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# Is Behavioral Ethics Ready for Giving Business and Policy Advice?

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## Abstract

This essay is a critical perspective of the applicability of behavioral ethics in business and policy interventions. I summarize a series of proposed interventions to increase people's honesty, inspired by ethical dissonance theory, such as increasing salience of moral norms, visibility, and self-engagement. Although I agree that behavioral ethics could offer simple, low-cost interventions with the potential of reducing unethical behavior (not only) in organizations, there are several risks and methodological limitations not sufficiently discussed. The interventions thus could eventually lead to weaker positive impacts or even long-term negative consequences. I suggest several alternative approaches to decrease dishonesty such as making the moral choice easier, implementing salient accountability, and removing dishonesty temptations and dishonest employees. The article concludes with a warning that unrealistic expectations may damage the credibility of behavioral ethics.

## Keywords

affect/emotions, behavioral theory, ethics, individual decision making, organizational behavior

Ethical behavior has been demonstrated to be critically important to the proper functioning of an organization, and social sciences researchers have generated a large sum of knowledge about the nature of the (un)ethical behavior (Kish-Gephart, Harrison, & Treviño, 2010; Moore & Gino, 2015; Torsello & Venard, 2016; Treviño, Weaver, & Reynolds, 2006). Behavioral ethics and moral psychology have identified many factors leading to dishonesty (Bazerman & Gino, 2012; Dinh & Lord, 2013; Houdek, 2017a; Moore & Gino, 2013), even though people may possess true motivation to keep a high moral standard (Barkan, Ayal, & Ariely, 2015).

Ethical dissonance theory, the widely used workhorse of behavioral ethics, argues that a person who behaves dishonestly—and thus violates his or her own moral code—experiences an unpleasant tension. Previolation or postviolation justifications could reduce this dissonance between self-perception and unethical behavior and enable people to behave dishonestly while still feeling moral; they are "process[es] of providing reasons for questionable behaviors and making [people] appear less unethical" (Shalvi, Gino, Barkan, & Ayal, 2015, p. 125).

On the contrary, reminding people of moral code constrains the ability to use justifications, for example, signing academic honor code makes moral values of students more salient and decreases cheating (Mazar, Amir, & Ariely, 2008), and signing a form at its beginning (unlike at the end) brings more attention to the identity of the answering person and increases their honesty (Shu, Mazar, Gino, Ariely, & Bazerman, 2012). A mere picture of watching eyes increases the contributions to an honesty box in an office coffee room (Bateson, Nettle, & Roberts, 2006). Moreover, people behave more dishonestly if they "cheat" rather than if they are "cheaters"—nouns directly characterize the actor, that is, they are attributes of the person's essential identity, and nobody wants to be The Cheater (Bryan, Adams, & Monin, 2013). Supervisors exposed to moral symbols of their subordinates (a moral quote "Better to fail with honor than succeed by fraud" in their e-mails) are less likely to engage in unethical behavior (Desai & Kouchaki, 2017).

The field of behavioral ethics is now experiencing a shift from these descriptive findings toward policy recommendations to decrease the prevalence of dishonest behavior (Zhang, Gino, & Bazerman, 2014). Ayal, Gino, Barkan, and Ariely (2015) introduce the "REVISE" framework, a useful toolkit for proposing simple and cheap situational measures to limit dishonesty: REminding, that is, creating cues that increase the salience of morality and decrease the ability to justify dishonesty; VIsibility, that is, restriction of anonymity; and SElf-engagement, that is, helping to bridge the gap between abstract moral values and actual behavior. The potential use of these measures in management of organizations is obvious:

> If most adults' thinking about right and wrong is highly susceptible to external influence, then the management of such conduct through attention to norms, peer behavior, leadership, reward systems, climate, culture, and so on becomes important. (Treviño et al., 2006 p. 955)

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**Table 1.** A Summary of Proposed Measures According to Behavioral Ethics, Their Limitations, Risks and Unexpected Consequences, and Alternative or Complementary Interventions.

| Recommendations and interventions based on the REVISE proposal | Their limitations, risks, and unexpected consequences | Alternative or complementary interventions |
|---|---|---|
| Reminding<br>Provide moral reminders (honor codes, highlight possible damage or victims of dishonesty, etc.)<br>Visibility<br>Personalize the reporting process. Place mirrors or subtle cues to enhance people's perception of being watched.<br>Self-engagement<br>Require people to start filling a form by signing an honor code and committing to true reporting. Run surveys prior to tax time asking people general questions about their morality. | Learning—The intervention can have some short-term positive impact, because people assume that the risk of exposure increased. But they will eventually learn that the risk did not change, and return to the higher levels of dishonesty.<br>Habituation—The intervention loses its salience and relevance. People suffer from attention poverty and will not be influenced long-term despite updating the cues.<br>The intervention can have reversed impact as it can call to mind the norm violation as well and will lead to increase in dishonesty (broken windows theory).<br>The intervention could unintentionally crowd out another norm maintenance mechanism (game theory).<br>Success of the interventions signalizes that people are prone to specific manipulation and can become targets of fraud. The measure could be discredited.<br>Interventions' effectiveness could be heterogeneous in different groups of people and their (moral) identities. | Make the moral choice easier (e.g., create "blind" processes of recruitment and evaluation of employees) and implement corporate ethics programs.<br>Create strong moral identity and implement salient accountability or real reputational stimuli (e.g., implement third party–reported paper trails).<br>Remove dishonesty temptations and/or recruit employees with high level of moral character. |

*Source.* Adapted from the REVISE proposal (Ayal, Gino, Barkan, & Ariely, 2015, p. 740, Table 1).

Although all interventions can be always criticized for their incompleteness as well as for their flaws, this essay tries to point out that proposals such as REVISE have a lot of potential drawbacks that are discussed insufficiently or not at all. The interventions could lead to weaker positive impacts or even long-term negative consequences for an organization or a society (see Table 1). I argue that it is often not identified—or tested at all—what specific psychological factors truly nudge toward honesty. The interventions also underestimate the effect of habituation and the resulting reduction of relevance of the taken measures, even if they are updated. The interventions do not reflect the fact that measures implying that others would not follow norms in a given situation may lead to more widespread disregard for the norms. Furthermore, the proposals do not adequately discuss the impact of the proposed interventions on different populations. Finally, I suggest some alternative approaches to decrease dishonesty.

## What Genuinely Leads to Honest Behavior?

People behave more honestly when they are aware that their specific action may violate an abstract moral norm they want to adhere to. For example, the study Shu et al. (2012) concludes that signing a reported mileage form for an insurance company at the beginning of the form (instead of at the end) leads to higher reported mileage due to higher self-awareness and the consequent higher honesty (the higher mileage means higher insurance premiums). This explanation is likely, albeit just hypothesized by the authors. The insured party could have also been influenced simply by encountering a new, unfamiliar type of form (with signing at the beginning) which may have led them to think (a) whether the insurance company treats them differently now, (b) whether the new forms will be checked more strictly, (c) whether the insurance company implemented a new, perhaps more effective system of evidence and evaluation of the reported mileage, and so on. All these hypotheses are conceivable, but the study does not discuss any possibility of the increasing perception of exposure risk by the insured, although it could explain the observed honest behavior even without assuming the effect of increasing self-awareness on dishonesty. In short, the study is missing a control condition which would exclude the confound of a new form, that is, the insurance company should have also sent another different form without stressing self-awareness of the policyholders. Only in comparison with this condition could the authors conclude that the higher level of moral behavior was caused by the increased self-awareness. If the results of the study had been caused by the altered perception of exposure risk (unwarrantedly), then the long-term impact of signing forms at their beginning would be minimal or zero.

Another tool of the fight against dishonesty is moral reminders. They are supposed to make one's own moral values salient and decrease the willingness to act dishonestly (or the ability to justify one's dishonesty). The now famous study (Mazar et al., 2008) showed that reminding students of academic honor code or the Ten Commandments led them to cheat less. The students could cheat easily as they only reported the number of their correct answers from a numerical task and, in contrast to the control group, did not hand their answer sheets to the experimenters. Mazar et al. conclude that without the morality reminder, the students cheated, whereas with the reminder, they did not.

Nevertheless, is the moral reminder and striving toward one's own positive moral image really behind the reduction of cheating? It is not apparent what psychological mechanism really caused the observed behavior. A reminder of academic integrity or the Ten Commandments can reduce cheating not by making the moral norm more salient but by alerting participants to the possibility that honesty is in fact the subject of the study. Some participants then may cheat less because of experimenter's demand effect if they correctly guess that the Ten Commandments or honor code are supposed to have such effect (Zizzo, 2010). Due to the presence of the moral reminders, other participants may start to doubt whether the experimenter really isn't able to check their answers, and the fear of exposure may cause them to cheat less. The study does not control for any of the mentioned confounds. Future research should clarify what psychological mechanisms play a pivotal role in the moral norm reminders (Vranka & Houdek, 2015). If we consider these objections, it is unclear in what ways are moral reminders more effective for organizations than implementing formal corporate ethics programs and effective enforcement of norms (Weaver, Treviño, & Cochran, 1999).

Also, a little discussed problem of the experimental evidence is disregarding the process of self-selection or assignment of employees. Most of the current findings of behavioral ethics stem from the design of randomized assignments of participants into control/experimental groups. The influence of various factors on dishonest behavior is then tested in the experimental group (e.g., greater/lower likelihood of being caught, moral reminders, options for rationalizing the dishonest behavior, etc.). This approach has a strong internal validity in testing the causal influence of the factors, but it lacks external validity, because in the organizational sphere, people are not randomly assigned to positions or environments. On the contrary, they select or are assigned to environments they most fit (Houdek, 2017b). It has been shown that men are generally more risk-seeking and competitive, and therefore prefer environments enabling these preferences (Niederle & Vesterlund, 2007); in India, people with a greater tendency toward dishonesty prefer the state sector (Banerjee, Baul, & Rosenblat, 2015), and managers willing to corrupt can achieve superior objectives in a corruption environment (Mironov, 2015). In some occupations (salesperson, advertiser), deception can signal a deceptive individual's ability to fulfill their role (Gunia & Levine, 2016). Reactions of such selected groups of professionals on factors relevant in moral decision making would be different than findings from studies using random assignments imply (Gino, Krupka, & Weber, 2013).

In addition, the majority of studies of dishonesty use very specific samples (Rosenbaum, Billinger, & Stieglitz, 2014; for a general review of nonrepresentative samples, see Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010). It is thus not clear whether their findings are generalizable to organizational settings and how the interventions will affect various populations. It is possible to argue that the reminders and other interventions could act very heterogeneously: different groups of people have different perceptions of shame (Perez-Truglia & Troiano, 2015), intensity of honor (Schlüter & Vollan, 2011), self-serving attitudes (Nagin & Pogarsky, 2003), inequality feelings (Houser, Vetter, & Winter, 2012), or socio-demographic characteristics (Pruckner & Sausgruber, 2013) and react differently based on their momentary identities as well (Akerlof & Kranton, 2005). A reminder that illegal sharing of films, music, or e-books steals from and destroys the media industry can discourage the average consumer from the illegal activity. However, it can increase the motivation toward more illegal activities in pirates and their sympathizers (Cronan & Al-Rafee, 2008). It is difficult to assess how the salience of one's identities causes their (dis)honest behavior (Vranka & Houdek, 2015). Even a seemingly innocent intervention aimed to increase the tax morale, like asking people questions about their morality followed by specific questions about cheating on taxes (Ayal et al., 2015), could prove controversial if a large number of targeted people adhere to the opinion that "taxes are theft," or they interpret the message in the context of how in/effectively the government handles the tax money. Similarly, companies can try to honestly ensure compliance to the various norms, but if these measures were perceived as a vote of no confidence by the employees, the effect would be quite the opposite. A famous example is David Packard's memory of General Electric's mistake to distrust their employees. In *The HP Way*, he wrote,

> GE was especially zealous about guarding its tool and parts bins to make sure employees didn't steal anything. Faced with this obvious display of distrust, many employees set out to prove it justified, walking off with tools or parts whenever they could. Eventually, GE tools and parts were scattered all around town, including the attic of the house in which a number of us were living. In fact, we had so much equipment up there that when we threw the switch, the lights on the entire street would dim. (Packard, 2006, pp. 135-136)

A sensitive implementation, framing, timing, and/or segmentation of intervention targets are thus highly advisable. It therefore appears that a more effective solution for companies would be internalizing norms in employees and creating an authentic organizational moral identity, which would be honest toward the employee, without the need for (nudging) moral reminders. Without authentic organizational ethical standards, moral reminders would lead to employees' disbelief of stated proclamations and distrust of the firm's real motives. Moreover, authentic strategy empowers the employees to act morally and doesn't only limit potential dishonest behavior. One's ethical behavior can further inspire others to make more ethical decisions (just as dishonest behavior can spread among colleagues; Gino, Ayal, & Ariely, 2009) and motivate moral employees to work in such company (Cohen, Panter, Turan, Morse, & Kim, 2014).

## Habituation and Loss of Relevance

A more pressing issue is that even if moral reminders increased ethical self-awareness in ways assumed by their proponents, the effect could be smaller and more short-lived than it seems based on one-shot experimental studies. Anything that momentarily draws a person's attention influences their thinking and behavior, especially in a contextually limited laboratory study. Yet in a complex reality, people can ignore or become gradually accustomed to reminders, which more or less lose their salience and effectiveness over time (Argo & Main, 2004; Fellner, Sausgruber, & Traxler, 2013; Kettle, Hernandez, Sanders, Hauser, & Ruda, 2017; Wogalter & Laughery, 1996). Alternatively, if the reminder implies the possibility of negative consequences of norm violation, they learn that the violation does not actually result in any punishment, and return to the higher levels of dishonesty (Montag, 2014; Rincke & Traxler, 2010).

Habituation cannot be waved away by noting "we need to change and reactualize reminders every now and then" (Ayal et al., 2015, p. 739). People—and managers especially (Houdek, 2016)—suffer from attention poverty as the number of stimuli demanding cognitive or emotional processing is very high (Levitin, 2014). Further information stimuli would therefore be ignored in many real situations. Moreover, other agencies wishing to convey their message (ads, traffic information, mobile phones, to-do lists, etc.) won't stay behind and may react to the updated moral reminders by increasing the visibility of their own messages, and information overload will follow. Situationally relevant reminders such as "Be considerate and switch off your mobile phones" will likely stay effective in meeting rooms and lecture halls, similar to reminders to keep due dates (Apesteguia, Funk, & Iriberri, 2013). In contrast, another sign such as "Keep the premises clean" won't likely have any permanent effect on limiting the littering. In this case, making the moral choice easier, that is, simply providing enough bins (Finnie, 1973), could be more effective (however, I recognize that added bins depicting moral reminders would be the finest solution; these integrative approaches to reducing dishonesty, see Zhang et al., 2014, are the best cost–benefit interventions for utilization in firms).

An illustrative example of relevance loss is the watching eyes effect (Bateson et al., 2006), that is, evoking the feeling that one is seen or easily identifiable (even though they in fact are not). In a one-shot exposition and without the presence of other people, the effectiveness of this false reputation stimulus on encouragement of honest behavior has been shown in laboratory as well as field studies (Ernest-Jones, Nettle, & Bateson, 2011). It would be surprising if such easy, cheap, and effective measure against dishonesty was not used more. However, as expected, the effect fades away when people are exposed to the watching eyes repeatedly or in an environment consisting of more people (Sparks & Barclay, 2013); moreover, meta-analyses found no evidence to support the general effectiveness of these artificial surveillance cues (Northover, Pedersen, Cohen, & Andrews, 2017).

I agree with the REVISE concept that proposed measures can be updated and modified in many ways, for example, by placing mirrors everywhere or, as another example, by requiring attaching a photo along with signing a form. Nevertheless, the evidence so far suggests that although their long-term effect may sometimes last, it would remain very low (Pruckner & Sausgruber, 2013) and sometimes nonexistent. For example, in a particular setting, the moral appeals for paying TV licensing fees had no effect on honesty in Austria, whereas threat mailings produced a clear-cut increase in compliance (Fellner et al., 2013).

Real reputational stimuli and salient accountability are usually more effective measures (Duflo, Hanna, & Ryan, 2012). A randomized controlled study suggests that police body-worn-cameras reduce the prevalence of use-of-force by the police as well as the incidence of complaints against the police (Ariel, Farrar, & Sutherland, 2014), third party–reported paper trails increase self-enforcing properties of tax enforcement (Kleven, Knudsen, Kreiner, Pedersen, & Saez, 2011; Pomeranz, 2015), and adoption of monitoring information technology appears to reduce corrupt behaviors of employees (without counterproductive rebound; Pierce, Snow, & McAfee, 2015). Organizations have power to design how employees and/or their teams work, and could effectively remove temptations to act dishonestly. As Zhang et al. (2014) describe, it is possible to implement the so-called structure-oriented approach, which means creating such structure of rewards, opportunities, tasks, or teams that would limit or eliminate tendencies toward dishonest behavior.

> For example, the current auditing system in the U.S. actually inhibits auditors from making independent and unbiased judgments about companies under evaluations . . . Reducing auditors' dependence on their clients by restricting the audited firms' ability to hire and fire their auditors, preventing auditors from taking on jobs with their clients, and restricting auditing companies from providing other consulting services to their clients would allow auditing firms to make more independent assessments. (Zhang et al., 2014, p. 69)

There can be many other options how to structure a firm's workings to limit the prevalence of dishonest behavior. For example, offering the option of one-time severance package if employees decide to leave after some time of training—which would ensure that only the loyal ones who respect the (moral) goals of the company would stay (Dur & Schmittdiel, 2013). Another option is to avoid unstructured interviews, which allow manifestations of prejudices or favoritism, in recruitment or evaluation of employees, and instead use, for example, processes where the evaluator is blind toward the candidate's identity and selects employees based on objective performance (Goldin & Rouse, 2000) or compares candidates/employees in parallel (not serially). Such processes lead to lower bias manifestation (Bohnet, van Geen, & Bazerman, 2016). Also important is enabling an organizational culture where (occasional) failure or error constitutes a learning opportunity, not a reason for firing the employee or decreasing benefits—factors that can motivate dishonesty (Schweitzer, Ordóñez, & Douma, 2004).

## Reminders, Broken Windows Theory, and Moral Hazard

Perhaps the most treacherous impact of the application of moral reminders may be an increase in dishonesty if messages of the reminders are flagrantly broken. The presence of a ban, reminder, or any other explication of a moral norm (i.e., praise for compliance) doesn't only emphasize the norm but could also highlight its potential violation (Cialdini, 2003). The moral reminders could lead the people on whom the norm is aimed to deduce that in that environment, breaching the norm is more widespread than expected. The broken windows theory presumes that people deduce descriptive norms ("what people normally do") or probability of sanctions from the signs of violation of injunctive norms in their surroundings. Breaking a ban to lock bicycles to the fence leads to more frequent breaches of entry ban, street with litter and graffiti leads to more thefts of envelopes containing money from the mailboxes, and so on (Keizer, Lindenberg, & Steg, 2008, 2011, however, see Wicherts & Bakker, 2014, for a cautionary note on the findings). When students sign their academic integrity pledges but at the same time see that lying, cheating, and plagiarizing are widespread, it can be expected that their willingness to adhere to moral norms would decrease. If companies officially state intentions to promote ethical behavior, but at the same time set unrealistically ambitious goals, they are pushing their employees to resort to unethical means. As I already mentioned, a moral reminder placed in an environment with salient norm-violating cues thus could induce further violations of the norm (Keizer et al., 2011).

Moreover, the authorities, organizations, or managers who implemented the moral reminders or other measures for norm-keeping can give in to the illusion that they had "done something" against dishonest behavior, and subsequently limit their other activities that had really helped to maintain the norms, such as their enforcement (Tsebelis, 1989). This way, moral reminders could unintentionally crowd out more effective mechanisms of norm-keeping.

There are other conditions and unseen consequences the interventions must face. Although it is not a serious threat, it is possible that people primed to higher honesty could become an easier target for people who do not possess a good moral self-image or are willing to sell it cheap—people with whose existence the REVISE concept does not deal at all. It can be speculated that once it is proven on the population level that people, for example, admit higher taxes if reminded of the potential harm of insufficient fiscal funds, con artists abusing the same mechanisms could appear (as is the case; Konnikova, 2016). They may send requests and pleadings for contributions "for the right thing," which may in long-term diminish effects of the proposed interventions.

In many situations, the simplest effective intervention is to remove temptation to behave dishonestly. Some researchers' efforts to increase reported download count of their papers led Social Science Research Network to implement methods to obstruct deceptive self-downloads (Edelman & Larkin, 2015), people are less likely to pirate music when pay websites have good functionality (Sinha & Mandel, 2008), more opportunities for spending free time usually lead to a decrease in crime (Dahl & DellaVigna, 2009; Jacob & Lefgren, 2003, but see Billings, Deming, & Ross, 2016), and so on.

Firms could implement measures to limit unethical behavior by making it impossible—for example, if customers didn't have to state their gender, price discrimination of women in car repairs could not occur (Busse, Israeli, & Zettelmeyer, 2017); firms could design software implementations and administrative processes lowering the occurrence of dishonest behavior (Derfler-Rozin, Moore, & Staats, 2016). Also, formal ethical systems of firms are highly effective when employees feel strong "informal" push to wrongdoing (Smith-Crowe et al., 2014).

## Conclusion

Behavioral ethics has become an innovative and inspiring research program. It offers many simple, low-cost interventions for reducing the prevalence of dishonest behavior in public or in organizations. However, some of the proposed measures could have only weak or null effects in real settings, because of external and ecological validity problems of experimental studies on which the measures are based. In reality, interventions' effectiveness will depend on a number of influences and conditions that could limit or even reverse the desired impacts. Straightforward implementation of some of the proposals in policy is therefore controversial.

Behavioral ethicists sometimes create an unnecessary juxtaposition of research fields by inventing straw men, such as: "standard economic models would expect individuals to cheat to the maximum possible extent if there were no external costs" (Zhang et al., 2014, p. 64) or "standard economic approach to curbing dishonesty relies on enforcement . . . instead of encouraging people to be honest, enforcement teaches them to avoid punishment or to become better cheaters" (Ayal et al., 2015, p. 738). I did not encounter any economics study totally denying human fairness preferences and presuming that without the existence of punishment, cheating would reach maximum extent. Rule enforcement can lead toward punishment avoidance and is certainly not a perfect approach. Yet what else emphasizes moral norms better than the effort to enforce them, despite some backfires (Di Tella & Schargrodsky, 2004; Fehr & Schmidt, 2006; Gintis, Bowles, Boyd, & Fehr, 2005; Kuběna, Houdek, Lindová, Příplatová, & Flegr, 2014; Nagin, 2013)?

I believe that in solving ethical problems, norm enforcement cannot be criticized as a problematic option just to be replaced by suggestions to wear jewelry with moral symbolism (i.e., "Members of important law-making committees should have officials sign for and pin Ethical Commitment buttons on their lapels or wear Integrity bracelets on their wrists," Ayal et al., 2015, p. 740). It is certainly beneficial to point out that alongside the "carrot and stick" approach, more subtle measures reflecting how the human mind works could be used in resolving ethical problems and achieving comparable results. Nevertheless, it is necessary to realize that in some situations, the potential strength of their effect would be low to null.

Many ethical problems employees face are of a complex nature (Fleming & Zyglidopoulos, 2008). Sometimes it's not possible to do the right thing (urgent solution is needed, risk of catastrophic failure exists, etc.), or it's not clear ex ante which decision is ethical (or if it has any ethical dimension at all). No simple situational measure can of course be sufficiently preventive in so complex decisions. Moral aspects of one's character would thus likely play a more important role, just like the selection of moral employees and managers (Cohen et al., 2014).

Behavioral ethicists should continue to develop more interdisciplinary linkages of effective tools for increasing honesty. A good example is linking the "economic" method of sending notification letters about increased future monitoring to tax avoiders (Pomeranz, 2015), along with the "psychological" (REVISE) insight into the effectiveness of gray area elimination and formulating a deterrent message stating that non-declaration of taxes is an intentional and deliberate choice, rather than an oversight, aiming to overcome the status quo bias (Halpern, 2015), a measure that has led to an increase in paid taxes.

For its policy recommendations, the field of behavioral ethics could further get inspiration in strong, robust, and long-term determinants of (dis)honest behavior (Ariel et al., 2014; Pierce et al., 2015; Pomeranz, 2015), for example, based on the cultural patterns of dishonesty (Ariely, Garcia-Rada, Hornuf, & Mann, 2015). UN diplomats from high-corruption countries committed parking violations in New York more often, regardless of the length of their stay, in the United States (Fisman & Miguel, 2007), but introducing norm enforcement eradicated the violations. On the contrary, international students of British universities coming from corruption-ridden countries are more willing to bribe in a corruption experiment; however, this willingness decreases with the increasing length of their stay in the United Kingdom (Barr & Serra, 2010). (Un)ethical behavior clearly depends on the salience of social norms implied by the (dis)honesty of in-groups or out-groups (Gino et al., 2009).

The proponents of behavioral interventions should discuss major limitations of their proposals to avoid disappointment and/or condemnation of behavioral ethics (Zhang et al., 2014). Of course, in my objections, I may be committing the same crime the behavioral ethics recommendations are accused of. I could overgeneralize and overinterpret the possible absence of an effect in some proposed interventions, and as there is no robust evidence for or against them so far, it may be too soon to draw definitive statements. It will remain an empirical question whether measures to increase people's honesty will be replicated in a particular situation (Klein et al., 2014; Open Science Collaboration, 2015) and will truly lead to a long-term marginal reduction of dishonesty at acceptable cost. It is certainly worthwhile to experiment with different behavioral interventions to promote honesty.

In a form of self-critical and interdisciplinary field, the behavioral ethics interventions have their best years ahead. Officials and managers of departments, firms, and bureaus then can utilize the measures to robustly reduce dishonesty of citizens, customers, and employees.

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