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Moral Courage: Its Personal and Situational Determinants

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Abstract

This study focuses on the effect of personality on the appraisal of situations calling for moral courage. Sixty students rated vignettes with respect to the severity of norm violation and risk of an intervention, and answered a Big Five personality factors inventory. As predicted, conscientiousness, extraversion, and agreeableness were positively related to perceived severity of norm violation. Agreeableness, and neuroticism were positively, openness negatively associated with perceived intervention risk. Personality factors were more important in weak than in strong situations. The study complements existing research that focuses predominantly on situational determinants of pro-social behavior.

Keywords: moral courage, personality, situational determinants

Zivilcourage: Seine persönlichen und situativen Verhaltensdeterminanten

Zusammenfassung

Die Studie analysiert den Einfluss der Persönlichkeit auf die Einschätzung von Situationen, die Zivilcourage erfordern. Sechzig Studierende beurteilten Vignetten im Hinblick auf den Grad der Normverletzung sowie das Interventionsrisiko und füllten einen Persönlichkeitsfragebogen aus. Wie vorhergesagt korrelierten Gewissenhaftigkeit, Extraversion und Verträglichkeit positiv mit dem wahrgenommenen Grad der Normverletzung. Verträglichkeit und Neurotizismus waren positiv, Offenheit negativ mit dem wahrgenommenen Interventionsrisiko korreliert. Die Befunde zeigen darüber hinaus, dass Persönlichkeitsfaktoren in schwachen Situationen gewichtigere Prädiktoren sind als in starken Situationen. Die Studie erweitert bestehende Zivilcourage-Forschung, die vorwiegend auf situative Determinanten prosozialen Verhaltens fokussiert.

Schlüsselbegriffe: Persönlichkeit, Zivilcourage, situative Verhaltensdeterminanten

Kurzfassung

In der vorliegenden Studie wird der Einfluss von Persönlichkeitsmerkmalen auf die Wahrnehmung von Zivilcourage-Situationen untersucht. In Zivilcourage-Situationen werden Personen verbal oder im Extremfall körperlich angegriffen und so in ihrer Menschenwürde verletzt. Während die bisherige Forschung zu Zivilcourage sich vielfach damit beschäftigt hat, wie sich Zivilcourage von anderen prosozialen Verhaltensweisen anhand situativer Merkmale unterscheidet, soll nun der Frage nachgegangen werden, welchen Einfluss Extraversion, Neurotizismus, Gewissenhaftigkeit, Verträglichkeit und Offenheit für neue Erfahrungen auf die Wahrnehmung von Zivilcourage-Situationen haben. Dadurch wird die bisherige Forschung sinnvoll um eine personenbezogene Perspektive ergänzt.

Im Hinblick auf Zivilcourage-Situationen wird die Wahrnehmung und Bewertung a) der Schwere der Normverletzung und b) des Interventionsrisikos in einer Zivilcourage-Situation untersucht. Es ist zu erwarten, dass die Schwere der Normverletzung positiv mit Gewissenhaftigkeit zusammenhängt. Außerdem sollte die Schwere der Normverletzung sowohl positiv mit Verträglichkeit als auch mit Extraversion zusammenhängen. Des Weiteren gehen wir davon aus, dass Neurotizismus und Verträglichkeit positiv mit dem wahrgenommenen Interventionsrisiko einhergehen, während Extraversion und Offenheit für neue Erfahrungen negativ mit dem Interventionsrisiko zusammenhängen sollten. Generell ist zu erwarten, dass die Zusammenhänge zwischen Persönlichkeitsvariablen und Beurteilungen der Situation in ambigen Situationen (schwache Situationen) stärker ausfallen als in Situationen, die ein hohes Aufforderungspotential haben (starke Situationen), da in ambigen Situationen der Einfluss der Persönlichkeit relativ zum Einfluss der Situation stärker ist.

60 Studierende der Universität Zürich bewerteten acht verschiedene Zivilcourage-Szenarien. Sie schätzten verschiedene Aspek-

te der Schwere der Normverletzung und des erwarteten Interventionsrisikos auf drei bzw. fünf Items mit einer siebenfach gestuften Antwortskala (1 = "überhaupt nicht" bis 7 = "sehr") ein. Zudem füllten sie den PASK5 (Brandstätter, 2012) aus, anhand dessen die globalen Dimensionen des NEO-PI-R, Extraversion, Neurotizismus, Verträglichkeit, Gewissenhaftigkeit und Offenheit für Erfahrungen geschätzt wurden. Wie erwartet ließen sich die Zivilcourage-Szenarien faktoranalytisch in starke und schwache Situationen aufteilen.

Den Hypothesen entsprechend sagten Gewissenhaftigkeit, Verträglichkeit und Extraversion die Schwere der Normverletzung in einer Pfadanalyse positiv vorher; der negative Pfadkoeffizient von Offenheit war nicht erwartet worden. Interventionsrisiko wurde erwartungsgemäß von Neurotizismus und Verträglichkeit positiv, von Offenheit negativ vorhergesagt. Der erwartete negative Zusammenhang zwischen Extraversion und Interventionsrisiko blieb aus. Anhand genesteter Modelle konnte gezeigt werden, dass hypothesengemäß die Zusammenhänge zwischen Persönlichkeitsvariablen und Situationswahrnehmungen in schwachen Situationen stärker waren als in starken Situationen.

In dieser Studie wurde der Einfluss von Persönlichkeit auf die Wahrnehmung von Zivilcourage-Situationen untersucht. Die Wahrnehmung der Situation ist ein erster Schritt hin zu einem Eingreifen. Bis auf wenige Ausnahmen wurden die erwarteten Zusammenhänge gefunden. Auch wenn die Daten korrelativer Natur sind, ist davon auszugehen, dass die Persönlichkeitsvariablen die Wahrnehmung von Zivilcourage-Situationen beeinflussen und nicht umgekehrt. Die vorliegende Studie hat mehrere Einschränkungen. Zum einen wurde die Wahrnehmung von Zivilcourage-Situationen anhand von Szenarien untersucht. Obwohl bekannt ist, dass auch verbale Beschreibungen lebhaftere Vorstellungen von Situationen ermöglichen, wäre es wünschenswert, in zukünftiger Forschung auch reale bzw. gestellte Situationen miteinzubeziehen. Zum anderen wurden weitere

Aspekte der Situation, wie z.B. vorherrschende politische Meinungen oder aktuelle Debatten über Zivilcourage, nicht beachtet.

Die berichteten Befunde können dazu beitragen, Trainings oder Kampagnen wirksamer zu gestalten, indem berücksichtigt wird, dass verschiedene Persönlichkeitsaspekte die Wahrnehmung von Zivilcourage unterschiedlich beeinflussen. Im Sinne einer optimalen Person-Situations-Passung scheint es also angeraten, z.B. mehrere verschiedene Slogans oder Take-Home-Nachrichten zu verfassen, so dass die Wahrscheinlichkeit erhöht wird, die verschiedenen Teilnehmenden zu erreichen.

1 Theoretical Reflections

1.1 Definition of Moral Courage

Imagine you see a man on the street shouting at a woman and pushing her around. What do you think? "Well, it seems they are having an argument." or "This is some family business, I will rather not interfere." or "He is hurting her, I need to help her!" or "I should help her, but what if he hits me instead?" Such thoughts may come into your mind in a situation that commonly is understood as one calling for moral courage (MC), i.e. a courageous intervention against every form of discrimination, harassment or norm violation that threatens human and social rights (Jonas & Brandstätter, 2004). Situations calling for MC typically are defined by a triadic interaction between an actor, a perpetrator, and a victim (Jonas, 2009). The victim, a person or a group, often in a minority position (Meyer, 2009), can be present in the situation or not, and the perpetrator may be a person or not (institutional injustice can also be understood as perpetrator). The core characteristic of MC situations is the violation of norms and/or human and social rights (Nunner-Winkler, 2007).

During the last years, there has been more and more research on MC, offering multiple perspectives on the phenomenon (Frey, Neu-

mann & Schäfer, 2001; Labuhn, Wagner, van Dick & Christ, 2004; Meyer, 2004). Most studies to date have investigated the similarities and differences between helping behavior and MC albeit with different foci (Fischer et al., 2004; Greitemeyer, Fischer, Kastenmüller & Frey, 2006; Kayser, Greitemeyer, Fischer & Frey, 2010). Some studies – neglecting the fact that helping can also be dangerous – differentiated situations calling for MC from situations calling for helping behavior by varying the degree of anticipated negative consequences or danger. The more severe consequences were anticipated, the more likely it was that participants categorized situations as related to MC (e.g. Fischer et al., 2006). In other studies it could be shown that helping behavior and MC are differentially influenced by mood states or the activation of different prototypes, respectively (Kayser et al., 2010; Osswald, Greitemeyer, Fischer & Frey, 2010a). Also, there have been attempts to conceptually differentiate MC from other forms of courage, e.g. physical courage (Osswald, Greitemeyer, Fischer & Frey, 2010b).

This paper does not intend to contribute to the conceptual debate of MC and its relationship to other concepts of pro-social behavior. It takes for granted that intervening against violations of human dignity and human rights is in principle a moral obligation the enactment of which depends on the social circumstances as well as on personality characteristics. Looking for the influence of personality factors complements existing research focusing mainly on situational determinants of pro-social behavior.

1.2 Norm Violation and Intervention Risk as Situational Determinants of Moral Courage

There are various kinds of norm violations in people's behavior that might set off observers' criticism or intervention, for instance, inappropriate clothes, drunkenness, sexually indecent behavior in public, noisiness, shoplifting, cruelty to animals, soiling the environment, or

hindering the traffic. Many of the mentioned behaviors are judged differently in different cultures, e.g. kissing in public is normal in some cultures, while it is considered indecent in others. Thus, what is perceived as norm violation is culture specific, too.

We are concerned with a specific form of norm violation, i.e., violating human dignity and human rights by depreciating, threatening, or attacking persons as individuals or as members of groups, in particular of minority groups (Jonas, 2009). Even though there may be cultural variation in the understanding of what is a violation of human dignity, such norms should be rather general, especially in western cultures where they are oriented on universal human rights as framed e.g. in the European human rights agreement (1998).

Conceptually, there is some overlap between situations calling for MC and situations calling for help, an overlap that could be named *defending and/or succoring people in events of distress*, irrespective of the causes of distress. That is our understanding: Whenever a person's distress is rooted in other people's violations of basic human rights and human dignity, an intervention is a manifestation of moral courage. Helping a person in distress for some other reasons, for instance in a road accident or a natural disaster, may also demand courage, particularly physical courage. Thus, the difference is not riskiness per se, but the kind of risk, i. e., having to face a perpetrator or not (Voigtländer, 2008). We are interested in the appraisal of (a) severity of norm violation and (b) riskiness of intervention as antecedent conditions of a person's actual intervention in situations calling for MC.

More specifically, we want to learn more about how characteristics of the circumstances and characteristics of the person influence the *appraisal* of situations. As to the transition from appraising to acting in the field of MC we refer to the work of other authors who use measures as independent variables that have some affinity (not full correspondence) with our dependent variables. Baumert, Halmburger and Schmitt (2013) find that high sensitivity to injustice fosters

actual intervention in a shoplifting situation. It seems plausible to assume that people who are sensitive to injustice perceive norm violations as more severe. Kastenmüller, Greitemeyer, Fischer & Frey (2007) collected data on the participants' willingness to interfere (as measure of MC) in three kinds of situations (mobbing at the workplace, disdaining slogans against minorities, physical attacks). The measure of general MC correlated significantly and substantially with personal dispositions somewhat similar to the perception of severity of norm violation. These dispositions refer to interpretation (easily recognizing situations as calling for intervention), responsibility (feeling responsible for intervention), and personal norms (felt obligation to intervene). There is some additional evidence of the behavioral relevance of perceived severity of norm violation: Personality traits, in particular conscientiousness, agreeableness, and extraversion, that in our study are related to perceived norm violation and intervention risk, have predicted acts of intervention in other studies (cf. Brandstätter & Opp, in press; Walker & Frimer, 2007). Knowledge of these determinants is important for theoretical and practical reasons: It deepens our understanding of factors contributing to or hindering MC and thereby engenders helpful intervention strategies for training contexts (Jonas, Boos & Brandstätter, 2007).

Situations calling for MC can be categorized by the severity of norm violation (V. Brandstätter, 2007). Generally, low norm violation is given when, for example, bar-room clichés are uttered in the absence of the discriminated person or group (slogan). *Ceteris paribus*, the norm violation is more severe when such discriminations are uttered in the presence of the target person or group (coarse language). Finally, a physical attack can be considered as the strongest norm violation because the physical integrity of the person is violated (brawl; V. Brandstätter, 2007). Of course, there are other factors that may influence the appraisal of norm violation, e.g. the content of utterances, the social roles of the offenders (relatives, neighbors, colleagues,

supervisors etc.). We are confident that the variety of selected situations (vignettes) warrants some generalizability over different situations calling for MC.

Severity of norm violation and risk of intervention are expected to be correlated, but they should still be conceived of as distinct because collective descriptions of norm violation and intervention risk are only moderately correlated across situations (Fischer, Greitemeyer, Pollozek & Frey, 2006). Moreover, any specific situation with a certain extent of norm violation and intervention risk can be perceived quite differently by different persons.

2 Hypotheses

2.1 Predictions for Personality Traits

Because a facet of *conscientiousness* is feeling obliged to follow social rules (Borghans et al., 2008) we expect a positive correlation with perceived severity of norm violation. On the level of behavior one could argue that conscientious people tend to behave conventionally by adhering to the social norm, for instance, of not criticizing misbehaving superiors or not infringing a perpetrator's privacy rendering intervention less likely. But to us it seems more plausible that conscientious people identify more strongly with values of human rights and social justice than with rather superficial norms of conduct (cf. Swami et al., 2012). There is no reasoning concerning the relation of conscientiousness with perceived risk of an intervention, neither from a theoretical nor from an empirical perspective.

Concerning *neuroticism* and *agreeableness*, we expect that persons high in these traits judge the risk of an intervention higher than persons with low scores in these traits, because the former are more anxious, the latter are rather tender-minded, thus more sensitive to threats of social conflicts. This corresponds to Muris, Mayer and Schubert (2010) who found significant negative correlations for neuroticism and agreeableness but posi-

tive correlations for openness and extraversion with children's measures of courage. Perceiving higher risk can be understood as being less courageous. For our study extraversion was expected to be negatively correlated with risk perception. Extraverts should seek out excitement and stimulation (Borghans et al., 2008) and thus judge situations as normal which for others seem risky (see below).

Following the idea of an anonymous reviewer one could argue that for neurotics congruent information processing would mean particularly high sensitivity to negative cues, which would imply high sensitivity to norm violation, and consequently higher ratings of severity of norm violation. However, neurotics' lack of empathy (Davis, 1983) would neutralize a possible sensitivity effect to negative cues, in particular to those cues that threaten others but themselves.

Perceived severity of norm violation is assumed to correlate positively with agreeableness because agreeable persons are assumed to be particularly sensitive to actions causing social conflicts and to be more empathic (Del Bario, Aluja & Garcia, 2004). In another field of research, conflict avoidance of agreeable persons, manifested by lenient ratings of poor performance, has been reported by Randall and Sharples (2012). Extraversion has been known to come along with high levels of empathy (Richendoller & Weaver, 1994). Therefore we assume that extraverts assess norm violation as more severe than introverts.

As to intervention risk, we assume that *openness* and *extraversion* lead to a lowered appraisal of intervention risk because these traits incorporate a readiness to take a risk and a readiness for actively influencing their environment. Also, for children higher levels of courage (that is, lower appraisal of riskiness) correlate positively with extraversion (Muris, Mayer & Schubert, 2010).

Finally, it is assumed that body height and weight, as objective indicators of physical strength, correlate negatively with the perceived risk of an intervention (when sex and age are controlled for).

2.2 Predictions for Weak and Strong Situations

The differentiation between weak and strong situations implies the assumption that the personality effects are dependent on the circumstances (see Mischel, 1977). Already Staub (1974, p. 323) stated: "Very powerful situational influences, ... , may have a relatively uniform effect on people, reducing the likelihood that personality characteristics will affect behavior". Individual differences have a stronger influence on perceived severity of norm violation and on perceived intervention risk in weaker, more ambiguous situations than in stronger, more clear-cut situations.

3 Method

3.1 Participants

Sixty students from the University of Zurich with different majors took part in the study. Thirty-two were men and 28 women, aged between 19 and 41 years ($Md = 23$).

3.2 Vignettes

Participants were confronted with eight MC vignettes, i.e., short verbal descriptions of situations that were expected to vary in severity of norm violation and risk of intervention. Here are three examples (see Appendix for remaining vignettes):

Family reunion (discriminating slogan). You are sitting next to a close relative (uncle or aunt) at a family celebration. There are other people at the table and you are talking with each other. The relative close to you makes more and more discriminating statements like "They should stay where they are! They only steal our jobs from us!" or "Isn't it logical that they don't know how to behave? They come from the African bush; everyone is still running around naked down there!"

Supermarket (use of coarse language). You are standing at the cashier in a supermarket. In front of you there is a man who looks

like a foreigner. When it is his turn to pay, the woman at the cashier asks whether he has 5 cents. The man does not seem to understand and looks questioningly at the woman. She says in a very irritated tone of voice, "You have small coin? – Oh, forget it, you don't understand anything anyway, do you?"

At night downtown (brawl). Late at night you are walking through the streets with a friend. You notice a drunken man staggering along the sidewalk. Suddenly two hooligans appear. They start insulting and threatening the man. Then, they begin to hit him. When he falls defenseless to the ground, they kick him with their boots.

As evident, the vignettes differed in the degree of palpable threat shown by the perpetrators, ranging from discriminating slogans over the use of coarse language to a dangerous brawl. All in all, there were three vignettes describing discriminating slogans, two describing the use of coarse language, and three describing brawls (see Appendix).

3.3 Measures of Perceived Norm Violation and Intervention Risk

The eight vignettes were rated on a 7-point-scale from "not at all" to "very much" with regard to several aspects of severity of norm violation and of intervention risk. Confirmatory factor analyses of these items, each averaged across vignettes (a data matrix of 60 participants by eight statements) confirmed the two-factor-structure with five items loading on the factor risk of an intervention (e.g., "Would there be unpleasant consequences for you if you intervened in this situation?") and three items loading on the factor severity of norm violation (e.g., "Are basic rights of a person threatened or violated in this situation?"; see Table 1 for all items). For each person and vignette we calculated the mean over the items concerning intervention risk and over the items concerning severity of norm violation, finally two person specific means (one for severity of norm violation, the other for intervention risk) were calculated over all eight MC situations described in the vignettes. In-

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations (in Parentheses) for all Eight Items and the Two Scales over the Eight Situations

	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8
	<i>sl</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>sl</i>	<i>sl</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>cl</i>	<i>cl</i>
Risk of intervention								
- Is the situation threatening?	4.5 (0.8)	5.3 (0.9)	6.3 (0.6)	3.2 (1.2)	4.5 (1.3)	6.7 (0.4)	3.1 (1.1)	3.5 (1.4)
- Is the situation threatening?	3.4 (1.6)	5.5 (1.4)	6.4 (0.7)	2.9 (1.7)	3.6 (1.8)	6.9 (0.3)	3.0 (1.8)	3.7 (1.8)
- Is it necessary to be courageous to intervene in this situation?	5.0 (1.3)	5.7 (1.2)	6.4 (0.8)	3.4 (1.7)	4.9 (1.5)	6.8 (0.5)	3.4 (1.7)	3.4 (1.8)
- Are unpleasant consequences likely if you intervened in this situation?	5.1 (1.0)	5.2 (1.4)	6.3 (0.7)	3.4 (1.6)	4.6 (1.7)	6.7 (0.5)	2.4 (1.4)	3.3 (1.8)
- Would you feel threatened if you intervened in this situation?	3.9 (1.5)	4.2 (1.6)	6.1 (0.8)	2.3 (1.4)	4.3 (1.7)	6.6 (0.8)	2.0 (1.2)	2.6 (1.7)
- To what extent is intervening in this situation an example for moral courage?	4.6 (1.1)	6.1 (1.2)	6.4 (0.8)	4.6 (1.3)	5.2 (1.4)	6.8 (0.7)	4.4 (1.4)	5.7 (1.4)
Norm Violation								
- Are basic rights of a person threatened or violated in this situation?	5.2 (1.1)	5.9 (1.1)	6.5 (0.7)	5.2 (1.3)	5.0 (1.3)	6.8 (0.4)	4.9 (1.4)	5.4 (1.3)
- In your opinion, is it necessary to intervene in this situation?	5.2 (1.7)	5.9 (1.2)	6.7 (0.9)	4.0 (1.8)	4.8 (1.7)	6.8 (0.5)	4.7 (2.0)	4.6 (1.5)
- In your opinion, to what extent are social rights violated in this situation?	5.2 (1.5)	5.8 (1.3)	6.6 (0.7)	5.2 (1.8)	4.2 (1.7)	6.9 (0.4)	4.8 (1.7)	4.8 (1.9)
- In your opinion, to what extent are social rights violated in this situation?	5.9 (1.2)	5.9 (1.1)	6.4 (0.6)	5.7 (1.7)	5.7 (1.4)	6.7 (0.6)	5.5 (1.7)	5.8 (1.7)

Note. S1 Team meeting S2 The neighbours S3 Shopping Centre S4 Family reunion S5 In the Subway S6 At night downtown S7 Supermarket S8 Election campaign; *sl* = discrimination slogans, *cl* = use of coarse language, *b* = brawl

ternal consistency over vignettes was $\alpha = .75$ for severity of norm violation and $\alpha = .74$ for risk of intervention.

3.4 Defining Strong vs. Weak Situations

We distinguished weak from strong situations on the basis of the specific type of situation described in the vignettes (slogan, coarse language vs. brawl). Intuitively it seemed to us that offending utterances either in the absence of the target person or group (slogan) or in the presence of the target person or group (coarse language) imply a lower level of norm violation than situations in which the perpetrator threatens to attack or actually attacks somebody physically (brawl). This distinction was confirmed by a principal axes analysis with oblimin rotation using Kaiser normalization based on the participants' ratings of severity of norm violations (a data matrix of 60 participants by eight vignettes). It happened that slogans and coarse language were subsumed under one factor while brawls formed a second one (see Table 2 for classification of the vignettes). These two factors had eigenvalues higher than 1 (slogan and coarse language = 3.02, brawl = 1.60) and accounted for 58% of variance. Vignettes concerning slogans or coarse language had factor loadings ranging from .52 to .84, and vignettes concerning brawls had factor loadings from .45 to .92.

3.5 Measures of Personality Traits

The global dimensions of the NEO-PI-R, i.e. conscientiousness, neuroticism, agreeableness, openness to experience, and extraversion were estimated on the basis of the 32 bipolar personality adjective ratings (rating scale from 1 to 9; PASK5; H. Brandstätter, 2012). These scales allow for a satisfactory estimation (via multiple regression analyses) of the global personality dimensions of the NEO-PI-R in the German version of Ostendorf and Angleitner (2005). Previous research had shown that the global personality dimensions (each one a dimension specific sum of

optimally weighted responses to the 32 items) correlated quite well with the five global dimensions of the NEO-P-IR within a range of $.61 < r < .74$ ($Md = .63$). The optimal weights had been identified in a study ($N = 477$) with participants completing both questionnaires, that is, the NEO-PI-R and PASK5. The most characteristic items (italics indicating the item in sense of the scale) for conscientiousness are *dreamer (träumerisch)* vs. *oriented towards reality (realistisch)*; *moody (wechselhaft)* vs. *self-controlled (selbstdiszipliniert)*, for neuroticism emotionally stable (*seelisch stabil*) vs. *easily get worried (leicht zu beunruhigen)*, good at handling stress (*seelisch widerstandsfähig*) vs. *not good at handling stress (seelisch wenig belastbar)*, for agreeableness *stubborn (eigenwillig)* vs. *accommodating (anpassungsbereit)*; *rough (derb)* vs. *gentle (zart besaitet)*, for openness to experience *conservative (an Bewährtem orientiert)* vs. *like to try things (experimentierfreudig)*, down to earth (*nüchtern*) vs. *imaginative (phantasievoll)*, for extraversion shy (*schüchtern*) vs. *daring (draufgängerisch)*; prefer a quiet life (*stillebedürftig*) vs. *sensation seeking (erlebnishungrig)*.

A number of studies demonstrated the predictive validity of the PASK5 concerning similar personality measures as well as behavioural outcomes. Based on the data of the present sample the five personality variables were orthogonalized, that is, construed as independent, by running a principal component analysis with the five raw scores of the scales and extracting again five dimensions. This was meant to simplify the interpretation of the path models without changing the meaning of the personality scores. The correlations between the original and the orthogonalized five factor scores are $.94 < r < .99$.

We constructed two response set measures, one for people's unconventionality by averaging the absolute deviations of each of the 32 adjective ratings from the item means, the second for social desirability by averaging the absolute deviations of each of the 32 adjective ratings from the scale midpoint of 5. These response sets could contribute to com-

mon method variance as cause of systematic errors.

3.6 Additional Data

Data on body weight ($M = 66.03$ kg, $SD = 12.93$ kg) and height ($M = 174.67$ cm, $SD = 9.14$ cm) were collected in addition to data on sex and age because we expected that the propensity to act in dangerous situations would be influenced by these factors as well.

4 Results

4.1 Personality Traits as Predictors of Perceived Severity of Norm Violation and Risk of an Intervention

We conducted a path analysis with AMOS 17.0 comprising five uncorrelated independent (Big Five personality factors) and two correlated dependent variables (severity of norm violation and intervention risk; see Figure 1). Remember, for each vignette and participant the three ratings of severity of norm violation and the five ratings of intervention risk, respectively, were averaged over items (statements) and once more averaged across the eight vignettes. Thus, a participant's score on perceived norm violation and perceived risk of intervention, respectively, is the mean of three, respectively five (items) times eight (vignettes) ratings. For the correlations of the variables see Table 2.

As expected, severity of norm violation was significantly ($p < .05$, one-tailed) predicted by conscientiousness ($\beta = .37$), agreeableness ($\beta = .24$), and extraversion ($\beta = .22$). The negative coefficient of openness ($\beta = -.20$) was not expected. Risk of intervention was predicted by neuroticism ($\beta = .19$), agreeableness ($\beta = .29$) and openness ($\beta = -.22$). The expected negative effect of extraversion on risk perception was not supported by the data. On the whole, personality scales explained 29% of the variance of perceived

severity of norm violation and 18% of the variance of perceived intervention risk.

The perfect fit of the model, telling us that its covariance structure matches the covariance structure of the data, should not be understood as evidence of the model's validity. A model can be judged as valid only if besides a close fit the β -coefficients as measures of effect sizes are in line with the hypotheses. This is true for the model of Figure 1.

Controlling for gender by comparing a path model where the personality parameters for women and men were set equal to a model with free parameters showed that the fit of an unconstrained model was not significantly better than the fit of a model with equal weights for women and men ($\chi^2 = 16.86$; $df = 18$; $p = .53$, CFI = 1.000, RMSEA = .000). Thus, the predicted personality effects on severity of norm violation and intervention risk hold equally for both women and men. Including the participants' age in the path model changes the coefficients of the personality traits only marginally. The same is true for the measure of unconventional responding and the social desirability measure.

4.4 Differential Effects of Weak and Strong Situations

In the following the focus is on comparing nested models that differ in the number of fixed parameters. The question is whether setting residual variances for weak and strong situations as equal leads to a significantly lower fit than allowing free estimation of the parameters. We had assumed that personality variables would influence the appraisal of weak situations more strongly than the appraisal of strong situations. Our data confirmed this hypothesis (see Figure 2). In weak situations 29%, in strong situations 14% of variance of severity of norm violation is explained by personality traits. Comparing the model of Figure 2 with a model that assumes equal residual variances for weak and strong situations results in statistics ($\chi^2 = 9.128$; $df = 1$; $p = .003$) telling us that the likelihood of finding a $\chi^2 > 9.128$ is $p < .003$, if the un-

Table 2. Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations of the Global Personality Scales, and Criterion Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1 Age													
2 Sex ^a	.03												
3 Severity	.16	.12											
4 Risk	.09	.19	.48										
5 Severity weak sit.	.20	.11	.95	.52									
6 Severity strong sit.	-.04	.08	.52	.07	.22								
7 Risk weak sit.	.09	.15	.43	.95	.53	-.12							
8 Risk strong sit.	.03	.17	.29	.45	.12	.57	.15						
9 Conscientiousness (C)	.01	-.03	.37	.08	.32	.29	.02	.19					
10 Neuroticism (N)	-.05	.14	-.02	.19	.00	-.04	.18	.08	.00				
11 Agreeableness (A)	.16	-.06	.24	.29	.30	-.05	.27	.15	.00	.00			
12 Openness (O)	-.08	.11	-.20	-.22	-.26	.08	-.32	.21	.00	.00	.00		
13 Extraversion (E)	-.13	.15	.22	.06	.17	.22	.04	.06	.00	.00	.00	.00	
M	23.53	1.47	5.62	4.64	5.14	6.41	3.75	6.12	.00	.00	.00	23.53	1.47
SD	3.96	.50	.68	.60	.95	.59	.87	.51	1.00	1.00	1.00	3.96	.50

Note. ^a Sex is coded as 1 = male, 2 = female.

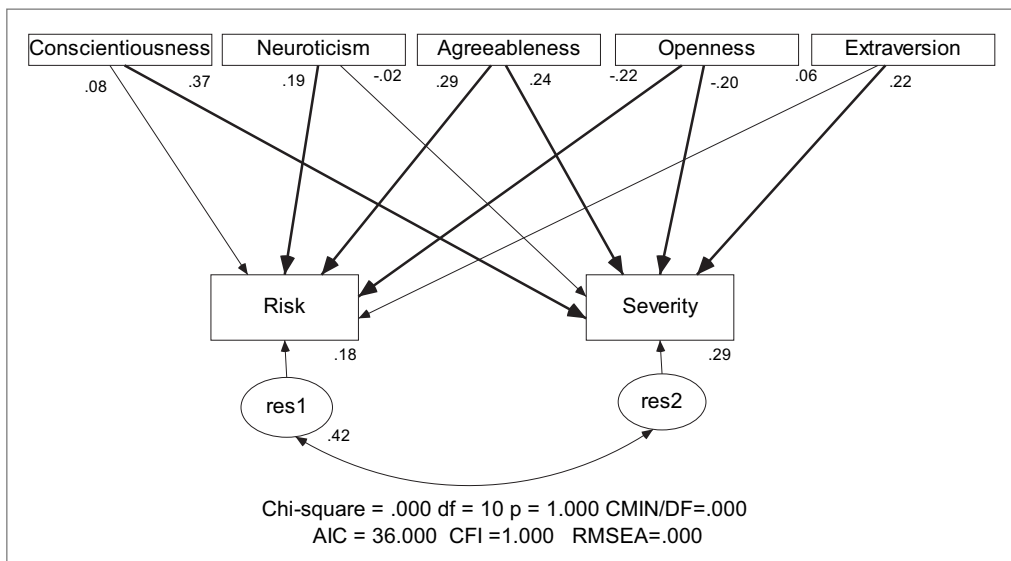


Figure 1. Personality effects (Big Five) on perception of severity of norm violation and intervention risk. Paths in bold lines are significant ($p < .05$, one-tailed). Because the personality scales are orthogonal, the β -coefficients in Figure 1 are equal to the respective correlation coefficients in Table 2 (rows 9 to 13 crossed with columns 3 and 4)

restricted model is true. This suggests a rejection of the restricted model which means that the data support the expected moderator effect: Personality traits are more pronounced in weak than in strong situations. Setting additionally the regression coefficients as equal, the advantage in fit of the unrestricted model turns out to be somewhat stronger ($\chi^2 = 22.507$; $df = 6$; $p = .001$).

Among the four traits that contribute significantly to the prediction of perceived severity of norm violation (C, A, O, and E; see Figure 1), extraversion is the only one with a somewhat higher coefficient in the strong than in the weak condition. The differences (weak versus strong) of agreeableness and openness are significant ($p < .01$).

It speaks for the reliability of the results presented in Figure 1 that mostly the same traits are involved in the global dependent variable (Figure 1) as in the situation specific dependent variables (Figure 2). Consequently, it is plausible that setting the regression weights, but not the residual variances, under weak and strong situations as equal does only marginally reduce the model fit, whereas

setting the residual variances as equal does drastically reduce the model's fit. Similar differences were found in predicting intervention risk (Figure 3). The difference (21% versus 11% of explained variance) is again significant ($\chi^2 = 27.29$; $df = 6$; $p = .000$).

4.5 Physical Attributes and Risk of an Intervention

As expected, body height and weight correlate negatively with risk of an intervention ($r = -.24$; $p = .067$; $r = -.26$; $p = .044$, respectively). Age, gender, and physical attributes (body height, body weight) did not predict severity of norm violation and risk of an intervention if personality factors were controlled for.

5 Discussion

In this study we were interested in how global personality traits influence the appraisal of situations in which a person or group, while absent or present, is verbally devalued or

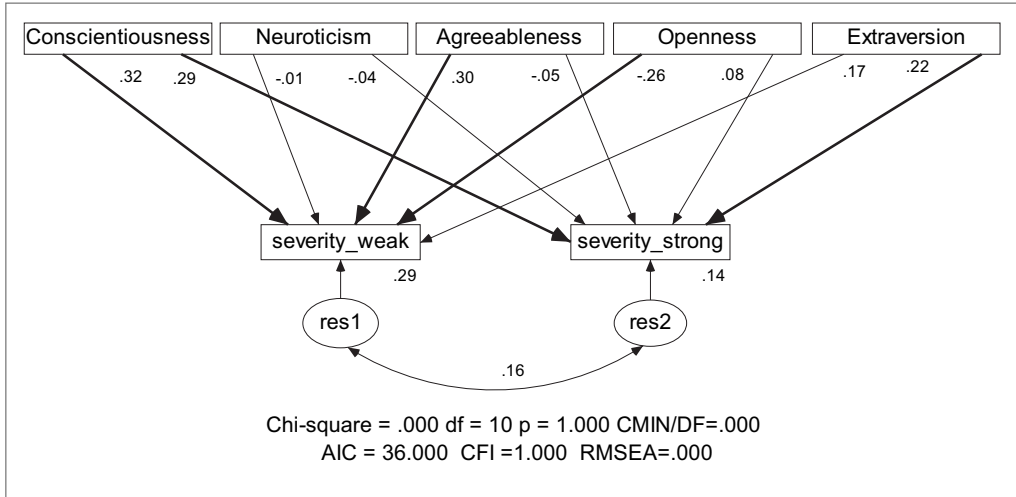


Figure 2. Personality effects on perceived severity of norm violation in weak and strong situations. The orthogonality of the personality dimensions together with free estimation of all other parameters leads to a perfect fit of the model. Paths in bold lines are significant ($p < .05$, one-tailed)

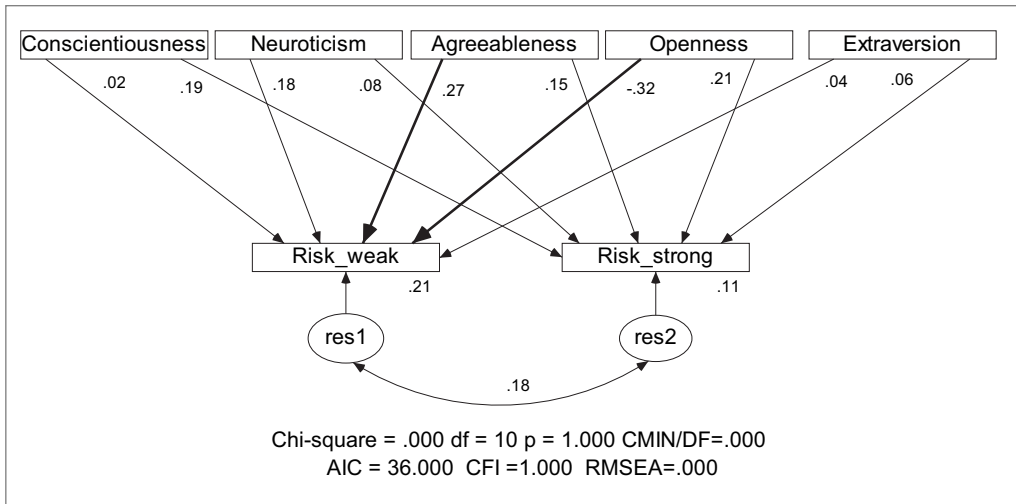


Figure 3. Personality influence on risk perception in weak and strong situations. The orthogonality of the personality dimensions together with free estimation of all other parameters leads to a perfect fit of the model. Paths in bold lines are significant ($p < .05$, one-tailed).

physically harmed because of ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or disability. We focused on the appraisal of the situation because an appraisal always precedes and thus codetermines if and which action follows.

As expected, the personality dimensions of conscientiousness, extraversion, and

agreeableness were significant predictors of severity of norm violation. A strong commitment to social and personal norms is a facet of conscientiousness explaining why norm violations as described in our vignettes are perceived as especially severe by conscientious persons. A heightened awareness of so-

cial situations is conceived as a characteristic of extraversion leading to an appraisal of violations of social norms as more severe. Agreeableness implies high sensitivity to sources of social conflicts that are, therefore, perceived more easily as violating social norms.

As to risk of an intervention, anxious persons and persons scared of confrontation, that is, persons high in neuroticism and agreeableness, judge the possible risk of an intervention as higher than less anxious and less conflict avoidant persons. The expected negative effect of extraversion and openness on intervention risk was found only for openness.

As we predicted, the appraisal of strong situations (brawls) is less influenced by personality variables than the appraisal of weak situations (slogans and coarse language). These differences in explained variance match the differences between the criteria's standard deviations. However, this does not mean that the differences in explained variance between weak and strong situations are artifacts of the differences in standard deviations. Both kinds of differences (in explained variance and standard deviations) result from real situation-specific effects of personality factors. The internal consistency of measures for perceived severity of norm violation (median .67 vs. .63) and perceived intervention risk (median .77 vs. .77) do not differ between weak and strong situations. This, too, is an argument against the artifact interpretation.

Speaking of personality influences on mental processes and overt behavior in situations calling for MC implies interpreting correlations as indicators of causal effects. Are there interpretations of the data which would make causal inferences questionable? That past behavior in MC situations would have shaped the self-concept in terms of the Big Five is utterly unlikely. Would there be variables (besides weather or classroom environment) that to a remarkable degree could have influenced both the answers to the personality questionnaire and the reports on the participants' appraisals of the MC vignettes? As

possibly confounding variables, an anonymous reviewer mentioned common method variance, response tendencies as preference for socially desirable answers, and need for congruence in concurrently answering a personality questionnaire and ratings of vignettes. We can not exclude that unmeasured variables are to some extent confounded with our observed variables. However, at least for two response sets (unconventionality and social desirability) we can exclude confounding effects.

Thus, the most plausible assumption is that personality characteristics cause appraisal, even if we cannot tell exactly how such causation happens. Priming a mental state that corresponds to a specific personality trait, for instance conscientiousness or agreeableness, and observing its effect on the appraisal of MC situations could provide additional evidence for causal inferences. This recommendation of a reviewer is worth considering in any study on personality effects, because proximal causes of behavior are not personality traits, but mental states that are a confluence of stimulations from the specific environment and individual traits. Mental (cognitive, emotional, or motivational) states could be conceived of as variables mediating the influence of personality traits on cognitions and behavior in situations calling for MC.

6 Limitations and Conclusion

6.1 *Vignettes as Research Method*

Our study is limited in several ways. We confronted participants with vignettes and not with real situations. There are doubts about the assumption that people in real life situations would respond in a similar way as they do when they are confronted with situations via vignettes (Baumert, Halmburger & Schmitt, 2013). Voigtländer (2008) points out much higher intervention rates derived from responses to vignettes (intentions to intervene) than intervention rates actually ob-

served. However, differences between anticipated and real intervention rates are not really a convincing argument against the validity of vignettes. Differences in means or relative frequencies do not exclude that anticipated intervention could be predicted by the same personality traits as real intervention.

Doubts about research based on vignettes come together with general monitions against the neglect of behavior in psychological research (Back & Egloff, 2009). Of course, there are differences between reading about a situation and encountering it in reality. However, research also shows that there is a certain degree of correspondence between the experience of written (and imagined) stories and the experience of real life situations (Bledow & Frese, 2009; Robinson & Clore, 2001). In our case, the question is not the correspondence between behavioral intentions and real behavior, but between appraisals of situations described in vignettes and perception of real situations. It is plausible to assume that verbal descriptions of social events elicit lively impressions. Otherwise the relevance of (verbally held) court trials or psychiatric experts' reports had to be doubted and the fascination with novels, focusing on what people think, feel, and do in everyday and in extraordinary life situations, would hardly be understandable. Novelists and play writers may compete for public attention, since reading a novel or watching a play might always have been an evenly lively and veridical experience.

There are possibly important aspects of situations not considered in our study, for instance social or political attitudes prevalent in the social environment, in particular social support or defiance of MC in the society or the community. As to characteristics of persons we did not include relevant values or skills. It remains a task of future research to find out whether these variables have additive effects to those of personality traits on risk and severity of norm violation.

6.2 Personality Aspects Beyond the Big Five

It may well be that some facets of the Big Five would be better predictors than the five global scores, but differentiating those facets was not possible with the PASK5. Moreover, considering the sample size of $n = 60$, including facet measures by applying extensive questionnaires (Ostendorf & Angleitner, 2005) would have resulted in a disproportionate number of independent variables. Also because of the modest sample size we did not consider non-linear (for instance quadratic) effects of personality traits, nor interactions between pairs of personality traits, although one could think of some theoretically interesting complex effects. Moreover, trait and state constructs specifically designed for explaining and predicting MC behavior might gain some incremental validity.

6.3 Practical Usefulness of the Study Results

Even if one were convinced of the theoretical importance of personality traits, one could still doubt their practical relevance in the field of bystander intervention. Because personality traits are conceived of as rather stable characteristics, they seem not easily accessible to change. However, personality traits are not hindrances of learning and changing behavior, rather they determine what and, most important, how we can effectively learn and cope with life tasks. Changing behavior to the better in any field of life depends very much on the optimal *trait x treatment interaction*, i.e., on choosing for individual education and for media campaigns in the public interest methods and change agents that are particularly efficient with specific personality types, an optimum that can only be found by taking characteristics of both personality and circumstances into account. Thus, for any training or campaign it seems important to frame take-home messages and slogans in different ways so that they appeal to people with different personal-

ity characteristics because our study showed that personality already makes a difference in the appraisal of the situation. Also, this seems especially important for contexts in which moral courage against slogans or the use of coarse language is propagated. Our results show that in such weak situations personality plays a more important role than in strong situations. This result can also serve as a caveat for trainers trying to promote moral courage: There might be much more discussion about the severity of norm violation and the risk of intervention concerning weak situations not only because of a higher ambiguity of the situations but also because of the personality of the trainees. To have this in mind could help to plan trainings better (e.g., give more time for the discussion of weak situations) and could help to moderate processes in trainings on moral courage more effectively (e.g., focus more on individual convictions than on characteristics of the situation).

Finally, we hope that research from social and personality psychology on antecedents and consequences of MC and the conclusions drawn from this research will help encourage people to show more MC. MC is not only important in a given situation but also for our society as a whole. Standing up courageously against discrimination and violation of important social norms helps to create suitable conditions for an ideal life together in our society.

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Appendix

1. Team meeting (slogan)
During a team meeting your boss makes snide commentaries on a female colleague, which are not justified. Your colleague is not present because one of her children has fallen ill. Your boss says, "She is not able to organize her life. If you need to have kids, then you have to stay at home." or "If she was as dedicated a worker as she is a mother, she would have been promoted long ago!"
2. Neighbors (brawl)
You are enjoying your breakfast on a Sunday morning on your balcony. You notice a loud argument between your neighbors because their windows are open. The mother is berating her six year old son. She says that he is a useless, lazy and stupid boy. The insults become louder and louder, like "If you don't care more, you'll never get anywhere in life! You are only six, but you are already as stupid as your father." You witness the noise of blows and hear the loud crying of the boy...
3. Shopping centre (brawl)
In a shopping centre you want to visit the bathroom, which is located in the basement of the building. Just in front of the bathroom doors you notice two young men who hassle a young woman in a corner. The young woman is visibly distressed and seems helpless.
4. Family reunion (slogan) – see Method section
5. In the subway (slogan)
It is late afternoon and you are sitting in the subway on your way home. In the compartment next to you there are three 16-year-old adolescents. You notice that the adolescents start talking about gay men. They make increasingly insulting statements like "That is abnormal, they belong in a clinic, such behavior should

be treated medically!" or "They should be kept away from the public! I don't want to be contaminated! They should wear a sign so you could avoid them more effectively."

6. At night downtown (brawl) – see Method section
7. Supermarket (coarse language) – see Method section
8. Election campaign (coarse language)

A few weeks before the city council election you find a propaganda leaflet of a party that roots massively against foreigners. All foreigners are lumped together and are called criminals who live at the expense of Swiss people and steal housing space and jobs from them. According to the leaflet foreigners are as maladapted to Switzerland as polar bears to the desert. The party calls itself a well eligible choice because they are not only social and environment friendly but also pro-Switzerland.



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Prof. em. Dr. Hermann Brandstätter war Professor für Wirtschafts- und Sozialpsychologie an den Universitäten Augsburg und Linz. Seine früheren und gegenwärtigen Forschungsinteressen betreffen Entscheidungsprozesse in Gruppen, Aufklärung von Abweichungen wirtschaftlichen Verhaltens vom rational-ökonomischen Modell, Beschreibung und Erklärung von Emotionen im Alltagsleben mit Hilfe des Zeitstichproben-Tagebuchs, Optimierung der Studienwahlberatung nach Analysen der kognitiven, motivationalen und emotionalen Bedingungen des Studienerfolgs und die Validierung der Persönlichkeits-Adjektivskalen (PASK5).