Charity or Solidarity? How Donor Motives Shape Third-Party Perceptions of Giving

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CRediT Author Statement

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Abstract

People often engage in the same prosocial behaviors for distinct, yet ultimately altruistic, reasons. How do those underlying virtuous motives shape how prosocial actors are perceived by others? Across seven studies (N = 1690, four preregistered), we investigate perceptions of hypothetical donors making identical donations motivated by justice or generosity. Overall, we find that people's perceptions depend on whether donors communicate their own motives. When donors share about their virtuous motives, raising the possibility that they are masking a self-serving motive, generosity-motivated donors are evaluated less positively than justice-motivated donors: they are seen as less moral, warm, competent, intent on inspiring similar prosociality, and more intent on improving their reputation. But when a third party describes the same donations and underlying motives, these effects disappear and in some cases reverse: generosity-motivated donors are seen as warmer, quicker to give, and sometimes more moral. Comparing these contexts reveals that all donors, but especially generosity-motivated ones, are penalized for publicly sharing about their giving. These findings advance our understanding of how moral motives shape judgments of prosocial actors and when sharing about one's giving may backfire. As donors are increasingly encouraged to publicize their giving to raise awareness and motivate others, our findings reveal potential strategies to mitigate the reputational cost of sharing about a donation.

Keywords: Moral Motives, Prosocial Behavior, Virtues, Donation, Social Evaluation

Charity or Solidarity? How Donor Motives Shape Third-Party Perceptions of Giving

Organizations use a range of appeals to inspire people to give. Charities often issue recruitment emails, pop-up advertisements, or glossy end-of-year mailers focused on eliciting a feeling of heroism: “Children need a champion” (UNICEF; *Join David Beckham*, n.d.); “Protect the Future of Nature” (World Wildlife Foundation; *Protect The Future Of Wildlife*, n.d.); “Put a present under someone’s tree today. And a roof over someone’s head tomorrow” (The Salvation Army Massachusetts Division, 2023). These messages emphasize the potential donor's unique ability to provide the external help recipients need to overcome hardship. In contrast, mutual aid groups and similar grassroots organizations frame donating as a way to correct inequities created by systemic injustices that have benefited donors. Their calls for donations often include messages such as “giv[e] others what belongs to them,” “redistribute your wealth,” and “solidarity not charity” (Rosie’s Place; Rotton, 2021; Spade, 2020). The messages from charities and mutual aid organizations represent distinct moral framings of donating: a generous act to help those less fortunate or a just act to promote equality. Moreover, these distinct framings may shape how donors understand and communicate their own reasons for giving. In light of growing evidence that one of the most effective ways to motivate others to give is for donors to share about their donation (Small & Silver, 2024), it is important to understand: How do different motives to donate shape how donors are perceived by others?

Generosity and Justice as Virtuous Motives

Broadly, two types of motives underlie people’s decisions to help others: an authentic desire to benefit others (a *virtuous* motive) or a selfish desire to achieve personal gain (an *egoistic* motive). Existing work has largely focused on how these different motives for prosocial

behavior shape observers' judgments of the actor and their actions (Carlson & Zaki, 2018; Cushman, 2015; Kraft-Todd et al., 2023a, 2023b; Lin-Healy & Small, 2012; Loustau et al., 2023; Newman & Cain, 2014; Raihani & Power, 2021; Vonasch et al., 2024). Yet virtuous motives themselves are diverse as well: for example, people can help others out of a sense of kindness and compassion or a desire to correct an injustice and promote equality (Kim & Hemphill, 2025; Lee et al., 2014). The distinctiveness of these virtuous motives and their unique influence on prosocial behaviors and moral judgments have been theorized (e.g., virtue ethics; Aristotle, 1999) and empirically supported (e.g., Moral Foundations Theory; Graham et al., 2013). In the present work, we focus on two such virtuous motives: generosity and justice.

Generosity and justice are both foundational motives for prosocial behavior. Generosity is defined as a "readiness to give more of something, especially money, than is necessary or expected" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023). Justice, on the other hand, is defined as following "principles of moral right or of equity" or behaving in a way that is "righteous," "equitable," and "fair" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2024a, 2024b). Generosity and justice shape prosocial behavior and cooperation from an early age and across cultures (Blake et al., 2015; Cowell et al., 2017; Graham et al., 2013; McAuliffe et al., 2017). Toddlers, for instance, help strangers even when they will not receive any benefits (Warneken & Tomasello, 2006), and will share resources equally, even at a personal cost (Ulber et al., 2015). Children also distinguish between these virtues (Shure, 1968) and hold others to them, preferring those who are generous or just (Hamlin et al., 2007), and punishing selfishness, even if they are not personally impacted (Bernhard et al., 2020; McAuliffe et al., 2020). They also recognize that others expect them to be just and generous (Smith et al., 2013) and will share more and divide resources more fairly when they

know they are being observed (Herrmann et al., 2019; Leimgruber et al., 2012; McAuliffe et al., 2020; Fujii et al., 2015; Shaw et al., 2014).

Adults, like children, value generosity and justice and recognize that behaviors aligned with these virtues can improve one's reputation (Kraft-Todd et al., 2023a, 2023b). This awareness often leads people to scrutinize whether generous and just behaviors are truly motivated by these virtuous motives (Cushman, 2015; Newman & Cain, 2014). Public prosocial acts, in particular, are often viewed as motivated by a desire to look good and enhance one's reputation (Kraft-Todd et al., 2023a, 2023b). But not all public prosocial acts are judged equally: similar to children, adults distinguish between generosity and justice, and public acts of generosity are often viewed with more suspicion than public acts of justice, as they often confer greater social rewards to the prosocial actor in terms of interpersonal relationships and reputational credit (Kraft-Todd et al., 2023b; Shure, 1968). Recent research suggests that this discrepancy may partly arise from the prosocial behaviors people associate with generosity versus justice (Kraft-Todd et al., 2023b). Generosity is often associated with acts that benefit others, such as friends and family or the less fortunate, at a personal cost, such as gift-giving or volunteering. Conversely, justice is linked to actions aimed at promoting equality, such as improving accessibility for people with disabilities or ensuring fair voting practices (Kraft-Todd et al., 2023a). People perceive these behaviors differently: compared to prototypically generous behaviors, prototypical acts of justice are seen as less beneficial for the actor, more socially expected, and less feasible to perform anonymously (Kraft-Todd et al., 2023a). Yet generosity and justice often motivate the same prosocial behavior, such as donating resources to individuals or groups (Kim & Hemphill, 2025; Lee et al., 2014). These cases raise an important question: How do people perceive prosocial actors who engage in the *same* behavior when their reported

virtuous motive is generosity versus justice? And is this perception shaped by how certain they are that the virtuous motive is genuine or authentic?

The Present Research

To answer this question, we investigated perceptions of virtuously motivated donors when motive information is shared by a trusted third party (i.e., the experimenter) or by the actors themselves. Our first hypothesis is that, when people learn about a donor's virtuous motive from the experimenter, a trusted source, they will perceive generosity-motivated donors as more moral (**H1a**), warm (**H1b**), emotion-driven (**H1c**), and quick to help (**H1d**) than justice-motivated donors. Generosity fosters cooperative relationships by sending a strong and costly signal of one's willingness to cooperate and benefit others, thereby fulfilling a core function of morality (Barclay & Willer, 2007; Curry et al., 2016). Since prior work has found that people see cooperative actors as warm, emotion-driven, and quick-to-help (Critcher et al., 2013; Fiske et al., 2007; Jordan et al., 2016; McManus et al., 2024; Montealegre et al., 2025; Rom & Conway, 2017; Van de Calseyde et al., 2014), we hypothesize that people will judge generosity-motivated donors more positively on these traits.

In contrast, we expect people to see justice-motivated donors as more competent (**H2a**), calculating (**H2b**), and deliberative (**H2c**), because justice is typically associated with behaviors that follow, rather than exceed, shared rules or norms that people are expected to follow (Bicchieri & Chavez, 2010). Moreover, the expected or obligatory nature of just behaviors leads us to hypothesize that people will think that justice-motivated donors have a greater intent to spur others to engage in the same prosocial behavior (**H2d**) (i.e., *norm signaling,* Kodipady et al., 2021).

When donors share about their own virtuous motive, a context that may make observers uncertain about the donors' authenticity, we hypothesize that donors, regardless of their virtuous motive, will be judged less positively (**H3)**. Building on Kraft-Todd et al.'s (2023b) finding that people are more likely to discount public generosity than public justice, we further hypothesize that generosity-motivated donors sharing about their motive will be judged more harshly than justice-motivated donors (**H4a**) and seen as driven by reputational concerns (*reputation signaling*) (**H4b)**. Finally, we expect that perceptions that justice-motivated donors are norm signaling will be especially pronounced when donors publicly share their virtuous motive, because observers may infer that the actor is aware of their increased capacity to influence others (**H5**).

Studies 1 and 2 examine whether people make distinct judgments of generosity- and justice-motivated donors. Study 3 explores whether these effects are driven by inferences about the donor's or donation recipient's political leanings. Studies 4 and 5 examine the robustness of the effect when using more naturalistic language. Study 6 examines judgments of justice- and generosity-motivated donors who share their own virtuous motives. Finally, Study 7 uses a mixed within-between design to assess whether donors are discounted for sharing about their virtuous motive and whether this discounting differs for generosity- and justice-motivated donors. All studies, measures, manipulations, and data or participant exclusions are reported in this manuscript or in the Supplementary Materials. The pre-registration status of each study is noted in the corresponding study introduction, and all pre-registrations are available on OSF (Trenfield, 2026).

Study 1

In Study 1, we conducted an exploratory investigation of whether participants perceive donors differently depending on whether they are motivated by generosity or justice. We focused on three key judgments: which donor seemed more genuine, whose motivation participants approved of more, and which donor was seen as more motivated by a desire to signal norms to others (the latter adapted from Kodipady et al., 2023). Study 1 was not preregistered; however, all measures, materials, and analyses are fully reported below and are available on OSF.

Methods

Participants

We recruited 100 U.S.-based online participants from Prolific, an online behavioral research platform, in line with our a priori plan to collect 100 observations. No participants were excluded from analyses. A sensitivity analysis showed that this sample provided 80% power to detect an effect size of $\varphi = .28$ or greater in a chi-square goodness-of-fit test with a 5% false-positive rate (Faul et al., 2007).

The sample (ages 18–76, $M_{age} = 35.3$, $SD_{age} = 11.9$) consisted of 48 men, 51 women, and one nonbinary person. Seventy-five participants identified as White, eight as Asian or Asian American, six as Black or African American, and 11 as multiracial. Forty-eight participants had a bachelor's or advanced degree. Fifty-two participants identified as Democrats, 11 participants identified as Republicans, 35 identified as Independents, and two as "Something else."

Materials & Procedure

Participants first read descriptions of two donors (shown below).

> Jon decided to donate $100 to a local organization. He made this donation because he was motivated to act in accordance with his value of **justice**.

> Will decided to donate $100 to a local organization. He made this donation because he was motivated to act in accordance with his value of **generosity**.

The order of these sentences was randomized, such that half of the participants read about the justice-motivated donor first (Jon), whereas the other half read about the generosity-motivated donor (Will) first. These descriptions also appeared at the top of each subsequent page of questions.

As an exploratory measure, participants were asked the following question for both justice and generosity: "What does [**justice/generosity**] mean to you in this context? Feel free to use synonyms for [justice/generosity] in your response." Next, participants answered three randomly ordered questions (selected from our pilot study; see Supplemental Materials). "Who do you think is more **genuine**?", "Whose motivation for donating do you **approve of** more?", and "Who was more motivated to donate to this cause because he wanted to **signal to others** that it is **important** and **right**?"

Following these, participants answered a set of demographic questions on age, gender, race, household income, educational attainment, subjective socioeconomic status, political party, social politics, and economic politics. Finally, participants read a debriefing statement about the study.

Results

Conceptualizations of Generosity and Justice

To examine how participants conceptualized justice and generosity, we measured the words participants most frequently used in their open-ended definitions of generosity and justice using the R package tidytext (Silge & Robinson, 2016). To accurately assess this, we combined different inflections of words (e.g., *feel*, *feels*) and removed words with no semantic value (e.g., *a*, *the*). Participants' definitions of generosity most frequently included terms related to giving resources (e.g., *giving, sharing, money*) out of kindness (e.g., *heart*, *kindness*). In contrast, definitions of justice frequently included terms associated with achieving fairness (e.g., *fairness*, *equality*), addressing wrongs or social causes (e.g., *wrong*, *social*), and references to the recipient (*organization)*. See Supplemental Material for the full word frequencies by virtuous motive.

We also identified and categorized emotionally valenced words in participants' definitions across virtuous motives to assess their emotional tone, using the Bing sentiment lexicon (Hu & Liu, 2004). The proportion of positive emotion words in definitions of generosity was overwhelmingly high (61 total positive words and 8 total negative words). In contrast, a more even amount of positive and negative emotion words was used in definitions of justice (60 total positive words and 40 total negative words).

Perceptions of Donors

A chi-square test goodness-of-fit was used to examine whether participants' forced-choice judgments favored the generosity- or justice-motivated donor across outcomes. Participants were more likely than chance to judge the generosity-motivated donor as more

genuine than the justice-motivated donor, χ^2 (1, N = 100) = 7.84, p = .005, φ = 0.28. Participants were also more likely to approve of a generosity motive than a justice motive, χ^2 (1, N = 100) = 4.00, p = .046, φ = 0.20. Conversely, participants were more likely to view the justice-motivated donor as norm signaling compared to the generosity-motivated donor, χ^2 (1, N = 100) = 29.16, p < .001, φ = 0.54.

Summary

Study 1 revealed that participants' definitions of generosity and justice in the context of donating, as well as their perceptions of donors motivated by these virtues, align with preexisting definitions. Participants typically defined generosity as giving or sharing resources, especially money, out of kindness and without an expectation of reciprocation (e.g., "*[Generosity] means giving to others without expecting anything else in return. They are doing it out of the kindness of their heart.*"). Consistent with this definition, participants judged the generosity-motivated donor as more admirable and genuine than the justice-motivated donor. Conversely, participants framed justice as achieving fairness and equality, righting wrongs, and contributing to social change (e.g., "*Something might have happened where a person or people were wronged, so he donated to a cause to support the victims or a cause that advocates for change.*"). Correspondingly, participants judged the justice-motivated donor as having a greater intention to norm signal.

Participants' definitions also provided novel insight into how these virtues are construed specifically in the context of donating. Compared to generosity, definitions of justice emphasized the recipient organization and used substantially more negatively valenced words. This contrast

suggests that participants see generosity as centered on the donor's intent and impact, whereas justice directs attention toward the recipients and harms being addressed.

Study 2

Study 2 built on the findings of Study 1 by expanding the range of traits used to assess donor perceptions and by shifting from forced-choice responses to individual ratings. While Study 1 focused on three key judgments (genuineness, approval, and norm signaling) to assess perceptions of generosity- and justice-motivated donors, Study 2 added additional measures on moral character, intent, warmth, competence, decision speed, and spontaneity. Study 2 was preregistered, and all measures, materials, and analyses are fully reported below and are available on OSF.

Methods

Participants

Before data collection, we conducted an a priori power analysis for a small within-participant effect ($d = 0.20$), which indicated that approximately 200 participants would provide 80% power to detect an effect of this size using a two-tailed within-subjects test with a false positive rate of 5% (Faul et al., 2007). We recruited 201 U.S.-based online participants from Prolific. No participants were excluded from data collection. A sensitivity analysis showed that this sample provided 80% power to detect an effect size of $d = 0.20$ or greater in a two-tailed within-subjects t-test with a 5% false-positive rate (Faul et al., 2007).

The sample (ages 19–81, $M_{age} = 41.2$, $SD_{age} = 14.7$) consisted of 99 men, 97 women, and four nonbinary people; one participant did not report their gender. One hundred thirty-five

participants identified as White, 16 as Asian or Asian American, 14 as Hispanic or Latina/o/x/e, 13 as Black or African American, two as Indigenous American, American Indian, or Alaska Native participants, and 11 as multiracial. Three participants did not report their race. 98 participants had a bachelor's or advanced degree. 102 participants identified as Democrats, 46 as Republicans, 48 as Independents, and four as "Something else"; one participant did not report their political affiliation.

Materials & Procedure

Participants read the same passage as in Study 1, with the same between-subjects randomization of sentence order. Unlike Study 1, participants then rated *each* donor on traits assessing moral character, warmth, competence, donation characteristics, and intent.

Moral character was assessed using a new item assessing donor morality, in addition to the items measuring donor authenticity and approval of the donor's motives used in Study 1. Warmth and competence were assessed using adapted items from Rom et al. (2017). Donation characteristics were assessed using items adapted from Montealegre et al. (2025) that captured decision speed and emotional versus logical decision-making. Intent was assessed using the norm signaling measure from Study 1 and a new item measuring the extent to which donors intended to improve their reputation (*reputation signaling*), both adapted from Kodipady et al. (2023). Participants then answered the same demographic questions and viewed the same debriefing information used in Study 1. See Supplemental Materials for the full text of all items.

Exclusion Criteria

For this and all subsequent studies, the following exclusion criteria were used. Two questions were included to ensure participants were human: a CAPTCHA and a picture of a red bucket with instructions to describe the image. Participants who failed to complete the CAPTCHA could not proceed with the study. Participants who provided nonsensical or no description of the image were excluded from the data analysis. At the end of the survey, as an attention check, we asked participants, "Overall, how much did you pay attention to this study while you were taking it?" on a Likert scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*completely*). Participants were assured that their response to this question would not impact their compensation. In Study 2, no participants were excluded from the analysis based on these criteria.

Results

Table 1.

Effects of Donor Motive (Generosity vs. Justice) on Third-Party Perceptions Across Studies

	Study 2	Study 3	Study 4	Study 5	Study 6	Study 7	
						Experimenter	Donor
Moral Approval	0.16**	0.19***	0.07	0.11*	-0.23***	-0.04	-0.29***
Warmth	0.23***	0.36***	0.27***	0.33***	-0.06	0.13*	-0.05
Competence	-0.12***	-0.17***	-0.13***	-0.07*	-0.18***	-0.18***	-0.20***
Decision Speed	.15**	0.13*	0.24***	0.19***	0.04	0.11*	0.05
Emotion-Driven	.18*	0.06	-0.01	0.05	-0.25**	0.11	-0.25**
Norm Signaling	-.20*	-0.47***	-0.26***	-0.32***	-0.30***	-0.20*	-0.38***
Reputation	-.12	-0.07	0.14	0.04	0.40***	0.15	0.44***

Signaling

Note. Unstandardized coefficients from mixed-effects models with random intercepts for participants. The justice virtuous motive and the "commit" phrasing were the referent conditions for these analyses. Positive values indicate higher ratings for the generosity-motivated donor; negative values indicate higher ratings for the justice-motivated donor. For reputation signaling, higher ratings indicate less favorable evaluations of donors. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

We fitted linear mixed-effects models with random intercepts for participants, using composites identified through an exploratory factor analysis (see Supplemental Materials). The generosity-motivated donor was judged as higher on the composite variable *moral approval* (hereafter referred to as *moral)* and warmth, and their donation was seen as quicker and more emotion-driven. Conversely, the justice-motivated donor was judged as more competent and higher in norm signaling. There was no significant difference between virtuous motives in reputation signaling. See Table 1 for a summary of model results, Table 2 for full model outputs, and Table 3 for descriptive statistics.

Summary

Study 2 suggests that participants infer extensive character differences from generosity- and justice-motivated donors. Specifically, participants see generosity-motivated donors as more moral, warm, emotion-driven, and quick to give. In contrast, justice-motivated donors are seen as more competent and intent on norm signaling, with no significant difference in perceived reputation signaling. These results suggest that distinct virtuous motives shape broad impressions of character and intent, even for the same prosocial behaviors.

Study 3

Studies 1 and 2 suggest that participants make substantially different inferences about a donor's character and intent based solely on the virtue driving the donation. We hypothesize that these differences arise from the distinct social functions of generosity and justice: fostering cooperative ties or promoting equality, respectively.

An alternative explanation, however, is that participants' inferences are not based on the virtues themselves, but on what these virtues may signal: the donor's political identity. The exploratory natural language processing analysis of Study 1 revealed that participants also associate justice with social justice in the context of donating. Therefore, when participants learn that a donor is motivated to give out of a sense of justice, they may perceive the donor, or the organization they support, as left leaning. Moreover, prior work shows that liberals are more likely to support justice-oriented charities (Chapman et al., 2024; Denis et al., 2023), which suggests that participants may also hold a heuristic that justice-motivated donors are more liberal. Study 3 tested whether differences in donor perceptions were driven by inferences about the donor or recipient organization's political affiliation. Study 3 was not preregistered; however, all measures, materials, and analyses are fully reported below and are available on OSF.

Methods

Participants

In line with our earlier power analysis, we recruited a sample of 200 U.S.-based participants from Prolific. One participant failed the attention check and was excluded from the data analysis, leaving a final sample of 199. A sensitivity analysis showed that the final sample

of 199 participants provided 80% power to detect an effect size of $d = 0.20$ or greater in a two-tailed within-subjects t-test with a 5% false-positive rate (Faul et al., 2007).

The sample (ages 18–85, $M_{age} = 39.4$, $SD_{age} = 14.0$) consisted of 98 men, 95 women, four nonbinary people, and one participant who did not disclose gender. One hundred thirty-four participants identified as White, 25 as Black or African American, 12 as Hispanic or Latina/o/x/e, five as Asian or Asian American, one as Indigenous American, American Indian or Alaska Native, one as Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and 18 as multiracial. Three participants did not disclose race. Ninety-five participants had a bachelor's or advanced degree. Ninety-four participants identified as Democrats, 31 identified as Republicans, 69 identified as Independents, and 5 participants identified as "Something else."

Materials & Procedure

The procedure for Study 3 was identical to that of Study 2, with the addition of two sets of questions on donors' and organizations' political leanings, presented in random order. The first question asked, "How would you describe the **political orientation** of each donor?" The second set of questions asked participants whether they believed the donors were giving to the **same organization**, with response options "Yes, same organization" and "No, different organizations." Participants who believed the donors gave to the same organization were asked, "How would you describe the **political leaning** of the organization [Will and Jon/Jon and Will] donated to?" Participants who believed the donors gave to different organizations were asked to describe the political leaning of "The organization Will donated to" and "The organization Jon donated to". For all political orientation questions, participants were provided with seven-point Likert scales ranging from *Very liberal* to *Very conservative*. For all questions referring to Will and Jon, the

names were randomly ordered. Participants then completed the same demographic questions and debriefing protocol used in Studies 1 and 2.

Results

Perceptions of Donors

As in Studies 1 and 2, the generosity-motivated donor was perceived as significantly more moral, warm, and quicker to give than the justice-motivated donor. Conversely, the justice-motivated donor was perceived as significantly more competent and more intent on norm signaling. As before, we found no differences in reputation signaling. Unlike Study 2, we found no differences in perceptions of how emotion-driven donors were. See Table 1 for a summary of model results, Table 2 for full model outputs, and Table 3 for descriptive statistics.

Perceived Political Orientation of the Donor

To test whether our effects could be explained by the motive manipulation altering perceptions of the donor's political orientation (e.g., justice being associated with social justice), we regressed perceived donor political ideology on virtuous motive (justice vs. generosity), with random intercepts for participants. Perceptions of donor political ideology did not differ by motive condition (b = -0.24, SE = 0.15, t(398) = -1.62, p = .105, 95% CI [–0.53, 0.05]; justice-motivated: M = 3.7, SD = 1.6; generosity-motivated: M = 3.5, SD = 1.3).

Perceived Political Orientation of the Recipient

We also investigated whether these effects might be driven by perceptions of recipient organizations' political orientation. Sixty-four percent of participants believed the donors were

giving to different organizations, and their perception of each organization's political affiliation approached significance, b = -0.36, SE = 0.19, $t(252)$ = -1.96, p = .052, 95% CI [–0.73, 0.001]. However, this effect trended in the opposite direction of our alternative hypothesis, such that the organization that the justice-motivated donor gave to (M = 3.7, SD = 1.6) was perceived as more conservative than the one the generosity-motivated donor gave to (M = 3.5, SD = 1.3). We also analyzed perceptions of organizational political leaning among the 36% of participants (n = 72) who believed both donors gave to the same organization. A Shapiro–Wilk test indicated the distribution for their perception of the organization's political affiliation deviated from normality (W = 0.91, p < .001), so we used a Wilcoxon one-sample test against the neutral value of 4 (politically moderate). We found that among participants who believed the donors gave to the same organization, that organization was perceived as slightly but significantly liberal (M = 3.5, SD = 1.3), V = 240, p = .004, r = .41.

Perception of Donors Among Participants Who Believed They Gave to the Same Organization

We also examined our primary effects among participants who believed both donors gave to the *same* organization (i.e., those who perceived the donations as truly identical). Among participants who believed both donors gave to the same organization (36% of the sample; n = 72), generosity-motivated donors were evaluated as more moral (b = 0.25, SE = 0.10, $t(71)$ = 2.55, p = .013, d = 0.43 [0.09, 0.76]) and warmer (b = 0.33, SE = 0.11, $t(71)$ = 2.95, p = .004, d = 0.49 [0.16, 0.83]). In contrast, justice-motivated donors were perceived as marginally more competent (b = –0.11, SE = 0.06, $t(71)$ = –1.89, p = .06, d = –0.31 [–0.65, 0.02]) and more motivated by norm signaling (b = –0.38, SE = 0.14, $t(71)$ = –2.62, p = .011, d = –0.44 [–0.77, –

0.10]). No differences emerged in perceptions of how quick to give or emotion-driven donors were, or their intent to reputation signal.

Summary

Study 3 replicated the key findings from Studies 1 and 2 and showed that these effects were not driven by perceived political differences between justice- and generosity-motivated donors. Participants did not perceive the donors as differing significantly in political affiliation and, contrary to our proposed alternative explanation for the results of Studies 1 and 2, actually trended towards identifying organizations that justice-motivated donors gave to as more conservative. Additionally, we replicated many of our effects even among participants who believed the donors gave to the same organization. Even within this underpowered subsample, we replicated the overall pattern of findings from the full sample: generosity-motivated donors were judged as more moral and warmer, whereas justice-motivated donors were perceived as more norm signaling and marginally more competent.

Study 4

Studies 1–3 demonstrated that people draw meaningful distinctions between generosity- and justice-motivated donors, perceiving them differently across dimensions of moral approval, warmth, competence, and intent. In Study 4, we adopted more naturalistic language to describe donor motives, framing their behavior as either driven by a personal commitment to generosity and justice or because they value generosity or justice. This change also provided an opportunity to explore the robustness of participants' perceptions of donors across multiple phrasings. Study 4 was preregistered, and all measures, materials, and analyses are fully reported below and are available on OSF.

Methods

Participants

To provide additional power to measure the between-subjects effect of different phrasings, we decided a priori to collect 300 participants. We recruited 301 U.S.-based participants from Prolific. One participant was excluded from the analysis for failing the bot check. A sensitivity analysis showed that the final sample of 300 participants provided 80% power to detect an effect size of $d = 0.16$ or greater in a two-tailed within-subjects t-test, and an effect size of $d = 0.32$ or greater in a two-tailed between-subjects t-test with a 5% false-positive rate (Faul et al., 2007).

The sample (ages 18–75, $M_{age} = 40.5$, $SD_{age} = 13.4$) consisted of 146 men, 142 women, six nonbinary participants, two who selected "an identity not listed," and four who did not disclose their gender. Two hundred fifteen participants identified as White, 21 as Black or African American, 20 as Hispanic or Latina/o/e/x, 14 as Asian or Asian American, three as Indigenous American, American Indian, or Alaska Native, one as Middle Eastern or North African, and 19 as multiracial. Two participants selected "Other," and five did not disclose their race. One hundred fifty-four participants had a bachelor's or advanced degree. One hundred sixty participants identified as Democrats, 42 as Republicans, 86 as Independents, nine as "Something else," and three did not disclose their political affiliation.

Materials & Procedure

Participants completed a protocol identical to Study 3, except for the language used to describe the two donors' behaviors and virtuous motives. Participants were randomly assigned to

see either commitment language or values language; the order in which the two donors' actions were presented was also randomized.

Commitment language	[John/Will] decided to donate $100 to a local organization. He felt inspired to donate because of his commitment to [**generosity**/**justice**].
Values language	[John/Will] decided to donate $100 to a local organization. He chose to give to this organization because he really values [**generosity**/**justice**].

The spelling change of John (versus the previously used Jon) was not intentional.

Results

Perceptions of Donors

As in earlier studies, the generosity-motivated donor was seen as significantly warmer and quicker to give than the justice-motivated donor, whereas the justice-motivated donor was seen as significantly more competent and intent on norm signaling. Additionally, we found no significant differences in perceptions of how emotion-driven each donor was or how intent they were on reputation signaling. However, there was a trend towards participants perceiving generosity-motivated donors as marginally more intent on reputation signaling. See Table 1 for a summary of model results, Table 2 for full model outputs, and Table 3 for descriptive statistics.

Unlike earlier studies, we did not find a difference in the perceived morality of the two donors. To explore this deviation, we examined the individual items comprising the moral approval composite. We found that participants perceived no difference in morality (b = 0.05, SE = 0.05, $t(299)$ = 0.96, p = .34, 95% CI [–0.05, 0.14]) or authenticity (b = 0.05, SE = 0.06, t(299) = 0.77, p = .44, 95% CI [–0.07, 0.15]) across virtuous motives. However, participants approved of generosity (M = 4.3, SD = 0.9) more than justice (M = 4.2, SD = 1.0) as a motive for giving (b = 0.12, SE = 0.05, t(299) = 2.26, p = .024, 95% CI [0.02, 0.23]).

Effect of Vignette Phrasing

To test whether our effects depended on how the donor's virtuous motive was described, we added sentence phrasing (values vs. commitment) and its interaction with the donor's virtuous motive (justice vs. generosity) as fixed effects in mixed-effects models predicting donor evaluations. Across outcomes, sentence phrasing had no significant impact on judgments of donors, and there was no evidence that its effect differed across virtuous motives (see Supplemental Materials for full model results).

Summary

Study 4 demonstrated that differences in perceptions of generosity- and justice-motivated donors largely persist when using more naturalistic language. However, in contrast to prior studies, there was no significant difference in moral approval, though exploratory analyses of the individual items that make up the composite revealed that participants still preferred generosity as a motive over justice.

Study 5

To further test the robustness of earlier findings and the impact of different approaches to describing donors' virtuous motivations, in Study 5, we assessed perceptions of generosity- and justice-motivated donors when their motivation was communicated using the "accord" phrasing in Studies 1-3 compared to the "values" or "commitment" phrasing used in Study 4. Study 5 was preregistered, and all measures, materials, and analyses are fully reported below and are available on OSF.

Methods

Participants

Similar to Study 4, we recruited 300 U.S.-based participants from Prolific. Two participants were excluded from the analysis for failing the bot check. A sensitivity analysis showed that the final sample of 298 participants provided 80% power to detect an effect size of $d = 0.16$ or greater in a two-tailed within-subjects t-test, or an effect size of $d = 0.40$ or greater in a two-tailed between-subjects t-test with a 5% false-positive rate (Faul et al., 2007).

The sample (ages 18-76, $M_{age} = 41.3$, $SD_{age} = 13.4$) consisted of 143 men, 148 women, five nonbinary participants, two who selected "an identity not listed," and two who did not disclose gender. Two hundred thirteen participants identified White, 25 as Black or African American, 18 as Hispanic or Latina/o/x/e, 17 as Asian or Asian American, one as Indigenous American, American Indian or Alaska Native, 23 as multiracial. One participant indicated their race as "Other," and two participants did not disclose race. One hundred sixty-two participants had a bachelor's or advanced degree. One hundred thirty-nine participants identified as

Democrats, 50 as Republicans, 101 as Independents, and 10 chose not to disclose their political affiliation.

Materials & Procedure

Study 5 replicated Study 4, with one change to further test the impact of different phrasings of donors' virtuous motives on our effects. Participants were randomly assigned to read about the donations and virtuous motives using the "commitment" phrasing from Study 4, the "value" phrasing from Study 4, or the "accordance" phrasing in Studies 1-3. Both donors' virtuous motives were described using the same phrasing.

Results

Perceptions of Donors

We initially examined results collapsed across phrasing. We found that, as in earlier studies, the generosity-motivated donor was seen as significantly more moral, warm, and quicker to give. In contrast, the justice-motivated donor was perceived as significantly more competent and more intent on norm signaling, with no difference in reputation signaling. Similar to Studies 3 and 4, we found no differences between generosity- and justice-motivated donors in judgments of how emotion-driven their giving was. See Table 1 for a summary of model results, Table 2 for full model outputs, and Table 3 for descriptive statistics.

Effect of Vignette Phrasing

To test whether effects depended on how the donor's virtuous motive was described, we added sentence phrasing (accord vs. values vs. commitment) and its interaction with motive

(justice vs. generosity) as fixed effects in mixed-effects models predicting donor evaluations. For most outcomes, sentence phrasing did not significantly affect judgments of donors, nor did its impact differ across virtuous motives. However, for moral approval and emotion-driven outcomes, the *accord* phrasing led to more favorable generosity judgments than either the *value* or *commitment* phrasing, such that the generosity-motivated donor was judged as more moral and more emotion-driven only when the motive was described using the *accord* phrasing. Full model outputs and simple-effects analyses are provided in the Supplemental Materials.

Summary

Study 5 further demonstrated that most effects are robust across distinct phrasings of donors' virtuous motives, while clarifying the impact of using more naturalistic phrasing: it leads people to judge generous donors as less moral and emotion-driven.

Study 6

In Studies 1–5, participants learned about donor motives through third-party descriptions. While this mirrors many real-world situations, such as hearing about a donor's motive from a trusted friend, donors also often communicate their own motives. Whether through "donor walls" on an organization's website, personal conversations, or social media posts, this form of direct self-presentation can leave the authenticity of the expressed motive more ambiguous. In Study 6, we investigated participants' perceptions of generosity- and justice-motivated donors when the donors themselves communicated their motives. Study 6 was preregistered, and all measures, materials, and analyses are fully reported below and are available on OSF.

Methods

Participants

In line with Study 2's power analysis, we recruited 200 U.S.-based participants from Prolific. Two participants were excluded from the analysis for failing the bot check. A sensitivity analysis showed that the final sample of 198 participants provided 80% power to detect an effect size of $d = 0.20$ or greater in a two-tailed within-subjects t-test with a 5% false-positive rate (Faul et al., 2007).

Our sample (ages 21–85, $M_{age} = 42.2$, $SD_{age} = 14.2$) consisted of 98 men, 97 women, two nonbinary participants, and one participant selected "an identity not listed." One hundred fifty-six participants identified as White, 12 identified as Hispanic or Latina/o/x/e, eight as Black or African American, seven as Asian or Asian American, and 12 as multiracial. Three participants did not disclose their race. One hundred ten participants had a bachelor's or advanced degree. One hundred one participants identified as Democrats, 41 as Republicans, 52 as Independents, and four as "Something else."

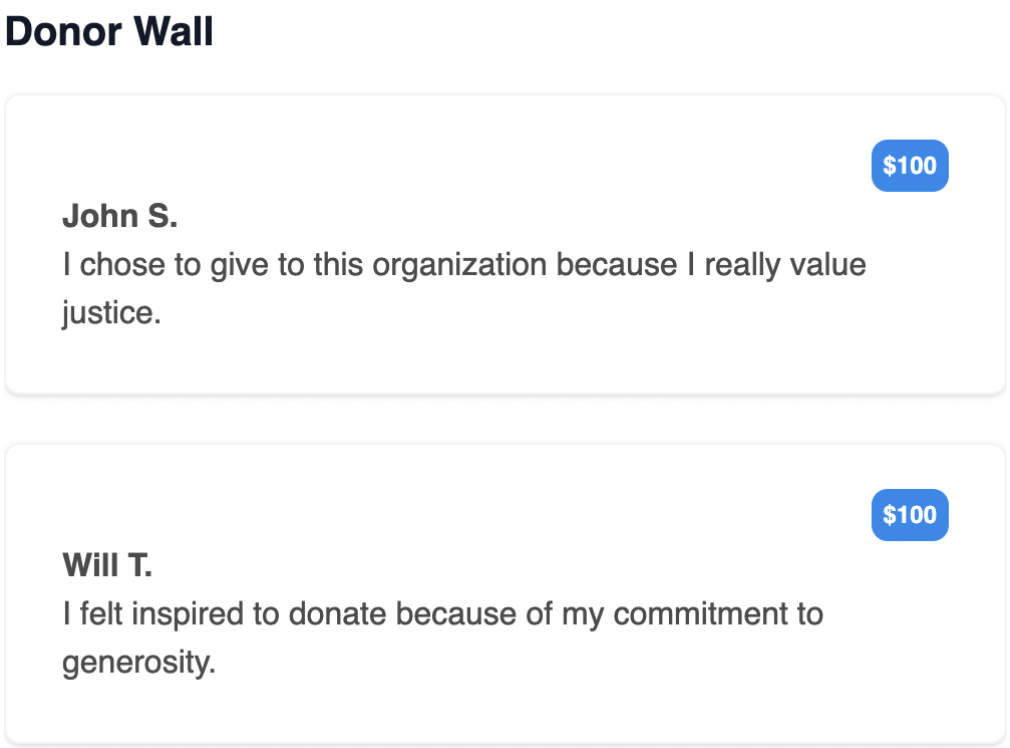
Materials & Procedure

Participants first read an introductory message stating, "On the following pages, you will see a few recent posts from a donation site. Please read them carefully and answer the questions that follow." Participants then viewed an image of a simulated "donor wall" on a donation website; see Figure 1. We used a donor wall to mimic a realistic context in which people encounter strangers' public statements regarding their donations and motives. Additionally, it enabled us to hold the organization donors were giving to constant. To make the donors' posts on

the donor wall appear more authentic, we used the values and commitment language from Study 4 (i.e., “I chose to give to this organization because I really value [virtue]” or “I felt inspired to donate because of my commitment to [virtue]”). Donors’ virtuous motives and the language used to describe each motive were randomized across participants.

Figure 1.

Example Donor Wall



Note. The order of donors and the language describing each donor’s motive were randomized across participants.

Participants then answered the same questions as in Studies 4 and 5 and completed a funnel debriefing protocol to assess whether they doubted the authenticity of the donor wall. We

first asked participants, “Did you notice anything strange about the study?” Participants who responded “no” were directed to the debriefing page, which, in addition to the standard content used in Studies 1-5, included a paragraph stating “**What you should know about this study**: When you began this study, you were told that you were reading messages written by people who had donated to charity. However, these messages were actually generated by the experimenters for the purpose of the study. You were not told this during the study because it was important that your responses were about real donors.” Participants who answered “yes” to the first question were then directed to a question that asked, “Did you believe that the messages from the donors were real?” After answering this question, they viewed the same debriefing page.

Results

Perceptions of Donors

When donors shared about their virtuous motive, generosity-motivated donors were seen as significantly less moral, competent, emotion-driven, and less intent on norm signaling. Additionally, they were judged higher on reputation signaling. There were no differences in perceptions of donors’ warmth or speed of giving. See Table 1 for a summary of model results, Table 2 for full model outputs, and Table 3 for descriptive statistics.

Perceived Political Orientation of the Donor

Perceptions of donor political ideology did not differ by motive condition (b = -0.16, SE = 0.15, $t(197)$ = -1.01, p = .31, 95% CI [–0.46, 0.15]; justice-motivated: M = 3.8, SD = 1.7; generosity-motivated: M = 3.6, SD = 1.4).

Effect of Vignette Phrasing

To test whether effects depended on how the donor's virtuous motive was described, we added sentence phrasing (value vs. commitment) and its interaction with the donor's virtuous motive (justice vs. generosity) as fixed effects in our mixed models predicting donor evaluations. Across outcomes, sentence phrasing had no significant impact on judgments of donors, and there was no evidence that its effect differed across virtuous motives.

Summary

Study 6 demonstrated that when donors shared about their donation and underlying virtuous motive, many of the effects found when donors' motives were stipulated disappeared or even reversed. When donors communicated their motives, participants judged justice-motivated donors as more moral and emotion-driven than generosity-motivated donors, reversing previous findings. Participants also now judged both donors as equally warm and quick to give and saw generosity-motivated donors as more intent on improving their reputation. Participants continued to perceive justice-motivated donors as more competent and more intent on norm signaling. Overall, Study 6 reveals that the inferences people make from a donor's virtuous motive depend on the source of that information.

Study 7

Studies 1–6 demonstrated that participants form impressions of donors based on the virtuous motive driving them to giving, and that these impressions depend on whether those motives are communicated by a third party or by the donor themselves. However, these studies were conducted separately, with different participant cohorts. In Study 7, we replicated and

directly compared these two modes of communication within the same participant cohort. Study 7 was preregistered, and all measures, materials, and analyses are fully reported below and are available on OSF.

Methods

Participants

To provide additional power to measure the between-subjects effect of the source sharing about the donor's motives, we aimed to recruit 400 participants. We ultimately recruited 398 U.S.-based participants from Prolific. Five failed the bot check, leaving us with a final sample of 393 participants. A sensitivity analysis showed that the final sample of 393 participants provided 80% power to detect an effect size of $d = 0.16$ or greater in a two-tailed within-subjects t-test, and an effect size of $d = 0.28$ or greater in a two-tailed between-subjects t-test with a 5% false-positive rate (Faul et al., 2007).

The sample (ages 19-77, $M_{age} = 40.5$, $SD_{age} = 13.7$) consisted of 195 men, 190 women, seven nonbinary participants, and one participant who did not disclose their gender. Two hundred sixty-eight participants identified as White, 35 as Black or African American, 25 as Asian or Asian American, 24 as Hispanic or Latina/o/x/e, two Indigenous American, American Indian, or Alaska Native participants, and 33 as multiracial. Six participants did not disclose their race. Two hundred twenty-three participants had a bachelor's or advanced degree. One hundred eighty participants identified as Democrats, 77 as Republicans, 122 as Independents, and 11 as "Something else". Three participants did not disclose their political affiliation.

Materials & Procedure

Study 7 used a between-subjects design to compare third- and first-person descriptions of donors' donations and virtuous motives. Participants were randomly assigned to either a first-person condition, which was a direct replication of Study 6, or a third-person condition. In the third-person condition, participants viewed a paradigm similar to Study 4, which used the same naturalistic language as Study 6. To further match the two conditions, each donor in the third-person condition was described using one of the two naturalistic phrasings (values or commitment), with phrasing assigned randomly, such that each donor was described using a distinct phrasing.

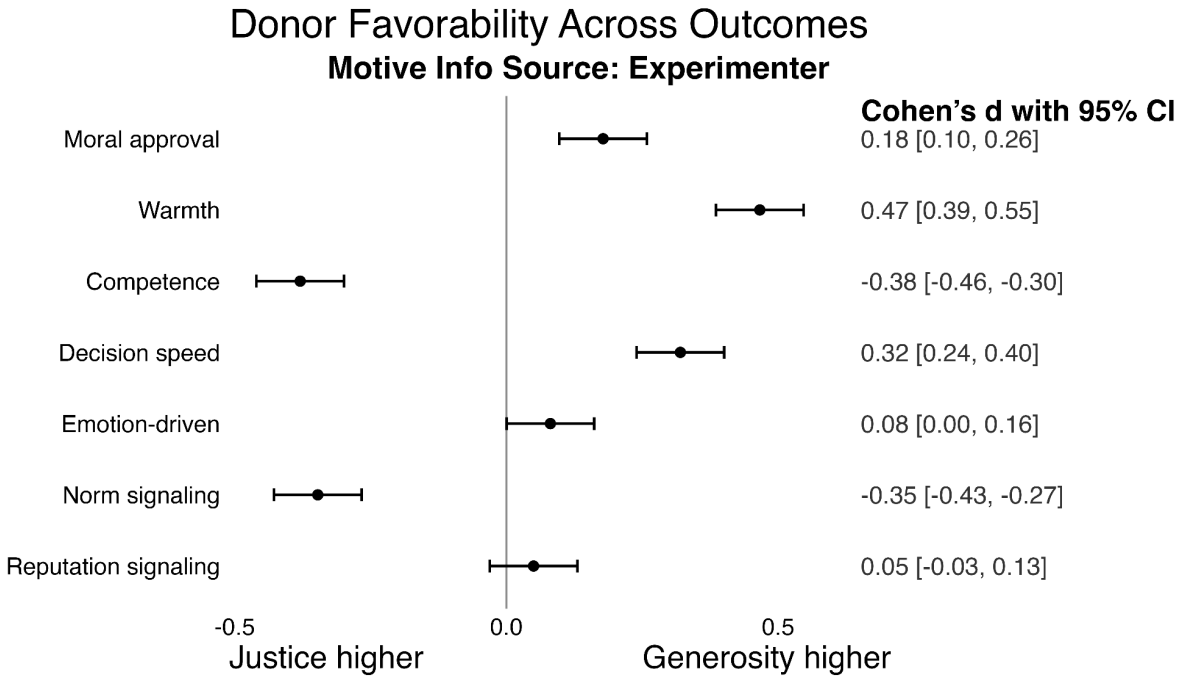
Studies 4-5: Same language for donors	John decided to donate $100 to a local organization. He felt inspired to donate because of his commitment to **justice**. Will decided to donate $100 to a local organization. He felt inspired to donate because of his commitment to **generosity**.
Study 6: Different language for donors	John decided to donate $100 to a local organization. He chose to give to this organization because he really values **justice**. Will decided to donate $100 to a local organization. He felt inspired to donate because of his commitment to **generosity**.

Participants then evaluated donors using the same questions as in Study 4 (third-person condition) or Study 6 (first-person condition) and received the same debriefing procedures as in those studies.

Results

Figure 2

Donor Favorability Across Outcomes When the Experimenter stipulates Donors' Virtuous Motives.

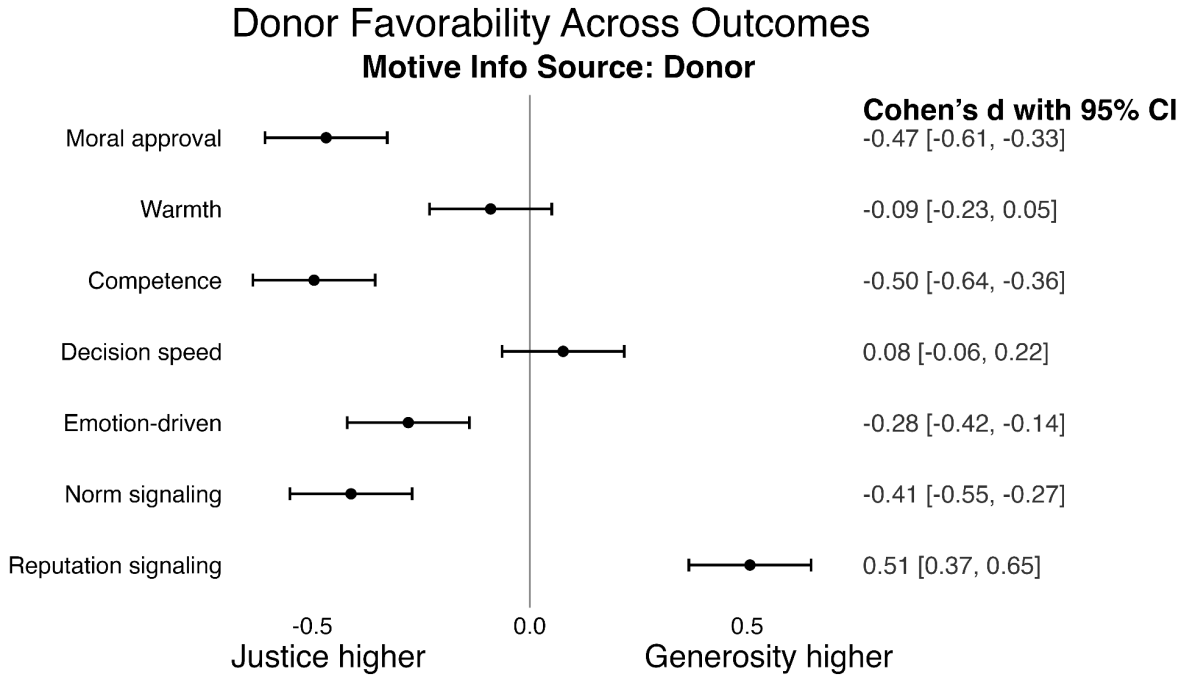


Note. This figure shows whether donors were judged more highly on the respective outcome when their virtuous motive was justice (left of the vertical line) or generosity (right of the vertical line). Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Higher values for reputation signaling reflect more negative judgments.

Figure 3

Donor Favorability Across Outcomes When Donors Communicate Their Virtuous Motive.

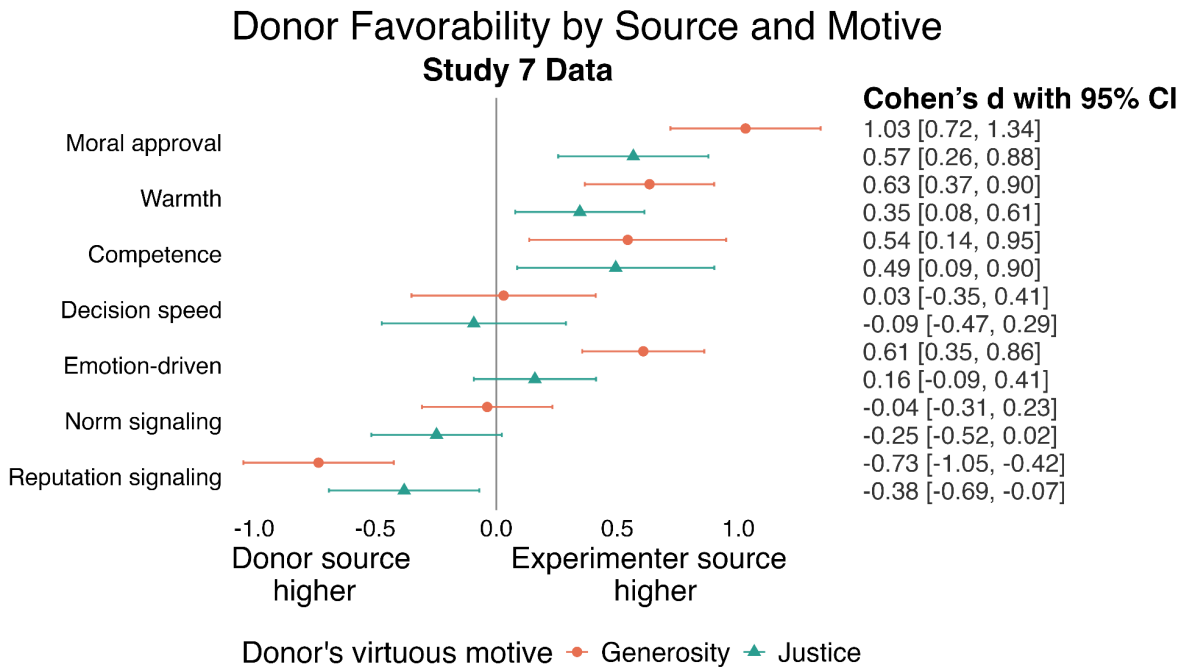


Note. This figure shows whether donors were judged more highly on the respective outcome when their virtuous motive was justice (left of the vertical line) or generosity (right of the vertical line). Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Higher values for reputation signaling reflect more negative judgments.

Figure 4

Donor Favorability Across Outcomes by Source of Information About Donors' Virtuous Motive and Donors' Virtuous Motive.



Note. This figure shows whether generosity- and justice-motivated donors were judged more highly on the respective outcome when the source of information about their motive was the donor themselves (left of the vertical line) or the experimenter (right of the vertical line). Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Higher values for reputation signaling reflect more negative judgments.

Perception of Donors

Experimenter-Shared Motive

When the experimenter shared donors' virtuous motive, generosity-motivated donors were seen as significantly warmer and quicker to give. In contrast, justice-motivated donors were seen as more competent and intent on norm signaling, replicating Studies 2 through 5. We also found no difference in perceptions of how emotion-driven each donor was, similar to Studies 3–5, and no difference in perceptions of morality, consistent with Study 4, which also used the

"value" and "commit" language. See Table 1 for a summary of model results, Table 2 for full model outputs, and Table 3 for descriptive statistics.

Donor-Shared Motive

When donors communicated their own virtuous motive, we replicated the results of Study 6. Justice-motivated donors were seen as significantly more moral, warm, competent, emotion-driven, and more intent on norm signaling. In contrast, generosity-motivated donors were seen as significantly more intent on reputation signaling. There was no difference in perceptions of how warm donors were or how quickly they gave. See Table 1 for a summary of model results, Table 2 for full model outputs, and Table 3 for descriptive statistics.

Effect of Virtuous Motive Information Source

Across virtuous motives, donors were discounted when they communicated about both their donation and their underlying virtuous motive. Compared to when donors' gifts and motives were disclosed by a third party, donors who shared about the same information were judged as significantly less moral, warm, competent, and as more intent on reputation signaling. This discounting was not uniform across virtuous motives: generosity-motivated donors were discounted more than justice-motivated donors on perceptions of morality, warmth, emotionality (such that only generosity-motivated donors were seen as less emotion-driven when they shared about their own motive), and reputation signaling. Full model outputs and simple-effects analyses are provided in the Supplemental Materials.

Summary

Study 7 replicated key findings from earlier studies and clarified how, and to what extent, donors are discounted for sharing their own virtuous motives. Consistent with Studies 1–5, when a trusted source shared information about a donor's motive, generosity-motivated donors were perceived as warmer and quicker to give, whereas justice-motivated donors were judged as more competent and more engaged in norm signaling. As in Studies 4 and 5, using the "commitment" / "value" language to describe a donor's motive led to nonsignificant differences in participants' moral approval of generosity- and justice-motivated donors, and judgments of how emotion-driven these donors were.

When donors communicated their own motive, we replicated Study 6: justice-motivated donors were seen as more moral, competent, emotion-driven, and intent on norm signaling. Conversely, generosity-motivated donors were seen as more intent on reputation signaling, and no differences were found between donors on warmth or decision speed.

Study 7 also revealed that regardless of a donor's virtuous motive, they are discounted for communicating their own donation and virtuous motive. Compared to when their motive was stipulated, donors who shared about their virtuous motive were seen as less moral, warm, competent, and as more engaged in reputation signaling. This penalty is harsher for generosity-motivated donors: they receive a heavier discount on judgments of warmth, moral approval, reputation signaling, and emotionality. Overall, Study 7 demonstrated the robustness of many earlier effects and revealed the penalty donors experience when communicating their virtuous motive.

General Discussion

Across seven studies, we investigated how people evaluate prosocial actors who engage in the same behavior (donating to charity) when that behavior is driven by different virtuous motives: generosity or justice. When the experimenter stipulated donors' virtuous motives, participants judged generosity-motivated donors as more moral, warmer, and quicker to give. Conversely, participants saw justice-motivated donors as more competent and more intent on motivating others to engage in the same behavior (*norm signaling*). Perceptions of donors' political identity did not drive these differences, and, aside from moral approval, the effects persisted across variations in how motives and behaviors were described. When donors communicated their motives, raising doubts about authenticity, generosity-motivated donors were judged as less moral, less competent, less emotion-driven, less intent on norm-signaling, and more intent on reputation signaling. Moreover, participants judged donors more harshly for communicating their virtuous motive regardless of the specific motive. Donors who communicated their virtuous motive were seen as less moral, warm, competent, and more intent on improving their reputation (*reputation signaling*). This discounting was especially strong for generosity-motivated donors: compared to justice-motivated donors, generosity-motivated donors were seen as less moral, less competent, less emotion-driven, less engaged in norm signaling, and more engaged in reputation signaling.

The Communicative Function of Virtuous Motives

Through investigating perceptions of generosity- and justice-driven donations, the present work reveals that people differentiate between virtuous motives and use them to make distinct and robust inferences about prosocial actors' character, behavior, and intent, even for *identical*

prosocial actions. Notably, when a trusted third party communicates donors' virtuous motives, the broad inferences people draw align with patterns found in prior work on perceptions of prosocial actors. For example, both in the present study and in previous work, prosocial actors who appear quick to act are perceived as warmer and more moral, whereas deliberative actors are seen as more competent (Critcher et al., 2013; Jordan et al., 2016; Rom et al., 2017). Judgments of warmth and morality have also been shown to be closely linked: the two have a moderate-to-strong correlation (Goodwin et al., 2014), and measures for both are composed of overlapping traits (Fiske et al., 2007). Conversely, competence and morality are weakly negatively correlated (Goodwin et al., 2014), and particularly impartial (i.e., justice-motivated) prosocial actors, such as effective altruists and utilitarians, are judged as more competent, but less warm and moral (Everett et al., 2018; Montealegre et al., 2025; Rom et al., 2017).

That people make systematic inferences across multiple trait dimensions when learning about a donor's virtuous motive suggests these motives and traits function as cues for a shared social purpose: signaling how cooperative someone is. Existing work already argues that moral judgments reflect perceptions of others' willingness to cooperate, and that warmth and spontaneity are not only interpreted as signals that someone is particularly cooperative but are actually linked to greater cooperation (Evans & Rand, 2019; Jordan et al., 2016; Li et al., 2025). In line with this social function, people judge the donor motivated by generosity, a virtue that is often associated with costly signals of one's willingness to cooperate (Barclay & Willer, 2007; Curry et al., 2016), as more moral, warm, and spontaneous.

One part of the present work that did not fully align with this account that virtuous motives communicate prosocial actors' willingness to cooperate is perceptions of how emotion-

driven the donors were. Emotion-driven prosocial actors are both perceived as, and tend to be, more cooperative (Barasch et al., 2014; Levine et al., 2018). However, we did not find a consistent difference in perceptions of how emotion-driven generosity- and justice-motivated donors were when third parties described their motives. This may be because of the specific prosocial action we studied. Donating is often an emotion-driven act (Huber et al., 2011), which may have led people to perceive donors as emotion-driven regardless of the specific virtuous motive compelling donors to give.

The Costs of Communicating One's Virtuous Motive

The present findings suggest virtuous motives signal different information when donors communicate their own virtuous motives. Donors who communicate their own virtuous motives are judged more harshly on multiple trait dimensions than when identical information is communicated by a third party. This penalty is particularly pronounced for generosity-motivated donors, who are discounted so heavily that they are evaluated less favorably than justice-motivated donors. Although these patterns reflect a reversal of perceptions under conditions of relative certainty about donors' motives, they align with prior research on the social consequences of publicly signaling prosocial behavior.

Public prosociality, including sharing about one's prosocial behaviors, raises suspicions that the actor is motivated by self-interest (Berman et al., 2015; Kraft-Todd, 2023a; Siem & Stürmer, 2019), a motive people disapprove of and punish (Berman et al., 2015; Carlson & Zaki, 2018; Newman & Cain, 2014; Lin-Healy & Small, 2013). Prior work also finds that people are especially suspicious of public generosity: prosocial actors engaging in prototypically generous behaviors are discounted more than those engaging in prototypically just behaviors (Kraft-Todd,

2023b). The present work suggests that this differential discounting is not driven by differences in the behaviors themselves, but the social meaning of the virtuous motives underlying them. Specifically, people may suspect that the actor knows generosity is praised particularly positively (Kraft-Todd et al., 2023a, 2023b) and is strategically communicating a generosity motive for reputational gain. In line with this, in both real-world vignettes and economic games, people will pay costs to avoid cooperating with unusually generous partners when their generosity is unexplained, inferring that the partner is motivated by self-interest (Hennig-Schmidt et al., 2008; Vonasch et al., 2024).

People's heightened suspicion towards generosity-motivated donors who share about their virtuous motive may help explain why some effects observed when a third party communicated motives did not replicate when using more naturalistic language. The goal of using more naturalistic language was to better reflect how donors describe their motives in real-world contexts. In achieving this aim, however, the third-party descriptions may have come across as less objective and factual, and potentially sourced from the donors themselves, inviting suspicion that the motive was not truly authentic. The suspicion introduced by this phrasing change may have detracted from positive perceptions of generosity-motivated donors.

Motivating Donors to Tell Others About Their Donations

The present work's findings on perceptions of donors who share about their own virtuous motives also offer insight into how organizations and practitioners can encourage this behavior. Donors who talk about their giving with others can inspire additional donations, an impact that may be amplified when donors share about their virtuous motives (Grodeck & Schoenegger, 2023; Silver & Small, 2024). Yet, as shown in the present work and prior research, sharing about

one's giving can lead others to perceive donors as reputation-driven, a concern that inhibits many donors from discussing their donation with others (Berman et al., 2015; Bolderdijk & Cornelissen, 2022). Recent work finds that some donors can still be motivated to talk about their giving despite these reputational costs if they are informed that their sharing will inspire others to donate (Silver & Small, 2024). But the present work suggests a complementary approach that may further encourage donors to share about their giving. Since donors are often motivated to give by both generosity and justice (*Understanding Donors' Motivations for Giving*, 2009), organizations and practitioners can recommend that donors frame their donations as driven by justice, rather than generosity. Doing so reduces the negative social consequences of sharing about their donation and may even increase this disclosure's ability to inspire others to give. Justice-motivated donors who communicate their own motive, compared to the motive being shared about by a third-party, are perceived as marginally more engaged in norm signaling, which is associated with observers' holding stronger beliefs that the behavior is normative and stronger intentions to engage in the same behavior themselves (Kodipady et al., 2023).

Limitations & Future Directions

There are multiple steps future work can take to further contextualize our findings. One step is introducing a donor without an explicit virtuous motive. This condition can clarify whether people infer that a donor has generosity or justice motives in the absence of explicit motive information, and how much of the reputational costs donors incur when sharing about their giving stems from talking about the donation itself rather than sharing one's virtuous motive. This approach may even reveal that sharing a virtuous motive is actually reputationally beneficial.

Another informative direction is to investigate judgments of donors motivated by both generosity and justice, a combination that reflects many donors' actual motives (*Understanding Donors' Motivations for Giving*, 2009). Prior work suggests people may view donors driven by both virtues particularly positively. For example, donors who deliberate before giving are seen as less moral but more competent than those who give impulsively out of empathy (Montealegre et al., 2025). By contrast, a donor who first feels strong empathy, then deliberates, is seen as both moral and competent (Montealegre et al., 2025). However, this work has not yet explored how such donors are perceived when they publicly share about their giving. In this context, observers may be especially skeptical of donors who say they are motivated by both generosity and justice and judge them more harshly, because they see the act of broadcasting two virtuous motives as particularly reputation driven.

Future research can explore how observers' identities shape perceptions of donors motivated by justice versus generosity. For example, younger adults are increasingly supportive of mutual aid organizations (Hasan, 2024), with three-fourths preferring mutual-aid style direct-to-victim giving over giving to traditional charities (compared to less than half of older adults) (GivingTuesday, 2022). This trend suggests that younger adults may prefer justice-motivated donors and, in turn, express harsher attitudes towards donors they suspect of sharing inauthentic justice motives. Donor identity may also shape responses to generosity and justice motives for giving. When donors occupy social roles where impartiality or competence is especially prized, such as workplace superiors (Shaw et al., 2018) or hospital administrators (Rom et al., 2017), people may actually prefer that they are motivated by justice, the virtue they wish for these individuals to authentically hold in their social roles.

Future work can investigate whether people are threatened by justice-motivated donors, which may provide a complementary explanation for why people prefer authentically generosity-motivated donors. The present findings suggest that justice-motivated donors may elicit threat at both interpersonal and systemic levels. Interpersonally, justice-motivated donors are seen as expecting others to conform to their behavior, a perception that can provoke defensive and punitive responses (Herrmann et al., 2008; Monin, Sawyer, & Marquez, 2008; Minson & Monin, 2012). At the system level, participants' definitions of justice in the context of donating suggest that people associate a justice motive with structural change, such as achieving equality and addressing social issues. These goals may appear threatening because they challenge the legitimacy or fairness of existing systems and social hierarchies (Jost et al., 2004; Sidanius et al., 2004). When donors share about their own giving, the threat posed by the justice-motivated donors may be outweighed by people's disdain for prosocial actors seeking reputational gain.

Conclusion

The present research demonstrates that people make widely different inferences about prosocial actors based on differences in the motives underlying the same prosocial actions. Examining these judgments suggests that people use virtuous motives as cues for assessing the prosocial actor's character. Moreover, testing how these judgments are shaped by the source of information about a donor's motive—a third party or the donor themselves—helps clarify the social consequences of public prosociality. Specifically, our finding that justice-motivated donors are discounted less than generosity-motivated donors points to a novel strategy for organizations and practitioners seeking to encourage donors to share about their giving with others. Together, the present findings highlight how nuanced differences in motives shape social

judgments and open avenues for future approaches to moral psychology that reflect the richly contextualized nature of everyday social evaluation.

Open Practices

All preregistrations, materials, and data can be accessed at https://osf.io/z6xhn/overview?view_only=d64307266299404cb9b79a31b7d5f06e.

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Table 2.

Full Model Results

Study	Source	Outcome	*b*	*SE*	*df*	*t*	*p*	*d [95% CI]*
2	Experi-menter	Moral Approval	0.16	0.05	200	3.06	.003	0.31 [0.11, 0.52]
		Warmth	0.23	0.05	200	4.35	<.001	0.43 [0.24, 0.63]
		Competence	-0.12	0.03	200	-3.74	<.001	-0.35 [-0.55, -0.15]
		Decision Speed	0.15	0.06	200	2.71	.007	0.27 [0.07, 0.47]
		Emotion-Driven	0.18	0.09	200	2.01	.046	0.20 [0.004, 0.40]
		Norm Signaling	-0.20	0.09	200	-2.22	.027	-0.22 [-0.42, -0.02]
		Reputation Signaling	-0.12	0.10	200	-1.24	.218	-0.12 [-0.32, 0.07]
3	Experi-menter	Moral Approval	0.19	0.06	198	3.46	<.001	0.35 [0.15, 0.55]
		Warmth	0.36	0.06	198	6.22	<.001	0.62 [0.42, 0.83]
		Competence	-0.17	0.03	198	-5.17	<.001	-0.52 [-0.72, -0.32]
		Decision Speed	0.13	0.06	198	2.09	.038	0.21 [0.01, 0.41]
		Emotion-Driven	0.06	0.09	198	0.64	.525	0.06 [-0.13, 0.26]
		Norm Signaling	-0.47	0.08	198	-5.55	<.001	-0.56 [-0.76, -0.36]
		Reputation Signaling	-0.07	0.09	198	-0.70	.485	-0.07 [-0.27, 0.13]
4	Experi-	Moral Approval	0.07	0.05	299	1.47	.142	0.12 [-0.04, 0.28]

	menter	Warmth	0.27	0.05	299	5.42	<.001	0.44 [0.28, 0.60]
		Competence	-0.13	0.03	299	-4.09	<.001	-0.33 [-0.50, -0.17]
		Decision Speed	0.24	0.04	299	5.24	<.001	0.43 [0.27, 0.59]
		Emotion-Driven	-0.01	0.07	299	-0.15	.885	-0.01 [-0.17, 0.14]
		Norm Signaling	-0.26	0.07	299	-3.74	<.001	-0.31 [-0.47, -0.14]
		Reputation Signaling	0.14	0.07	299	1.9	.053	0.16 [-0.002, 0.32]
5	Experi-menter	Moral Approval	0.11	0.04	297	2.54	.01	0.21 [0.05, 0.37]
		Warmth	0.33	0.05	297	7.07	<.001	0.58 [0.41, 0.74]
		Competence	-0.07	0.03	297	-2.22	.03	-0.18 [-0.34, -0.02]
		Decision Speed	0.19	0.04	297	4.85	<.001	0.40 [0.23, 0.56]
		Emotion-Driven	0.05	0.06	297	0.73	.47	0.05 [-0.11, 0.21]
		Norm Signaling	-0.32	0.07	297	-4.83	<.001	-0.40 [-0.56, -0.23]
		Reputation Signaling	0.04	0.07	297	0.65	.52	0.05 [-0.11, 0.21]
6	Donor	Moral Approval	-0.23	0.06	197	-4.08	<.001	-0.41 [-0.61, -0.21]
		Warmth	-0.06	0.06	197	-0.99	.32	-0.10 [-0.30, 0.10]
		Competence	-0.18	0.04	197	-4.32	<.001	-0.43 [-0.63, -0.23]
		Decision Speed	0.04	0.06	197	0.57	.57	0.06 [-0.14, 0.26]
		Emotion-Driven	-0.25	0.09	197	-2.70	.008	-0.27 [-0.46, -0.07]

		Norm Signaling	-0.31	0.07	197	-3.99	<.001	-0.40 [-0.60, -0.20]
		Reputation Signaling	0.40	0.08	197	4.77	<.001	0.48 [0.28, 0.68]
7	Experi-menter	Moral Approval	-0.04	0.05	196	-0.80	.42	-0.08 [-0.28, 0.11]
		Warmth	0.13	0.06	196	2.04	.04	0.21 [0.01, 0.40]
		Competence	-0.18	0.03	196	-6.10	<.001	-0.61 [-0.82, -0.41]
		Decision Speed	0.11	0.05	196	1.99	.05	0.20 [0.001, 0.40]
		Emotion-Driven	0.11	0.07	196	1.50	.14	0.15 [-0.04, 0.35]
		Norm Signaling	-0.20	0.08	196	-2.50	.01	-0.25 [-0.45, -0.05]
		Reputation Signaling	0.15	0.08	196	1.77	.08	0.18 [-0.02, 0.38]
	Donor	Moral Approval	-0.29	0.06	195	-5.22	<.001	-0.53 [-0.73, -0.32]
		Warmth	-0.05	0.06	195	-0.80	.43	-0.08 [-0.28, 0.12]
		Competence	-0.20	0.04	195	-5.53	<.001	-0.56 [-0.76, -0.36]
		Decision Speed	0.05	0.05	195	0.95	.34	0.10 [-0.10, 0.30]
		Emotion-Driven	-0.25	0.09	195	-2.85	.005	-0.29 [-0.49, -0.09]
		Norm Signaling	-0.38	0.09	195	-4.17	<.001	-0.42 [-0.62, -0.22]
		Reputation Signaling	0.44	0.08	195	5.28	<.001	0.53 [0.33, 0.74]

Note. The justice virtuous motive is the referent condition for these analyses. For reputation signaling, higher scores indicate less favorable evaluations of donors.

Table 3.

Means and Standard Deviations for Donor Perception Outcomes by Motive and Source

Study	Source	Outcome	Virtuous Motive	M	SD
2	Experimenter	Moral Approval	Generosity	4.3	0.7
			Justice	4.1	0.8
		Warmth	Generosity	4.0	0.8
			Justice	3.7	0.8
		Competence	Generosity	3.7	0.7
			Justice	3.9	0.7
		Decision Speed	Generosity	2.9	1.1
			Justice	2.8	1.0
		Emotion-Driven	Generosity	3.9	1.0
			Justice	3.7	1.1
		Norm Signaling	Generosity	3.3	1.3
			Justice	3.5	1.4
		Reputation Signaling	Generosity	2.5	1.3
			Justice	2.7	1.4
3	Experimenter	Moral	Generosity	4.3	0.7

		Approval	Justice	4.1	0.8
		Warmth	Generosity	4.1	0.7
			Justice	3.7	0.8
		Competence	Generosity	3.8	0.7
			Justice	4.0	0.7
		Decision Speed	Generosity	3.0	1.0
			Justice	2.9	1.0
		Emotion-Driven	Generosity	3.9	1.1
			Justice	3.9	1.0
		Norm Signaling	Generosity	3.3	1.2
			Justice	3.8	1.2
		Reputation Signaling	Generosity	2.5	1.3
			Justice	2.6	1.3
4	Experimenter	Moral Approval	Generosity	4.1	0.8
			Justice	4.1	0.9
		Warmth	Generosity	4.0	0.8
			Justice	3.7	0.9
		Competence	Generosity	3.7	0.7
			Justice	3.9	0.7

		Decision Speed	Generosity	2.9	1.1
			Justice	2.7	1.0
		Emotion-Driven	Generosity	3.8	1.0
			Justice	3.8	1.0
		Norm Signaling	Generosity	3.4	1.3
			Justice	3.6	1.3
		Reputation Signaling	Generosity	2.8	1.4
			Justice	2.7	1.3
5	Experimenter	Moral Approval	Generosity	4.2	0.7
			Justice	4.1	0.9
		Warmth	Generosity	4.0	0.7
			Justice	3.7	0.8
		Competence	Generosity	3.7	0.7
			Justice	3.8	0.8
		Decision Speed	Generosity	2.9	1.0
			Justice	2.7	1.0
		Emotion-Driven	Generosity	3.8	1.0
			Justice	3.8	1.1
		Norm	Generosity	3.3	1.3

		Signaling	Justice	3.6	1.2
		Reputation Signaling	Generosity	2.5	1.4
			Justice	2.5	1.3
6	Donor	Moral Approval	Generosity	3.6	1.1
			Justice	3.9	1.1
		Warmth	Generosity	3.5	0.9
			Justice	3.6	0.9
		Competence	Generosity	3.5	0.8
			Justice	3.7	0.8
		Decision Speed	Generosity	3.0	1.0
			Justice	2.9	0.9
		Emotion-Driven	Generosity	3.4	1.1
			Justice	3.7	1.0
		Norm Signaling	Generosity	3.4	1.1
			Justice	3.8	1.1
		Reputation Signaling	Generosity	3.3	1.4
			Justice	2.9	1.4
7	Experimenter	Moral Approval	Generosity	4.1	0.8
			Justice	4.1	0.8

		Warmth	Generosity	3.9	0.8
			Justice	3.8	0.8
		Competence	Generosity	3.7	0.6
			Justice	3.9	0.6
		Decision Speed	Generosity	2.9	1.1
			Justice	2.8	1.1
		Emotion-Driven	Generosity	3.9	1.0
			Justice	3.8	1.0
		Norm Signaling	Generosity	3.4	1.2
			Justice	3.6	1.2
		Reputation Signaling	Generosity	2.6	1.4
			Justice	2.5	1/3
	Donor	Moral Approval	Generosity	3.5	0.9
			Justice	3.8	0.8
		Warmth	Generosity	3.5	0.9
			Justice	3.6	0.8
		Competence	Generosity	3.5	0.7
			Justice	3.7	0.7
		Decision	Generosity	2.9	0.9

		Speed	Justice	2.9	0.9
		Emotion-Driven	Generosity	3.4	1.1
			Justice	3.7	1.0
		Norm Signaling	Generosity	3.4	1.2
			Justice	3.8	1.1
		Reputation Signaling	Generosity	3.2	1.2
			Justice	2.8	0.9

Note. Values are rounded to one decimal place. For reputation signaling, higher scores indicate less favorable evaluations of donors.

Supplemental Materials

Pilot Study

We conducted a pilot study to explore whether people perceive differences between donors motivated by generosity versus justice. This study informed the measures used in Study 1.

Method

Participants

We recruited 200 U.S. participants from Prolific. After excluding participants who failed attention checks (36% of the sample), the final sample we analyzed included 129 participants (ages 18–83, $M_{age} = 35.3$, $SD_{age} = 11.9$). The sample included 68 men, 59 women, and 1 participant identifying as nonbinary or other.

Design & Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to view one of two sets of 16 vignettes. Each vignette described a male donor who gave $100 to a local organization. The charities were drawn from real Boston-area nonprofits (though not described as such) and covered a range of common causes, such as homelessness, hunger relief, and environmental protection.

In each condition, eight vignettes featured a donor motivated by generosity and eight featured a donor motivated by justice. The donor's motive was expressed using a standardized sentence structure (e.g., "He made this donation because he wanted to act in accordance with his value of generosity/justice.") Vignettes were counterbalanced across the two conditions, such

that each charity and donor name appeared equally often with each virtuous motive across the full sample.

After each vignette, participants rated the donor on a set of items capturing perceived character, intent, and self-image:

Character Measures

- I think [donor] is genuine.
- I think [donor] is moral.
- I think [donor] is praiseworthy.
- I approve of [donor]'s motivation for donating.
- I think I am similar to [donor].
- I would like [donor] as a friend.

Intent Measures

Was [donor] motivated to donate to this cause because…

- …he wanted to help address the issue at hand?
- …he wanted to provide resources to those who need them?
- …he felt like he needed to fulfill an obligation?
- …he wanted to go above and beyond?
- …he believed it would improve his reputation?
- …he believed his peers would think more highly of him?
- …he wanted to signal to others that it is important?
- …he wanted to signal to others that it is the right thing to do?

Donor's Self-Image

- I think [donor] thinks he is moral.

- I think [donor] thinks he is praiseworthy.
- I think [donor] would like me as a friend.

Exclusion Criteria

We included an attention check prior to assigning participants to a condition. Participants read a vignette similar to the ones they would encounter later in the study. At the end of the vignette, they were instructed: *"When asked whether you think [the donor] is caring, please answer strongly disagree."*

Immediately afterward, they responded to the item: *"I think [the donor] is caring,"* using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree). Participants who did not select "Strongly disagree" were excluded from the analyses.

Results

All models were estimated using linear mixed-effects regressions with random intercepts and slopes for condition by participant and vignette. In some cases, random slopes could not be reliably estimated due to a singular fit. In these cases, we retained random intercepts only.

Participants saw the generosity-motivated donor as marginally more praiseworthy, b = 0.09, SE = 0.05, $t(68.88) = 1.91$, $p = .060$, and more motivated by a desire to go above and beyond, $b = 0.13$, $SE = 0.04$, $t(23.89) = 3.15$, $p = .004$. Conversely, participants perceived justice-motivated donors as more motivated by a sense of obligation, $b = 0.14$, $SE = 0.04$, $t(128) = 3.18$, $p = .002$, and a desire to signal to others that addressing the issue is important, $b = 0.12$, $SE = 0.05$, $t(36.42) = 2.49$, $p = .018$, and the right thing to do, $b = 0.15$, $SE = 0.04$, $t(29.21) = 3.56$, $p = .001$. All other outcomes were non-significant.

Discussion

This pilot study provided initial evidence that participants make distinct inferences about donors' character and intent based on the virtue motivating their prosocial behavior. Justice-motivated donors were seen as more duty-bound and norm signaling, whereas generosity-motivated donors were perceived as going above and beyond and marginally more praiseworthy. These distinctions informed the measures we used in Study 1.

Study 1

Natural Language Processing Results

Table S1.

Most Frequently Used in Participants' Open-Ended Responses, By Virtuous Motive

Virtuous Motive	**Generosity**		**Justice**	
	Word	**Count**	**Word**	**Count**
	Giving	34	Fairness	25
	Heart	14	Organization	13
	Money	13	Wrong	9
	Sharing	13	Feels	8
	Feel(s)	12	People	8
	Kindness	9	Social	8

	Return	8	Equality	7
	Person	7	Giving	7
	Act	6	Donated	5
	Expecting	5	Law	5
	Freely	5	Money	5
			Support	5

Note. Only includes words used in at least 5 participants' definitions.

Study 2

Measures

Table S2

Study 2 through 7 Primary Outcomes

Norm signaling	How much was each donor motivated to donate because he wanted to signal to others that it is **important** and **right**?
Reputation signaling	How much was each donor motivated to donate because he believed it would improve his **reputation** and make his peers think **more highly** of him?

Approval	Whose motivation for donating do you **approve of** more?
Genuine	Who do you think is more **genuine**?
Moral	How much do you think each donor is **moral**?
Deliberate	How much did each donor donate **deliberately**?
Spontaneous	How much did each donor donate **spontaneously**?
Emotion	How much did each donor donate based on **feelings and emotions**?
Logic	How much did each donor donate based on **logical reasoning**?
Quick	How much did each donor decide to donate **very quickly**?
Slow	How much did each donor **take a long time** to decide before donating?

Warm	How **warm** is each donor?
Good-natured	How **good-natured** is each donor?
Tolerant	How **tolerant** is each donor?
Sincere	How **sincere** is each donor?
Competent	How **competent** is each donor?
Confident	How **confident** is each donor?
Independent	How **independent** is each donor?
Competitive	How **competitive** is each donor?
Intelligent	How **intelligent** is each donor?

Note. The Norm Signaling, Approval, and Genuine measures are identical to Study 1. All outcomes are on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (Not at all) to 5 (Very Much).

Exploratory Factor Analysis Results

We performed an exploratory factor analysis using maximum-likelihood extraction and promax (oblique) rotation in the factanal function of Base R. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure indicated sampling adequacy (KMO = .85), and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant, $\chi^2(190) = 2524.26$, $p < .001$, suggesting the data were suitable for factor analysis. Parallel analysis and eigenvalues supported a six-factor solution, which explained 45% of variance in our outcome measures (SS loadings = 2.09, 1.89, 1.75, 1.26, 1.18, 0.84). Pattern loadings for the retained model are presented in Table S3 (loadings < .30 suppressed).

The factors were interpreted as follows: Factor 1 (Warmth), Factor 2 (Competence), Factor 3 (Moral Approval/Genuineness), Factor 4 (Signaling), Factor 5 (Decision Speed), and Factor 6 (Emotion). Two items ("Slow," "Deliberate") failed to meet the loading cutoff and were excluded from subsequent composite coding. While the original competence scale from Rom et al. (2017) included a *competitive* item, we dropped it from the final competence factor as it loaded weakly. Additionally, while the *reputation signaling* and *norm signaling* loaded onto the same factor, *norm signaling* loaded weakly, and we developed these outcomes to measure distinct intentions, so we analyzed them separately.

Internal consistency was acceptable for the final version of each composite: Warmth ($\alpha = .81$), Competence ($\alpha = .79$), Moral Approval ($\alpha = .79$), and Decision Speed ($\alpha = .67$).

Table S3.

Exploratory Factor Analysis Pattern Loadings

Item	Warmth	Competence	Moral Approval	Signaling	Decision Speed	Emotion
Good-natured	0.72					
Tolerant	0.66					
Warm	0.77					
Sincere	0.37					
Competent		0.50				
Confident		0.53				
Independent		0.57				
Intelligent		0.55				

Logic		0.65				
Competitive		0.33				
Approval			0.76			
Moral			0.70			
Genuine			0.63			
Reputation Signal				0.99		
Norm Signal				0.33		
Quick					0.77	
Spontaneous					0.68	

Emotion						0.80

Note. Factor loadings based on an exploratory factor analysis with oblique rotation for 20 items measuring participants' perceptions of donors (N = 201). Factor loadings <0.3 are suppressed. The items "Slow" and "Deliberate" did not map onto any factor with a loading >0.3 and were subsequently dropped from analysis.

Deviations from preregistration.

While we preregistered a deliberation composite ("Slow," "Deliberate," "Logic") and a spontaneity composite ("Quick," "Spontaneous," "Emotion"), our preregistered exploratory factor analysis indicated a different structure: a single *decision speed* factor and a distinct *emotion-driven* factor. Additionally, two items ("Slow," "Deliberate") that failed to meet loading criteria, and one item ("Logic") loaded onto the competence factor rather than the expected deliberation dimension. Consistent with the EFA, our primary analyses use measurement-refined composites that exclude these items.

For transparency, we also report results using the preregistered competence, deliberation and spontaneity composites: generosity-motivated donors were rated as less competent (b = -.10, SE = 0.03, t(200) = -3.49, p < .001) and deliberative (b = -0.19, SE = 0.05, t(200) = -4.09, p < .001) than justice-motivated donors, and more spontaneous, (b = 0.16, SE = 0.05, t(200) = 3.21, p = .002). This pattern of results is consistent with those obtained using the EFA-derived competence and decision speed composite.

Study 3

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

We conducted a confirmatory factor analysis to evaluate the seven-factor model identified in Study 2's exploratory factor analysis: Moral approval (approval, moral, genuine), Warmth (warm, good-natured, tolerant, sincere), Competence (logic, independent, intelligent, confident, competent), Decision speed (quick, spontaneous), Emotion-driven (emotion), Reputation signaling, and Norm signaling. The model showed adequate fit, $\chi^2(101) = 256.88$, $p < .001$, CFI = .93, TLI = .91, RMSEA = .06, 90% CI [.05, .07], SRMR = .05.

Study 4

Effect of Phrasing

Table S4.

Effect of Changes in Sentence Phrasing

Outcome	Predictor	*b*	*SE*	*df*	*t*	*p*
Moral Approval	Sentence phrasing	0.07	0.10	469	0.66	.51
	Sentence phrasing*motive	-0.07	0.10	298	-0.73	.47
Warmth	Sentence phrasing	0.04	0.10	490	0.43	.67
	Sentence phrasing*motive	-0.01	0.10	298	-0.08	.94
Competence	Sentence phrasing	0.16	0.08	389	1.93	.055
	Sentence phrasing*motive	-0.05	0.06	298	-0.88	.38
Decision	Sentence phrasing	0.20	0.12	390	1.61	.11

Speed	Sentence phrasing*motive	0.09	0.09	298	0.92	.36
Emotion-Driven	Sentence phrasing	0.02	0.12	542	0.13	.89
	Sentence phrasing*motive	0.02	0.14	298	0.14	.89
Norm Signaling	Sentence phrasing	0.02	0.15	462	0.11	.91
	Sentence phrasing*motive	-0.01	0.14	298	-0.10	.92
Reputation Signaling	Sentence phrasing	0.15	0.16	442	0.98	.33
	Sentence phrasing*motive	-0.06	0.14	298	-0.40	.69

Note. The justice virtuous motive and the "commit" phrasing were the referent conditions for these analyses.

Study 5

Effect of Phrasing

Table S5.

Effect of Changes in Sentence Phrasing

Outcome	**Comparison**	**Predictor**	***b***	***SE***	***df***	***t***	***p***
Moral Approval	Accord vs Value	Sentence phrasing	0.17	0.11	449	1.46	.15
		Sentence phrasing*motive	-0.29	0.11	295	-2.67	.008
	Accord vs Commit	Sentence phrasing	0.06	0.12	449	0.53	.15
		Sentence phrasing*motive	-0.18	0.11	295	-1.66	.10

Warmth	Accord vs Value	Sentence phrasing	0.06	0.11	476	0.54	.59
		Sentence phrasing*motive	-0.18	0.11	294	-1.55	.12
	Accord vs Commit	Sentence phrasing	0.04	0.11	476	0.35	.59
		Sentence phrasing*motive	-0.12	0.12	294	-1.04	.30
Competence	Accord vs Value	Sentence phrasing	0.09	0.10	397	0.89	.37
		Sentence phrasing*motive	-0.01	0.08	295	-0.18	.86
	Accord vs Commit	Sentence phrasing	0.02	0.10	397	0.18	.86
		Sentence phrasing*motive	0.13	0.08	295	1.60	.11
Decision Speed	Accord vs Value	Sentence phrasing	0.03	0.15	369	0.24	.81
		Sentence phrasing*motive	-0.11	0.10	295	-1.14	.26
	Accord vs Commit	Sentence phrasing	-0.01	0.15	369	-0.10	.92
		Sentence phrasing*motive	-0.08	0.10	295	-0.82	.41
Emotion-Driven	Accord vs Value	Sentence phrasing	0.21	0.15	490	1.43	.15
		Sentence phrasing*motive	-0.30	0.15	295	-1.89	.06
	Accord vs Commit	Sentence phrasing	0.19	0.15	490	1.25	.15
		Sentence phrasing*motive	-0.27	0.16	295	-1.69	.09
Norm Signaling	Accord vs Value	Sentence phrasing	0.05	0.17	447	0.31	.76
		Sentence	0.16	0.16	294	1.00	.34

		phrasing*motive					
	Accord vs Commit	Sentence phrasing	-0.26	0.18	447	-1.46	.15
		Sentence phrasing*motive	0.17	0.16	294	0.11	.92
Reputation Signaling	Accord vs Value	Sentence phrasing	0.16	0.19	426	0.83	.41
		Sentence phrasing*motive	0.13	0.17	295	0.77	.44
	Accord vs Commit	Sentence phrasing	0.17	0.19	426	0.91	.37
		Sentence phrasing*motive	-0.03	0.17	295	-0.18	.86

Note. The justice virtuous motive and the "accord" phrasing were the referent conditions for these analyses.

Study 6

Deviations from preregistration.

Due to a miscommunication between members of the research team, we accidentally pre-registered the reverse direction of our predicted effect for hypothesis one. Our intended hypothesis was that justice-motivated donors would be seen as, if not more, moral as generosity-motivated donors. However, we incorrectly pre-registered that "Participants will, on average, demonstrate more moral approval toward a donor motivated by generosity than toward a donor motivated by justice."

Study 7

Effect of Information Source

Table S6.

Descriptive Statistics for Primary Outcomes Across Sources of Information About Donors' Virtuous Motives

Outcome	Source	Predictor	*M*	*SD*
Moral Approval	Experimenter	Total	4.11	0.8
		Generosity-motivated Donor	4.1	0.8
		Justice-motivated Donor	4.1	0.8
	Donor	Total	3.7	0.9
		Generosity-motivated Donor	3.5	0.9
		Justice-motivated Donor	3.8	0.8
Warmth	Experimenter	Total	3.8	0.8
		Generosity-motivated Donor	3.9	0.8
		Justice-motivated Donor	3.8	0.8
	Donor	Total	3.5	0.9
		Generosity-motivated Donor	3.5	0.9
		Justice-motivated Donor	3.6	0.8
Competence	Experimenter	Total	3.8	0.6
		Generosity-	3.7	0.6

		motivated Donor		
		Justice-motivated Donor	3.9	0.6
	Donor	Total	3.6	0.7
		Generosity-motivated Donor	3.5	0.7
		Justice-motivated Donor	3.7	0.7
Decision Speed	Experimenter	Total	2.9	1.1
		Generosity-motivated Donor	2.9	1.1
		Justice-motivated Donor	2.8	1.1
	Donor	Total	2.9	0.9
		Generosity-motivated Donor	2.9	0.9
		Justice-motivated Donor	2.9	0.9
Emotion-Driven	Experimenter	Total	3.8	1.0
		Generosity-motivated Donor	3.9	1.0
		Justice-motivated Donor	3.8	1.0
	Donor	Total	3.5	1.0
		Generosity-motivated Donor	3.4	1.1
		Justice-motivated Donor	3.7	1.0

Norm Signaling	Experimenter	Total	3.5	1.2
		Generosity-motivated Donor	3.4	1.2
		Justice-motivated Donor	3.6	1.2
	Donor	Total	3.6	1.1
		Generosity-motivated Donor	3.4	1.2
		Justice-motivated Donor	3.8	1.1
Reputation Signaling	Experimenter	Total	2.6	1.3
		Generosity-motivated Donor	2.6	1.4
		Justice-motivated Donor	2.5	1.3
	Donor	Total	3.0	1.3
		Generosity-motivated Donor	3.2	1.3
		Justice-motivated Donor	2.8	1.2

Table S7.

Model Results for Primary Outcomes Across Sources of Information About Donors' Virtuous Motives

Outcome	**Predictor**	***b***	***SE***	***df***	***t***	***p***	***d* [95% CI]**

Moral Approval	source	-0.31	0.09	579	-3.58	<.001	-0.80 [-1.08, -0.52]
	source*motive	-0.25	0.07	391	-3.25	.001	0.23 [0.09, 0.37]
Warmth	source	-0.21	0.08	650	-2.54	.01	-0.49 [-0.72, -0.26]
	source*motive	-0.18	0.09	391	-2.02	.04	0.14 [0.003, 0.28]
Competence	source	-0.16	0.07	494	-2.38	.02	-0.52 [-0.90, -0.13]
	source*motive	-0.02	0.05	391	-0.35	.72	0.02 [-0.12, 0.17]
Decision Speed	source	0.05	0.10	510	0.48	.63	0.03 [-0.32, 0.39]
	source*motive	-0.06	0.07	390	-0.86	.39	0.06 [-0.08, 0.20]
Emotion-Driven	source	-0.13	0.10	682	-1.24	.22	-0.38 [-0.59, -0.17]
	source*motive	-0.36	0.12	391	-3.14	.002	0.22 [0.08, 0.36]
Norm Signaling	source	0.21	0.12	645	1.80	.07	0.14 [-0.09, 0.37]
	source*motive	-0.18	0.12	391	-1.47	.14	0.10 [-0.04, 0.24]
Reputation Signaling	source	0.31	0.13	578	2.40	.02	0.56 [0.28, 0.84]
	source*motive	0.29	0.12	391	2.48	.01	-0.18 [-0.32, -0.04]

Note. The justice virtuous motive and the experimenter source were the referent conditions for these analyses.

Table S8.

Simple Effects of Sources of Information About Donors' Virtuous Motives on Primary Outcomes

Outcome	Motive	*b*	*SE*	*t*	*p*
Moral Approval	Generosity	-0.56	0.85	-6.51	<.001
	Justice	-0.31	0.85	-3.58	<.001
Warmth	Generosity	-0.39	0.08	-4.65	<.001
	Justice	-0.21	0.08	-2.54	.01
Competence	Generosity	-0.18	0.07	-2.62	.009
	Justice	0.05	0.07	-2.38	.01
Decision Speed	Generosity	-0.02	0.10	0.48	.63
	Justice	0.05	0.10	-0.15	.87
Emotion-Driven	Generosity	-0.49	0.10	-4.72	<.001
	Justice	-0.13	0.10	-1.24	.22
Norm Signaling	Generosity	0.03	0.12	0.28	.78
	Justice	0.21	0.12	1.80	.07
Reputation Signaling	Generosity	0.61	0.13	4.64	<.001
	Justice	0.31	0.13	2.41	.02

Note. The justice virtuous motive and the experimenter source were the referent conditions for these analyses.

Order Effects

We examined whether the order in which the two vignettes were presented influenced participants' evaluations or moderated the effect of the virtuous motives. Across studies, we found no consistent evidence that order meaningfully shaped donor judgments. The following effects emerged: In Study 3, participants who viewed the justice-motive vignette first rated donors as higher in reputation signaling, though this effect did not interact with motive. In Study 4, we observed an interaction between order and motive on warmth, such that the difference between generosity and justice was smaller when the justice-motive vignette appeared first. In Study 6, participants who saw the generosity-motivated donor first rated both donors as more emotion-driven, and this effect was particularly pronounced for their evaluations of justice-motivated donors. Additionally, we observed an interaction between order and motive on warmth: the non-significant benefit on judgments of warmth generosity-motivated donors received reversed when participants saw the generosity-motivated donor first. No other outcomes showed significant order or order × motive interactive effects. Full model results are provided in Table S9.

Table S9.

Order effects in vignette presentation

Study	Outcome	Predictor	*b*	*SE*	*df*	*t*	*p*
3	Moral Approval	order	-0.08	0.10	327	-0.72	.47
		order*motive	0.10	0.11	197	0.93	.36
	Warmth	order	0.01	0.11	333	0.10	.92
		order*motive	0.06	0.11	197	0.54	.59

	Competence	order	0.02	0.10	244	0.21	.84
		order*motive	0.02	0.06	197	0.35	.73
	Decision Speed	order	0.03	0.14	278	0.22	.83
		order*motive	-0.22	0.12	197	-1.82	.07
	Emotion-Driven	order	0.04	0.15	357	0.25	.80
		order*motive	0.07	0.17	197	0.39	.70
	Norm Signaling	order	-0.04	0.17	310	-0.23	.82
		order*motive	0.23	0.17	197	1.40	.16
	Reputation Signaling	order	0.46	0.18	317	2.50	.01
		order*motive	-0.33	0.19	197	-1.77	.08
4	Moral Approval	order	0.19	0.10	470	1.95	.052
		order*motive	-0.09	0.10	298	-0.92	.36
	Warmth	order	0.17	0.10	488	1.71	.09
		order*motive	-0.21	0.10	298	-2.08	.04
	Competence	order	0.15	0.08	389	1.82	.07
		order*motive	-0.07	0.06	298	-1.20	.23
	Decision Speed	order	0.03	0.12	388	0.21	.83
		order*motive	0.11	0.09	298	1.19	.24
	Emotion-Driven	order	0.07	0.12	542	0.60	.55

		order*motive	0.09	0.14	298	0.63	.53
	Norm Signaling	order	-0.06	0.15	462	-0.40	.69
		order*motive	0.10	0.14	298	0.69	.49
	Reputation Signaling	order	-0.08	0.16	442	-0.54	.59
		order*motive	0.06	0.14	298	0.44	.66
5	Moral Approval	order	-0.01	0.09	454	-0.12	.90
		order*motive	-0.03	0.09	296	-0.33	.74
	Warmth	order	-0.01	0.09	479	-0.07	.95
		order*motive	-0.02	0.09	295	-0.18	.86
	Competence	order	0.02	0.08	400	0.24	.81
		order*motive	-0.01	0.07	296	-0.22	.82
	Decision Speed	order	0.05	0.12	370	0.45	.65
		order*motive	0.05	0.08	296	0.63	.53
	Emotion-Driven	order	0.01	0.12	493	0.11	.91
		order*motive	-0.13	0.13	296	-1.05	.30
	Norm Signaling	order	0.18	0.14	447	1.26	.21
		order*motive	-0.08	0.13	295	-0.60	.55
	Reputation Signaling	order	0.26	0.15	428	1.65	.10
		order*motive	0.06	0.14	296	0.45	.66

6	Moral Approval	order	0.01	0.13	273	0.11	.92
		order*motive	-0.21	0.11	196	-1.89	.06
	Warmth	order	0.11	0.13	290	0.86	.39
		order*motive	-0.26	0.12	196	-2.24	.03
	Competence	order	-0.02	0.11	259	-0.20	.84
		order*motive	-0.07	0.08	196	-0.82	.41
	Decision Speed	order	0.13	0.15	278	0.90	.37
		order*motive	-0.13	0.12	196	-1.07	.29
	Emotion-Driven	order	0.31	0.15	371	2.07	.91
		order*motive	-0.57	0.18	196	-3.12	.002
	Norm Signaling	order	0.24	0.16	304	1.47	.14
		order*motive	-0.09	0.15	196	-0.63	.53
	Reputation Signaling	order	0.24	0.19	285	1.25	.21
		order*motive	0.13	0.17	196	0.76	.45
7	Moral Approval	order	0.02	0.09	391	0.19	.85
		order*motive	-0.05	0.08	570	-0.66	.51
	Warmth	order	0.16	0.08	638	1.96	.051
		order*motive	-0.30	0.09	391	-3.46	<.0001
	Competence	order	0.07	0.07	493	1.03	.31

	order*motive	-0.03	0.05	391	-0.65	.51
Decision Speed	order	-0.03	0.10	510	-0.28	.78
	order*motive	-0.10	0.07	391	-1.36	.17
Emotion-Driven	order	-0.03	0.11	680	-0.33	.75
	order*motive	-0.11	0.12	391	-0.91	.36
Norm Signaling	order	0.12	0.12	646	1.05	.29
	order*motive	0.08	0.12	391	0.63	.53
Reputation Signaling	order	0.002	0.13	575	0.06	.99
	order*motive	0.02	0.12	391	0.04	.84

Note. The justice virtuous motive and the vignette order with justice first are the referent conditions for these analyses.