Does Networking Make People Feel "Dirty"? Explaining People's Reluctance to Network through the Cognitive Frame and Moral Emotions they Associate with Networking Actions

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This version: 2021

Abstract. Casciaro, Gino, and Kouchaki (2014, hereafter CGK) have proposed that people view networking actions as morally impure and therefore feel dirty when doing so, which in turn triggers a need for cleansing. In the present paper, I challenge the theoretical premise and empirical evidence presented in CGK. I first argue that the core concept of the paper (i.e., moral purity) lacks theoretical grounds and construct validity, and highlight several methodological issues that threaten the original conclusions. I then offer a different perspective on the discomfort people experience when networking. Referring to the literature on moral emotions and networking, I argue that people experience guilt when networking partly because they construe networking as the objectification of others and find support for this account in a pre-registered experiment. I finally investigate the moderating role of prosocial motives, which are predicted to alleviate feelings of guilt, but do not find evidence that such motives mitigate the guilt people experience when networking.

Keywords: networking, morality, guilt, objectification, self-serving justification, prosocial motivation

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The materials, raw data and code can be found on the OSF: https://osf.io/2hjp9/

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INTRODUCTION

Network scholars have called for more research on the antecedents of networks (Brass, Galaskiewicz, Greve, & Tsai, 2004). In particular, they have highlighted the need to better understand the role played by human agency in the shape and evolution of network structure (Ahuja, Soda, & Zaheer, 2012), and to study how people network, that is instrumentally build, maintain and leverage relationships with others (Bensaou, Galunic, & Jonczyk-Sédès, 2014; Shipilov, Labianca, Kalnysh, & Kalnysh, 2014; Vissa, 2012).

The literature on networking behaviors has first highlighted the numerous benefits of networking. Networking fosters career success (Eddleston, Baldridge, & Veiga, 2004; Forret & Dougherty, 2001; Hwang, Kessler, & Francesco, 2004), either directly through promotion, and salary progression (Forret & Dougherty, 2004; Gould & Penley, 1984; Luthans, 1988; Luthans, Hodgetts, & Rosenkrantz, 1988; Michael & Yukl, 1993; Wolff & Moser, 2009), or indirectly by helping people reach better positions in their network (Bensaou et al., 2014; Shipilov et al., 2014). It improves learning and knowledge acquisition (Leeman & Whymark, 2001; Sonnenberg, 1990), helps entrepreneurs strike deals (Vissa, 2012), and helps people get jobs (Wanberg, Kanfer, & Banas, 2000).

However, this literature has also documented a paradox: Even when people acknowledge the benefits of networking, they appear reluctant to engage in those behaviors (Kuwabara, Hildebrand, & Zou, 2018). An oft-mentioned explanation to this paradox is that people intrinsically dislike networking. For instance, descriptive studies have suggested that people have negative attitudes toward networking, particularly toward the morality of networking, which subsequently prevent them from undertaking such activity (Bensaou et al., 2014; Kuwabara et al., 2018). Those studies also suggest that people find the idea of networking uncomfortable or intimidating (de Janasz & Forret, 2008; Ferrazzi, 2005; Wanberg et al., 2000);

see networking as selfish (Trefalt, 2014), or unfair (de Janasz & Forret, 2008); and associate networking with being “fake”, “artificial”, or “manipulative” (Bensaou et al., 2014; Kuwabara et al., 2018), which may in turn reduce their engagement in networking activity.

So far, a single paper has provided causal evidence that networking triggers a change in people’s psychological state. Indeed, Casciaro, Gino and Kouchaki (hereafter CGK, 2014) have presented two studies claiming causal evidence that networking triggers “moral impurity,” which manifests itself through feelings of “dirtiness” and the heightened accessibility of cleansing-related concepts. To help people overcome their reluctance to network, a first solution would therefore be to extent the theoretical model proposed in CGK. However, a closer look at the paper casts doubts on the possibility to extend the model, and on its ability to explain people’s reluctance to network. In the following sections, I challenge CGK’s conclusion on both theoretical and methodological grounds. I first discuss the origin of “moral purity” as a concept and argue that it lacks a formal definition, and therefore construct and measurement validity. I then highlight key issues in the operationalization of networking actions in CGK’s experiments.

Considering those issues, I then offer a model of networking discomfort grounded in the literature on moral emotions. More precisely, I explore the cognitive frame people use to make sense of their networking actions (Snow, Rochford, Worden, & Benford, 1986) and its downstream consequence in term of moral emotion. I argue that since people frame networking as an activity in which others are seen as means to an end, they consider networking as a form of objectification of others (Orehek & Weaverling, 2017). Insofar as this objectification violates the moral imperative according to which people should not be considered as objects that can be used to satisfy personal ends, I argue that people who network experience guilt, a specific self-conscious moral emotion experienced when people engage in a behavior that violates moral rules and affects others’ well-being (Haidt, 2003; Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007).

With a better understanding of the negative emotions that networking triggers, and of the mechanism leading to those emotions, I finally propose a boundary condition to this relationship. Since guilt is an other-oriented emotion that facilitates perspective-taking and empathic processes (Tangney et al., 2007), to mitigate the level of guilt experienced when networking, individuals could need a self-serving justification (Shalvi, Gino, Barkan, & Ayal, 2015) in which the welfare of others is considered. I then argue that networking for prosocial motives (Bolino & Grant, 2016) could provide individuals with such self-serving justification, and make networking morally acceptable by justifying the objectification of others, thereby reducing the guilt that people experience.

In sum, the goal of the present paper is to answer three research questions: Do people experience discomfort when networking and why? What is the exact emotion associated with this discomfort? And can this discomfort be mitigated?

THEORY

Past research has tried to explain why people are reluctant to engage in networking despite the numerous benefits of doing so, mainly by describing what people feel or think about networking. A general conclusion is that people hold negative views of networking activities: People often describe networking as "uncomfortable," "awkward," "humiliating," "threatening," "intimidating," "unfair," "inappropriate," "illegitimate," "presumptuous," "unnatural," "insincere," "dishonest," "fake," "artificial," "manipulative," or "selfish" (Bensaou et al., 2014; de Janasz & Forret, 2008; Ferrazzi, 2005; Ibarra, 2016; Ibarra, Carter, & Silva, 2010; Trefalt, 2014; Wanberg et al., 2000).

While those labels suggest that people dislike networking, they do not tell us about the specific emotions that people could experience when networking and why they would experience them. Beyond the theoretical interest of investigating the discomfort that arise when

people network, understanding the nature of this discomfort is a necessary condition to implement mitigation strategies, and offer remedies to help people overcome their aversion to network. However, scant empirical evidence has been offered to show the causal effect of networking behaviors on discomfort. To the best of my knowledge, a single paper (CGK) made this theoretical and empirical effort.

Evidence linking Networking to Moral Impurity

In CGK, the authors argue that people engaged in networking actions will experience "moral impurity," which translates into feeling "dirty" and experiencing a desire for "cleansing." More precisely, they argue that, because networking is motivated by the satisfaction of personal interests with little to no concern for others, people engaged in such activity will experience a moral contamination and therefore feel morally impure.

Given that this paper offers the only causal evidence linking networking actions to specific changes in people's psychological states, it is first important to evaluate the soundness of the theoretical framework and empirical evidence it provides.

What is Moral Purity?

CGK proposes that the psychological mechanism that underlies networking discomfort is "moral impurity." They define moral purity as "a psychological state that results from viewing the self as clean from a moral standpoint" (p. 705), and "moral impurity" as the state of feeling "psychologically dirty" which then elicits a need for physical cleansing. From this perspective, networking actions, because of their perceived immorality, are morally threatening for the initiator of such actions, which subsequently triggers feelings of dirtiness, and in turn increases people's need for cleansing.

The concept of moral purity, and its downstream consequences on people's need for physical cleansing, hinge upon a small number of papers (Lee & Schwarz, 2010; Schnall,

Benton, & Harvey, 2008; Zhong & Liljenquist, 2006) that have claimed a psychological connection between moral integrity and physical cleansing. This psychological connection is called the Macbeth effect, and situates itself in a stream of the literature in psychology that has claimed metaphorical links between bodily sensations and cognitions/emotions.[1] In a seminal paper, Zhong and Liljenquist (2006) provided evidence that recalling or witnessing immoral actions (e.g., sabotaging a co-worker) activates a need for physical cleansing. Other follow-up papers (Lee & Schwarz, 2010; Schnall et al., 2008) have claimed a similar association. For example, Lee and Schwarz (2010) have shown that participants who lied with malevolent intentions (i.e., to hurt someone else's career) were willing to pay more for a mouthwash or a hand sanitizer. Similarly, Schnall, Benton, and Harvey (2008) have shown that physical cleansing reduces the severity of moral judgment: Participants judge moral transgressions (e.g., eating one's dead dog, switching the tracks of a trolley to kill one workman instead of five, keeping money inside a found wallet, killing a plane crash survivor to avoid starvation, putting false information on a résumé, and using a kitten for sexual arousal) as less serious when they have been primed with concepts related to cleanliness first.

However, a recent re-analysis of the effects examined in those papers suggests that the results were driven by selective reporting (Ropovik, Sparacio, & IJzerman, 2020). Further, direct replications of the effects have since repeatedly failed to replicate. For example, several large-scale replications of the relationship between moral threat and desire for cleansing (Earp, Everett, Madva, & Hamlin, 2014; Fayard, Bassi, Bernstein, & Roberts, 2009; Gámez, Díaz, & Marrero, 2011; Johnson, Cheung, & Donnellan, 2014) have failed to replicate the original effect (Zhong & Liljenquist, 2006) as well as its downstream consequences (Schnall et al., 2008), and

[1] It is worth noting that many of the foundational effects claiming metaphorical connections between bodily sensations and cognitive or emotional states have failed to replicate (Chabris, Heck, Mandart, Benjamin, & Simons, 2018; Doyen, Klein, Pichon, & Cleeremans, 2012; Goldhill, 2019; Michigan State University, 2017; Skibba, 2016).

a meta-analysis of eleven studies that did not involve the original authors of those effects has found no effect (Siev, Zuckerman, & Siev, 2018).

Taken together, those findings suggest that there is no discernable association between moral integrity and physical cleanliness and therefore no evidence for the Macbeth effect. As such, the concept of "moral purity", that is assumed to capture the psychological connection between physical cleanliness and moral integrity, appears to lack psychological underpinnings.[2]

Measuring Moral Impurity

In addition to the theoretical issues highlighted above, the measures of "moral impurity" offered in CGK appear problematic for multiple reasons. In study 1 first, the authors rely on the original word-completion task that Zhong and Liljenquist (2006) have used to claim a link between moral integrity and physical cleanliness. Based on this previous finding, they propose to measure the feelings of "moral impurity" induced by networking actions through the mental accessibility of cleansing-related words (Zhong & Liljenquist, 2006).

This indirect measure is problematic for at least three reasons. First, measures of association are, by definition, less sensitive to changes in the level of the construct than direct measures. To identify if a person is a man or a woman, for example, it is better to directly ask them (a direct measure) than to infer their gender from their height or weight (an indirect measure). The same logic applies to the accessibility of cleansing-related words as a measure of "moral impurity."

Second, as mentioned in the previous section, the original link between moral threats and accessibility of cleansing-related words has been documented for strong moral threats. From this perspective, it is unclear whether a much milder violation (i.e., engaging in

[2] Additional reflections on CGK's theory can be found in the Appendix.

networking) would have a comparable impact, thereby reducing the likelihood of finding a significant effect.

Finally, and as mentioned earlier, all pre-registered investigations of the Macbeth effect (i.e., the psychological connection between moral integrity and physical cleansing) have failed to replicate the original effect (Earp et al., 2014; Fayard et al., 2009; Gámez et al., 2011; Johnson et al., 2014). In particular, in a replication study using the specific measure of association of CGK, the authors found no evidence that recalling unethical deeds triggered an increased mental accessibility of cleansing-related concepts (Gámez et al., 2011).

For all those reasons, the magnitude of the changes in the accessibility of cleansing-related words observed in CGK ($d = .71$, $p < .001$) is surprising, and suggests that other mechanisms than moral threats are driving this difference (Simmons, 2020; Simmons, Nelson, & Simonsohn, 2011).

In studies 2 and 3, CGK captures "moral impurity" directly: They ask participants to report dirtiness-related feelings using a Likert scale. To measure this concept, they use a three-item scale in Study 2 ("dirty", "inauthentic", "uncomfortable"), and a four-item scale in study 3 (with the addition of "ashamed"). However, this direct measure of moral impurity raises several questions.

First, it is unclear how the feelings those items refer to map onto the idea of "moral impurity" as defined by the authors. As mentioned earlier, the concept has little precedent in the psychological literature, and seems uniquely defined by the existence of a link between moral integrity and physical cleanliness. From this perspective, it is difficult to see how the items are measuring this association.

Second, the scale is composed of items, such as "ashamed" and "inauthentic", that are known to map onto distinct constructs, and for which established scales exist (state authenticity:

Fleeson & Wilt, 2010; Kernis & Goldman, 2005; and state shame: Izard, 1977; Mosher & White, 1981; Tangney, 1996). On the one hand, authenticity refers to "the degree to which individuals connect with and enact their true selves in various situations" (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Kifer, Heller, Perunovic, & Galinsky, 2013, p. 281). People typically feel authentic in a situation when their enduring propensities (e.g., their attitudes, beliefs, values, or personality) are aligned with their cognition and actions in this situation (Lenton, Bruder, Slabu, & Sedikides, 2013). On the other hand, shame is a self-conscious moral emotion "elicited by the appraisal that there is something wrong or defective with one's core self, generally due to a failure to measure up to standards of morality, aesthetics, or competence" (Haidt, 2003, p. 860). "Shame involves a negative evaluation of the global self" (Tangney et al., 2007, p. 349) which makes this emotion particularly painful for the one experiencing it. Finally, the two constructs are also distinct at face value: A person who feels ashamed would not necessarily feel inauthentic, and vice versa.

The other two items on the scale are equally problematic. Indeed, while "dirty" might be a face-valid measure of moral impurity (although it is unclear if it refers to physical or moral cleanliness), it is again distinct from feelings of shame and inauthenticity. Finally, that networking makes people feel "uncomfortable" is non-specific, as the psychological drivers of "discomfort" are ill-defined.

Finally, the fact that the construct is measured with different items in various studies cast doubts on the psychometric properties of the scale and inflate the likelihood of a Type 1 error (Simmons et al., 2011). For example, Gino, Kouchaki, and Casciaro (2018) report three different scales to measure moral impurity in four different studies (study 1 and 4: "dirty", "tainted", "inauthentic", "ashamed"; study 2: "dirty", "inauthentic", "impure"; study 3: "dirty",

"inauthentic", "ashamed"). Similarly, Gino, Kouchaki, and Galinsky (2015)[3] report another scale to measure the same concept (study 1 and 3: "impure", "dirty", "tainted").

Manipulating Networking

CGK presents two studies providing causal evidence for the impact of networking on moral impurity. However, the way networking is manipulated in those two studies is problematic.

In the first study, CGK primed participants by activating a mental representation of a situation in which they were spontaneously (vs. instrumentally) approaching others for personal (vs. professional) reasons. While such recall tasks can be high in external validity (as long as participants recall real experiences), they are typically lacking in internal validity (since there is no control over the circumstances that participants recall). Here, the differences between conditions that are attributed to networking (vs. spontaneously interacting with people) might reflect other factors. For instance, if people only network when they have a pressing need to, asking them to recall a situation in which they networked would lead them to recall more stressful circumstances, irrespective of the emotions generated by the action of networking itself.

Beyond this issue, the validity of such priming manipulations (in which recalling specific circumstances is expected to lead to downstream consequences on an ostensibly unrelated task) have been heavily debated (Bargh, 2006; Kahneman, 2012). As mentioned above, it is unclear which concepts are being activated by the prime, and how reliable the effects on subsequent behaviors are. In particular, multiple failures to replicate social priming effects suggest that the effects of those manipulations are too small to be reliably detected (Doyen, Klein, Pichon, & Cleeremans, 2012; Harris, Coburn, Rohrer, & Pashler, 2013; Johnson et al.,

[3] In this paper, the authors show that inauthenticity leads to moral impurity, which is confusing: Inauthenticity cannot be both part of the "moral impurity" construct and be an antecedent of it.

2014; Pashler, Coburn, & Harris, 2012; Rivers & Sherman, n.d.; Shanks et al., 2013; Steele, 2014), and that they should not be used as a first-order manipulation, or at least that researchers using such priming manipulations should provide direct pre-registered replications of their own effects (Cesario, 2014).

In the second study, CGK overcomes this issue by using vignettes in which they directly manipulate the type of approach (instrumental vs. spontaneous) as well as the context and content of the interactions (professional vs. personal). However, they do not manipulate those constructs orthogonally: Only two vignettes are used, and participants are assigned either to the Spontaneous-Personal condition or to the Instrumental-Professional condition. Since this design does not uniquely manipulate networking by comparing the spontaneous to the instrumental approach, this comparison is not a discriminant test of networking: The authors cannot tease apart the effect of instrumental (vs. spontaneous) interactions from the impact of the content and setting of the interactions (professional vs. personal).

Given the formal definition of networking behaviors, only the type of approach separates networking actions from non-networking actions. Networking behaviors have been defined as proactive and purposeful efforts made by individuals to create, maintain, and leverage relationships that can provide them with valuable resources for their work and career (Bensaou et al., 2014; Forret & Dougherty, 2004; Higgins & Kram, 2001; Higgins & Thomas, 2001; Kram, 1988; Kuwabara et al., 2018; Wolff & Moser, 2009). Networking behaviors require people to analyze their existing social network in terms of available resources, and to make those resources accessible through purposeful social interactions (Van Buren & Hood, 2011). As such, networking excludes (Kuwabara et al., 2018) spontaneous interactions that naturally emerge from social situations with no premeditated purpose or specific intention (Bourdieu, 1985; Wellman & Berkowitz, 1988), passive interactions that are initiated by others,

forced interactions required for the accomplishment of a task, or purely affective interactions, such as friendship, that have no strategic function (Ingram & Zou, 2008).

On the contrary, the content of the interaction does not allow to distinguish networking from non-networking actions since networking behaviors are likely to bring both personal and professional resources (e.g., when people network to find mentors).

This definition confirms that a valid manipulation of networking should compare strategic social interactions to non-strategic social interactions (e.g., a spontaneous, passive, or forced social interaction), while keeping constant the content of the interactions and the context in which they occur. In study 2, one cannot rule out that the effect is driven by the content and context (professional vs. personal) rather than the type of approach (instrumental vs. spontaneous).

A New Framework on Networking Discomfort

Having documented theoretical and methodological issues in CGK, both in the dependent variable (the concept of "moral impurity") and in the independent variable (the manipulations of "networking"), I return to the original questions that spurred CGK's investigation: Do people feel uncomfortable when networking, and if so why?

To answer these questions, I attempt to build a parsimonious model grounded in established constructs in the domain of moral emotions, and design an experiment testing the causal mechanism as well as the moderating factor proposed in the model.

The Moral Issue in Networking

Past research on networking has brought descriptive evidence that people attach a moral component to networking actions. For instance, Wanberg, Kanfer, and Banas (2000) have shown that people who use their network to find a job may experience embarrassment (a type of moral emotion), which in turn is associated with reduced networking intensity. Similarly,

Bensaou, Galunic, and Jonczyk-Sédès (2014) have shown that the more people question the morality of networking actions, the less they network. Finally, Kuwabara, Hildebrand, and Zou (2018) argue that people may have negative attitude toward the morality of networking that ultimately prevent them from networking.

CGK have also framed networking in moral terms. They argue that networking is mainly motivated by the satisfaction of one's self-interest: People who network are using their relationships to gain personal benefits, with little consideration for the person with whom they are interacting, above and beyond the resources at their disposal. They further argue that since those selfish intentions are clear to the initiator, but not necessarily to the target, a form of deception is attached to networking. As such, they argue that networking actions are inherently selfish and deceptive, and therefore difficult to justify from a moral standpoint (Blum, 1980; Rogers, 1997; Singer, 1995; Williams, 1973).

Those various pieces of evidence describe why people could view networking as immoral. However, they do not make explicit predictions about what exactly in networking actions makes people experience moral discomfort, and which specific emotions underpin this discomfort.

Cognitive Frame of Networking Activities

To understand what exactly individuals judge morally problematic in networking, I explore the way people frame networking behaviors. A cognitive frame is a lens through which individuals view a situation and make sense of it (Goffman, 1974; Snow et al., 1986). It reflects individuals' impression of what is happening (Perry-Smith, 2014). I argue that the cognitive frame people use to make sense of networking actions could explain the emotional discomfort they experience when networking, and in turn their reluctance to do so.

In their qualitative work, Bensaou, Galunic, and Jonczyk-Sédès (2014) reported that people who were the least likely to network typically refused to do so because they saw networking as a means–end relationship. Those people were only willing to network when they had a genuine interest for the person. What seems off-putting in networking is therefore the perception that it involves instrumentality towards people, regardless of their other human qualities (Gruenfeld, Inesi, Magee, & Galinsky, 2008).

From this piece of evidence, I argue that individuals frame networking as an activity in which interactions with others are not primarily driven by a genuine interest for the person, but by the possibility of extracting value from this person and thus satisfy personal interests. As such, networking could be perceived as a form of objectification through which individuals are considered as means that can be used to get personal gains (Bartky, 1990; Calogero, 2013; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Gervais, DiLillo, & McChargue, 2014; Goldenberg, 2013; Gruenfeld et al., 2008; Nussbaum, 1999; Orehek & Weaverling, 2017).

Objectification is a process through which people are treated as objects rather than individuals (Bartky, 1990; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Gruenfeld et al., 2008; MacKinnon, 1987; Nussbaum, 1995, 1999). More precisely, the individual is considered to be objectified "when a person's body parts or functions are separated from the person, reduced to the status of instruments, or regarded as capable of representing the entire person" (Gervais, Bernard, Klein, & Allen, 2013, p. 2). For example, employers may objectify employees by reducing them to their work qualities and to their capacity to do the job (Marx, 1844), and physicians may objectify patients by reducing them to their symptoms and pathologies (Barnard, 2001; Foucault, 1989).

Besides, past research has shown that when others are perceived as facilitating the accomplishment of personal goals, they are considered as "instrumental means" towards goal

pursuit (Orehek, 2017; Orehek & Forest, 2016), and are used as such to accomplish those goals (Feeney, 2004; Fitzsimons & Finkel, 2010, 2011; Fitzsimons, Finkel, & Vandellen, 2015).

Instrumentality is an essential feature of objectification (Gruenfeld et al., 2008; Nussbaum, 1999; Orehek & Weaverling, 2017). When a person is instrumental to someone's else goals, this person becomes a useful and attractive tool used to satisfy one's own purpose (Ferguson & Bargh, 2004; Fitzsimons & Shah, 2008). The targeted person is then perceived, defined, and evaluated based on his or her usefulness to the observer's goals (Orehek & Weaverling, 2017). From this framework, I predict the following relationship:

Hypothesis 1: *People who network (i.e., strategically approach someone) will be more likely to frame their behavior as the objectification of the interaction partner, compared to people who do not network (i.e., spontaneously approach someone).*

Networking is Guilt-Inducing

A direct implication of objectification is that a person may be used, manipulated, or exploited (Orehek & Weaverling, 2017), which is perceived as morally problematic (Nussbaum, 1999). More precisely, the objectification of others violates the moral imperative according to which individuals should not be used (Kant, 1785). Objectifying others is judged immoral because it violates people's dignity by depriving them from their intrinsic value: When individuals are objectified, their value lies in their usefulness, which in turn makes them comparable and substitutable to one another (Orehek & Weaverling, 2017).

More precisely, this objectification implies valuing others from the resources that they can bring, with little to no consideration for their intrinsic value as individuals. This type of calculus is transgressing the idea of incommensurability, or the fact that a value cannot be put on individuals (Fiske & Tetlock, 1997). Unlike objects, which have a subjective value and a price, and can therefore be easily compared and substituted to one another, people have an intrinsic value that makes them irreplaceable and with no equivalent (Kant, 1785; Orehek &

Weaverling, 2017). Entering relationships in a cost-benefit calculus is perceived as morally offensive: “In brief, to compare is to destroy. Merely making explicit the possibility of certain trade-offs weakens, corrupts, and degrades one’s moral standing.” (Fiske & Tetlock, 1997, p. 256).

I therefore argue that the perceived objectification of the interaction partner makes networking a morally suspect behavior, likely to trigger negative moral emotions, and more particularly guilt.

Guilt is a moral emotion, associated with the interest or welfare of others, and a self-conscious emotion that help individuals navigate the complexities of social situations (Haidt, 2003). This moral emotion operates as “an emotional moral barometer” that provides immediate and salient feedback on individuals’ social and moral acceptability (Tangney et al., 2007, p. 347). It is caused by the violation of moral rules and imperatives (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955), particularly when this violation is likely to cause harm or suffering to others (Haidt, 2003).

More precisely, I argue that several characteristics of networking make networking particularly likely to trigger guilt, compared to other self-conscious moral emotions such as shame[4], for the three following reasons:

First, the fact that networking is seen as instrumental, selfish and deceptive suggests that networking will trigger a negative evaluation of the behavior itself rather than of the self. Contrary to shame, guilt involves a negative evaluation of the specific behavior, and not of the

[4] The literature on moral emotions distinguishes two families of moral emotions: the other-condemning moral emotions and the self-conscious moral emotions. The self-conscious moral emotions (guilt, shame, and embarrassment) typically help individuals navigate social situations without triggering the moral condemnation of others (Haidt, 2003). Since I argue that networking is likely to be perceived as a morally problematic behavior, the question is then to know which one of those self-conscious moral emotions those who network experience. More precisely, I focused on the differences between shame and guilt because embarrassment has been shown to be less centrally relevant to the domain of morality than shame and guilt (Tangney, Miller, Flicker, & Barlow, 1996; Tangney et al., 2007).

entire self (H. Lewis, 1971; M. Lewis, 1995), which also makes guilt a less painful emotion than shame (Tangney et al., 2007).

In addition, networking involves a social interaction between an initiator and a target. I therefore argue that networking will trigger others – rather than self – oriented emotions, and that any moral emotion triggered by networking should reflect concern for others' perspective. Guilt is typically an other-oriented emotion that correlates with perspective-taking and empathy for others, while shame is a self-oriented emotion that correlates with a focus on one's own distress (Leith & Baumeister, 1998; Marschall, 1997; Tangney, Marschall, Rosenberg, Barlow, & Wagner, 1994).

Finally, the observation that people stop networking after experiencing discomfort (Bensaou et al., 2014; Kuwabara et al., 2018; Wanberg et al., 2000) suggests that networking elicits an emotion that motivates corrective actions. Guilt possesses an inhibitory function that leads to constructive responses, but not shame (Dearing, Stuewig, & Tangney, 2005; Stuewig & McCloskey, 2005; Tangney, Wagner, Hill-Barlow, Marschall, & Gramzow, 1996): Because guilt facilitates empathic processes, it subsequently motivates people to choose the right action by considering the welfare of others.

I therefore expect that networking will trigger heightened levels of guilt, and that people who network (i.e., approach someone strategically rather than spontaneously) frame their behavior as the objectification of their interaction pattern, which in turn increases their feelings of guilt.

Hypothesis 2a: *People who network (i.e., strategically approach someone) will be more likely to experience guilt compared to people who do not network (i.e., spontaneously approach someone).*

Hypothesis 2b: *The increase in experienced guilt for people who network will be mediated by an increase in the perceived objectification of the interaction partner.*

Self-serving Justification to Network

The model I have proposed so far suggests that networking behaviors are viewed as morally inappropriate. The instrumentality attached to networking could lead people to perceive their networking actions as the objectification of others, which may subsequently elicit guilt among those who undertake those actions.

According to the hypothesized model, people could feel less discomfort when networking when they can morally justify their action. Such self-serving justifications would weaken the misalignment between moral standards and their action, and therefore lead to lower levels of guilt. Indeed, when people perceive they have "good reasons" not to act in accordance with their values, their sense of moral integrity is not affected (Becker, 1998). As such, people are likely to behave in a self-interested, or even immoral, way when they can construct seemingly reasonable explanations allowing them to justify their behavior (Babcock & Loewenstein, 1997; Dawson, Gilovich, & Regan, 2002; Gilovich, 1983; Hastorf & Cantril, 1954; Kunda, 1990; Schweitzer & Hsee, 2002; Shalvi, Dana, Handgraaf, & De Dreu, 2011; Shalvi et al., 2015; Snyder, Kleck, Strenta, & Mentzer, 1979; Zuckerman, 1979).

Self-serving justifications have been defined as a process through which people find reasons to justify their questionable behaviors (Shalvi et al., 2015). These justifications attenuate the moral threat these behaviors raise by making them excusable. This need for justification comes from two psychological premises. First, people strive to maintain a positive self-concept (Allport, 1955; Rosenberg, 1979), that can be threatened when they behave immorally. Second, when people experience or anticipate an ethical dissonance between the way they want to see themselves (i.e., as moral persons) and the way they act (i.e., immorally), they use justifications to reduce this internal conflict (cognitive dissonance theory: Festinger, 1957). Self-serving justifications, by providing people reasons to excuse their misbehaviors, attenuate or even eliminate the threat to their moral self-concept, and therefore enable people

to reconcile two competing motivations: seeing themselves as moral and obtaining valuable resources from questionable behaviors (Aronson, 1969; Harris, Mussen, & Rutherford, 1976; Mazar, Amir, & Ariely, 2008).

Prosocial Motivation as a Self-serving Justification

Since guilt is an other-oriented emotion that facilitates perspective-taking and empathic processes, it subsequently motivates people to take actions through which the welfare of others is considered (Tangney et al., 2007). As such, a self-serving justification considering the needs and interest of others, beyond and above the only interest of the one who networks, could help people networking reduce their guilt feelings.

One of the self-serving justifications people use to justify their misbehaviors is the altruistic motivation (Shalvi et al., 2015): Misbehaviors become morally justifiable when they can benefit others. For instance, people perceive lies as more justified when lies benefit both the self and another person (Erat & Gneezy, 2012). Altruistic justifications can turn unethical deeds into a legitimate course of action if those deeds are perceived as serving a greater good (Shalvi et al., 2015). For example, past research (Conrads, Irlenbusch, Rilke, & Walkowitz, 2013) has shown that, when people privately roll a die and that this roll determines the payoff for the group (vs. for themselves only), people are more likely to lie about the outcome of the roll to inflate the benefit of the group, partly because it allows them to dilute their responsibility. A prosocial motivation can be a moral justification that increases the moral acceptability of the behavior in question, and therefore frees individuals from the guilt triggered by this behavior (Bandura, 1986, 1999; Detert, Treviño, & Sweitzer, 2008).

These findings echo observations made on networking (Casciaro, Gino, & Kouchaki, 2016): When people focus on a higher purpose while networking (e.g., on the collective benefits associated with networking actions) rather than on their personal benefits, they report

experiencing less discomfort, and be more likely to network again. In other words, having a prosocial motivation when networking might moderate the emotional discomfort people experience when doing so by providing them with a self-serving justification.

Prosocial motivation refers to “the desire to expend effort to benefit other people” (Batson, 1987, p. 49; Grant, 2008). It can be a trait or a state. As a temporary psychological state, prosocial motivation involves individuals to be momentarily focused on the goal of promoting and protecting the welfare of others (Batson, 1987; Grant, 2007, 2008). Contrary to a purely altruistic or selfless motivation, a prosocial motivation may involve concern for both others and oneself (Bolino & Grant, 2016).

In this framework, I argue that people who network for prosocial reasons will experience less guilt than people who do so for proself (i.e., purely selfish) reasons. Indeed, a person networking for reasons going above and beyond his or her self-interest, should experience less guilt than a person networking only for his or her own self-interest.

Hypothesis 3a: *The extent to which people experience guilt when networking will be moderated by the extent to which they are prosocially-motivated when networking: The more prosocial their motivation to network, the less guilt they will experience.*

Besides, I do not expect that networking with a prosocial motive will change how people view networking actions: People will still perceive networking as a form of objectification of others. However, objectifying someone to increase the welfare of others might be easier to justify from a moral standpoint than objectifying someone to satisfy one’s self-interest. I therefore expect that the objectification of the interaction partner for prosocial motives will be perceived as excusable, reducing subsequent feelings of guilt. The full model is summarized in Figure 1.

Hypothesis 3b: *The pathway between objectification and guilt will be moderated by people's motivation when networking: When people network with a pro-social motive, the link between objectification and feelings of guilt will be weaker than when they network with a proself motive.*

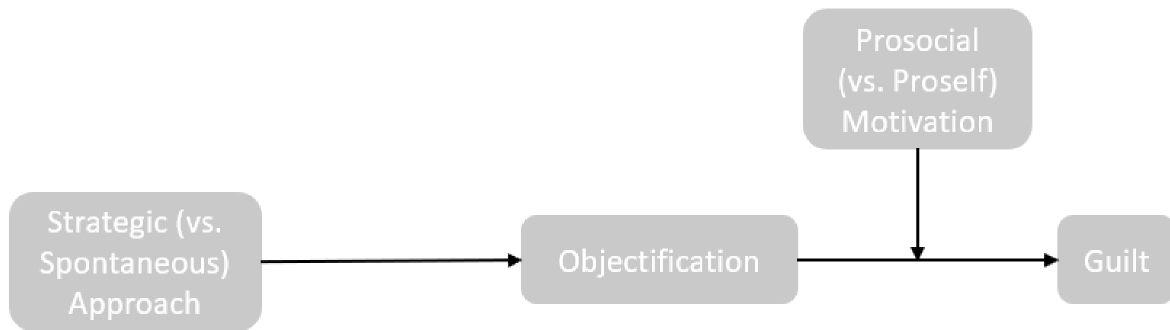

Figure 1. Theoretical Model
Note. Networking (i.e., a strategic approach) will increase guilt through objectification, and this relationship will be mitigated when the person has a prosocial motivation to network.

METHOD

Design and Participants

To investigate the hypotheses formulated above, I conducted a pre-registered[5] experiment. The study used a 2 x 2 between-subject design, manipulating the type of approach (strategic vs. spontaneous) as well as the motivation to network (prosocial vs. proself). The participants were randomly assigned to one of the four-cell between-subject design. All participants read a vignette and were asked to imagine themselves in the situation described. Immediately after reading the vignette, they answered a questionnaire measuring how they would think and feel in the situation described. Finally, comprehension checks, manipulation checks, and demographic questions were included at the end of the questionnaire.

[5] http://aspredicted.org/blind.php?x=76nh6m

I collected responses from 450 participants from an online platform called Prolific in exchange of payment. To improve the validity of the sample, selection criteria previously used in studies investigating networking behaviors (Forret & Dougherty, 2001) were applied, such that all participants were full-time employees (not part-time, not self-employed) in any type of organizations to the exclusion of family business (54% from the UK, 25% from North America, and 21% from continental Europe; 52% female; mean age = 36, *SD* = 9.28; mean work experience = 15 years, *SD* = 9.77).

Experimental Manipulations

Two factors, the type of approach (strategic vs. spontaneous) and the motivation to network (prosocial vs. proself), were manipulated between-subjects in vignettes. Participants had to imagine themselves as an employee working in a company providing with marketing solutions. A friend invited this employee to join a running club. While participating to his/her first run with the club, the employee approached the sales director of a company that could be a future client and started a conversation with him. The vignettes used to manipulate both conditions are reported in the Appendix.

The choice of the social setting (i.e., a running club) matched typical networking settings described in past research. For example, Shipilov and colleagues (2014) talk about "structured foci networking" or networking occurring in "ongoing formal entities that actively and regularly bring individuals together to engage in organized joint activities" (p. 73). Similarly, Forret and Dougherty (2001) describe networking activities such as participating in sport clubs, in community projects, in civic or social groups.

Manipulation of Approach. In the spontaneous approach condition, the employee decides to join the running club because he/she likes running and wants to exercise more. After his/her first run with the club, he/she serendipitously meets the sales director while getting to know the other members of the club better. In the strategic approach condition, the employee

decides to join the running club because he/she realizes that many members of the club are potential clients for the company in which he/she is working. After his/her first run with the club, he/she purposefully and proactively strikes a conversation with the sales director and steers the conversation toward his work.

Manipulation of Motivation. In addition, I manipulated the motivation of the employee as follows: In the prosocial condition, the employee was described as eager to contribute to the success of the department to which he/she belongs by helping it get resources and gain visibility, while in the proself condition, the employee was described as eager to make a career in the company and get visibility to be promoted.

Measures

Comprehension checks. I included three comprehension checks to verify whether participants paid enough attention to the story told in the vignette to which they had been exposed. The pre-registration planned that participants making at least one error would be excluded from the sample prior to analysis. However, preliminary analyses on those three comprehension checks indicated that 38% of participants failed the second question. Given the large number of participants that would then be excluded (193 participants), I decided to relax this criterion and not to consider the responses to this second question. I therefore excluded participants who failed at least one of the two remaining comprehension checks, leading to the exclusion of 52 participants. All analyses and statistics reported are based on the final sample of 398 participants. This final sample had between 95 and 104 participants per condition. The three comprehension checks as well as robustness checks on other possible exclusion criteria are reported in the Appendix. The measures of Objectification and Guilt can also be found in the Appendix.

Manipulation checks. To assess the effectiveness of the manipulations, participants evaluated the main reason for which they joined the running club on a 7-point scale from (1)

To run more regularly to (7) To approach executives from other companies, or (4) For both reasons equally. They then assessed the extent to which they were strategic in the way they approached the sales director with five items graded on a 7-point scale from (1) Strongly disagree to (7) Strongly agree. Finally, I adapted a scale from Rioux and Penner (2001) measuring the importance of proself motives and a scale from Grant (2008) measuring the importance of prosocial motives, and asked participants to assess the importance of those different motives with eight items on a 6-point scale from (1) Not at all important to (6) Extremely important.

Objectification[6]***.*** The extent to which participants perceived they objectified the interaction partner was measured with ten items on a 7-point scale from (1) Strongly disagree to (7) Strongly agree by adapting an ad-hoc measure from Gruenfeld, Inesi, Magee, and Galinsky (2008). Examples of items are: "I am treating Peter Myers as a mean to an end", "I think of Peter Myers in terms of how he can be useful to me", "If Peter Myers cannot give me what I want, I will probably not invest in this relationship" (Min = 1.5, M = 4.55, Max = 7, SD = 1.09, α = 0.9).

Guilt. A measure of state guilt was used to capture the "transitory affective state reflecting the immediate psychological consequences of violating moral standards" (Kugler & Jones, 1992, p. 319). State guilt was measured with ten items on a 7-point scale from (1) Strongly disagree to (7) Strongly agree by adapting[7] the scale developed by Jones, Schratter, and Kugler (2000). Examples of items are: "I would regret what I have done in this situation", "I would have felt better if I hadn't done what I did in this situation", "Coming out of this situation, I would feel worried" (Min = 1, M = 3.14, Max = 7, SD = 1.21, α = 0.92).

[6] While some scales have been developed to measure sexual objectification, there is no scale that captures objectification in general. As such, previous papers measuring this construct have created ad-hoc measures (e.g., Andrighetto, Baldissarri, & Volpato, 2017; Belmi & Schroeder, 2020; Gruenfeld et al., 2008).
[7] The ten items were slightly adapted to fit the situation described in the vignette.

Willingness to network. This second depend variable was added as a proxy to capture the likelihood of participants to network as described in the vignette to which they had been exposed. It consisted of a single question asking participants to determine to what extent they would be willing to behave this way, and was rated on a 7-point scale from (1) I would NEVER behave in this way to (7) I would DEFINITELY behave in this way. Since no specific hypothesis was pre-registered about this variable, it was used only in exploratory analyses.

RESULTS

Manipulation Checks

When asked about the main reason for which they joined the running club, participants in the strategic approach condition mostly answered that they joined the running club to approach executives from other companies (M = 6.10, SD = 1.11), while participants in the spontaneous approach condition mostly answered that they joined the running club to run more regularly (M = 1.50, SD = 1.05; $t(396) = 5.48$, $p < .001$). In addition, participants in the strategic approach condition perceived their approach as more strategic (M = 5.15, SD = 0.93) than participants in the spontaneous approach condition (M = 2.73, SD = 1.04; $t(396) = 24.42$, $p < .001$). Similarly, participants in the prosocial condition perceived that they were more prosocially motivated (M = 3.81, SD = 0.74) than participants in the proself condition (M = 3.07, SD = 0.79; $t(396) = 9.68$, $p < .001$). Taken together, those results show that the manipulations were successful. I then proceeded to the main analysis. Descriptive statistics are reported in Table 1.

TABLE 1
Descriptive Statistics:
Mean (SD) and Sample Size per Condition and Dependent Variable

	Spontaneous Approach		Strategic Approach	
	Proself Motivation	Prosocial Motivation	Proself Motivation	Prosocial Motivation
Guilt	2.78 (1.05)	2.77 (1.03)	3.46 (1.29)	3.59 (1.26)
Objectification	4.06 (1)	3.99 (0.91)	5.08 (0.98)	5.14 (0.89)
N	102	104	95	97

Note. Correlation coefficient between Guilt and Objectification = 0.31, p < .001

Test of the Main Effect and the Mediation Effect

Hypothesis 1 predicted that people who network (i.e., strategically vs. spontaneously approach others) would perceive that they objectify their interaction partners more (vs. less). To test this hypothesis, I regressed participants' perceived objectification on the type of approach. This analysis revealed a positive and significant effect of the type of approach on objectification ($\beta = 1.08$, $t(396) = 11.39$, $p < .001$): Those who networked were indeed more likely to frame their behavior as the objectification of the interaction partner ($M = 5.11$, $SD = 0.93$) than those who did not ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 0.96$). Hypothesis 1 is therefore supported.

Hypothesis 2a predicted that people who network would experience more guilt than people who do not. To test this hypothesis, I regressed participants' level of guilt on the type of approach. This analysis revealed a positive and significant effect of the type of approach on guilt ($\beta = 0.75$, $t(396) = 6.45$, $p < .001$): Those who networked were indeed more likely to feel guilt ($M = 3.52$, $SD = 1.27$) than those who did not ($M = 2.78$, $SD = 1.03$). Hypothesis 2a is therefore supported.

Hypothesis 2b predicted that the previous relationship would be mediated by objectification. More precisely, I predicted that networking (i.e., a strategic approach) would increase the perceived objectification of the interaction partner, leading to increased level of guilt. Hypothesis 1 indicated that the first path of the mediation was significant: Participants in

the strategic approach condition reported greater perception of objectification that participants in the spontaneous approach condition ($\beta = 1.08$, $t(396) = 11.39$, $p < .001$). I then regressed guilt on objectification while controlling for the type of approach, and as expected found that a greater level of objectification was indeed associated with stronger feelings of guilt ($\beta = 0.23$, $t(395) = 3.76$, $p < .001$).

To test the mediation model, I ran model 4 in PyProcessMacro[8] (André, 2017) and used bootstrap mediation with 5000 random samples and percentile confidence intervals (Caron, 2019; Hayes, 2017; Preacher, Rucker, & Hayes, 2007; Rucker, Preacher, Tormala, & Petty, 2011; Williams & MacKinnon, 2008; Zhao, Lynch, & Chen, 2010). I defined the type of approach as the independent variable, objectification as the mediator, and guilt as the dependent variable. As expected, I found a positive and significant indirect effect of approach on guilt ($\beta = 0.25$, Confidence Interval (CI) at 95% = [0.08, 0.43]): The positive impact of approach (strategic vs. spontaneous) on guilt was significantly mediated by the perceived objectification of the interaction partner. Hypothesis 2b is therefore supported. Interestingly, I also found a residual direct effect of approach on guilt ($\beta = 0.5$, CI at 95% = [0.24, 0.76]), indicating that objectification does not fully explain the relationship between approach and guilt. This could signal either measurement error in the objectification scale, or that other processes are contributing to feelings of guilt. Results of the linear regressions are reported in Table 2, and those of the mediation analysis are reported in Table 3.

Moderating Role of Prosocial Motivation

Hypothesis 3 predicted a moderation effect of prosocial motivation not only on the main effect (H3a) of approach on guilt, but also on the second path of the mediation effect (H3b) between objectification and guilt. More precisely, because a prosocial motivation would allow

[8] The Python version (https://pypi.org/project/PyProcessMacro/) of PROCESS from Andrew F. Hayes (https://www.processmacro.org/index.html).

those who network to morally justify their behavior, I predicted that such motivation would mitigate the main effect of networking on guilt, as well as the effect of objectification on guilt in the mediation.

To test the first of these hypotheses, I regressed guilt on approach and motivation and on the two-way interaction between those variables. I found no effect of motivation on the relationship between approach and guilt ($\beta_{\text{App}\times\text{Motiv}}$ = 0.13, *t*(394) = 0.56, *p* = .57). Hypothesis 3a is therefore not supported. The results of this linear regression are reported in Table 2.

TABLE 2
Linear Regressions

	Dependent variable:			
	Guilt			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Approach (strategic = 1)	0.749***	0.503***	0.683***	0.574**
	(0.116)	(0.132)	(0.165)	(0.182)
Objectification		0.227***		0.107
		(0.060)		(0.082)
Motivation (prosocial = 1)			-0.002	-1.039*
			(0.161)	(0.512)
Approach x Motivation			0.131	-0.181
			(0.232)	(0.263)
Objectification x Motivation				0.261*
				(0.121)
Constant	2.776***	1.862***	2.777***	2.343***
	(0.081)	(0.256)	(0.115)	(0.350)
Observations	398	398	398	398
R^2	0.095	0.126	0.097	0.138
Adjusted R^2	0.093	0.122	0.090	0.127
Residual Std. Error	1.157 (df = 396)	1.138 (df = 395)	1.159 (df = 394)	1.135 (df = 392)
F Statistic	41.651*** (df = 1; 396)	28.589*** (df = 2; 395)	14.032*** (df = 3; 394)	12.534*** (df = 5; 392)
Note:				+p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

To test the moderated mediation model, I ran model 15 in PyProcessMacro (André, 2017) and used bootstrap mediation with 5000 random samples and percentile confidence intervals. I defined the type of approach as the independent variable, objectification as the mediator, motivation as the moderator, and guilt as the dependent variable.

The moderated mediation model revealed a significant conditional indirect effect of approach on guilt via objectification when motivation is prosocial ($\beta = 0.40$, CI at 95% = [0.22, 0.61]), and a non-significant conditional indirect effect of approach on guilt via objectification when motivation is proself ($\beta = 0.12$, CI at 95% = [-0.13, 0.38]). However, those two indirect effects were not significantly different from each other ($\Delta\beta = 0.28$, CI at 95% = [-0.01, 0.59]). Hypothesis 3b is therefore not supported. The moderated mediation effects are reported in Table 3.

TABLE 3
Summary of Indirect Effect and Conditional Indirect Effects

Mediated Path		**Indirect Effect**	**Direct Effect**	**Total Effect**
Approach to Guilt via Objectification	Effect	0.25	0.50	0.75
	95% CI	[0.08, 0.43]	[0.24, 0.76]	[0.52, 0.98]
Conditionally Mediated Paths		**Indirect Effect**	**Direct Effect**	**Total Effect**
Approach to Guilt via Objectification	Effect	0.40	0.39	0.81
(Prosocial Motivation)	95% CI	[0.22, 0.61]	[0.02, 0.76]	[0.49, 1.13]
Approach to Guilt via Objectification	Effect	0.12	0.57	0.68
(Proself Motivation)	95% CI	[-0.13, 0.38]	[0.22, 0.93]	[0.36, 1.01]

Note. Index of moderated mediation: 0.2829, 95% CI = [-0.0128, 0.5939]

Exploratory Analyses

In an exploratory analysis, I verified whether the negative moral emotion participants experienced after networking affected their willingness to network. To do so, I tested four different models: the main effect of approach on willingness to network; a mediation model in which approach is the dependent variable, guilt the mediator, and willingness to network the dependent variable; a serial mediation model in which objectification and then guilt mediate the relationship between approach and willingness to network; and finally, I tested the moderating effect of a prosocial motivation on the three previous relationships.

I first regressed willingness to network on approach and found that the more strategic the approach, the less willing to network people were ($\beta = -0.98$, $t(396) = -6.17$, $p < .001$).

Besides, this relationship was significantly and negatively mediated by an increase in guilt (β = -0.63, CI at 95% = [-0.85, -0.43]).

I then tested a serial mediation model in which objectification and then guilt mediated the relationship between approach and people's willingness to network. As expected, I found a significant and negative indirect effect of approach on willingness to network via objectification then guilt (β = -0.20, CI at 95% = [-0.35, -0.07]), suggesting that a strategic approach increases the perceived objectification of the interaction partner, which in turn increases feelings of guilt, which subsequently reduces the willingness to network. In addition, I found a marginally significant residual direct effect (β = -0.25, $t(394)$ = -1.72, p = .086), indicating that the two mediators capture most of the relationship between approach and willingness to network.

Finally, I tested the moderating effect of a prosocial motivation on the three previous models (i.e., the main effect, the simple mediation and the serial mediation) and found no effect of motivation.

DISCUSSION

Summary

Casciaro, Gino, and Kouchaki (2014) have provided the first causal evidence of the relationship between networking and emotional discomfort. However, the paper suffers from both theoretical and methodological issues that prevent us from drawing conclusion from their work, and therefore leaves their original questions (i.e., do people feel uncomfortable when networking, and if so why?) unanswered. On the one hand, there is no empirical evidence for the theoretical premises of the paper (i.e., the Macbeth effect), and the core concept of the paper (i.e., moral purity) lacks both construct and measurement validity. On the other hand, the manipulation of the independent variable in both experiments is either weak (i.e., based on

priming, cf. Ritchie, 2020; Singal, 2021) or does not provide a discriminant test of networking (i.e., confounded treatment).

Based on the lessons learned from their work, I proposed a theoretical framework, grounded in the literature on moral emotions, investigated both a mediator and a moderator, and tested the hypothesized model in a pre-registered experiment.

I first examined the way people cognitively frame networking activities. I argued that the instrumentality of networking leads people to frame networking as a process of objectification through which alters are considered for what they can bring to the person who networks, with little to no interest for the persons they are. Alters therefore become means that can be used to satisfy personal ends. I then argued that this objectification makes networking a morally suspect behavior that triggers guilt. Finally, to help people overcome their discomfort, I tried to understand under which conditions this guilt might be mitigated. I argued that networking with a prosocial motive, that is a motive going above and beyond the satisfaction of one's self-interest, could provide people with a self-serving justification allowing them to make excusable or morally acceptable their networking actions.

In a pre-registered online experiment, I found support for the main effect and the mediation effect, but not for the moderation effect. Besides, the mediation effect indicated that objectification does not fully explain the relationship between networking and guilt, and therefore that other factors might play a role. In addition, the lack of significant results for the moderator might be explained by the size of the sample. Indeed, two-way interactions that predict an attenuation effect are difficult to capture because they require large samples (Simonsohn, 2014a), and a sample size of 398 participants might not be sufficient (Simmons, 2014; Simonsohn, 2014b). It is also worth noting that if networking had a positive and significant effect on the perceived objectification of the interaction partner, this perceived objectification was also quite high in the non-networking situation (i.e., the spontaneous

approach condition): On average, participants in this condition rated the level of objectification at 4.03 on a 7-point scale. A post-hoc explanation might be that people felt that the interaction described in the "spontaneous" vignette was inappropriate given the context, since the person brought up professional matters in a non-professional context.

Exploratory analyses showed a similar effect of approach on people's stated likelihood to network: People's willingness to network decreased after a strategic interaction and this relationship was mediated by an increase in their feelings of guilt. I also found support for a serial mediation model in which objectification and then guilt captured a large fraction of people's unwillingness to network.

Theoretical Implications

A critical look at CGK casts doubt on the validity of both the theoretical argument and the evidence presented in the paper. The construct of moral purity on which the paper relies is based on a spurious finding that has since failed to replicate. Consequently, it should not be used as a foundation to explain people's discomfort when networking.

The model offered in this essay focuses on the cognitive frame people use to make sense of their networking actions, and the subsequent moral emotions they experience, as a theoretical basis for people's unwillingness to network. Indeed, while the literature on networking behaviors had described some ways people might think or feel about networking, it had not formulated specific hypotheses connecting networking behaviors to specific cognitions and emotions. By offering empirical evidence of a causal link between networking and moral emotions, and proposing a psychological mechanism, the present essay suggests that the literature on networking can be enriched by considering the moral emotions people experience when networking, and by understanding the features of networking that people find morally questionable.

The present research extents the psychological literature on objectification. While much of this literature uses the concept of objectification to understand the sexual objectification of women (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), this concept might be useful to understand a broader set of issues (Belmi & Schroeder, 2020), and in particular networking interactions. In addition, while the present research emphasizes a core feature of objectification (i.e., instrumentality, or using a person to satisfy one's own goals and needs), other features of objectification might be relevant in a networking situation (Nussbaum, 1995, 1999). For example, treating a person as "fungible" (i.e., interchangeable with another person having similar attributes) might also play a role in the feelings of guilt people experience when networking. The fungibility of interaction partners might make the lack of genuine interest for others and the focus on the resources at their disposal more salient, ultimately making networking more difficult.

It is also worth noting that the hypothesis that a prosocial motivation would alleviate guilt and help people network, by offering a self-serving justification for networking, was not supported. While this null effect might be attributed to other factors (e.g., a lack of statistical power or a subtle manipulation), it contradicts the proposition that having a high purpose in mind would help people overcome their aversion to network (Casciaro et al., 2016). The relationship between self-serving justification and willingness to network might thus be more nuanced than originally offered: A prosocial motive might not be sufficient to shield people against the negative affect triggered by networking, but other stronger justifications, such as moral licensing (when people's recent prosocial actions lead them to feel entitled to act immorally in a subsequent situation: Monin & Miller, 2001; Sachdeva, Iliev, & Medin, 2009) or distancing (when people justify their immoral acts by pointing out other's immoral deeds: Shalvi et al., 2015) might help people justify their networking actions from a moral standpoint.

Practical Implications

Given how beneficial networking can be, not only in terms of network structure (Bensaou et al., 2014; Shipilov et al., 2014), but also in terms of career outcomes (Forret & Dougherty, 2001, 2004; Shipilov et al., 2014; Vissa, 2012; Wanberg et al., 2000; Wolff & Moser, 2009), understanding the precise type of negative emotions networking triggers, the mechanism leading to them, and the conditions that can mitigate them is critical to help people network more comfortably and so more efficiently, and finally help them fully benefit from their network. The present findings confirm that acknowledging the benefits of networking might not be sufficient to bring people to network: Even if people are aware of its usefulness, people will be reluctant to network as long as they perceive and interpret this activity as a self-interested activity in which the interaction partner is objectified.

Knowing that networking triggers guilt, partly because it is associated with a process of objectification of the interaction partner, might already help people mitigate their discomfort. They might reflect on the reasons why networking does not necessarily mean objectifying others, and hopefully mitigate the feelings of guilt that they experience when networking with others. For example, since guilt is typically triggered by the fear of hurting others, people who network might try to focus on what the interaction partner might get out of the exchange: For instance, the target might be flattered, or might even be happy to have the opportunity to help.

In addition, the observation that networking could be guilt-inducing suggests multiple strategies to help people engage in networking. A first strategy would consist of changing how people evaluate networking. Since guilt results from a negative evaluation of the behavior itself (Tangney et al., 2007), people who manage to evaluate their networking actions less negatively could subsequently reduce their guilt feelings. For example, if they manage to see networking as a routine task making part of their job, they might no longer attach a moral component to

networking. Similarly, managers could also help their subordinates by reminding them the importance of networking or by explicitly making networking an official part of their job.

A second strategy would consist of considering the needs of the target while networking. Since guilt is an other-oriented emotion that correlates with perspective taking (Leith & Baumeister, 1998; Tangney et al., 2007), if people manage to adopt the perspective of their interaction partner, for example by considering their needs and priorities while networking, and to turn the instrumental interaction into a win-win exchange, people could reduce their guilt.

Finally, a third strategy would consist of implementing compensatory actions after networking. Since guilt motivates corrective actions, leads to constructive responses, and facilitates empathic processes (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heartherton, 1994, 1995; Tangney, 1991, 1995a, 1995b), if after networking people think about how they can either give back to their interaction partner or give to others to make them benefit from what they have received, it could help them reduce their guilt feelings.

Limitations

While the present research was meant to improve research on networking discomfort, it suffers from multiple limitations. First, the current study would benefit from a replication with a larger sample. It would confirm that the effects found hold, but also allow us to draw stronger conclusions about the presence (or the absence) of a moderating effect of prosocial motivation on guilt. Second, the findings might not generalize to other networking actions. I have only tested a single vignette, and this vignette mixes two types of networking behaviors, called search activities and leveraging activities. People search for new ties when they explore their social environment, when they identify opportunities and establish contact (Bensaou et al., 2014; Vissa, 2012). People leverage relationships when they exploit their social environment, when they access or mobilize resources from others and extract value from their contacts

(Bensaou et al., 2014; Kuwabara et al., 2018). While I do not expect each networking behavior taken separately or other networking behaviors, such as maintenance, to be fundamentally different in terms of how they are perceived, or in terms of the emotions they generate, I would nonetheless see value in replicating the current findings on each type of networking actions. Finally, it is noteworthy that there is no established scale for measuring objectification (except for sexual objectification). Future research would therefore benefit from scale development efforts aimed at defining the boundaries of the construct and establishing its validity in the context of networking activities.

Directions for Future Research

The present research opens interesting venues for future research. First, while this paper documents the role of a specific frame (i.e., objectification) and a specific moral emotion (i.e., guilt) in the discomfort that people experience when networking, it is possible that other cognitive frames and other moral emotions would be present in specific networking settings. For instance, future research could investigate the circumstances in which feelings of "shame" might emerge following networking actions, and the type of cognitive frame likely to trigger this emotion. Networking actions that imply a negative evaluation of the self could be likely to trigger shame (Tangney et al., 2007). For example, using one's connections to gain an unfair advantage (e.g., knowing someone in the C-suite, and using this relationship to increase one's chance of getting a promotion) could be perceived as unfair, or disguising one's true selves to approach someone (e.g., pretending to like golf to play with one's boss) could be perceived as inauthentic, and both could subsequently trigger shame.

Then, I adopt an egocentric perspective in which I try to understand the cognitive and emotional hurdles that prevent people from networking. However, networking should probably be studied not only from the initiator's point of view but also from both the recipient's and the observer's perspective. Indeed, any networking action requires a sender and a receiver, and

most of the time, since those actions are public, they may also imply an observer. Some research has suggested that people may perceive networking as unfair or manipulative (Beer, 2002; Bensaou et al., 2014; Ibarra, 2016; Ibarra et al., 2010), in particular because it might imply asking and using special favors from others to gain unfair advantage (de Janasz & Forret, 2008; Ibarra, 2016). From an observer's perspective, seeing other people network might then trigger "other-condemning moral emotions" such as contempt, anger, or disgust (Haidt, 2003; Tangney et al., 2007). It has also been suggested that self-interest, if perceived, is counterproductive in relationship building (Brass, 2011). From the receiver' perspective, overt networking attempts might therefore be judged harshly, which might in turn prevents the initiator of such interactions to gain valuable resources. Ultimately, if people anticipate that their networking actions might be misjudged, both by the recipient and the observer of the interaction, they might then be particularly reluctant to undertake those actions.

Another interesting venue would be to investigate whether people can reframe networking behaviors themselves in such a way that the selfishness, deception, and instrumentality attached to those behaviors disappear. In the present paper, I have investigated whether prosocial motives could help people justify their networking attempts. In other words, I did not expect that networking with a prosocial motivation would change the way people perceive networking actions, especially in term of objectification, but only expected that such motivation would justify and excuse the immorality attached to networking and objectification. However, other moderators could be more effective if they can change the way people frame networking actions in the first place. For instance, if people learn to view networking behaviors as an opportunity to give to others, to build mutually beneficial connections, or to reciprocate favors they have received in the past (Casciaro et al., 2016; Ibarra, 2016; Kanter, 2020; Uzzi & Dunlap, 2005), they might no longer object to the morality of networking. In particular, giving to others has been shown to be one of the factors that help employees flourish within their

organization, by enhancing their perception that their work is meaningful (Colbert, Bono, & Purvanova, 2016). By changing the lenses through which they make sense of networking actions, people could construe networking behaviors as building a community of resources accessible to all contacts and in which others are genuinely considered rather than just seen as instruments through which personal interests can be satisfied.

Finally, recent research has shown that people engage more in objectification at work than in a non-work context: Because people make decisions based on cost-benefits considerations at work, they engage more in calculative and strategic thinking (Belmi & Schroeder, 2020). This finding is noteworthy for two reasons. First, if people tend to objectify others more in a work context, it might then be easier for them to network within the organization: They might be less likely to experience the moral burden attached to objectification and so to networking in a context in which instrumentality toward others is accepted or even desirable. Second, past research has shown that networking outside of any formal organizations may be more efficient than networking within formal organizations by increasing the diversity of the network built and so the access to resources (Shipilov et al., 2014). Those two pieces of evidence might suggest a paradox: While people would be better of networking outside of their work organization, they might feel more comfortable networking at work, therefore reducing their capacity to build efficient networks and accessing valuable resources. Testing whether the context (work vs. non-work) in which networking is occurring impacts the extent to which people experience negative moral emotions, as well as examining what makes objectification in a non-work context aversive and what makes it acceptable in a work context might help us understand the circumstances under which networking discomfort is the most likely to emerge.

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APPENDIX

Comments on CGK's Theory

CGK cites the work of Tetlock and co-authors on taboo trade-offs (2000). In this paper, the authors empirically test the sacred-value-protection model (Tetlock, 2000) that explains how people cope with threats to sacred values: To distance themselves from moral transgressions, people express moral outrage and engage in moral cleansing. Through moral cleansing people reaffirm their core values and loyalties to the moral order that has been transgressed. As such, the model predicts that people who merely contemplate moral transgressions will engage in symbolic acts of moral cleansing to reaffirm their attachment to the moral order. For example, they show that people exposed to taboo trade-offs or secular-sacred trade-offs (e.g., allocating a massive amount a money to save the life of a single child who needs an organ transplantation or sacrificing the child but allocating this money to make the hospital better) were more likely to engage in moral cleansing such as volunteering for an organ-donation campaign than people exposed to secular trade-offs.

As such, for Tetlock and colleagues (2000), moral cleansing is a way for people to distance themselves from morally forbidden trade-offs. The term "moral cleansing" here refers to symbolic, and not literal, cleansing: It refers to a set of actions that people engage in to reestablish moral order. On the contrary, Zhong and Liljenquist (2006) claim that "cleansing" is more than symbolic. Based on the observations that, in many religions, physical cleansing ceremonies serve to purify the soul and clean the conscience of the faithful, they expect a psychological association between moral purity and physical purity. They predict that people who feel morally threatened, will feel physically contaminated and will experience a need for cleansing. However, not only this idea has failed to be replicated (Earp et al., 2014; Fayard et al., 2009; Gámez et al., 2011; Johnson et al., 2014; Siev et al., 2018), but has also no theoretical foundation beyond the religious metaphor.

Finally, some predictions of CGK raise questions. CGK distinguishes two dimensions of social interactions: the approach (spontaneous vs. instrumental) and the content (personal vs. professional). They define instrumental approach as proactive and carried out with the specific intention of benefiting the initiator of the interaction. On the contrary, they define an approach as spontaneous when this intention is missing, and that the interaction naturally emerges from the social situation. They then predict that an instrumental approach will be more likely to increase moral discomfort compared with a spontaneous approach and that this difference will be stronger for professional interactions than for personal interactions. They argue that, since personal ties are other-oriented, and that an action is moral if it is concerned by the welfare of others, and motivated by altruism (Blum, 1980; Rogers, 1997; Singer, 1995; Williams, 1973), personal ties will be easier to morally justify that purely self-interested professional ties.

If the present paper confirms the first part of their prediction (i.e., an instrumental approach is more guilt-inducing than a spontaneous approach), the second part of their prediction (i.e., the moderating effect) is at odds with the theory cited in the paper. Indeed, the literature on taboo

trade-offs (Tetlock et al., 2000) and relational schemata (Fiske, 1992) argue the opposite: Instrumentally approaching someone to build personal ties would be more objectionable than instrumentally approaching someone to build professional ties (Fiske & Tetlock, 1997; McGraw & Tetlock, 2005).

Since personal ties are communal-affective relationships (i.e., characterized by a general obligation to care for the welfare of others, and free of calculus and costs-benefits considerations), they are not supposed to be built with ulterior motives. Strategically building personal ties by placing a value on one's friendships is morally questionable. This kind of trade-off calculus not only undermines the relationship but also degrades one's moral standing. As such, the more personal the content of the interaction is, the more offensive an instrumental approach should be perceived. This inconsistency further limits the generalizability of CGK's argument.

Vignettes

Approach:

- Spontaneous
- Strategic

Motivation:

- Proself
- Prosocial

You are working for HBM, a company providing marketing solutions.

[*Proself Motivation:* You have always wanted to work here, and you are eager to make a career in this company.][*Prosocial Motivation:* You love the department in which you are working, and you are eager to contribute to the success of your colleagues.]

[*Proself Motivation:* You think securing new clients might be a fantastic springboard for your career: It would reflect positively on you, and you might be considered for a promotion.] [*Prosocial Motivation:* You think securing new clients would be great for the department: It would bring more resources, and help your colleagues gain visibility within the company.]

A couple of days ago, Alice, a friend of you, told you about a running club she just joined, and invited you to join it. [*Spontaneous Approach:* You like running and have been looking for running partners for a while. You think that running in a group would help you run more regularly.] [*Strategic Approach:* You ask her questions about the other members of the club. Alice tells you about who they are and what they do for a living. You quickly understand that several members are marketing executives in other companies, and that they could be interested in HBM's solutions. You then realize that this running club might be an opportunity to approach them.]

You decide to join and ask Alice when the next running event is.

A week later, you go to your first run with the club. You get a good workout, and after the run the group stops at a local juice bar. [*Spontaneous Approach:* You use this time to get to know the other members better and strike a conversation with someone who introduces himself as Peter Myers. He starts talking about his work and tells you that he is the sales director of AirCo. You then realize that AirCo could be interested in HBM's marketing solutions.] [*Strategic Approach:* You use this time to strike a conversation with one of the other members, Peter Meyers. You know he is the sales director of AirCo, which is one of the companies you believe could be interested in HBM's marketing solutions. You introduce yourself, and quickly steer the conversation towards his work.] As the conversation develops, you tell him more about what [*Proself Motivation:* you are] [*Prosocial Motivation:* your department is] doing at HBM, and that [*Proself Motivation:* you] [*Prosocial Motivation:* your department] might have marketing solutions to offer if he is interested. You agree on a meeting in the near future to discuss this further.

Measures

Objectification

Adapted from an ad-hoc measure from Gruenfeld, Inesi, Magee, Galinski (2008)

Please tell us the extent to which you agree with each of the following statements.
Measured on a 7-point scale: (1) Strongly disagree – (4) Neither agree nor disagree – (7) Strongly agree

1. I think more about what Peter Myers can do for me than what I can do for him.
2. I am treating Peter Myers as a mean to an end.
3. I am interested in Peter Myers as a person. ®
4. The relationship with Peter Myers is important to me because it might help me accomplish my goals.
5. I think of Peter Myers in terms of how he can be useful to me.
6. I interact with Peter Myers out of genuine interest for him, rather than because of what he could bring me. ®
7. If Peter Myers cannot give me what I want, I will probably not invest in this relationship.
8. Someone else with a position equivalent to Peter Myers' could become equally important to me.
9. How useful Peter Myers is to me does not matter for our relationship. ®
10. I care about Peter Myers beyond what he could bring me. ®

State Guilt

Adapted from the scale developed by Jones, Schratter, and Kugler (2000)

For each of the following statements, please indicate how you would feel in this situation.
Measured on a 7-point scale: (1) Strongly disagree – (4) Neither agree nor disagree – (7) Strongly agree

1. I would feel good about myself and what I have done. ®
2. I would regret what I have done in this situation.
3. In this situation, I would feel that it isn't easy being me.
4. I would feel calm and worry-free. ®
5. Coming out of this situation, I would feel that there is absolutely nothing I have done that I would change. ®
6. I would not feel particularly guilty about anything I have done in this situation. ®
7. Coming out of this situation, I would wish to be able to go back and rectify what I have done wrong.
8. Looking back to this situation, I would feel that there is at least one thing I would like to change.
9. I would have felt better if I hadn't done what I did in this situation.
10. Coming out of this situation, I would feel worried.

Comprehension checks

1. HBM is a company providing:
   - Pharmaceutical products
   - Food products
   - Marketing solutions
   - IT solutions
2. Alice is:
   - Your boss
   - A colleague
   - The personal assistant of Peter Myers
   - One of your friends
3. You discussed with Peter Myers in:
   - A gymnasium
   - The subway
   - A local juice bar
   - The street

Robustness Checks to Different Exclusion Rules

The second comprehension check asked participants who Alice was in the story. The distribution of responses showed that 34% of participants responded that Alice was a "colleague" instead of a "friend", suggesting that the participants got confused either by the vignette or by the question on this specific piece of information.

While I decided to exclude this comprehension check from analysis, other options would have been possible:

- Exclusion Rule 1: Tolerating one false answer among the three comprehension checks (exclusion of 29 participants, N = 421).
- Exclusion Rule 2: Accepting "colleague" as a true answer for question 2 and excluding participants who failed at least one of the three comprehension checks (exclusion of 60 participants, N = 390)
- Exclusion Rule 3: Not tolerating a single error as pre-registered (exclusion of 193 participants, N = 257)

Below are the results for the different exclusion rules. The results are the same for the three hypotheses regardless of the exclusion criteria considered.

Hypothesis 1: effect of approach on objectification

- ER 1: $\beta = 1.06$, SD = 0.09, $t(419) = 11.46$, $p < .001$
- ER 2: $\beta = 1.10$, SD = 0.10, $t(388) = 11.54$, $p < .001$
- ER 3: $\beta = 1.09$, SD = 0.11, $t(255) = 9.49$, $p < .001$

Hypothesis 2a: main effect of approach on guilt

- ER 1: $\beta = 0.72$, SD = 0.11, $t(419) = 6.42$, $p < .001$
- ER 2: $\beta = 0.77$, SD = 0.12, $t(388) = 6.6$, $p < .001$
- ER 3: $\beta = 0.74$, SD = 0.14, $t(255) = 5.16$, $p < .001$

Hypothesis 2b: mediation of objectification

- ER 1:
  - Indirect effect = 0.23, 95% CI = [0.07, 0.40]
  - Residual direct effect = 0.49, SD = 0.13, $t(418) = 3.87$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [0.24, 0.74]
- ER 2:
  - Indirect effect = 0.24, 95% CI = [0.06, 0.43]
  - Residual direct effect = 0.53, SD = 0.13, $t(387) = 4.00$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [0.27, 0.80]
- ER 3:
  - Indirect effect = 0.26, 95% CI = [0.08, 0.46]
  - Residual direct effect = 0.48, SD = 0.16, $t(254) = 2.93$, $p = .004$, 95% CI = [0.16, 0.80]

Hypothesis 3a: moderation of motivation on the main effect

- ER 1: $\beta_{app\ x\ motiv} = 0.12$, SD = 0.23, $t(417) = 0.55$, $p = .58$
- ER 2: $\beta_{app\ x\ motiv} = 0.09$, SD = 0.23, $t(386) = 0.40$, $p = .69$
- ER 3: $\beta_{app\ x\ motiv} = 0.10$, SD = 0.29, $t(253) = 0.36$, $p = .72$

Hypothesis 3b: moderated mediation

- ER 1:
  - $\beta_{obj\ x\ motiv} = 0.25$, SD = 0.12, $t(415) = 2.09$, $p = .04$
  - Indirect effect:
    - Proself = 0.11, 95% CI = [-0.12, 0.35]
    - Prosocial = 0.37, 95% CI = [0.19, 0.56]
    - Index of moderated mediation = 0.26, 95% CI = [-0.02, 0.55]
- ER 2:
  - $\beta_{obj\ x\ motiv} = 0.28$, SD = 0.12, $t(384) = 2.31$, $p = .02$
  - Indirect effect:
    - Proself = 0.10, 95% CI = [-0.16, 0.37]
    - Prosocial = 0.41, 95% CI = [0.22, 0.61]
    - Index of moderated mediation = 0.31, 95% CI = [-0.003, 0.62]
- ER 3:
  - $\beta_{obj\ x\ motiv} = 0.08$, SD = 0.15, $t(251) = 0.53$, $p = .60$
  - Indirect effect:
    - Proself = 0.22, 95% CI = [-0.02, 0.49]
    - Prosocial = 0.31, 95% CI = [0.05, 0.58]
    - Index of moderated mediation = 0.09, 95% CI = [-0.27, 0.44]