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# LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

**D. Dunning**

University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, United States

**D. Fetchenhauer**

University of Cologne, Cologne, Germany

**A. Fishbach**

University of Chicago, Chicago, IL, United States

**G.H.E. Gendolla**

University of Geneva, Geneva, Switzerland

**E. Harmon-Jones**

The University of New South Wales, Sydney, NSW, Australia

**J.K. Maner**

Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, United States

**T.F. Price**

Aberdeen Proving Ground, Aberdeen, MD, United States

**M. Richter**

Liverpool John Moores University, Liverpool, United Kingdom

**E.T. Rolls**

Oxford Centre for Computational Neuroscience, Oxford, United Kingdom

**T. Schlösser**

University of Cologne, Cologne, Germany

**J. Steinmetz**

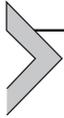
University of Chicago, Chicago, IL, United States

**Y. Tu**

University of Florida, Gainesville, FL, United States

**R.A. Wright**

University of North Texas, Denton, TX, United States



# The Psychology of Respect: A Case Study of How Behavioral Norms Regulate Human Action

D. Dunning<sup>\*,1</sup>, D. Fetchenhauer<sup>§</sup> and T. Schlösser<sup>§</sup>

<sup>\*</sup>University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, United States

<sup>§</sup>University of Cologne, Cologne, Germany

<sup>1</sup>Corresponding author: E-mail: [ddunning@umich.edu](mailto:ddunning@umich.edu)

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## Abstract

For any organization or society to thrive, it must possess a behavioral code that tempers self-interest, promoting instead coordinated, cooperative, and self-sacrificing action among its members. In this chapter, we examine *respect* as a case study of such behavioral codes or norms. By respect, we mean that people are impelled to treat each other as individuals of goodwill and competence, even if they do not privately believe it. This norm explains why people, including strangers, trust each other much more than the underlying rational economic analysis would suggest. It also explains a host of other interpersonal behaviors, such as helping and avoiding confrontation. The anatomy of respect is complex. It works often against a person's underlying preferences rather than for them, constitutes what people think they should do rather than what they want to do, is driven by anxiety, focuses on regulating actions rather than their outcomes, comprises avoidance motivation rather than approach motivation, and is more *moral* (ie, private and personal) than *social* (ie, honored only because it is actively enforced by others) in nature. Despite the range and power of its influence, the norm of respect itself receives too little respect, in that people commonly underestimate its impact on human behavior.

Arguably, the central collective project of the human species is taking the self-interest inherent in each of its members and tempering it enough so that all can live with one another in some semblance of peace and harmony. Self-interest is essential for each member of the species to survive, but if individuals take their selfishness too far, they interfere with the livelihood of all their peers. According to [Hobbes \(1660/1997\)](#), this need for social harmony is the fundamental reason why human societies create powerful governments, formal institutions designed to regulate the conduct of its citizens, so that the evils that people would visit upon each other in a state of nature are reduced, contained, or eradicated. For example, under American jurisprudence, a person is perfectly free to swing his or her fist in the air as much as he or she wants. This right, as famously observed by Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., ends just as soon as another person's nose begins. Severe sanctions are in place for anyone who violates that constraint on behavior. This theme of a social contract, a set of institutional rules, to govern human behavior is one that threads throughout Western philosophy, occupying such thinkers as [Grotius \(1625/2012\)](#), [Locke \(1689/2014\)](#), and [J. Rousseau \(1762/2014\)](#).

A careful student of human nature, however, soon realizes that our joint civil project goes much deeper than the creation of governments and formal legal systems. People also live by, and enforce, a web of informal and unwritten rules also in place to make sure that selfishness is constrained. Human life is made even less nasty, brutish, and short by applying an etiquette that compels people to coordinate and cooperate with each other, and even at times to sacrifice for one another, without resorting to formal government or a

legal code. Recent philosophers such as Rawls (1971) and Gauthier (1986) have argued for the necessity of informal rules between individuals to maintain a harmonious and benign society. Recent behavioral scientists have also argued that such a grammar of coordination and cooperation is essential for any culture to thrive and expand (Henrich, 2006; Henrich et al., 2010). Such rules can cover principles that allow people to coordinate their actions in order to avoid chaos—such as making sure to drive one’s car on the right side of the road (except for those 35% of countries that flip the rule to the left). They can also address codes of etiquette, such as saying “thank you” to someone who has extended a favor. Such rules extend all the way to behavior that is deeply moral, such as “thou shall not steal” or “murder” (Anderson & Dunning, 2014).

In this article, we begin by observing that people display remarkable expertise in following and applying these rules of civil engagement in their everyday life, but that formal scholarly study of these rules lags in understanding their properties and structure. In this, students of human behavior are somewhat like their colleagues in linguistics. Language, like social behavior, is an activity that virtually all people master in their everyday lives. To participate in a language community, people must learn a complex web of rules about how to form sounds into syllables and then into words and sentences. They also have to learn rules of verbal engagement—how to end an utterance and signal that another person can begin. People, however, may not be able to articulate and explicate consciously the rules they follow to execute a coordinated conversation. Moreover, even after decades of study, linguists have yet to complete their task of formally understanding how people manage the complex and nuanced activity of language (Traxler, 2011; Warren, 2012).

We submit that students of human behavior are even further behind in articulating the grammar of social action and habit that most members of modern societies must learn and master to successfully navigate their everyday world. To be sure, people may be quite adept in knowing how and when to apply social rules in their day-to-day life. It is just that their formal understanding of those rules may lag. As an example, consider the following scenario (from Kahneman, Knetsch, & Thaler, 1986):

*A small photocopying shop has one employee who has worked in the shop for six months and earns \$9 per hour. Business continues to be satisfactory, but a factory in the area has closed and unemployment has increased. Other small shops have now hired reliable workers at \$7 an hour to perform jobs similar to those done by the photocopy shop employee.*

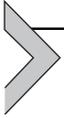
The story goes on to say: “The current employee leaves, and the owner decides to pay a replacement \$7 an hour.” Of 125 respondents asked, a full 73% judged the shop owner’s decision to be appropriate. But let’s imagine instead that the employee does not leave, and instead that: “The owner of the photocopying shop reduces the employee’s wage to \$7.” Of nearly 100 respondents, only 17% felt this was appropriate.

We presume that readers mostly share the opinions expressed by respondents in this study, doing so automatically, without much thought and reflection but with much decisiveness and certainty. But what rule differentiates the two scenarios? They both share the same economic outcomes. Unemployment is up. The current market wage is \$7 for employees. The supposed profit margin would be the same for the shop owner under both scenarios—but why is it okay to offer a new employee a lower wage but not to lower the wage of a current one? The original authors of the scenarios noted that respondents felt the first scenario was “fair” and that the second was “unfair”—but that only supplies a vague label to people’s opinions rather than a clear and precise rule that specifies what makes the two situations different when it comes to “fairness” (Kahneman et al., 1986).

We will not spend time on this specific scenario and rule, but bring up the example only to show that people live their lives by unwritten social rules that inform and constrain their behavior. For lack of a better description, these rules *motivate* the specific actions that people take. What these rules specifically motivate is behavior that is coordinated and cooperative. These rules motivate collective action that benefit individuals engaged in social interaction, as well as the society that they comprise. The ambition of this chapter is not to enumerate and structure all of the rules that might impinge on social behavior. Scholarship on norms already identifies 17 different categories of such rules (Anderson & Dunning, 2014), and the task of organizing the rules into a taxonomy would already be a difficult and complex task (Bicchieri, 2006; Dubreuil & Grégoire, 2013).

Instead, the ambition of this chapter is to focus on one specific type of social behavior that has been studied extensively in our labs—a behavior that turns out to be crucial for maintaining a civil and rewarding society yet is a mystery for why it occurs. We discuss a societal rule that appears to support this behavior, as implicated by data, and then unpack all the theoretical questions and issues that follow from the appearance of this rule and how it operates.

In doing so, we hope to lay out a possible agenda for studying society and its rules. Such a project involves not only uncovering the rules that regulate human behavior, it also entails identifying the mechanisms within the human organism that allow those rules to succeed in that regulation. What is it within the organism that allows rules that exist between individuals to steer what actions that organism will choose?



## 1. THE MYSTERY OF TRUST

More specifically, we wish to focus on a case study of one type of behavior that profits those who partake in it, even though it does so at some risk. More importantly, that behavior seems to be supported by the operation of at least one interpersonal rule.

The behavior in question is trust, which we define as allowing oneself to be vulnerable to exploitation by another person in order to achieve some benefit or reward. Trust is a ubiquitous aspect of human life (Balliet & Van Lange, 2013; Holmes & Rempel, 1989; Miller & Rempel, 2004; Ostrom & Walker, 2003; see Simpson, 2007; Van Lange, 2015; Wilson & Eckel, 2011; for recent reviews). People divulge secrets to intimate acquaintances, entrusting them to keep their confidences. People buy food at a supermarket trusting strangers who prepared it to ensure that it is fresh and healthy. People hand over our money to banks assuming that the institution will make that money available, with promised interest, when they want it back.

Indeed, it is hard to imagine any interpersonal relationship working smoothly without trust. It is difficult to think of any marriage thriving, or even surviving, without trust among its partners (Deutsch, 1958; Simpson, 2007). Any organization without trust would have a difficult time succeeding in its business (Kramer, 1998; Kreps, 1990). Democracy functions only to the extent that citizens trust the intentions of the officeholders they elect (Fukuyama, 1995; Sullivan & Transue, 1999). Economies blossom only to the degree that its members extend trust to others and have that trust reciprocated (Fetchenhauer & Van der Vegt, 2001; Knack & Keefer, 1997; Putnam, 1993). People truly profit from trust, even down to the level of their income: People who hold more cynical attitudes toward their peers tend to attain lower financial incomes than those who are more trusting about human nature (Stavrova & Ehlebracht, *in press*). Trust in others, as well, is connected to greater degrees of happiness (Oishi, Kesebir, & Diener, 2011).

But trust presents a mystery. It may be essential in everyday human life, but it also should not happen—especially if people are rational actors concerned in their own material self-interest. As philosophers like [Hobbes \(1660/1997\)](#) and [Machiavelli \(1515/2003\)](#) noted, any individual receiving a person's trust will surely violate that trust just as soon as it is in his or her interest to do so. Thus, rationally, no one should extend one's trust in the first place. Contemporary economic treatments of trust agree: People will surely violate our trust out of their own self-interest, so why make ourselves vulnerable to that inevitable exploitation ([Berg, Dickhaut, & McCabe, 1995](#))?

As an example of why people should not trust, consider the following economic game we present to participants in the lab. In that game, participants are brought into the lab in large groups and we confront them each with a decision about what to do with \$5 that we have just given them (or €5 when we do the experiment in Europe). They can either keep the \$5 or give it to another person in the room that we have assigned to them. However, they will never know who that other person is, nor will that person ever know who they are. The two will remain mutually anonymous strangers. Now, if the initial participant keeps the \$5, the interaction is over. However, if he or she gives the \$5 to the other person, that \$5 will be inflated to \$20, and the other person will have his or her own decision to make. That person can keep the entire \$20, or he or she can give \$10 back to the original participant. We should note that participants at times bring their own \$5, but that does not change what happens next in our experiment.

This \$5/\$20 interaction is known as the *trust* or *investment game* ([Berg et al., 1995](#); [Johnson & Mislin, 2012, 2011](#)) and is designed to mimic the types of circumstances people find themselves in when they have to decide whether to trust another person. That is, they must make a decision whether to play it safe or make themselves vulnerable to exploitation at the hand of another person in order to potentially obtain a benefit ([Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998](#)).

One can readily see that under a strict economic analysis, in which every person acts out of material self-interest, no one should ever trust and give the \$5. Being rational and anonymous, the second person faces no penalty for keeping the entire \$20, and so that is what he or she will do. Given this inevitable logic, the initial participant should keep the \$5. It is the best outcome possible. However, people do know that other people are often much too human and much less rational. They are kind

and giving, and so some percentage of participants in the second position will give money back. Thus, rationally, if the initial participant is optimistic enough about his or her chances of getting money back, that person should trust.

However, in our \$5/\$20 game, we find that very few people should trust even if they believe that some people will give money back—if they approached the decision strictly like an economist. That is, on average, people think that only about 45% of their peers would return \$10, with the rest keeping the entire \$20. And, elsewhere, they indicate that they require roughly a 66% chance of winning to induce them to gamble \$5 in order to win \$10 in a lottery. Thus, only a minority of participants, around 30%, has enough optimism about human nature to make giving the \$5 to their assigned stranger an economically rational decision. That is, their estimate that they would receive \$10 back from the stranger is equal to or higher than the probability they require to gamble \$5 in a lottery (Dunning, Anderson, Schlösser, Ehlebracht, & Fetchenhauer, 2014; Fetchenhauer & Dunning, 2009, 2010, 2012).

However, when it comes time to decide whether to trust the other person, we find that a full 50–75% of people decide to give up the \$5, far higher than the 30% rate suggested by the economic analysis (Dunning et al., 2014; Fetchenhauer & Dunning, 2009; Schlösser, Mensching, Dunning, & Fetchenhauer, 2015). Indeed, in a separate study, we explicitly told people—truthfully—that the chance their partner would return \$10 back was only 46%. A full 55% of participants still decided to gamble on that partner's decision, although only 28% of them agree to gamble on a lottery that presented the same payoffs and odds (Fetchenhauer & Dunning, 2012).

Thus, our studies of trust behavior leave us with a vexing mystery (Fetchenhauer, Dunning, & Schlösser, 2015). Why do so many of our participants gamble on the trustworthiness of their peers when they would not accept the same odds if the bet involved a lottery instead? What psychological dynamic supports such high levels of trust that fail to make sense economically?

Over the years, we have ruled out many possible explanations for this anomalous behavior. It is not that people are being altruistic (Batson, 1991), or trying to expand the pie of wealth for everyone even if they fail to share in it (Andreoni & Miller, 2002; Charness & Rabin, 2002). They are not trying to prove to themselves that they are nice, nor are they worried about their reputation in the eyes of the stranger (see Dunning et al., 2014;

Fetchenhauer & Dunning, 2009; Schlösser, Fetchenhauer, & Dunning, in press; Schlösser, Mensching, 2015).



## 2. THE ROLE OF RESPECT

Instead, participants in our studies appear to trust due to a behavioral rule—a norm—that supplies the impetus supporting those trust rates, and which in general would make life more pleasant, and profitable, for those facing decisions to trust. Curiously, the power of this norm is largely underappreciated among psychological researchers formally investigating human behavior as well as laypeople trying to navigate the complexity of human behavior in their everyday lives.

That norm, for lack of a better term, is *respect*. In dealings with other people, one must respect the character, goodwill, and honor of those people. One must communicate that the other person is an individual of social worth and dignity. One must not call the integrity, prestige, or status of that other person into question, or insult him or her. The key is not one's internal beliefs. One can believe that Jerry, for example, is a cad and an idiot—but in one's dealings with Jerry one must not let those opinions leak through to public awareness. Instead, one must be polite. One must maintain the pretense that Jerry is an intelligent human being of admirable honor.

It is hardly a novel observation that what we say to people's faces may not match what we say about them behind their back. Goffman (1958, 1967, 1971), in his classic sociological treatment of everyday interaction, discussed just how much people hide their true opinions, instead providing an actor's performance to maintain other people's "definition of the situation" (Thomas, 1923), a major part of which is the set of beliefs and identities that people claim for themselves. To violate the other person's definition, to question it, is to run the risk of causing a breakdown in smooth and harmonious social coordination, to heighten the threat of interpersonal conflict.

Linguists, through their work of analyzing the ways in which people speak, find themselves in agreement with Goffman (1958) concerning just how much effort people exert to maintain the *face* of the people they are surrounded by (see Brown & Levinson, 1987; Brown & Gilman, 1989; Holtgraves, 1992). Disagreement is muted; agreement is accentuated. People are quick with compliments but rapidly censor insults, even truthful

ones, before they emerge (Bavelas, Black, Chovil, & Mullett, 1990). If a disagreeable statement is made, those engaged in the conversation may ignore it and pretend it never happened. For example, DePaulo and Bell (1996) asked participants to rate several paintings according to which one they liked or disliked. Some participants then discovered they would be discussing the paintings they disliked with the artist who had created them. Participants shaded and lied about their true opinion of the paintings, particularly when they believed that the artist was emotionally invested in the work. Often, they said not much at all about the painting, not wanting to deceive but also not willing to offend the painter.

In doing so, people maintain the face of others in two distinct ways (Brown & Levinson, 1987). First, they work to maintain the other person's *positive* face, that is, the overall positive impression that they believe other people hold of themselves. They work to suggest that the other person has desirable qualities, and overall receives nothing but social approval from others. Second, people expend effort to maintain *negative* face, or rather the belief that the other person is an autonomous being whose free will is not being impinged upon. This is the reason why people avoid ordering other people around. At the dinner table, for example, people do not merely grumble "pass the salt." Instead, they wrap the request in a question that bolsters the other person's autonomy, asking whether the person can pass the salt. Naturally, the other person will concede to do so, but by asking the question, instead of stating a direct request, people maintain the pretense that the other person is free to do whatever her or she wants.

## 2.1 Role in Trust Behavior

In our work, we have found that respect not only influences what people say to one another but also how they behave—even behavior that at the surface looks like it should have more to do with economics and calculation than with social and moral dynamics. Although participants hold a cynical view of human nature, they cannot act on that dim view. Instead, they must act as though their partner is a person of good faith and intentions. That means in our trust game giving that partner the \$5. To keep it would be to insult the character of the partner.

How do we know this? We tested this idea by comparing the standard version of our \$5/\$20 trust game against a variant. In that variant, the partner was compelled to flip a coin to make a decision about what to do with the \$20—heads meant giving \$10 back, tails meant keeping the \$20. This, of course, maintained the probability that the original participant would get

\$10 back. However, it also removed the issue of the partner's character from the equation, and whether the original participants' decision to trust was a comment on that character. In this coin flip game, deciding to trust the partner would not compliment his or her character, nor would deciding against trust provide an insult. Thus, the decision to trust was no longer an issue of respect. Consistent with an account centering on respect, trust rates collapsed. Significantly fewer participants decided to give the \$5 in the coin flip variant than they did in the original trust game (Dunning et al., 2014; Study 5).

In a pointed follow-up, we ran yet another variant of the trust game in which original participants were given three options to consider. They could keep the \$5, give it to the stranger to decide whether to give back \$10, or give the \$5 but force the stranger to flip a coin to reach a decision. Again, participants were rather pessimistic about what their peers would do in the role of the stranger. They thought the chances they would get money back was higher if they forced the stranger to flip the coin rather than let him or her make a free decision. Yet, when it came time to decide, 54% decided to give up the \$5 and let the stranger decide. Only 22% opted for forcing the stranger to flip the coin, with the remainder deciding to keep the \$5 (Dunning et al., 2014). In short, participants opted for the respectful option even though it decreased the odds that they would benefit from any transaction with their assigned stranger.

## 2.2 Other Social Behaviors

Respect, however, is not only evident in trust behavior. It appears to be a norm influencing human thought and action in other areas of life. Consider the following examples from contemporary research.

### 2.2.1 Conflict of Interest

In today's complex world, people often find that they must go to experts to seek out advice, whether the issue is about financial planning, maintaining health, or making a consequential purchase such as buying a house. People go to experts for honest and accurate advice, but sometimes those experts work under a conflict of interest. A financial planner, for example, may receive a bonus for selling stock in a specific company, or a doctor may receive a referral fee for enrolling a patient in a clinical trial involving a new drug. According to ethical guidelines in most professions, an expert must disclose to a client when he or she has a conflict of interest in order

to allow the client to appropriately weigh the expert's advice. Doing so should release the client from the influence of the conflict.

But does disclosure work? Recent evidence suggests it does not. Experts who disclose their conflicts may subsequently feel licensed to give more biased, self-interested advice, particularly because they assume their clients will heavily discount it (Cain, Loewenstein, & Moore, 2005, 2011). This has been shown in an experiment in which participants were asked to guess the total value of coins that had been stuffed into six jars, after receiving advice from an "expert" who had been given a chance to closely scrutinize the containers (Cain et al., 2005). Some experts were given incentives to provide accurate advice to their "client" participants. Others, however, were given incentives to lead their clients to overestimate the value of the coins. Having this last group of experts to disclose this conflict of interest prompted them to give their clients coin-value estimates that were not only much higher (\$24.16) than reality (\$18.16), but significantly higher than experts who did not disclose their conflict (\$20.16).

The problem, however, is that disclosure of a financial conflict of interest did not lead clients to appropriately discount their expert's advice. Clients who knew about their expert's conflict provided higher estimates of coin-value (\$18.14) than did those for whom the conflict was left hidden (\$16.31)—an effect that has been repeatedly demonstrated in the literature (Cain et al., 2005, 2011). The norm of respect provides an explanation for this lack of discounting. To discount the advice is to suggest that the expert is less than honorable in his or her transactions. How is it possible to do so when the expert has gone out of his or her way to point out a potential conflict?

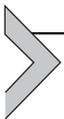
Indeed, recent evidence more directly suggests that issues of respect not only lead clients to discount expert advice less, it can also lead them to accept that conflicted advice more. Divulging a conflict leads clients to perceive advice as a request for a favor. To deny that favor is to disrespectfully communicate that it is unreasonable, a violation of positive face known as the *panhandler effect* (Sah, Loewenstein, & Cain, 2013). Other work shows that disclosure leads clients to view any disagreement with advice to be a signal of distrust, a signal they are quite reluctant to send. Also consistent with an account focusing on respect, clients do reject conflicted advice if they can avoid insulting the expert who gave it. This occurs when clients have learned about the conflict from some other source, the disclosure is not mutual knowledge between client and expert, or the client can make a decision in complete privacy (Sah et al., 2013). In each of these cases,

the client can refuse the advice without signaling a belief that the expert is inappropriately influenced by a financial interest. No signal of disrespect is sent.

### **2.2.2 Reactions to Apologies**

Respect may also underlie why people accept apologies from other people, even those they think are insincere and illegitimate. Across several studies, [Risen and Gilovich \(2007\)](#) had confederates purportedly insult other participants in the study. Sometimes, the confederate insulted the participant directly. At other times, the participant saw the confederate insult someone else. Of key interest, the confederate either apologized spontaneously for the insult he or she had made or apologized only after being coerced to do so by some other participant. Participants who merely observed the insult as a third-party rated the confederate more favorably when that confederate made a spontaneous apology rather than only after being coerced. They also stated that they preferred to work with the confederate making the spontaneous apology and rated that confederate as more remorseful.

However, the responses of participants who were the original target of the insult differed. Arguably because they were constrained by the dictates of respect, they rated the coerced apologies just as much remorseful and authentic as spontaneous ones. They also stated equal willingness to work with confederates who had offered coerced versus spontaneous apologies. In short, despite the inferences made by peers merely observing but not involved in the original insult, the inferences made by targets of the insult appeared to respect the putative sincerity and remorse behind the apology ([Risen & Gilovich, 2007](#)).



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## **3. BUT IS RESPECT DISRESPECTED?**

In sum, people honor the norm of respect innumerable times as they navigate their typical day. But, still, it may be a norm that people misunderstand and underestimate. In essence, as a norm, respect does not receive, perhaps, the respect it deserves.

Respect is truly a powerful influence on people's lives, and even some deaths. Between 1968 and 1994, the National Transportation and Safety Board (1994) found 16 fatal plane crashes in which members of the cockpit crew knew they were in serious danger but failed to intervene with the pilot. In a survey sponsored by the American Association of Critical-Care Nurses, researchers found that only 10% of respondents spoke up when they spotted

colleagues violating procedures or putting patients in danger (Maxfield, Grenny, McMillan, Patterson, & Switzler, 2005).

But in ongoing research, psychological scholars find that people directly underestimate the impact of respect on the behavior of others. Consider the following examples.

### 3.1 Interpersonal Confrontation

People believe they will confront other people who act in objectionable ways. However, when actually confronted with offensive behavior, people respond mostly by avoiding committing offense themselves. That is, they appear to follow Goffman (1967) rules toward respect and politeness.

In 1999, Swim and Hyer published a study in which they asked women how they would handle a man who made outrageously sexist remarks. Respondents were introduced to a role-play in which a mixed group of men and women worked on a complex social problem—selecting candidates most likely to survive on a desert island. During the role-play, one of the male group members started making clear sexist remarks, such as more women were needed on the island “to keep the men satisfied.” In the role-play, a full 81% of the women said that they would confront this group member directly after such an offensive remark. However, when an equivalent group of women was actually placed in an identical group discussion they thought was real, only 16% confronted the sexist group member. In fact, only 45% even acknowledged his remarks.

A similar outcome arose in a role-play involving a job interview in which a male interviewer asked inappropriate questions, such as *Do people find you desirable?* When asked to consider the interview hypothetically, a full 68% of women stated they would refuse to answer at least one question, with 16% saying they would walk out. However, when another group of women were asked the questions in an interview they thought was for a research assistant position, no one walked out and no question was refused (Woodzicka & LaFrance, 2001). That said, interviewees at times did ask why suspect questions were being asked, or asked the interviewer to clarify the question, but they avoided direct confrontations that would have placed the positive face of the interviewer and the social harmony of the interview into question.

### 3.2 Help-Seeking

This lack of appreciation of respect’s power to influence behavior is also evident in a growing literature on help-seeking. People underestimate

how much other people will accede to requests for help. Presumably, people respect requests for help as reasonable and thus are more likely to honor the request more than people anticipate.

A classic experiment by Stanley Milgram demonstrates this most directly (Milgram & Sabini, 1978). To begin, a panel of 16 New York City citizens was asked to estimate what percentage of subway passengers would give up their seat if requested to do so. The average estimate was 16%. Subsequently, Milgram sent 10 graduate student research assistants to the subways of New York City to actually ask passengers for their seats. In the simplest condition, in which requesters gave no justification for their asking, 56% of passengers gave up their seat with an additional 12% shifting to make room for the research assistant.

Further data suggested that respect—that is, assuming the assistant's request was a reasonable one—was at least partially responsible for passenger's altruistic responses. In a condition in which the assistant added instead a trivial and inappropriate justification for their request (eg, we can't read our book standing up), the percentage of passengers acceding to the request slid down to 37% (with only an addition 5% otherwise making room for the assistant). That is, with the presumption of reasonableness pierced, people were much more empowered to refuse the request (Milgram & Sabini, 1978).

Flynn and Lake (2008) discovered a similar surprising tendency for people to consent to requests for help. College students were asked to approach other students on the Columbia University campus and ask them to complete a two-page questionnaire. Half of the participants were asked to predict how many people they would have to approach to obtain five completed questionnaires. On average, they thought would have to approach just over 20 people. In reality, they had to ask only just over 10. In a follow-up experiment, participants approached strangers and asked to use their cell phones. On average, participants forecast that they would have to approach 10 strangers to succeed three times at the task. In reality, the number was only six. A subsequent field study involving a real nonprofit group affirmed this pattern of underestimation in a naturally occurring experiment. The typical volunteer in the group thought he or she would have to ask roughly 210 people for donations to achieve his or her designated fund-raising goal. The real figure on average was much smaller, only 122 people.

What is true of altruistic behavior, however, is also true of less admirable human pursuits: People underestimate how easy it is to instigate others to perform unethical acts. Bohns and colleagues had college students ask their

peers to sign a form indicating that the student had described a new course to them when they, in fact, had not. Students predicted they would have to approach 8.5 peers to get three to sign the form with the fake claim. In reality, they had to approach on average of only 4.5. In a follow-up, participants asked their peers to vandalize a library book (ie, writing “pickle” in the margins of the book). They thought it would take nearly 11 requests to get three people to perform the act. In reality, they needed on average to make fewer than 5 (Bohns, Roghanizad, & Xu, 2014).



## 4. THE PSYCHOLOGICAL ANATOMY OF RESPECT

Construed through the lens of respect, the actions of trust, helping others, acceding to their requests, accepting apologies, and overlooking another person’s conflict of interest bring several questions into sharp focus. But to focus on the norm of respect is to provide only a partial answer as to why people respond magnanimously in these situations. How exactly does the norm of respect operate?

Respect appears to have a complex anatomy, and a close examination of that anatomy reveals a number of issues that have to be addressed to fully understand its influence on human behavior. As such, it provides an illustrative example of the potentially weltering array of theoretical questions a researcher must consider before understanding just how any norm works. Consider the following questions still left open in the case of respect.

### 4.1 Preferences

The simplest presumption people have of their peers is that those peers ultimately do what they *want* to do—that choosing to trust, for example, reflects some underlying preference or goal that attracts a person to that choice. People choose to give their partner the \$5 in the trust game, for example, because they really want to get \$10 back. If not that, then they are attracted to creating more wealth—\$20 rather than the initial \$5 (Andreoni & Miller, 2002; Charness & Rabin, 2002). Or, they seek a positive connection with another person (Fehr, 2004), or the “warm glow” of doing something good (Dunn, Akin, & Norton, 2008). Or, they have a “taste” for fairness in human interaction (Rabin, 1993).

Work on trust, however, and the norm of respect that supports it suggest that people do not act out of some underlying preference or goal that attracts them. Left to their own devices, trust is a behavior they

would largely wish to avoid—if they could just evade or dodge the decision to trust altogether. To be sure, if the decision whether to trust is forced upon them, they will trust. But if given a chance to avoid the situation containing the decision altogether, they will take the chance. As some scholars have termed it, prosocial behavior is often not an issue of “giving” but rather one of “giving in” (Cain, Dana, & Newman, 2014). People succumb to social pressures that they should be kind and giving, but only if directly confronted with a decision that they cannot escape. If that opportunity can be avoided, people will favor the avoidance (Dana, Cain, & Dawes, 2006; Dana, Weber, & Kuang, 2007; DellaVigna, List, & Malmendier, 2012; Lazear, Malmendier, & Weber, 2012; List, 2007).

That is, if people are given a choice about whether to play a trust game or some alternative, they would show no attraction to either the game or to the decision to trust. We have shown this in an experiment in which participants were asked whether they wanted to play the trust game, as described above, or enter a lottery. Roughly 60% chose the lottery, with only 28% choosing to play the trust game and then to give the \$5. If anything, the overall preference of participants was to choose the lottery but then not to risk their \$5, which 44% chose (Anderson, Dunning, Fetchenhauer, & Schlösser, 2015).

These choices are in stark contrast to a second condition where participants, again, were given a choice between playing the trust game or taking part in a lottery. However, to get to the lottery, participants had to confront the trust game. That is, they had to play the trust game, indicate that they would keep the \$5, and then signal that they wanted to move ahead to play the lottery. In this case, fewer than 40% chose the lottery. Instead, a full 59% decided to hand over their money in the trust game (Anderson et al., 2015). In short, confronted with a decision to trust, a majority of people did. But, instead, if they had to pursue a decision to trust, people showed no preference for doing so.

This finding is reminiscent of a field study taking advantage of the traditional Salvation Army holiday fund-raising drive taking place at a Boston-area department store. In the control condition that mimicked the traditional Salvation Army method, volunteers dressed as Santa Claus stood outside the department store entrances, ringing a bell next to buckets where people could leave donations. In the treatment condition, the Santa volunteers were more active, looking people in the eye and asking them directly if they could donate. Squarely confronted with the request, one they had to answer, people donated 70% more money. But that was not the only effect of the direct request. The percentage of people leaving the department store

through other Santa-less exits also increased by 30% (Andreoni, Rao, & Trachtman, 2011).

This theme of direct confrontation also emerges in the literature on help-seeking. People accede to requests for help to a surprising degree only when they are directly confronted with the request to do so. For example, Flynn and Lake (2008, Study 6) deputized Columbia students to ask peers around campus to fill out a questionnaire. Participants were told to ask either by directly speaking to people or by handing people a flyer containing a written request and then walking away. Participants, again, overestimated the number of people they had to approach in order to get someone to complete the questionnaire—but only when the request was a direct, spoken one. When the request was indirect, participants instead underestimated the number of people they would have to approach to find someone who complied.

Other work echoes that acceding to help is not a preference people have if they can avoid it. In the Milgram and Sabini (1978) subway studies, if riders overheard a confederate talking to another confederate about asking someone for a seat, thus giving them enough time to come up with an excuse not to give up theirs, they did so. Forewarned, only 37% gave up their seat or slid over to the side to give the confederate space.

## 4.2 Want Versus Should

In short, people give money, in both the trust game and at the department store, not necessarily because of something they want to do. Left with complete freedom, they frequently avoid the chance to give money. But directly confronted with the choice they cannot avoid, people opt for the prosocial alternative. This suggests that people give because they sense it is something they *should* do rather than something they want to do. And, indeed, we have found that when we ask people what they want to do versus what they think they should do in the trust game, they show little preference for giving versus keeping the money—if couched in terms of what they want to do. That is, many people want to keep the money, many want to give it. However, people overwhelmingly think they *should* give the money, and this strong tilt toward thinking they ought to give their partner the \$5 explains, at least in part, why people trust even though they are so pessimistic about their trust being rewarded.

## 4.3 Emotional Profile

The fact that people trust out of a belief of what they should do is affirmed by the emotions that surround the decision to trust. Typically, theorists assert

that people choose prosocial actions to achieve a “warm glow” of happiness. Being nice feels nice, and so people pursue altruistic behaviors, taking a material loss, in order to achieve an emotional gain (Andreoni, 1990; Dunn et al., 2008; Zaki & Mitchell, 2013). The trust decision fails to follow this emotional logic. To be sure, people say they would feel more pleasant, content, and happier to give the \$5 to their partner—and these feelings do correlate with decisions to trust. The link between contentment and trust, however, are weak at best (Dunning et al., 2014).

Instead, trust seems to be a decision infused not by the pursuit of happiness but rather the avoidance of anxiety. In a conventional gamble, say deciding whether to gamble \$5 on a coin flip to potentially win \$10, most people report feeling more tense and anxious about taking the gamble rather than standing pat. As a consequence, most keep the \$5 and spurn the gamble (Schlösser, Dunning, & Fetchenhauer, 2013). That reverses in the trust game: People feel more *anxious*, *tense*, *remorseful*, and *guilty* about keeping the money rather than handing it to the partner. And those feelings matter, in that they strongly predict who will trust the partner with the \$5. Indeed, making people more agitated leads them to trust another person more, taking a risk, even though such agitation leads people to gamble less in general (Kugler, Connolly, & Ordóñez, 2012). Such discomfort has also been implicated in people’s surprising willingness to accede to requests for help (Bohns & Flynn, 2010).

Anxiety’s central role in trust fits well with the idea that people trust in order to fulfill an obligation, a duty, or adhere to a norm. Higgins (1987, 1989), in his self-discrepancy theory, asserted that people are not only concerned with the “self” they are in reality, but also with two other selves they wish to be. One is the *ideal self*, which is the person they want to be. For example, if a person wishes to be smart, getting an “A” on an exam is an evidence that a person is moving toward an ideal self. When people perceive such development, they feel happiness and pride. When they perceive instead a growing discrepancy between actual and ideal selves, such as failing a test, they feel dejected, sad, or depressed.

This pattern of emotions is very different to discrepancies related to the *ought self*, which focuses on the self an individual *should* be rather than wants to be. This is the self that fulfills duties and social obligations, such as being a good adult son or daughter who calls his or her parents every week. Fulfilling such duties brings a person satisfaction and calm, transgressing against them causes a person to feel agitation—that is, tense, nervous, and uneasy (Higgins, Bond, Klein, & Strauman, 1986; Higgins, Shah, & Friedman, 1997).