

Moral overconfidence

How the immoral think they're perceived by others

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BACKGROUND: People care about how they're perceived by others. But these judgments, called **meta-perceptions**, are often inaccurate. In the domain of **moral behavior**, inaccurate meta-perceptions may lead people to engage in behavior they do not realize will be perceived as immoral.

METHODS

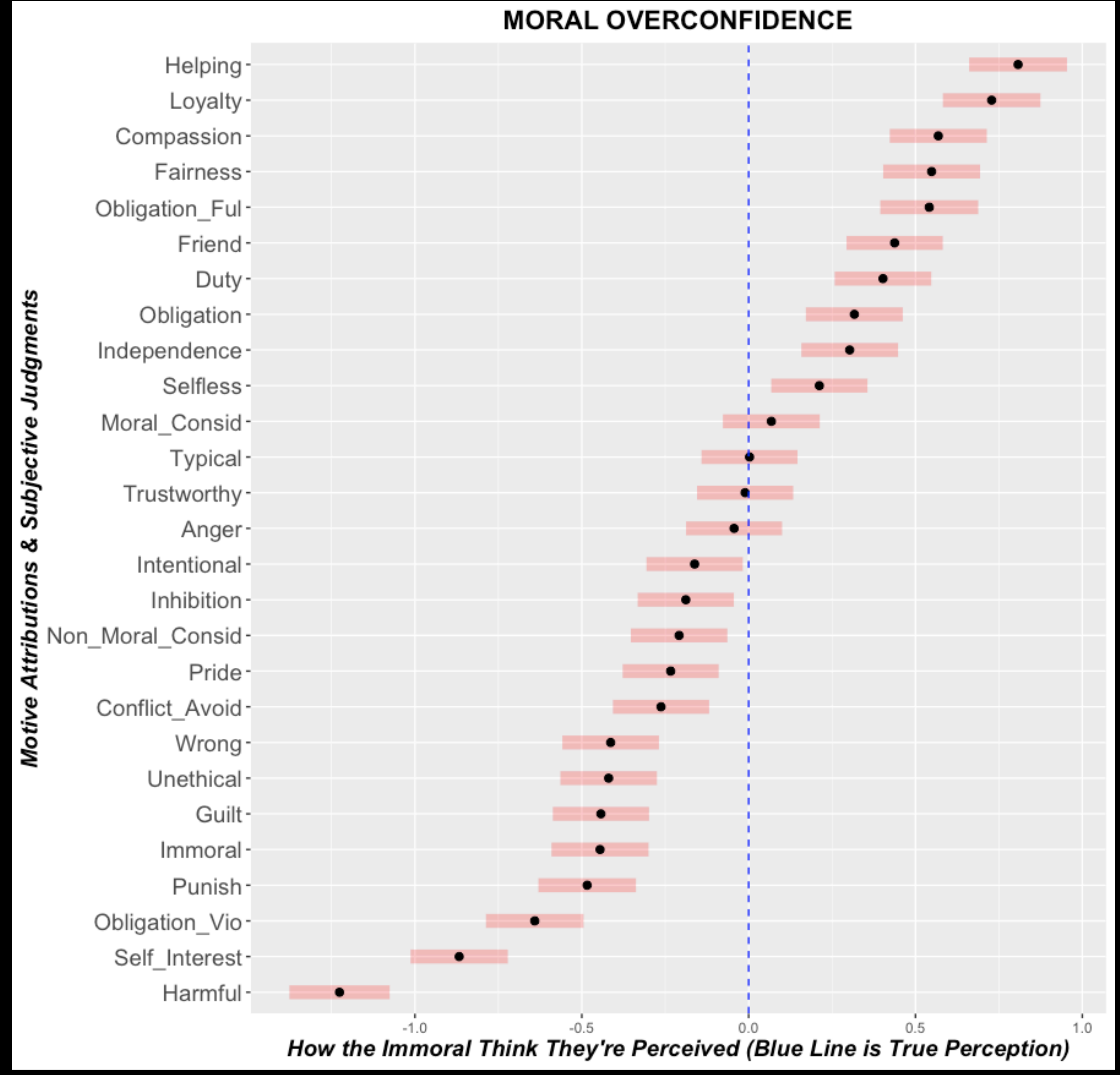
- Using nationally representative samples, 122 actors wrote about a time they did something "bad, but for good reason." We asked for **meta-perceptions**: how actors thought people would perceive their motives and behavior if they read the account. We also measured **actual-motives**: what the actors said actually motivated their behavior.
- We then gave the 122 stories to a sample of 256 observers, who read them and rated the actors' motives/behavior on the same survey items. In total there were **62,199 actor-observer judgments**.
- Directly comparing actors' meta-perceptions to observers' judgments allowed for a **direct test of meta-perceptive accuracy**. Using a Social Accuracy Model (Biesanz, 2010) mixed-effects framework, we examined rank-order and stereotypic accuracy (below), and directional-mean accuracy (center figure).

RESULTS: Actors were able to predict how they'd be perceived, but **rank-order accuracy was low**, and actors relied heavily on the stereotypic profile.

Actor Meta-Accuracy Models				
Predictors	Model 1: Baseline Meta-Accuracy		Model 2: Distinctive Meta-Accuracy	
	Estimates	CI	Estimates	CI
Intercept	-0.008	-0.131 - 0.115	0.001	-0.121 - 0.123
Observer Judgments	0.247 ***	0.215 - 0.280	0.169 ***	0.136 - 0.201
Stereotypic Profile			0.793 ***	0.658 - 0.928
N	122 Actor_ID		122 Actor_ID	
Observations	62199		62199	
Marginal R ² / Conditional R ²	0.062 / 0.195		0.123 / 0.317	

* p<0.05 ** p<0.01 *** p<0.001

Immoral actors overestimate how positively they're perceived and the positive motives they're ascribed.



Moderators of Meta-Accuracy

Actors higher on trait **Machiavellianism** and **Workplace Deviance** were **less accurate**. Actors higher in **Intelligence** and observer-accuracy (on a separate moral meta-perception task) were **more accurate**.

Actor-Observer Agreement

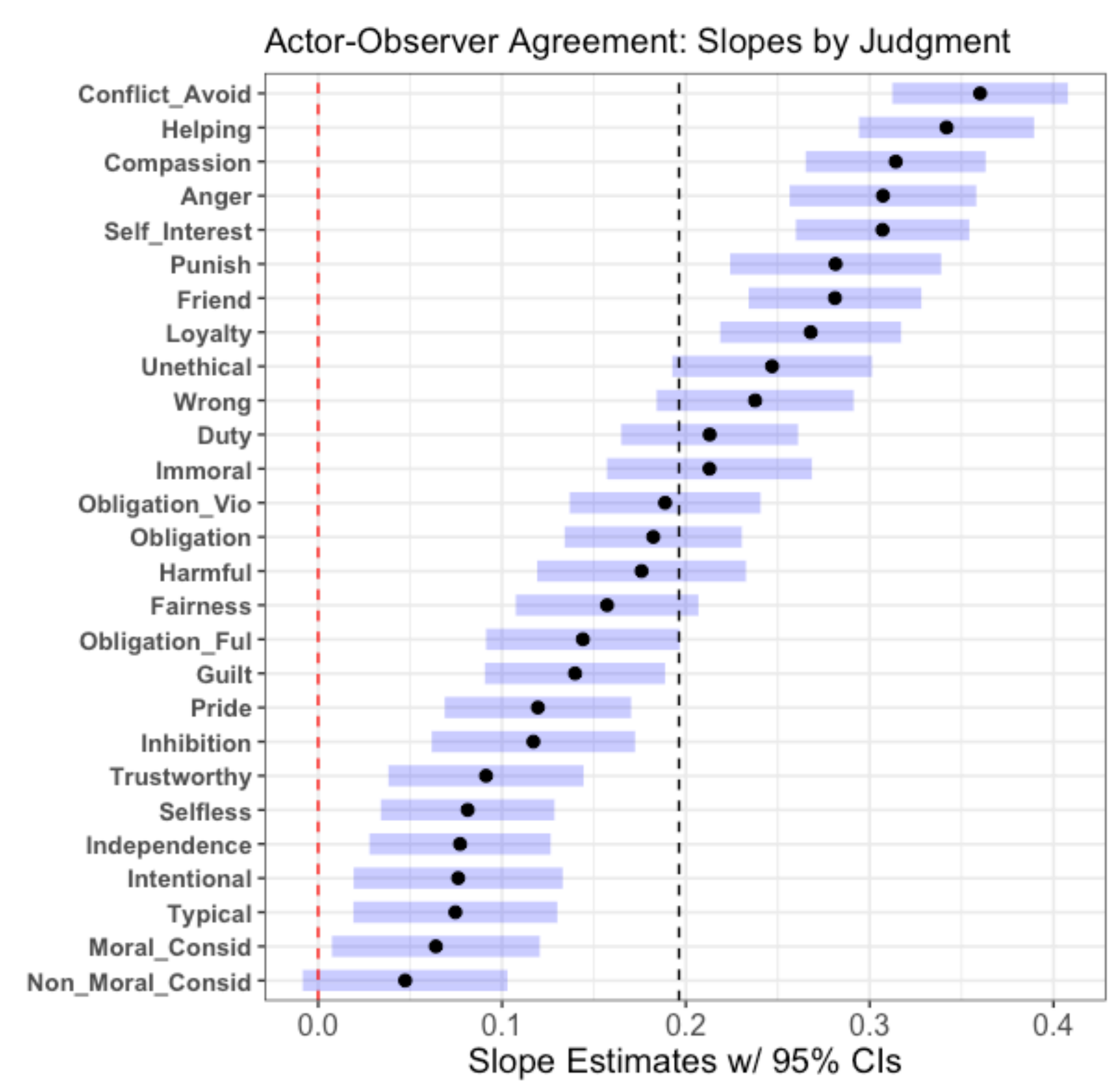
We examined actor-observer agreement: how much observer-judgments tracked with actors' self-reported motives. We found low to moderate levels of agreement, and that actors relied on the stereotypic profile.

Predictors	Self-Other Agreement		Distinctive Self-Other Agreement	
	Estimates	CI	Estimates	CI
Intercept	0.075	-0.005 - 0.155	0.070	-0.009 - 0.148
Actors' True Motives	0.256 ***	0.217 - 0.296	0.192 ***	0.152 - 0.232
Stereotypic Profile			0.452 ***	0.362 - 0.542
N	122 Actor_ID		122 Actor_ID	
	256 ID		256 ID	
Observations	62199		62199	
Marginal R ² / Conditional R ²	0.069 / 0.198		0.083 / 0.237	

* p<0.05 ** p<0.01 *** p<0.001

Agreement by Judgment

We broke down actor-observer agreement by judgment to examine whether agreement varied by the judgment being made.



Preregistrations/Open Materials: <https://osf.io/k6hms/>

SJDM Office Hours Link: <https://clemsonteam.zoom.us/my/jefflees>

Above Figure: Marginal-means plot of unstandardized intercept estimates from mixed-effects model regressing actor meta-perceptions onto observer perceptions. Values were true-mean centered, meaning intercepts that deviate from zero were deviating from the true-mean observer perception. Red bars are 95% confidence intervals.