Response – without Presenter B). The Moral Pronouncement condition was included in order to assess whether an accusation conferred unique trust benefits relative to a non-accusatory moral statement. The other two control conditions were included in order to assess the impact of an accusation and a non-accusatory moral statement relative to no response. The No Response – with Presenter B condition served as a comparison for the Accusation condition and the No Response – without Presenter B condition served as a comparison for the Moral Pronouncement condition.

In all conditions, participants read the following background information about a business problem:

> *Chemical Co. is losing money and now faces an additional hurdle – the United States government has recently issued a law against using the chemical ("Adhesive 100") in their best-selling furniture glue. There is a concern that Adhesive 100 can cause kidney cancer in children under the age of five. The law against using Adhesive 100 takes effect in 6 months. Chemical Co. cannot make the furniture glue without this chemical because the glue will lose much of its adhesive quality. Chemical Co.'s CEO has hired a*

consultant to design a strategy to restore the company to profitability. Revenue growth is also a key objective. The CEO knows of at least two solutions: (1) Use an alternative chemical, "Adhesive 200." Adhesive 200 is very effective as an adhesive, but it is more expensive than other adhesives. (2) Hire a lobbyist to promote the company's interests in keeping Adhesive 100 legal. The CEO is not very happy with these options, so the consultant is free to suggest alternatives. In other words, the consultant can choose from these options or invent new options.

Then, all participants saw slides summarizing solutions suggested "by a prior participant" (in reality, the slides were created by the authors). The slides suggested "finding competitors and learning the products they use," "stopping use of the cancer-causing product," and "seeing if customers would pay higher prices for Adhesive 200." These were the solutions provided by the first presenter (the accuser) in this study.

After reading the first set of solutions, participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions (the Accusation condition or one of the three control conditions). We expected that the accusation would elevate cognitive trust in the accuser relative to the three control conditions (Hypothesis 1) by improving perceptions of the accuser's integrity (Hypothesis 2). In two control conditions (Moral Pronouncement and No Response – without Presenter B), participants read what was said by the first presenter (the potential accuser) following his presentation. In the first control condition, Moral Pronouncement, the potential accuser made a moral pronouncement. Specifically, he stated, "No one's solutions should involve selling adhesive 100 in developing countries. That would be unethical." This statement is relevant to Chemical Co.'s business practices and conveys integrity, but is not an accusation of the other presenter because it does not address another person. Again, its inclusion allowed us to assess

whether accusations uniquely elevate trust, relative to other non-accusatory moral statements. In the second control condition, No Response – without Presenter B, the potential accuser made no further comments. Participants then proceeded to complete a survey measuring their perceptions of the first presenter.

In the other two conditions, participants viewed solutions suggested by a second presenter (the potential target) before reading the potential accuser's reaction. The second presenter suggested a few ethically questionable tactics (hiring a lawyer to make a case to Congress to repeal the law, advertising the existing glue product heavily while it was still legal, and selling Adhesive 100 in developing countries with weaker environmental regulations). Following the second presentation, the first presenter (the accuser in this study) had an opportunity to ask questions or provide comments. In the Accusation condition, the potential accuser (the first presenter) stated, "No solutions should involve selling adhesive 100 in developing countries. Your solutions are unethical." In the third control condition, No Response – with Presenter B, the potential accuser made no further comments. Again, we included the two No Response control conditions in order to understand the impact of the accusation and moral pronouncement relative to no response. After any post-presentation statements, participants completed the survey measuring their perceptions of the first presenter.

Trust. We measured cognitive trust using the four items from Dunn et al. (2012).[3] Participants rated the extent to which they agreed that they would rely on this person to follow through on commitments, assume this person's work was done properly if they needed to use it, be comfortable having the person in a critical role on their team, and feel uneasy if they needed to depend on the person's abilities (reverse-scored). Participants indicated their agreement with

each item using a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The scale was reliable

($\alpha = .89$).

Integrity. We measured perceptions of the accuser's integrity with an eight item scale,

described in Appendix A (e.g., this person takes ethics seriously; this person stands up for his

core moral beliefs), using a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) ($\alpha = .96$).

Manipulation check. To ensure that our manipulations were effective, we included three

items tapping the extent to which the first presenter was perceived to have made an accusation.

Using a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*), participants reported the extent to which the

first presenter accused another person of wrongdoing, confronted another person for acting

unethically, and claimed someone did something wrong ($\alpha = .96$). This scale appeared at the end

of the survey.

Results

Table 1 reports descriptive statistics and correlations. Results were analyzed using one-

way ANOVA followed by simple comparisons, unless otherwise indicated.

Manipulation check. Our manipulation effectively impacted perceptions of whether an

accusation was made, $F(3, 588) = 227.47$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .54$. In the Accusation condition ($M =$

5.59, $SD = 1.38$), the first presenter's statement was perceived to comprise an accusation to a

greater degree than did the Moral Pronouncement ($M = 2.45$, $SD = 1.84$), $F(1, 588) = 346.01$, p

$< .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .37$). Additionally, the Moral Pronouncement was perceived as more accusatory (M

$= 2.45$, $SD = 1.84$) than was no statement (No Response – without Presenter B: $M = 1.95$, $SD =$

1.36), $F(1, 588) = 8.71$, $p = .003$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$). Finally, no difference emerged across the two No

Response conditions (No Response – with Presenter B: $M = 1.70$, $SD = 1.14$), $F(1, 588) = 2.29$,

$p = .13$, $\eta_p^2 = .004$.

Trust in the accuser. To test our thesis, we explore how the accusation influenced trust in the accuser. Again, we expected that the accusation would elevate cognitive trust in the accuser relative to a non-accusatory moral statement and relative to no response (Hypothesis 1). First, we found that cognitive trust varied significantly across experimental conditions, F (3, 588) = 7.64, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$. Second, we compared the impact of the accusation to no response. As predicted, cognitive trust was higher in the Accusation condition ($M = 5.65$, $SD = 1.20$) than it was in the No Response – with Presenter B condition ($M = 5.26$, $SD = 1.32$), F (1, 588) = 6.68, $p = .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$. Third, we compared the impact of the accusation to the non-accusatory moral statement. As expected, cognitive trust was higher in the Accusation condition than it was in the Moral Pronouncement condition ($M = 5.35$, $SD = 1.32$), F (1, 588) = 4.11, $p = .04$, $\eta_p^2 = .007$. Together, those findings supported Hypothesis 1. That is, the accusation uniquely impacted trust. A statement that conveyed moral concern but did not accuse the target did elevate trust relative to making no statement (i.e., relative to No Response – without Presenter B, $M = 4.93$, $SD = 1.33$), F (1, 588) = 7.53, $p = .006$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$, but the accusation had a stronger impact. Additionally, cognitive trust in the accuser was higher after participants viewed the second presenter's (unethical) solutions (No Response – with Presenter B condition) than when they did not (No Response – without Presenter B condition), F (1, 588) = 4.77, $p = .03$, $\eta_p^2 = .008$. Figure 2 illustrates the results.

Perceptions of the accuser's integrity. We next examined the influence of accusations on perceptions of the accuser's integrity. The accusation influenced perceptions of integrity, F (3, 588) = 20.11, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$. As predicted, the accuser was rated to have more integrity following an accusation ($M = 6.04$, $SD = 1.05$) relative to no statement (No Response – with Presenter B: $M = 5.52$, $SD = 1.19$), F (1, 588) = 15.66, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$. Additionally, the

moral pronouncement ($M = 5.90$, $SD = 1.03$) led to more positive perceptions of integrity relative to no statement (No Response – without Presenter B: $M = 5.11$, $SD = 1.21$), $F(1, 588) = 35.95$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$. Finally, the accuser's integrity was rated similarly across the Moral Pronouncement and Accusation conditions, $F(1, 588) = 1.22$, $p = .27$, $\eta_p^2 = .002$.

Mediation analysis. We then examined the role of perceptions of the accuser's integrity in mediating the relationship between accusations and cognitive trust (Hypothesis 2). To do so, we first conducted a linear regression analysis. It predicted cognitive trust with three dummy variables for the three control conditions, alongside integrity perceptions. The accusation condition served as the reference group. In this analysis, only perceptions of integrity predicted trust at a statistically significant level, $\beta = .71$, $t(587) = 22.97$, $p < .001$. Other variables were non-significant ($ps > .08$).

Finally, we tested for statistically significant indirect effects from the control conditions to trust through integrity perceptions. To do so, we conducted three separate bootstrapping analyses of mediation with 10,000 samples (Preacher & Hayes, 2008), including covariates for the other two control conditions. The analyses yielded 95% confidence intervals of [-.52, -.95] and [-.21, -.63] for the indirect effects of the two No Response conditions, providing evidence of significant mediation. However, for the Moral Pronouncement condition, the 95% confidence interval bridged zero [-.30, .08]. Below, we discuss the implications of this null result.

Discussion

Making an accusation boosted cognitive trust in the accuser. The accusation elevated trust relative to making no statement and relative to making a non-accusatory moral statement. Both accusations and non-accusatory moral statements effectively signaled high levels of integrity. Although we expected accusations to serve as stronger signals of integrity than moral

pronouncements, no evidence emerged in support of this prediction. These data suggest that improved perceptions of integrity can only partially explain why accusations boost trust. It is possible that accusations boost trust by elevating perceptions of the accuser's abilities as well. Accusations are risky, confrontational acts. Relative to moral pronouncements, accusations confront targets more directly. For these reasons, accusers might be perceived to be more competent with respect to defending ethical standards than individuals who make moral pronouncements.

Study 2

In Study 2, we examine the effects of accusations in groups, with real unethical behavior. To do so, we used trained confederates. In each experimental session, one confederate served as a potential accuser and a second confederate served as the target. After completing a task, the target misreported the group's performance to the experimenter. By misreporting the group's performance, the target increased the monetary payoffs for each person in the group. This aspect of our design affords a conservative test of the potential benefits of making an accusation (Hypotheses 1, 2, and 5). In this setting, group members had self-interested reasons to prefer that nobody make an accusation. In fact, *none* of our participants corrected the target's over-statement, confronted the target, or reported the over-statement to the experimenter. That is, every participant in our study was complicit in the misrepresentation. In addition to measuring attitudinal trust as we did in Studies 1 and 2, we measured behavioral trust by having participants make trust game decisions.

Method

Participants. We aimed to collect as many observations as possible during our allocated laboratory time, with a minimum of 100 participants (50 per cell). Ultimately, we successfully

recruited 118 students at a Northeastern university to participate in a study in exchange for $10 an hour, plus the opportunity to earn additional money. Women comprised 61% of the sample. On average, our participants were 20.0 years old ($SD = 2.1$). Nineteen participants (16%) indicated suspicion concerning the study procedures and were excluded from our analyses, leaving a sample of 99 participants.[4] Our results are similar when we include suspicious participants in our analyses.[5]

Design and procedure. We employed a two-condition (Accusation v. Control), between-participants design. In this study, participants reported to the laboratory two at a time for a 30-minute study of groups. Upon arriving, they met two confederates who were ostensibly other participants. We trained eight male confederates to play the role of either the target (who cheated) or the accuser. These confederates participated in the 59 sessions of our experiment. In training sessions, our confederates practiced following a script to ensure consistent behavior across sessions.

The study had three parts: introductions, a problem-solving exercise, and an investment task. Prior to the introductions, the experimenter provided the group with instructions, set a timer for the problem-solving task, and then left the room. Then, introductions began. Group members stated their first name, the letter labeling their seat at the table, their favorite color, one of their hobbies, their favorite food, childhood pet, and the place they would most like to visit on a road-trip. The two confederates always provided the same, pre-scripted information.

Following the introductions, the group engaged in a problem-solving task (Mazar, Amir, & Ariely, 2008). The problem solving task involved finding two three-digit numbers that sum to ten in each of 20 matrices. Participants had three minutes to solve as many matrices as possible. Each person completed the task individually, and the group received a $0.10 bonus for each

matrix solved by a group member. For instance, if each of the four group members solved 5 matrices, each member of the group would earn a $2.00 bonus (4 people x 5 matrices x $0.10). The confederate in the cheater role always solved 6 matrices and the confederate in the accuser role always solved 5 matrices.

When the timer indicated three minutes had passed, the cheating confederate followed the experimenter's initial instructions to open an envelope with the answer key and score everyone's problem solving task. Then, the cheater said, "Here is how many each of us got right: I got 6, B got [real number], C got 5, D got [real number]." A few moments later, the experimenter returned to the room and asked how many problems each group member had solved. The cheater replied by over-reporting everyone's performance by adding two to the correct numbers he had just stated to the group. Specifically, he said, "I got 8, B got [real+2], C got 7, D got [real+2]." The experimenter acknowledged the total score that the cheater reported, stated the bonus amount that would be added to each of their payments, and then left the room to arrange the bonus payment.

After the experimenter left the room, the accuser either leveled an accusation or remained silent. In the accusation condition, the accuser said to the cheating confederate, "You know those amounts were too high. That's pretty unethical." In the control condition, the accuser said nothing.

Finally, the experimenter re-entered the room and instructed the group to complete an "investment task" via computer. In this stage of the experiment, participants provided a behavioral measure of trust via the investment task. Then, participants completed a survey measuring their perceptions of others in the group. They rated other group members by seat letter. At the end of the study, we paid and debriefed the participants.

Measures. Our dependent variables included perceptions of the accuser and the target.[6]

Trust (behavioral). To provide a behavioral measure of trust, participants completed the Trust Game (Berg, Dickhaut, & McCabe, 1995; Righetti & Finkenauer, 2011). In the experiment, we called this an investment task. Participants first reported their seat letter. Then, they read the following text:

> *In this task, 2 people are randomly assigned to be Transfer-ers and 2 people are randomly assigned to be Receivers. You are a Transfer-er. As a Transfer-er, you have the opportunity to invest up to $3 of your payment for participating in this experiment by transferring all or part of this $3 to one or two other participants in this study ("the Receivers"). If you decide to transfer any money, then the experimenter will double the transferred amount. Then, the participant who received your transfer will decide how much (if any) of the amount to transfer back to you. You may transfer any part of your $3 to one or both of the Receivers. The Receivers are: Person A, Person C.*

In our experiment, the two participants were always Transfer-ers and the two confederates were always the Receivers. As Transfer-ers, participants had the option of passing any amount between $0 and $3 total to the two confederates. To ensure comprehension, participants responded to two comprehension check questions before proceeding. The amount of money participants passed to each confederate served as our behavioral measure of trust.

Cognitive trust. Participants reported their cognitive trust using the same four items (Dunn et al., 2012) we used in Study 1. They responded using a scale from 1 *(strongly disagree)* to 7 *(strongly agree).* The scale was reliable for the accuser ($\alpha = .89$) and the target ($\alpha = .89$).

Results

We report descriptive statistics and correlations in Table 2.

Accuser perceptions. We first examined our hypothesis that making an accusation increases trust in an accuser.

Trust (behavioral)-Accuser. The accusation significantly influenced behavioral trust in the accuser. Participants transferred significantly more money to the accuser in the Trust Game following an accusation (M = $1.51, SD = 0.89) than they did in the control condition (M = $1.19, SD = 0.67), t (96) = 2.04, p = .04, d = 0.41. Figure 3 depicts this result.

Cognitive trust-Accuser. We also find a significant effect of the accusation on cognitive trust. When the accuser made an accusation (M = 5.31, SD = 0.98), participants reported greater cognitive trust in the accuser than they did in the control condition (M = 4.72, SD = 1.03), t (95) = 2.87, p = .01, d = 0.59. This provides further support for Hypothesis 1.

Target perceptions. On an exploratory basis, we also examined how accusations impact trust in the accused person. Recall that in this experiment the target of the accusation cheated by over-stating the group's performance.

Trust (behavioral)-Target. The accusation did not significantly influence our behavioral measure of trust in the target. Participants passed similar amounts to the target in both conditions, t (97) = -0.67, p = .50, d = 0.25.

Cognitive trust-Target. The accusation significantly reduced cognitive trust in the target. When the cheater was accused (M = 3.20, SD = 1.15), participants reported less cognitive trust in him than they did in the control condition (M = 3.77, SD = 1.52), t (96) = -2.07, p = .04, d = 0.42.

Discussion

In Study 2, we extend our investigation of accusations to a group setting and we include a behavioral measure of trust. Replicating our findings in Study 1, we find that making an accusation boosted both cognitive trust and behavioral trust in the accuser.

Notably, we document trust benefits to accusers even though our design affords a conservative test of this relationship in three ways. First, the target's unethical behavior helped the group. By over-reporting the group members' performance on the task, the target helped every group member gain a greater monetary reward. Second, the cheating was transparent. In our study, the unethical act was obvious and clear to the participants. Third, accusers demonstrated an ethical standard that was higher than the standard held by others in the group. All of our participants were complicit in the cheating; none intervened or accused the cheater of acting unethically.

We also found that the accusation impacted trust in the target. Although the target acted identically across conditions, participants trusted him *less* when he was accused. The amount participants passed to the target, however, was not significantly different across conditions. The trust game is a coarse measure of trust in general, and perhaps particularly so in our design; participants split their endowment between the two confederates and themselves.

Taken together, our findings are consistent with those in Study 1. We again find that making an accusation builds cognitive trust in the accuser. This trust boost was evidenced in both our attitudinal and our behavioral measures of trust. That is, the accuser benefits from making an accusation, whereas targets are harmed.

Study 3

In Study 3, we investigate moral hypocrisy as a moderator of the relationship between accusations and trust. In Studies 1 and 2, accusers increased cognitive trust by making an accusation. We postulate that a hypocritical accuser cannot credibly signal integrity. Consequently, we expect that individuals who act similarly to the target will not be able to gain cognitive trust by making an accusation. Study 3 tests this prediction by manipulating the ethical

behavior of an accuser. As proposed in Hypothesis 3, we expect an accusation to increase trust

when the accuser acts ethically (i.e. acts in a manner consistent with the accusation), but not

when the accuser acts unethically, in a fashion similar to the target (i.e. acts hypocritically).

Method

Participants. We aimed to recruit a full session of approximately 200 participants (50

per cell) to complete our study at a behavioral laboratory located at a Northeastern university.

Ultimately, we successfully recruited 191 participants to. We paid participants $10 an hour in

exchange for their participation. The sample included 61 men. The average age was 20.15 ($SD =$

1.38) years. Data from all participants were included in our analyses.

Design and procedure. We used a 2 (Accusation: Accusation v. Control) x 2 (Accuser's

Ethics: Ethical v. Unethical), between-participants design. We randomly assigned participants to

one of the four conditions. As in Study 1, participants read about a business problem faced by a

chemical company. An ingredient in the company's key product ("Adhesive 100") was outlawed

in the United States for causing environmental damage. Participants then watched videos of

confederates posing as participants from prior research studies. The confederates summarized the

problem and recommended solutions.

We manipulated the accuser's ethics. In the ethical accuser condition, the first presenter

(the accuser) recommended that the company, "Change the formula to be consistent with the law.

For example, remove Adhesive 100 to create a slightly different product that would not cause

environmental damage." In the unethical accuser condition, the accuser recommended that the

company, "Look for loopholes in the law. For example, mix Adhesive 100 with other chemicals

to create a slightly different product exempted from the law (despite the environmental damage it

causes)." After the first presenter spoke, the second presenter (the target) had no questions or comments.

The second presenter then presented and recommended that the company merge with competitors to obtain better prices from suppliers, advertise the product heavily while it was still legal, and hire a lobbyist to advocate repeal of the law. Following the target's presentation, the accuser either had no comment (Control) or made the following accusation (Accusation): "That solution seems pretty unethical." After the accusation (in the Accusation condition) or no comment (in the Control condition), the presentation concluded and participants completed survey measures of trust.

Measures. Participants responded to all items using scales from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

Cognitive trust. Participants reported their cognitive trust using the same four items (Dunn et al., 2012) we used in our prior studies. The scale was reliable, $\alpha = .90$.

Hypocrisy manipulation check. We used three items to measure whether or not the accuser was perceived to be hypocritical. Participants reported their agreement with the following statements about the first presenter ("Presenter A"): Presenter A pretends to be something he is not; when it is convenient, Presenter A claims to have higher principles than he really does; Presenter A's actions are consistent with his words (reverse-scored), $\alpha = .73$.

Results

Pre-test. We conducted a pre-test ($n = 35$) to confirm that the accuser's loophole solution and the target's lobbyist solution were both perceived to be unethical. Using a scale of 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*), participants reported whether each solution was ethical (reverse-scored), wrong, unethical, immoral, and principled (reverse-scored). The mean for the accuser's loophole

solution (α = .91) was significantly higher than the mid-point of the scale (M = 5.42, SD = 1.36),

t (34) = 6.16, p < .001, d = 2.11). The mean for the target's lobbyist solution (α = .95) was also

significantly higher than the mid-point of the scale (M = 5.03, SD = 1.56), t (34) = 3.91, p < .001,

d = 1.34). Using a paired samples t-test to compare perceptions of the two unethical solutions,

the accuser's loophole solution was seen as less ethical than the target's lobbyist solution, t (34)

= 2.07, p = .047, d = 0.71. This result confirms that the accuser's own proposal was perceived to

be unethical—and was perceived to be less ethical than the target's proposal. By accusing the

target of being unethical, the accuser is acting hypocritically.

 Hypocrisy manipulation check. We first report a manipulation check of our moral

hypocrisy induction. We conducted a two-way ANOVA including accusation and accuser ethics

as between-participant factors. Our findings confirm that the moral hypocrisy manipulation was

effective. Our ANOVA identified two main effects which were subsumed by an interaction.

First, we found a significant main effect of the accusation on hypocrisy, F (1, 187) = 8.23, p =

.005, η_p^2 = .04. The accuser was perceived to be more hypocritical following an accusation (M =

3.54, SD = 1.40) than in the control condition (M = 3.11, SD = 0.88). Second, we find a main

effect of accuser's ethics, F (1, 187) = 21.79, p < .001, η_p^2 = .10. The accuser was perceived to

be more hypocritical in the unethical condition (M = 3.68, SD = 1.26) than in the control

condition (M = 2.98, SD = 1.00). Finally, we found an interaction, F (1, 187) = 32.55, p < .001,

η_p^2 = .15. When the accuser had made an unethical recommendation similar to the target's, he

was perceived to be more hypocritical in the accusation condition (M = 4.31, SD = 1.34) than he

was in the control condition (M = 3.03, SD = 0.74), F (1, 187) = 36.57, p < .001, η_p^2 = .16. When

the accuser made an ethical recommendation, he was perceived to be less hypocritical in the

accusation (M = 2.76, SD = 0.96) than in the control (M = 3.18, SD = 1.00) condition, F (1, 187)

= 4.04, $p = .046$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$. After making an accusation, the accuser was perceived to be more hypocritical when he made unethical ($M = 4.31$, $SD = 1.34$) rather than ethical ($M = 2.76$, $SD = 0.96$) recommendations, $F(1, 187) = 53.54$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .22$. Without an accusation, we find no significant difference in hypocrisy by accuser ethics, $F(1, 187) = 0.54$, $p = .46$, $\eta_p^2 = .003$. Taken together, the results show that the moral hypocrisy manipulation worked as we had expected.

Trust in the accuser. We next examined trust in the accuser. For cognitive trust, we find an interaction between the accuser's ethics and whether an accusation was made, $F(1, 187) = 3.70$, $p = .056$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$. The main effects of the accusation [$F(1, 187) = 1.86$, $p = .17$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$] and accuser ethics [$F(1, 187) = 0.19$, $p = .66$, $\eta_p^2 = .001$] were not significant. As in Studies 1 and 2, when the accuser was ethical, making an accusation increased cognitive trust, $F(1, 187) = 5.43$, $p = .02$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$. This finding provides further support for Hypothesis 1. However, when the accuser was unethical, making an accusation did not significantly influence cognitive trust, $F(1, 187) = 0.16$, $p = .70$, $\eta_p^2 = .001$. Together, these findings partially support Hypothesis 3. We depict cognitive trust in the accuser in Figure 4.

Discussion

In Study 3, we identify moral hypocrisy as a key moderator of the relationship between making an accusation and boosting cognitive trust in the accuser. As in Studies 1 and 2, we find that ethical accusers gained cognitive trust when they made an accusation. However, when the accuser had proposed an unethical solution himself, accusing another person of being unethical was perceived to be hypocritical and did not enhance cognitive trust. That is, although accusers can benefit from making accusations, they only derive these benefits when they have acted ethically themselves.

Surprisingly, making an accusation did not harm trust when the accuser had acted unethically. The accusation simply failed to engender trust in a hypocritical accuser. One possible explanation is that participants perceived the accuser's unethical solution (which involved outsmarting the law) as more competent than the ethical solution (which involved conforming to the law). If so, the hypocritical accusation might have sent a positive signal of competence alongside the negative signal of integrity, with opposing effects on trust. A second possibility is that our sample of business school students perceived the hypocritical accuser as merely self-interested and had no negative reaction to observing self-interested behavior because they accept it as normal.

Study 4

In Studies 1, 2 and 3, we investigated the influence of accusations that observers knew to be true. That is, in our prior studies, the accusation provided no new information. Though this approach affords a conservative test of the influence of accusations, in many cases observers lack certainty about the veracity of the accusation. In Study 4, we extend our investigation by examining the influence of accusations at two points in time: First, after an accuser has made an accusation that may or may not be true, and second, after the accusation is revealed to have been true or false. We expect the revealed veracity of an accusation to moderate our findings: Accusations elevate trust in an accuser when the accusation is revealed to be true, but diminish trust in an accuser when the accusation is revealed to be false (Hypothesis 4). Additionally, Study 4 includes a supplemental control condition designed to explore whether accusations confer trust benefits relative to true statements. True statements might convey reliability and competence relative to no statement, but we expect that true statements do not signal integrity to

the same extent as do accusations. We therefore predict that accusations elevate trust relative to

true statements.

Method

Participants. We aimed to collect 600 observations (100 per cell) from Amazon

Mechanical Turk. Ultimately, 603 participants completed the study. Thirty-five participants (6%)

missed a question checking for attention and were excluded from analyses.[7] The remaining

sample of 568 participants included 238 women and had a mean age of 35.65 years ($SD = 11.15$).

Design and procedure. We employed a 3 (Accusation, Statement, Control) X 2

(Target's Solutions: Ethical, Unethical), between-participants design. The experiment had two

phases. At Time 1, the veracity of the accusation (and the statement) were unknown. At Time 2,

the accusation was revealed to be true or false. Our key predictions were three-fold. First, we

predicted that making an accusation of unknown veracity would elevate trust relative to no

statement at Time 1. Second, we predicted that the veracity of the accusation would moderate its

trust consequences at Time 2. Third, we predicted that the true accusation would elevate trust

relative to the true statement at Time 2. The six-condition design allowed us to explore each

question within one study.

As in Studies 1 and 4, participants read about a business problem faced by a chemical

company. Once again, we explained that people in the prior study had presented solutions to the

business problem and had the chance to offer questions and comments in response to

presentations made by peers. After reading about the business problem and study format,

participants read basic background information about one presenter (Presenter K). Specifically,

they read that this presenter had a 3.4 GPA, majored in History, was from Chicago, enjoys

running and watching movies on the weekend, and had recommended solutions to the business

problem such as refinancing the company's debt at a lower interest rate in order to save costs and investing in research and development to discover a better, cheaper adhesive that would not harm the environment. Then, the accusation manipulation occurred. In response to Presenter H's presentation, Presenter K said "Your solutions are not ethical" (Accusation condition), "Your solutions involve finding out what competitors pay for their supplies," (Statement condition), or "I have no questions or comments" (Control condition). Participants then rated their levels of trust in Presenter K, before seeing Presenter H's solutions, which would allow for the statement to be assessed as true or false.

After providing the first set of trust ratings, participants viewed Presenter H's slide deck with proposed solutions. We manipulated whether Presenter H (the target) had made ethical or unethical recommendations. In the Ethical Solutions condition, the target recommended hiring a scientist to explore new product formulations, undertaking mergers and acquisitions of competitors who make other products with alternative adhesives, and changing the formula to be consistent with the law. In the Unethical Solutions condition, the target recommended hiring a lawyer to make a case to congress, advertising the existing glue product heavily while it was still legal, and selling the product in developing countries with weaker environmental regulations. Across both conditions, the target included a recommendation to use the prices competitors pay suppliers as a reference point in negotiations. Therefore, the statement was always revealed to be true and the accusation was either revealed to be true (Unethical Solutions condition) or false (Ethical Solutions condition). Participants then completed a survey with the second round of trust ratings for Presenter K.

Trust. Using the same items from prior studies (Dunn et al., 2012), we measured cognitive trust in the accuser at two points in time: prior to any information regarding the

accusation's veracity (Time 1), and after learning whether or not the accusation was true (Time 2). Participants indicated their agreement with each item using a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

Manipulation checks. To check whether participants perceived an accusation, we included the three items from Study 1b (e.g., Presenter K accused another person of wrongdoing). To check whether participants perceived the accusation to be true, participants indicated whether Presenter K said something honest and spoke the truth. For all items, the scale ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*).

Table 3 provides scale reliabilities, descriptive statistics, and correlations among variables. The scales were highly reliable for the accuser and the target at both points in time.

Results

Time 1. We first explored the effects of our manipulations at Time 1, before participants had any information regarding the veracity of the accusation. The manipulation had a significant impact on cognitive trust in the accuser, $F(2, 565) = 15.82$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$. The accusation ($M = 4.54$, $SD = 1.42$) elevated cognitive trust relative to the control condition ($M = 4.14$, $SD = 1.39$), $t(379) = 2.82$, $p = .005$, $d = 0.28$, providing further support for Hypothesis 1. The statement ($M = 4.92$, $SD = 1.23$) also elevated cognitive trust relative to the control condition, $t(377) = 5.78$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.59$ and the accusation, $t(374) = -2.73$, $p = .01$, $d = 0.29$.

Time 2. To analyze the data at Time 2, we used ANOVA with two between-participant factors. One factor represented the accusation (Accusation v. Statement v. Control). The second factor represented how ethical were the target's solutions (Ethical v. Unethical). For cognitive trust in the accuser, two main effects were subsumed by a significant Accusation X Target's Ethics interaction, $F(2, 562) = 15.36$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$. Examination of the marginal means

revealed that when the target's recommendations were unethical (i.e., the accusation was true), the accusation ($M = 5.28$, $SD = 1.31$) elevated cognitive trust in the accuser compared to the true statement ($M = 4.62$, $SD = 1.46$, $SE = 0.21$, $p = .002$) and control ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 1.60$, $SE = 0.22$, $p < .001$) conditions. However, when target's recommendations were ethical (i.e., the accusation was false), cognitive trust in the accuser was lower following an accusation ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 1.50$) than a true statement ($M = 4.77$, $SD = 1.22$, $SE = 0.21$, $p < .001$). The false accusation did not dampen trust relative to no statement ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 1.45$, $SE = 0.20$, $p = .31$). These results partially supports Hypothesis 4, and we depict these findings in Figure 5. Moreover, in both the unethical ($SE = 0.20$, $p = .02$) and ethical ($SE = 0.21$, $p = .004$) solutions conditions, a true statement increased trust relative to no statement.

Discussion

In Study 4, we investigate the veracity of an accusation as another key moderator of the relationship between making an accusation and elevated trust in the accuser. When an accusation was ambiguous with regard to its truth, observers placed greater cognitive trust in the accuser relative to when the accuser made no statement at all. When the accusation was revealed to be true, the accuser gained cognitive trust, but when the accusation was revealed to be false, making an accusation harmed trust in the accuser relative to a true statement, but not relative to making no statement.

In this study, we also considered the effects of a task-focused statement. The task-focused statement we used conferred greater trust benefits than the control condition and the accusation when the veracity of both were uncertain. We speculate that the task-focused statement in this context could have signaled active listening and consequently boosted benevolence. When the

statement was placed in context and revealed to be true, it boosted trust relative to no statement but to a lesser extent than a true accusation.

Study 5

In Study 5, we further investigate the relationship between accusations and trust by exploring the moderating role of the target's intentions. When the target is well-intentioned, it is unclear whether observers will give targets or accusers the benefit of the doubt. We manipulated whether the target intended to act ethically or unethically when giving an official a gift, and we test whether or not the target's intentions moderate the relationship between making an accusation and building trust (Hypothesis 5).

Method

Participants. We aimed to collect 150 observations. We recruited those participants ($N =$ 150) via Amazon Mechanical Turk. Ten participants (7%) missed at least one question checking for attention and were excluded from analyses.[8] The remaining sample of 140 people included 59 women and had a mean age of 33.51 years ($SD = 11.92$).

Design and procedure. The study employed a 2 (Accusation v. Control) X 2 (Target's Intentions: Bad v. Good) between-participants design. In all four conditions, participants read the following scenario:

Jamie is Vice President of Operations for a large company. The company developed

plans to open a new manufacturing plant in Vietnam, and Jamie relocated to Vietnam to

oversee the opening of the new facility. It is critical for the company that the facility

opens on schedule. Delays could harm the company's profit and market share. Shortly

after arriving, Jamie met with a local government official who played a key role in

convincing Jamie's company to open in their current location. This official also oversees

the final inspection process that will allow the company to start production. The

manufacturing facility is about to undergo the final inspection for safety. Jamie is

concerned about passing inspection. In advance of the inspection, Jamie had a routine

meeting with the local government official. At the meeting, Jamie gave the official an

expensive ($300) watch like his own, which the official had admired during a former

meeting.

At the end of the scenario, we included text that manipulated the target's intentions

regarding the focal act. In the Unethical Intentions condition, participants read, "*The only reason*

Jamie gave the gift was that he wanted to influence the inspection process." In the Ethical

Intentions condition, participants read, "*The only reason Jamie gave the gift was that he had*

developed a friendship with the official during the past year." Then, participants in both

conditions read that Jamie, during a trip home, told an old friend Rob about the situation and the

gift.

In the Control condition, participants read, "Rob is a mid-level manager at a local

company. He has worked there for 7 years. In his free time, he enjoys jogging, reading, and

listening to music." In the Accusation condition, participants read the same text as before plus

one additional line: "Rob told Jamie, 'Giving that gift was unethical.'" After reading the

scenario, participants answered a survey assessing trust in the potential accuser.

Trust. Participants reported their cognitive trust in the accuser using the same items from

prior studies (Dunn et al., 2012). The scale was reliable ($\alpha = .89$).

Manipulation check of target's ethical intentions. At the end of the survey, we used

four items to assess perceptions of the target's intentions. Using a scale from 1 (*strongly*

disagree) to 7 (*strongly agree*), participants rated their agreement with the following statements:

It is difficult to tell whether or not Jamie acted ethically; In this situation, it is clear whether or not Jamie acted ethically (reverse-scored); In this case, it is easy to judge whether Jamie did the right thing (reverse-scored); and Jamie's decision is neither clearly right not clearly wrong. The four items formed a reliable scale ($\alpha = .88$).

Results

We analyzed the data using ANOVA with the accusation and the target's intentions as between-participant factors, unless otherwise indicated. Table 4 reports descriptive statistics and correlations among variables.

Manipulation check. First, we investigated whether or not our manipulation effectively changed perceptions of the target's intentions. We only find a main effect of the target's intentions, $F(1, 136) = 54.62$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .29$. The target's action was perceived to be substantially more ethical in the ethical intentions condition ($M = 4.28$, $SD = 1.32$) than in the unethical intentions condition ($M = 2.66$, $SD = 1.25$). No other effects were statistically significant (Fs < 0.19, ps $> .66$, η_p^2s $< .001$).

Trust in the accuser. We then examined trust in the accuser. For cognitive trust, we found a main effect of the accusation, $F(1, 136) = 27.79$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .17$. The accuser was trusted more after making an accusation ($M = 5.68$, $SD = 0.92$) than when no accusation was made ($M = 4.84$, $SD = 0.94$). Additionally, we find a significant Target's Ethical Intentions X Accusation interaction, $F(1, 136) = 3.98$, $p = .048$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$. When the target had ethical intentions, the accusation ($M = 5.56$, $SD = 0.97$) elevated trust in the accuser relative to when no accusation was made ($M = 5.04$, $SD = 0.80$), $F(1, 136) = 5.18$, $p = .02$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$. However, the trust benefits of the accusation ($M = 5.81$, $SD = 0.87$) relative to no accusation ($M = 4.67$, $SD =$

1.02) were larger when the target had unethical intentions, $F(1, 136) = 27.38$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .17$.

These findings supported Hypothesis 5.

Discussion

In Study 5, we found the trust benefits of making an accusation were robust to the target's intentions. Regardless of whether the target's intentions were ethical or unethical, potential accusers engendered greater trust after making an accusation than when they did not make an accusation. These findings reveal that accusers can derive significant benefits from making an accusation even when the target has good intentions and might deserve the benefit of the doubt. Quite possibly, the act of making an accusation signals high integrity across a broad range of contexts.

General Discussion

Accusations can transform workplace relationships. We build a foundation for accusation research by introducing and defining the accusation construct. In our pilot study, we find that accusations, especially those regarding ethical violations, are prevalent in organizations. Across five experiments, we describe how accusations influence perceptions of both the accused and the accuser. We find that accusations harm trust in the accused, harm group functioning, and boost trust in the accuser. We focus our investigation on perceptions of the accuser and find that people are perceived to be more trustworthy and to have greater integrity when they make accusations than when they do not, as long as the accusation appears to be motivated by a desire to defend moral norms; in this case, making an accusation increases cognitive trust by projecting integrity and high ethical standards.

Accusations may also boost affective trust in the accuser. In a meta-analysis on seven of our own studies involving over 1,000 participants, we found a small ($r = .08$, $p = .01$), positive

effect of accusations on affective trust in the accuser (see Study 6 in Appendix B for details). We interpret this result with caution, especially because we did not study accusations within existing relationships. However, the directionality of this finding is provocative, because accusations appear to influence interpersonal perceptions for favorably than other do-gooder behaviors (e.g., Howe & Monin, 2017; Minson & Monin, 2012; Monin et al., 2008; Trevino & Victor, 1992).

The trust benefits conferred by accusations do not appear to be part of a halo effect. We explored the impact of accusations on perceptions of competence and liking (see Appendix C in the Online Supplement), but we failed to find carry-over effects. These data suggest that accusations distinctly boost trust in an accuser.

Importantly, accusers do not reap trust benefits when they appear to have ulterior motives for making the accusation. Cues that provide information about the accuser (e.g., moral hypocrisy), the accusation (e.g., its veracity), and the target (e.g., good or bad intentions) attenuate the trust benefits of making an accusation, possibly by shifting the attributions observers make for why the accuser made the accusation. When accusers are hypocritical or the accusation is false, accusations cannot reliably signal integrity and observers are likely to infer that the accuser's actions were guided by less noble motives.

Our findings identify accusations as a potent impression management tool. Impression management is "the process by which people control the impressions others form of them" (Leary & Kowalski, 1990, p. 34). This was certainly the case for accusers. Even when accusations provided no new factual information about the target's behavior, accusations elevated trust in the accuser by signaling integrity and high ethical standards. Accusations conferred trust benefits to accusers even when the target was known to have good intentions.

One advantage of our investigative approach is our ability to control the accused target's actions across conditions. This approach enabled us to disentangle the unique effects of making an accusation from other contextual factors that are likely to influence the decision process of making an accusation. In our studies, participants' perceptions of the accused were directly influenced by accusations expressed by another person. Consistent with prior research on social influence (Asch, 1956; Cialdini, 1993; Milgram, 1963), our work attests to the influence individuals have on each other's perceptions and behavior.

Our research identifies an effective approach for communicating integrity. Although integrity is important for trust (Mayer et al., 1995), little prior research has examined how individuals might communicate integrity to others or judge the integrity of others. Communicating integrity is especially important for leaders in organizations, because their behavior sets the norm for others to follow (Mayer, Kuenzi, Greenbaum, Bardes, & Salvador, 2009). Our research suggests that making an accusation is an effective approach for signaling integrity. Even when the accusation was later revealed to be false, trust in the accuser was not harmed. This finding suggests that observers may over-value superficial cues and under-value the truth when they form interpersonal perceptions. Just as projecting confidence and overconfidence can boost status (Bitterly, Brooks, & Schweitzer, 2017; Kennedy, Anderson, & Moore, 2012), even false accusations may confer trust benefits if the veracity of the accusation is difficult to verify.

More broadly, it is possible that organizations derive benefits when organizational members make accusations. Specifically, accusations could benefit organizations by enforcing norms and promoting ethical behavior. To ensure ethical conduct, organizations must set an

ethical tone (Mayer et al., 2013), and a culture that tolerates or promotes accusations may guide employees to recognize the high costs of engaging in unethical behavior.

Prior work has conceptualized punishment of norm violators as an altruistic behavior (Fehr & Gachter, 2000). Our findings challenge this conceptualization. Rather than reflecting altruism, accusers may derive substantial *personal benefits* from punishing norm violators. The trust benefits of making an accusation provide a reason for even the most self-interested actors to intervene when they perceive unethical activity. That is, even when self-interest is the norm (e.g., Pillutla & Chen, 1999), individuals have trust incentives to openly oppose unethical behavior.

Practical Contributions

Accusations affect interpersonal perceptions and behavior, and our findings inform a number of practical, managerial implications. First, accusations can curtail unethical behavior. Both the direct effect, limiting the influence of unethical actors, and the indirect effect, warning potential unethical actors of the costs of unethical behavior, of accusations can curb undesirable behavior. In addition, accusations provide managers with useful information. Managers learn not only about potential violations within their organization, but they might also glean information about employees' integrity if accusations reflect genuine motivation to defend moral norms. Quite possibly, employees who make accusations are exactly the right type of people to put into leadership positions. Leaders with integrity can set an ethical climate in organizations (Mayer et al., 2009; Mayer et al., 2013) and selecting ethical leaders can have profound benefits.

However, although accusations may curtail unethical behavior, the potential for individuals to use accusations to advance their own interests, even when their actions undermine others around them, should give managers pause. Specifically, managers may need to hold people accountable for the accusations they make to ensure that accusers do not unfairly benefit

at the expense of others. When managers hear of accusations, they should be ready to investigate them. In some cases, accusations may be unfounded, and managers should remain receptive to the possibility that unfounded accusations are either mistakes or strategic weapons. Following an accusation, managers may need to engage in an effortful evaluation to ensure targets of an accusation are not unfairly harmed. Because accusers benefit while targets are harmed, accusers may initiate spirals of accusations whereby targets become accusers in order to regain the trust they lost.

We focus on the potential trust benefits conferred to accusers, but it may not always be wise to voice accusations. Our data suggest that accusers stand to gain most when the accusations are true, accusers have no history of unethical behavior, and the accused person had bad intentions in committing the unethical behavior. In addition, we conjecture that accusations put accusers at risk of retaliation, and the target's power and primary allies may make accusations costly.

Future Directions

Accusations are only one type of response to unethical behavior. We focused our inquiry by comparing accusations to no response (i.e., silence) because the decision to speak up is often binary (Morrison 2011). However, individuals who observe others' unethical behavior can engage in other types of communication as well, such as making moral statements or engaging in gossip. Our findings in Study 4 at Time 1 suggest that accusations may not always be the most effective way to build trust. Future research should explore a wider range of reactions to unethical behavior.

Future research should also explore other psychological mechanisms which might help to explain why accusations elevate cognitive trust in accusers. We conceptualize accusations as

risky and confrontational acts that signal commitment to enforcing ethical norms, but future

work should explore perceptions of risks and related social constructs, such as the loss of face.

In addition, we call for deeper inquiry into how accusations impact affective trust in the

accuser. Our studies did not investigate accusations in long-term relationships, and future

research should explore how accusations influence relationships characterized by strong

emotional bonds. Such inquiry might help to reconcile our findings with the documented dislike

for moral rebels (Howe & Monin, 2017; Minson & Monin, 2012; Monin et al., 2008).

Accusations could dampen trust in accusers when peers face clear evidence of their own moral

failure. However, accusers may often be able to right a wrong on behalf of the group without

implying condemnation, as in Study 2.

More broadly, all of our studies with the exception of Study 4 examined reactions to true

accusations. Future research should further investigate the impact of accusations of unknown

veracity. Although the results of Study 4 suggest that accusations can build trust in accusers even

when their truth is unknown, this topic is complex and requires further inquiry. When the truth of

an accusation is uncertain, the impact of an accusation may depend on other factors such as the

accuser's reputation and suspected motives.

Future research should also deepen knowledge of when and why an accusation is

considered credible. In most of our studies, the accusation did not convey new information.

However, in many cases, observers do not have complete information about a target's past

actions (Schweitzer, Ho, & Zhang, 2016). The credibility of the accuser and the nature of the

accusation are likely to profoundly influence the information the accusation signals.

Similarly, attributions of moral hypocrisy merit further exploration. Hypocrisy is often a

matter of degree. One factor which could influence attributions of hypocrisy is the domain of an

accuser's unethical behavior. In Study 3, the accuser's unethical behavior very closely resembled that of the target. If the moral failings of the accuser were more distal to the accusation of unethical behavior, the accusation may still benefit the accuser. For instance, if an accuser were found to have cheated on a tax return or to have been unfaithful to a spouse, would they still lack the psychological standing to accuse the target of recommending unethical solutions to a business problem? It is an open question whether accusers are discredited by ethical violations that occur in domains distinct from their accusation. On one hand, any ethical violation by an accuser may lead to attributions of hypocrisy, because people with integrity are expected to act ethically across situations (Kim et al., 2004; Reeder & Brewer, 1979). On the other hand, integrity may be judged within a specific role. If so, ethical violations in distal domains may not harm an accuser's credibility. A second factor which could impact attributions of hypocrisy is the degree of unethicality present in the accuser's behavior. In Study 3, the accuser's behavior was considered more unethical than the target's. Researchers should examine how unethical acts of lesser severity impact attributions of hypocrisy and trust.

In addition to hypocrisy, the hierarchical position of an accuser could impact judgments of their credibility. Accusers who hold higher rank (formally or informally) may enjoy more credibility because those who occupy higher rank are typically more competent (Magee, Kilduff, & Heath, 2011). Higher-ranking people also have more at stake in making an accusation because the status losses that could accrue from making false accusations would be painful for the accuser to endure (Marr & Thau, 2014; Pettit, Yong, & Spataro, 2010). As a result, accusations may be especially strong signals when made by high-ranking accusers and the trust benefits that accrue to higher-ranking accusers may be especially large. However, higher-ranking people may

be less likely to make accusations because they identify with the groups they oversee and have more difficulty identifying their groups' ethical problems (Kennedy & Anderson, 2017).

The gender of an accuser is another important factor which could impact the social consequences of making an accusation. Accusing others is an assertive, dominant act and could be socially proscribed for women relative to men (Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Phelan, & Nauts, 2012), potentially resulting in social backlash against women who accuse others of unethical behavior. However, it is possible that observers expect women to uphold ethical values and would not penalize them for doing so (Kennedy, McDonnell, & Stephens, 2018). Future research should consider both possibilities. Our studies cannot address this issue because they either focus on accusations by men or leave the accuser's gender unspecified. Accusations by women could be an important phenomenon to explore because of women's especially strong rejection of unethical behavior (Kennedy, Kray & Ku, 2017; Kennedy & Kray, 2014).

Competitive ties between the accuser and accused may also moderate the effects of accusations. Individuals in competition with each other may be motivated to disparage each other (e.g., politicians running against each other). Within competitions, accusations could very well signal the accuser's malice or self-interest, rather than integrity. Under those circumstances, we would not expect accusations to boost trust. Even then, accusations could harm the target even if they do not boost perceptions of the accuser.

A related moderator may be the timing of an accusation. We speculate that accusations proximal to the action are likely to signal integrity more powerfully than are accusations that occur after a delay. Similarly, we expect the first person to accuse a target of unethical behavior to signal greater integrity than the second or third person to accuse the same target of unethical behavior.

How the accusation is made could also impact credibility. For example, future work should explore the public versus private nature of the accusation. It is unknown whether observers would place greater trust in accusers who publicly defend ethical standards at considerable personal risk or those who privately raise their concerns, showing maximal responsibility for their impact on the accused. Private accusations may reflect purer motives, but private accusation are also lower risk for the accuser and consequently represent a weaker, less credible signal.

Future research could also adopt a different perspective, as we focused solely on observers' perceptions of the accuser. In particular, researchers could examine how accused targets experience and react to accusations. Targets' reactions are likely to be quite different from those of observers. Accusations may substantially reduce targets' affective trust in the accuser, especially when the audience who hears the accusation is large. Another potentially interesting question is whether accusations are most threatening to high or low status targets. High status individuals perceive others to have more positive intentions toward them and as a result, high status targets may react less negatively to accusations than lower status individuals (Pettit & Sivanathan, 2012). However, high status individuals also a great deal to lose (Marr & Thau, 2014; Pettit et al., 2010), and accusations may represent a substantial threat. In addition, powerful individuals may be particularly unused to, and miffed by, challenges posed by lower status accusers.

Future research could also examine when accusations help groups and when they hurt them. Accusations hold others accountable for ethical violations. When ethical violations are large in magnitude, accusations may help groups. Yet accusations also harm group harmony. When ethical violations are small, group harmony may be relatively more important.

A variety of different types of accusations merit exploration. We focused on ethics-related accusations, and our pilot data suggest that ethics violations are both common and important. However, future research should extend our investigation to examine other types of accusations as well. For example, by making an accusation of incompetence, individuals might signal information about their own competence by demonstrating that they have high standards for task performance.

Finally, the antecedents of accusations merit exploration. Both personality and situational factors are likely to impact whether an accusation is made (Chatman, 1989; Kenrich & Funder, 1988). Accusations might be more characteristic of disagreeable and assertive Machiavellian manipulators than of conscientious objectors, but only empirical data can answer that question.

Conclusion

Our investigation breaks new ground by introducing a powerful and prevalent, but understudied phenomenon—accusations. Accusations of unethical behavior harm trust in the target, but boost trust in the accuser. Across our studies, we demonstrate that individuals can derive significant impression management benefits by accusing others of unethical behavior, but only when their motives seem pure. Compared to individuals who did not make accusations, accusers who seemed motivated to defend moral norms engendered greater trust and were perceived to have greater integrity. However, accusations yielded no trust benefits for accusers who were morally hypocritical or who made false accusations. Because workplace relationships are characterized by both competition and cooperation, the true intentions of organizational actors are often difficult to identify (Galinsky & Schweitzer, 2015; Milkman, Huang, & Schweitzer, 2015). In light of the trust benefits conferred to accusers, accusations may be appealing tools for those who seek to compete under a guise of cooperation. Managers must

attend carefully to the dual functions of accusations to ascertain accusers' intentions. Individuals

may make accusations to enforce cherished group norms, to advance their own self-interest, or

both.

Footnotes

[1] We thank an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.

[2] The attention check asked participants to select "strongly disagree" for that question if they were reading the items. When all data are included in our analyses, results are identical. Most importantly, the accusation impacts cognitive trust in the accuser, $F(3, 399) = 13.58$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$. Cognitive trust was higher in the Accusation condition ($M = 5.80$, $SD = 1.05$) than it was in the Moral Pronouncement condition ($M = 4.80$, $SD = 1.65$), $t(199) = 5.09$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.72$. Other significant and non-significant effects remain the same, as well.

[3] All studies measured affective trust. Because this variable is not central to our current inquiry, we do not discuss it further except for disclosing the results of a meta-analysis in the General Discussion.

[4] To assess suspicion, we asked participants to describe the purpose of the study in their own words. Participants were excluded if they expressed doubt about whether Persons A and C (the confederates) were real participants or whether the over-reporting of the group's performance was genuine (e.g., "I think the purpose was to have person A purposely report higher #s & have person C say something about it to see if person B or D would react.")

[5] When all data are included in analyses, one significant effect becomes marginally significant: the effect of the accusation ($M = \$1.47$, $SD = 0.96$) relative to no accusation ($M = \$1.17$, $SD = 0.68$) on behavioral trust, $t(115) = 1.94$, $p = .055$, $d = 0.36$. Additionally, one significant effect becomes non-significant: the effect of the accusation on affective trust in the target, $t(115) = -1.27$, $p = .21$, $d = 0.23$. All other significant and non-significant effects remain so.

[6] We also measured perceptions of relationship conflict (Jehn, 1995) and group identification (Willer, 2009). The accusation elevated conflict ($t[95] = 7.71$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.55$) and dampened identification, $t(95) = -1.80$, $p = .08$, $d = 0.37$, but at only a marginally significant level. Because those findings are not central to the current investigation, we do not discuss them further.

[7] One manipulation check asked participants whether Alex accused Jamie. The second manipulation check appeared only in the accusation condition and asked whether Alex's accusation was true or false. When all data are included, the effects are nearly identical. All significant and non-significant effects remain so. Most critically, at Time 2, the Accusation X Outcome interaction for cognitive trust in the accuser remains highly significant, $F(1, 378) = 13.94$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$. When the investigation revealed unethical behavior, the accusation ($M = 4.78$, $SD = 1.36$) elevated

trust relative to no accusation ($M = 4.39$, $SD = 1.07$), t (186) = 2.15, $p = .03$, $d = 0.33$. When the investigation

revealed no unethical behavior, the accusation ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 1.29$) lowered trust relative to no accusation ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 1.06$), t (192) = -3.16, $p = .002$, $d = 0.45$.

[8] One attention check asked participants to identify the gift given by Jamie from a list of choices. The other attention

check asked participants to recall whether Rob told Jamie it was unethical to give the gift. When all data are

included in analyses, results are virtually identical. All significant and non-significant effects remain so. Most

critically, for cognitive trust in the accuser, a main effect of the accusation (F [1, 146] = 23.86, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .14$)

and an Accusation X Ambiguity interaction (F [1, 146] = 4.13, p = .04, $\eta_p^2 = .03$) continue to emerge.

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TABLE 1

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Study 1

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3
1. Cognitive trust	5.30	1.31	--		
2. Integrity	5.64	1.17	.70***	--	
3. Accusation manip. check	2.91	2.13	.11**	.22***	--

** *p* < .01. *** *p* < .001.

TABLE 2

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Study 2

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3
Accuser					
1. Trust (behavioral)	1.34	0.80	--		
2. Cognitive trust	4.99	1.04	.13	--	
Target					
3. Trust (behavioral)	0.88	0.69	-.07	-.20*	--
4. Cognitive trust	3.50	1.38	-.08	.02	.31**

* *p* < .05. ** *p* < .01. *** *p* < .001.

TABLE 3

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations in Study 4

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4
Time 1						
1. Cognitive trust	4.53	1.38	(.89)			
Time 2						
2. Cognitive trust	4.45	1.50	.50***	(.90)		
3. Accusation manip. check	3.06	2.07	-.04	-.01	(.94)	
4. Honesty manip. check	4.29	1.86	.29***	.53***	.07†	(.92)

Note. Alpha reliabilities provided in parentheses across diagonal.

*** $p < .001$. ** $p < .01$. * $p < .05$. † $p < .10$.

TABLE 4

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations in Study 5

Variable	M	SD	1	2
1. Manipulation check	3.44	1.52	--	
2. Cognitive trust	5.31	1.02	-.12	--

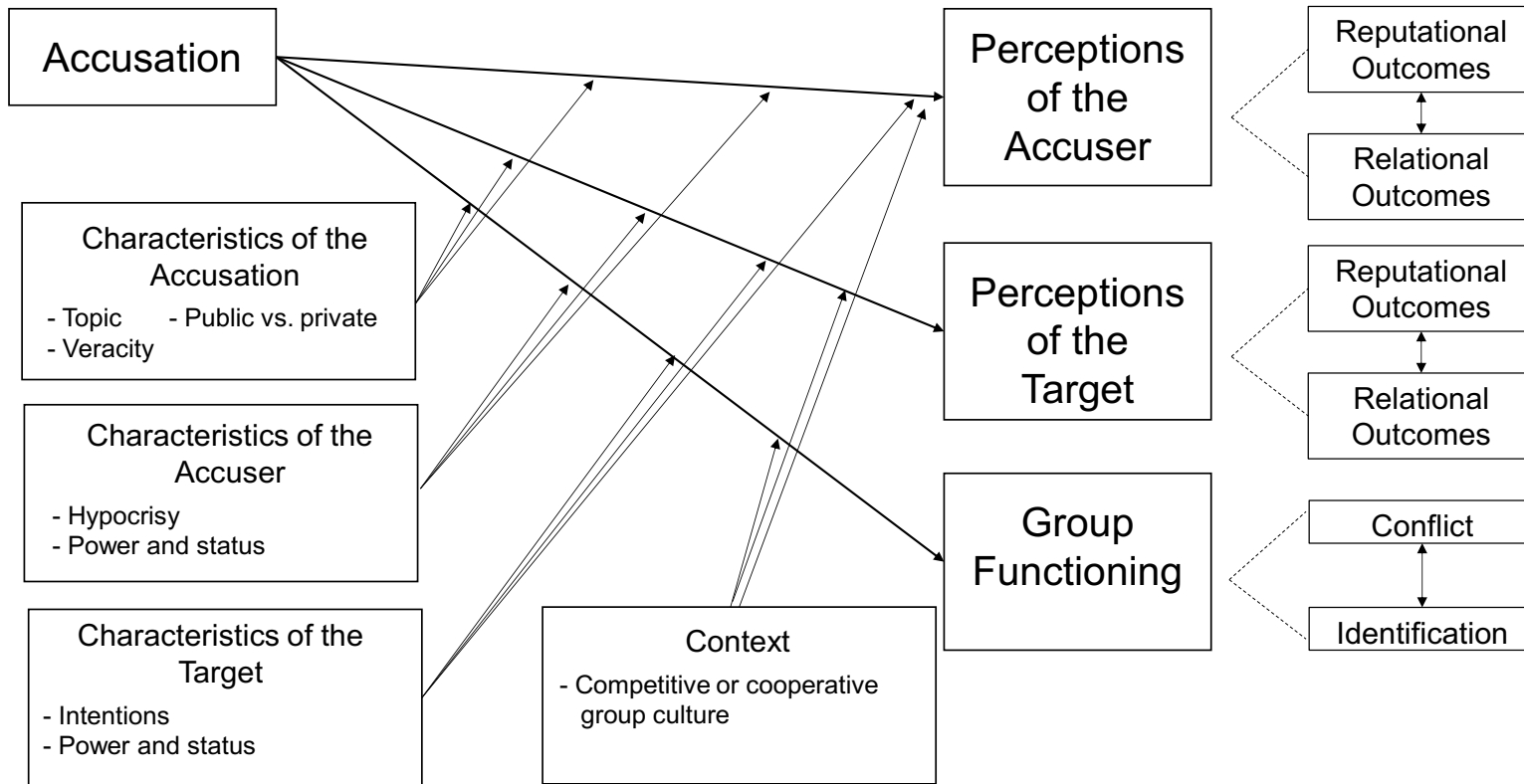*** $p < .001$. ** $p < .01$. * $p < .05$. † $p < .10$.

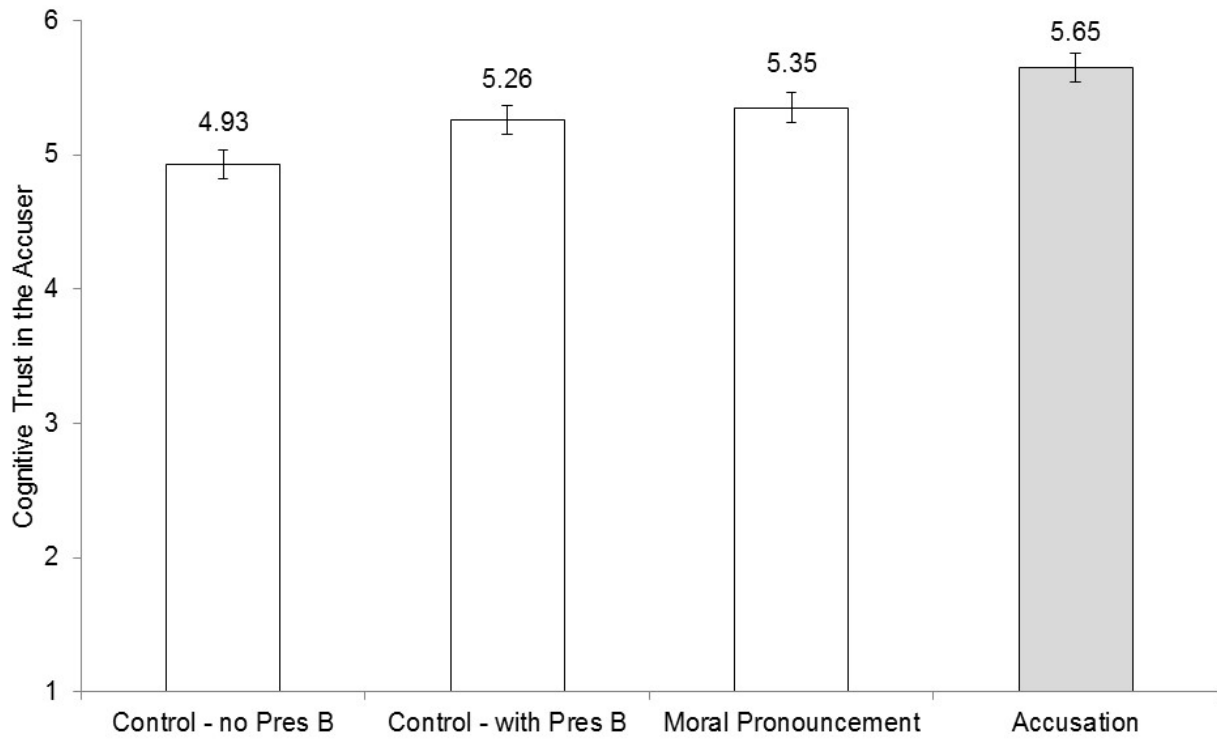*Figure 1*. Proposed model of accusations' interpersonal impact.

Figure 2. Cognitive trust in the accuser in Study 1. Error bars represent + / - 1 SE.
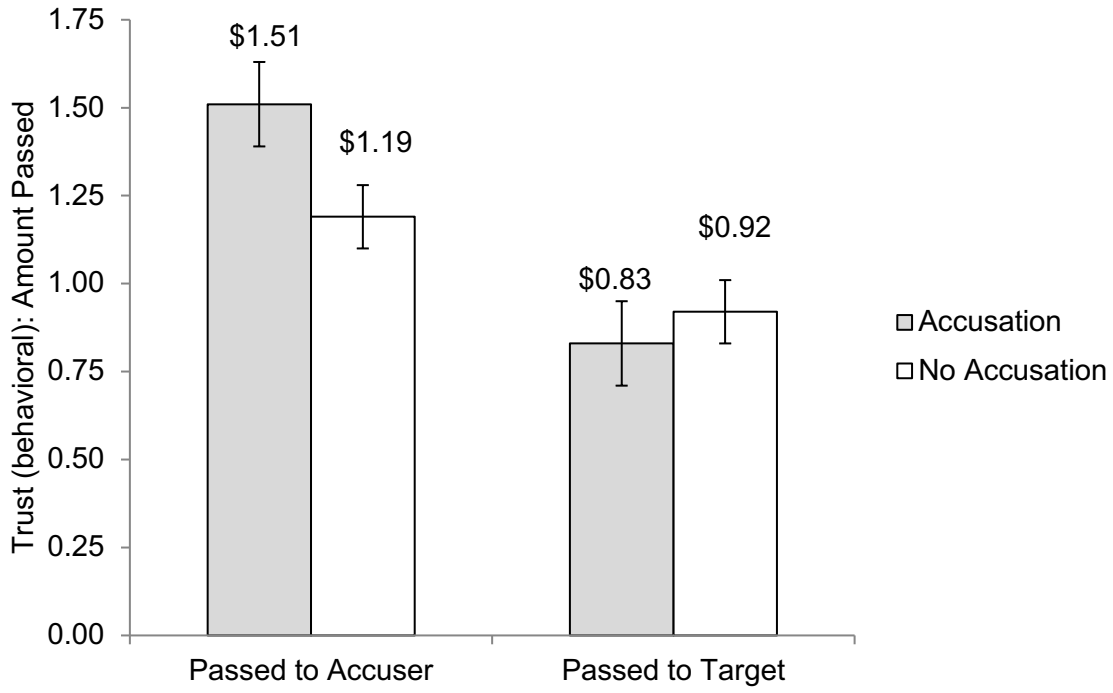
Figure 3. Trust (behavioral measure) in Study 2. Error bars represent + / - 1 SE.
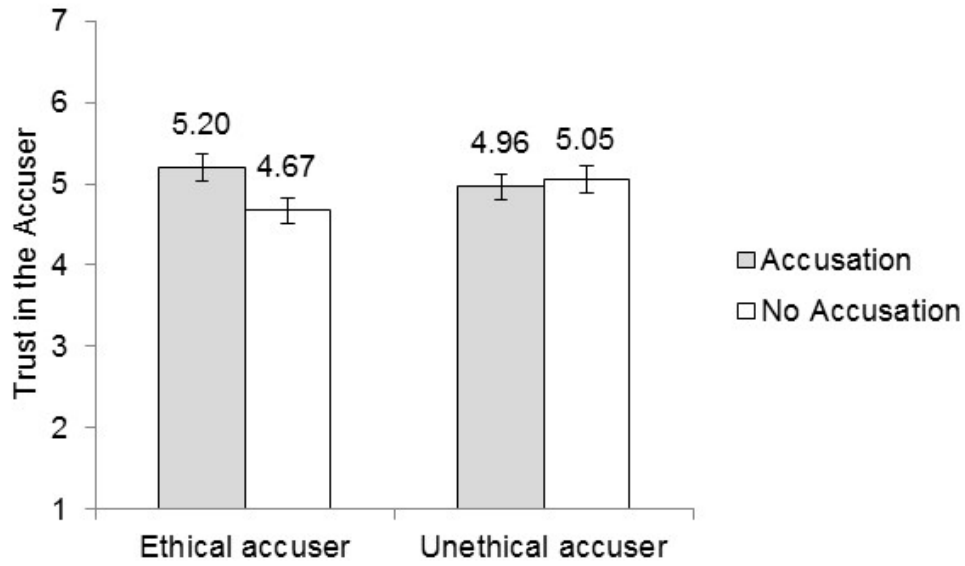
Figure 4. Cognitive trust in the accuser in Study 3. Error bars represent + / - 1 SE.
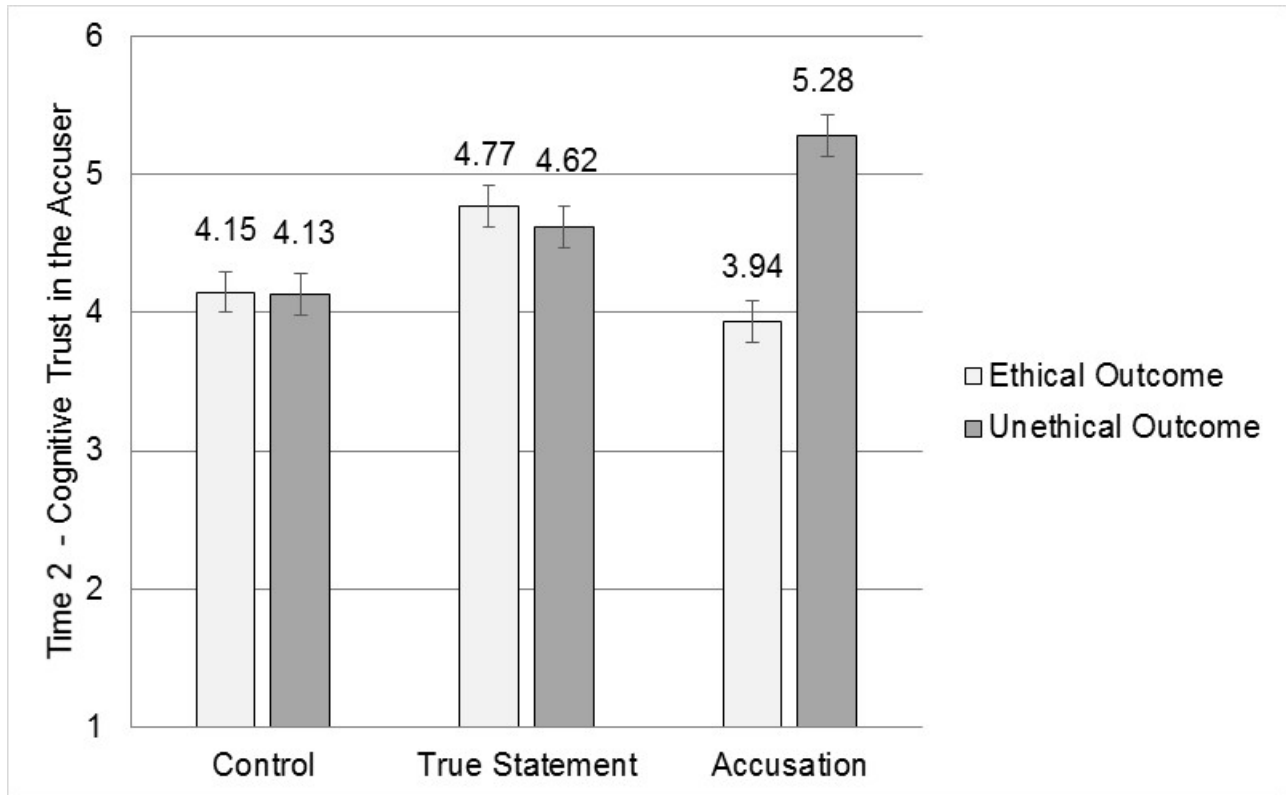
Figure 5. Cognitive trust in the accuser at Time 2 (after the target's recommendations were revealed) in Study 4.

Appendix A

Measure of Integrity (Study 1)

1. This person takes ethics seriously.

2. This person has high moral standards.

3. This person has higher moral standards than most other people.

4. This person has strong values.

5. This person stands up for his/her core moral beliefs.

6. This person has conviction about his/her moral standards.

7. This person will do whatever it takes to enforce ethical standards.

8. This person is committed to ethical behavior even when it is costly.

Appendix B

Effects of Accusations on Affective Trust (Studies 1-5)

Across our studies, we also measured the influence of accusations on affect-based trust. Affect-based trust reflects expectations of benevolence (Butler & Cantrell, 1984; Levine & Schweitzer, 2015; Mayer et al., 1995), and we consider the possibility that accusations can communicate either high or low levels of benevolence. Accusations can signal high benevolence by demonstrating concern for the community or even a desire to help an accused target improve their behavior. For instance, a teacher may accuse a student of cheating on a test to teach the student an important and constructive lesson. On the other hand, to the extent that accusations instigate investigations into the accused target's behavior and put the accused target at risk for punishment, accusations signal low benevolence toward the accused target. Because accusations send divergent signals regarding benevolence, the influence of accusations on affective trust may be highly context-dependent.

Extant research investigating perceptions of ethical individuals within groups has explored liking and acceptance (Reuben & Stephenson, 2013), rather than affective trust. The empirical findings in this literature, however, are generally consistent with the notion that accusations may harm affective trust. Notably, whistle-blowers are often ostracized and suffer retaliation (Near & Miceli, 1996; Rehg, Miceli, Near, & Van Scotter, 2008). Moreover, individuals who report unethical behavior are disliked by their peers, despite being perceived as ethical (Trevino & Victor, 1992). Similarly, people who refuse on principle to take part in unethical activities are disliked by other group members (Minson & Monin, 2012; Monin, Sawyer, & Marquez, 2008). This occurs because group members expect to be judged harshly by people who espouse high moral standards. However, Monin et al. (2008) found that observers

who were not directly involved had more positive perceptions of moral rebels. Additionally, McAllister (1995) reasoned that cognition-based trust facilitates emotional investments that ultimately develop affect-based trust. To the extent that accusations boost cognition-based trust, they may also, over time, elevate affect-based trust. Taken together, these findings suggest that the relationship between accusations and affect-based trust is complex, and that this relationship may be moderated by a wide range of factors, including time frame. As a result, we make no directional prediction regarding accusations and affect-based trust in an accuser. Below, we describe the empirical results for affective trust which emerged within each of our studies.

Measure of Affective Trust

Across our studies, we used four items from Dunn et al. (2012) to measure affective trust. Participants indicated their agreement with each item using a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Participants rated the extent to which they would share their most outlandish ideas and hopes with the person, talk with this person about difficulties they were having at school or work, be willing to admit their worst mistakes to this person, and rely on this person for support when they needed it. The scale was reliable (α = .86, .92, .84, .86, and .87 in Studies 1-5, respectively).

Results for Affective Trust

Study 1

Affective trust varied significantly across the four conditions, F (3, 588) = 5.09, p = .002, η_p^2 = .03. However, no statistically significant differences emerged across the Accusation (M = 4.28, SD = 1.42) and Moral Pronouncement (M = 4.13, SD = 1.45) conditions, or across the No Response – with Presenter B condition (M = 4.13, SD = 1.36), ts (293) < 0.95, ps > .34, ds < 0.12. Collapsing across those three conditions, affective trust was higher in accusers (M = 4.18,

SD = 1.41) than it was in potential accusers in the No Response – no Presenter B condition (*M* = 3.68, *SD* = 1.39), *F* (1, 590) = 14.12, *p* < .001, η_p^2 = .02.

Study 2

The accusation did not significantly impact affective trust in the accuser, *t* (95) = 1.25, *p* = .22, *d* = 0.25. The accusation reduced affective trust in the target. When the target was accused (*M* = 2.40, *SD* = 1.26), participants reported less affective trust in him than they did in the control condition (*M* = 2.92, *SD* = 1.35), *t* (96) = -1.95, *p* = .05, *d* = 0.40.

Study 3

We found no differences across conditions for affective trust in the accuser; the accusation [*F* (1, 187) = 2.21, *p* = .14, η_p^2 = .01], the accuser's ethics [*F* (1, 187) = 0.53, *p* = .47, η_p^2 = .003], and their interaction [*F* (1, 187) = 0.12, *p* = .73, η_p^2 = .001] were not significant.

Study 4

Time 1. The manipulation significantly impacted affective trust in the accuser, *F* (2, 565) = 11.79, *p* < .001, η_p^2 = .04. Affective trust between the accusation (*M* = 3.37, *SD* = 1.41) and control conditions (*M* = 3.14, *SD* = 1.31) did not differ at a statistically significant level, *t* (379) = 1.67, *p* = .10, *d* = 0.17. The statement (*M* = 3.81, *SD* = 1.33) elevated affective trust relative to the control (*t* [377] = 4.90, *p* < .001, *d* = 0.51) and accusation (*t* [374] = -3.06, *p* = .002, *d* = 0.32) conditions.

Time 2. A main effect of the accusation on affective trust was subsumed by a significant Accusation X Target's Ethics interaction, *F* (2, 562) = 7.09, *p* = .001, η_p^2 = .03. Examination of the marginal means revealed that when the target's recommendations were unethical, the accusation (*M* = 3.82, *SD* = 1.41) engendered greater affective trust relative to no statement (*M* = 3.41, *SD* = 1.30, *SE* = 0.22, *p* = .001). No difference in affective trust emerged between the

accusation and true statement ($M = 3.49$, $SD = 1.48$, $SE = 0.22$, $p = .15$) conditions. However,

when the target's solutions were ethical, the accusation ($M = 2.97$, $SD = 1.65$) engendered less

affective trust than the true statement ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 1.39$, $SE = 0.22$, $p = .001$) condition. No

difference between the accusation and no statement ($M = 3.15$, $SD = 1.47$, $SE = 0.21$, $p = .41$)

conditions emerged. The true statement increased affective trust relative to no statement ($SE = 0.22$, $p = .01$).

Study 5

For affective trust in the accuser, only a main effect of the accusation emerged, $F(1, 136) = 3.92$, $p = .050$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$. Affective trust in the accuser was higher following an accusation ($M = 4.34$, $SD = 1.25$) than no accusation ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 1.18$). No other effects were statistically significant ($Fs < 1.12$, $ps > .29$, $\eta_p^2 s < .01$).

Study 6

Across our studies, we identify a consistent pattern of results: Making an accusation

elevates *cognitive* trust in the accuser by signaling integrity. However, our findings linking

accusations and *affective* trust in the accuser were inconsistent. In Study 6, we conducted a

highly-powered test to explore how accusations impact affective trust in the accuser with a meta-

analysis of our results (cf. Cumming, 2014).

Method

We conducted a meta-analysis using all of the data we had for the accuser ($N = 1,131$)[1].

To do so, we used the methods of Lipsey and Wilson (2001) and Hunter and Schmidt (2004). For

each study, we recorded a zero-order correlation between the accusation and affective trust in the

accuser, ensuring that the accusation was coded with a larger number than the control condition

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[1] For Study 3, we included only data in the high (not low) accuser ethics condition ($n = 96$). For Study 4, we included only data at Time 1, before the accusation was revealed to be true or false.

(e.g., accusation = 1 and control = 0). We then adjusted the correlations for reliability in the affective trust scale. Using the sample size, we calculated standard errors and inverse variance weights (Lipsey & Wilson, 2001). Finally, we used SPSS and syntax from Wilson (2015) to conduct mean effect size analyses.

Results

Effect sizes ranged from $r = -.09$ to $.18$ ($SD_{weighted} = .11$). Following prior research (e.g., Kish-Gephart, Harrison, & Trevino, 2010), we then conducted a fixed effect analysis of the mean effect size, which assumes the existence of one true population correlation. Overall, accusations boosted affective trust; the results were statistically significant, but small ($r = .08$, $z = 2.55$, $p = .01$). A fixed effect analysis generated a 95% confidence interval for the effect size that ranged from $r = .02$ to $.13$. Results using a random effects model yielded a similar result ($r = .10$, $CI = .01-.18$, $z = 2.18$, $p = .03$). We find significant heterogeneity in the effect sizes, $Q(6) = 12.64$, $p = .049$, suggesting the potential presence of moderators.

Discussion

Study 6 documents a positive impact of making an accusation on affective trust in accusers. However, the effect size was small and is likely to be significantly influenced by moderators. Taken together, we find that accusations confer trust benefits to accusers, when the accuser is perceived to be motivated by a desire to defend moral norms.