

7-3-2019

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### Recommended Citation

Thomas, Benjamin J. (2019) "Integrity according to Whom? An Experiment of the Effects of Gender, Moral Integrity, and Behavioral Consistency on Evaluations of Leaders," *Organization Management Journal*: Vol. 16: Iss. 3, Article 6.

Available at: <https://scholarship.shu.edu/omj/vol16/iss3/6>



# Integrity according to Whom? An Experiment of the Effects of Gender, Moral Integrity, and Behavioral Consistency on Evaluations of Leaders

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## ABSTRACT

Organizational stakeholders place great importance on leaders' integrity, which, current theory indicates is a multidimensional construct. Drawing from leadership categorization theory and multidimensional leadership perspective, this research offered novel tests of the independent and interactive effects of a leaders' behavioral consistency (the alignment between a leader's words and actions) and moral integrity (doing right and not doing wrong) using experimental methods. The results of the 2x3x3 between-subjects (N = 781) factorial design reveal the moderate-strong magnitude of the effects of leader integrity on followers' evaluations, and indicate the two dimensions of leader integrity—behavioral consistency and moral integrity—interact in fascinating ways. Results also indicate gender and leader integrity interact. Implications include support for a multidimensional view of leader integrity, but reveal nuances in this theoretical perspective, emphasizing the value of both avoiding low integrity and striving for high integrity, and a caution on the importance of gender in considering leaders' integrity.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 17 Dec 2018  
Accepted 4 Jun 2019  
Revised 3 Jun 2019

## KEYWORDS

Multidimensional leader integrity; Leader Gender; leader trust; behavioral consistency; Experiment

A great number of recent organizational scandals have involved the failing integrity of leadership. Immorality by political figures (Jenkins, 2017; Rogers, 2017) and major companies (Kantor & Twohey, 2017), and organizational leaders who fail to practice what they preach (e.g., Facebook, Cuthbertson, 2018; Tesla, Eidelson, 2018), demonstrate the evaluative importance stakeholders place on leaders' integrity (Lord & Maher, 1993; Schyns & Schilling, 2013). The revelations of leaders' failing character in instances like these have resulted in intense scrutiny for companies and their leadership, often resulting in damage to company image, share values (Korosec, 2018; Picchi, 2018) and reported trust in leaders (Hempel, 2017). Scandals like these also illustrate that not all integrity failings by leaders are qualitatively the same. Stakeholders presented with a leader's moral violations, whether prurience or breaking laws (e.g., Samsung; Pham, 2017) evaluate a different kind of failure than for leaders who fail to live by the values they espouse (e.g., universities and religious groups' seeming duplicitous actions regarding sexual abuses; Goodstein & Otterman, 2018; Smith & Hartocollis, 2018). Certainly both types of failures threaten critical outcomes, like trust (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Moorman, Blakely, & Darnold, 2018) and high leader integrity is preferable to low integrity. According to extant research, leadership integrity is a multidimensional construct, comprised of a moral dimension and a behavioral

consistency dimension (Moorman, Darnold, & Priesemuth, 2013). Moral integrity describes a leader who adheres to standards of right and avoids doing wrong, with a focus on valuing the greater good (Becker, 1998). Behavioral consistency captures the notion of a leader who lives according to the values and beliefs they espouse, or who practice what they preach, across time and contexts (Palanski & Yammarino, 2007). However, no research has investigated the effects of both dimensions of leader integrity, independently and together. Like other multidimensional constructs involving related, but distinct dimensions (e.g., organizational justice, Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001), the value of a nuanced construct lies in the unique and interactive roles each dimension plays in the behaviors and experiences of organizational stakeholders. This research study addressed this need, using experimental methods to determine how harmful each dimension of integrity failure is and to test how these dimensions interact to affect evaluations of leaders.

## Leader integrity

Discussing leadership integrity requires a distinction from ethical leadership, although overlaps certainly exist between the domains of each (Palanski & Yammarino, 2007). Recently, authors have established specific definitions of perceived leadership integrity. Whereas some

authors state leadership integrity describes the extent to which followers believe leaders behave morally, according to standards of right and wrong (i.e., moral integrity; Becker, 1998), other authors emphasize a leader's behavioral consistency, or the extent to which leaders' words and actions align across time and context (Palanski & Yammarino, 2007). Theory and empirical evidence indicate, however, that both dimensions of integrity matter a great deal, resulting in a multidimensional leader integrity construct including both moral and behavioral consistency (Dunn, 2009; Moorman et al., 2018, 2013). Empirically, leader integrity yields strong relationships with many valued organizational outcomes including followers' ratings of leader effectiveness (Hoffman, Woehr, Maldagen-Youngjohn, & Lyons, 2011), job (Davis & Rothstein, 2006) and life satisfaction (Prottas, 2008), organizational citizenship behaviors (Hoffman et al., 2011), and turnover intentions (Greenbaum, Mawritz, & Piccolo, 2015). Moreover, leader integrity factors strongly into many popular leadership theories (e.g., transformational leadership; Pillai, Schriesheim, & Williams, 1999; Simons, 1999).

### **Leader evaluation processes**

The strong effects of leadership integrity on stakeholders' perceptions can be explained by Leadership Categorization Theory (LCT; Lord, Foti, & De Vader, 1984). Leadership categorization is the process by which observers compare a target leader to their pre-existing prototypes of leaders, or implicit leadership theories (ILTs; Kenney, Schwartz-Kenney, & Blascovich, 1996). These prototypes allow stakeholders to efficiently identify leaders, predict a leader's behaviors, and to guide their own actions based on these ILTs (Fiske & Taylor, 2013; Shondrick, Dinh, & Lord, 2010). Observers compare a target leader's characteristics to their ILT's characteristics, and determine how well the target matches the ILT. To the extent the target matches the ILT, especially the prototype of an ideal leader (Van Knippenberg, 2011), the leader will be evaluated more favorably (Shondrick et al., 2010; Van Quaquebeke, Graf, & Eckloff, 2014). Many people, across settings and cultures, hold the same ILTs (e.g., leaders of intelligence, strength; Offermann, Kennedy, & Wirtz, 1994). Regarding integrity, authors have empirically observed that many people hold traits like honesty (Lord et al., 1984), sensitivity (Epitropaki & Martin, 2004) and behavioral consistency (Martin et al., 2013) as important, defining characteristics of ILTs. Behavioral consistency fosters trust among followers, who can more reliably predict a leader's actions in the future, based on previous behaviors and the leader's words (Moorman & Grover,

2009). Because standards of morality involve subjectivity across groups (Treviño, Brown, & Hartman, 2003), to the extent a leader demonstrates moral integrity, a follower sees her/him as more closely aligned with the central values and beliefs of the group, which is critical in evaluations of leader effectiveness (Clapp-Smith, Vogelgesang, & Avey, 2009; Hains, Hogg, & Duck, 1997).

LCT research indicates how this prototype-comparison process meaningfully affects perceptions of leaders, such that leaders' alignment with prototypes mediates the path between a number of leader behaviors and follower motivational outcomes (Epitropaki & Martin, 2005; Van Quaquebeke & Brodbeck, 2008). Because both moral integrity and behavioral consistency characteristics have received support as commonly held traits of a prototypic leader (Epitropaki & Martin, 2004; Lord et al., 1984; Martin et al., 2013), it follows that both integrity dimensions relate to followers' reports of trust in a leader in predicted ways (i.e., high integrity relates to higher trust scores; Moorman et al., 2018). However, because ILT characteristics exist in a network, it is difficult to assign priority or to evaluate the independent effects of each characteristic. Existing research on multidimensional leader integrity has exclusively relied on cross-sectional methods and reflects this difficulty. Moreover, reports of behavioral consistency and moral integrity, for real leaders, yield a very strong relationship (uncorrected  $r$  values range from .74 – .95; Moorman et al., 2018, 2013). The strength of these relationships between reported dimensions of leadership integrity severely undermine any claims about the unique effects of each dimension, and also casts doubt on the multidimensionality of leader integrity.

Leader integrity, then, is a complex construct. In accordance with a nuanced view of any human trait or behavior, evidence indicates that most people display an average amount of integrity (Hogan & Hogan, 1989; Lee & Ashton, 2005), rather than uniformly exemplary or bad character across dimensions. Real-world examples of excellent or failing integrity by leaders also support this notion: Samsung's acting chief officer violated moral norms by engaging in numerous forms of white-collar crime, but these actions did not necessarily involve either excellent or poor behavioral consistency (Pham, 2017). Taking a multidimensional perspective Dunn (2009), acknowledges that leaders' may display a high level of one dimension and a low level of the other, and that onlookers may only detect one integrity dimension from their leader. For organizations and stakeholders seeking to understand how their leaders', or leadership candidates', varying integrity levels and behaviors may affect followers' evaluations, existing literature provides little guidance on the independent

effects of either dimension – behavioral consistency and morality – only that more integrity is preferable to less integrity. In considering how to evaluate, train, or hire leaders with regard to their integrity, this guidance is inadequate.

The value of a multidimensional construct lies in the nuanced role of each dimension's explanatory role, independently, and the interactive or additive effects of both dimensions together. Current research and theory unfortunately cannot separate the unique role of each leadership integrity dimension. Subsequently, organizational stakeholders cannot determine which dimension merits priority in the minds of evaluating followers, and how the interaction of dimensions may affect evaluations. Moreover, organizational policies and managerial educators cannot determine what, if any, prioritization should be given to either dimension of leadership integrity. That is, current evidence only supports a fairly self-evident advice set for leaders: (a) followers care a great deal about your integrity (Lord & Maher, 1993; Schyns & Schilling, 2013), (b) your integrity is assessed as a function of your morality and your consistency (Moorman et al., 2018, 2013), (c) strive for high integrity and avoid low integrity (Pillai et al., 1999; Simons, 1999). However, these principles require more clarity. Regarding the first, an exclusive reliance on cross-sectional research means the independent effects (e.g., effect sizes) of leader integrity on stakeholders' perceptions remain unknown. Next, although morality and consistency both matter in forming integrity perceptions, current evidence does not reveal how much each dimension matters, independently and in conjunction. Finally, leaders know high integrity is preferable to low integrity, but does high integrity produce the same magnitude of effects as low integrity? In other words, is the evaluative boost of high integrity as strong as the detrimental evaluative effects of low integrity? A more nuanced (i.e., a multidimensional) theoretical perspective of leader integrity should offer practical, specific guidance on these tenets for leaders, organizations, and educators, to know which dimension merits priority and how the dimensions of integrity interact.

### **Experimental vignette methodology**

Experimental methods hold promise for clarifying the independent, causal effects of leader integrity. Researchers have successfully used experiments to manipulate leaders' integrity levels (Greenbaum et al., 2015; Peterson, 2004; Staw & Ross, 1980), although no existing research has ever attempted to use experimental research to test both dimensions of leadership integrity and their effect on a commonly

discussed outcome – leader trust (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). Aguinis and Bradley (2014) discuss how experimental vignette methodology (EVM), which “consists of presenting participants with carefully constructed and realistic scenarios to assess dependent variables” (p. 352), offers unique value for answering questions wherein researchers need to: (a) establish experimental control over confounds, or known correlates, in order to test causal relationships and (b) study sensitive, or ethically challenging, topics using manipulation and assignment into experimental conditions. EVM can contribute to research involving infrequently occurring or observed behaviors and it holds promise for testing the effects of leadership integrity because: (a) the known correlation between dimensions of leader integrity cannot be methodologically controlled for in testing causal effects, except using experimental design, (b) exposing participants to low levels of leadership integrity in simulations or actual organizations poses ethical and feasibility limitations, and (c) in real-world settings, poor leadership integrity behaviors may be infrequently observed, poorly remembered, or incorrectly interpreted. Thus, the current research used EVM, following recommendations provided by Aguinis and Bradley (2014), to test the independent and interactive effects of both dimensions of leadership integrity.

Specifically, the study used EVM to study the independent effects of leaders' behavioral consistency and moral integrity levels on two dependent variables. First, reports of leader trust were gathered, because much attention has focused on leadership trust as central to leader effectiveness (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Palanski, Kahai, & Yammarino, 2011) and closely related to perceived leader integrity (Moorman et al., 2018, 2013). Additionally, the study included a hiring recommendation rating because of its applicability to organizational uses and its appropriate pairing with EVM. In many settings, organizations are increasingly using multiple raters (e.g., selection committees) to evaluate candidates during the hiring process (Chamberlain, 2015). Raters individually evaluate application materials from one or more candidates and provide an evaluation of the candidate, which the committee uses to identify preferred candidates. Similarly, a vignette provides information a participant must review, make a judgment regarding, and evaluate using a scale (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014). Thus, the common organizational process of quantitatively assessing candidates, using a realistic job description as a benchmark, served as a relatively high fidelity, salient situation for this experiment on the effects of either dimension of perceived leadership integrity on a psychological and an applied dependent variable.

Reports of leader integrity yield strong correlations between the two dimensions (uncorrected  $r$  values range from .74 – .95; Moorman et al., 2018, 2013). Likewise, ILT researchers have observed characteristics descriptive of both dimensions of integrity as commonly held in ILTs across many samples (Epitropaki & Martin, 2004; Lord et al., 1984; Martin et al., 2013). However, no empirical evidence can address how one dimension of leader integrity (e.g., moral integrity) affects perceptions of the other dimension of integrity (e.g., behavioral consistency). In comparison to cross-sectional research, a controlled experiment allows for a test of the effects of each dimension on perceptions of the other dimension. Given the strong empirical and cognitive network relationships between these dimensions, it was predicted:

*Hypothesis 1a: Leaders' behavioral consistency levels, absent any moral integrity information, will affect ratings of moral integrity*

*Hypothesis 1b: Leaders' moral integrity levels, absent any behavioral consistency information, will affect ratings of behavioral consistency.*

Currently, stakeholders know high (cf. low) leader integrity is desirable, but cannot know the causal effects of either dimension of leader integrity (i.e., how damaging is a behavioral consistency failure, compared to a failure of morality?) Subsequently they cannot guard against the more concerning types of failures or appropriately gauge which type of failure merits a stronger response. Cross-sectional research does not allow for a test of the independent, causal effects of both dimensions of leader integrity, but the current study does. Specifically, the current study tests the unique effects of both integrity dimensions, in combination (e.g., the effects of leader moral integrity when considered with behavioral consistency information) and independently (e.g., the effects of a leader's behavioral consistency, absent information about her moral integrity). Some previous research has experimentally tested the effects of either moral or behavioral consistency (Greenbaum et al., 2015; Peterson, 2004; Staw & Ross, 1980), but no experimental research has tested the effects of these two dimensions using similar, or parallel, research designs. These methodological differences limit the chances to compare the effect sizes of each dimension of integrity. The current research fills this need by examining the effects of each dimension, using similar manipulations. Because previous research has indicated moral integrity produces larger effect sizes than behavioral consistency (Greenbaum et al., 2015; Peterson, 2004; Staw & Ross, 1980), it was predicted:

*Hypothesis 2: Leaders' moral integrity differences will produce stronger effects than behavioral consistency differences.*

Crossing the dimensions of leader integrity in an experiment also allows for a test of their interactive effects – specifically how a leader's level of one integrity dimension may condition the effects of the other integrity dimension. The close empirical and ILT links between the dimensions would suggest high integrity on one dimension would suffice to merit favorable evaluations for a leader, effectively changing the effects of the other integrity dimension. In addition to understanding how one dimension of integrity may affect perceptions of the other dimension, an experimental design can reveal whether high (or low) integrity, on one dimension, is adequate to negate the effects of the other dimension of integrity. Such a result would indicate that stakeholders do not require a leader high in both dimensions of integrity, but these stakeholders only desire a leader high enough in integrity, generally. The close relationships between the dimensions supported such a prediction, specifically:

*Hypothesis 3: Leaders' moral integrity and behavioral consistency levels will interact as independent factors, such that a leader's integrity level on one dimension will condition the effects of the other dimension of integrity.*

Because people implicitly believe leaders possess integrity (Epitropaki & Martin, 2004; Lord et al., 1984; Martin et al., 2013), it follows that the absence, rather than the strength, of leader integrity will produce larger effects. Indeed, people often only take note of integrity when it fails, rather than in its presence (Arce, 2004). This aligns with the LCT prototype-matching processes, such that neutral or integrity-affirming information does not clash with common leadership ILTs, whereas low integrity information will result in a poor prototype match for the leader (Den Hartog et al., 1999; Epitropaki & Martin, 2004). Thus, it was predicted:

*Hypothesis 4a: The differences between low integrity leaders and neutral integrity leaders will produce stronger effects than between neutral and high integrity leaders.*

*Hypothesis 4b: The differences between low integrity leaders and high integrity leaders will produce stronger effects than between neutral and high integrity leaders.*

Because of the considerable evidence that leadership ratings are affected by leader gender (see Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992; Paustian-Underdahl, Walker, & Woehr, 2014), leader gender was included as an independent variable in the design. Specifically, the



present study incorporated a prediction based on Role Congruity Theory (RCT; Eagly & Karau, 2002). RCT explains how identical behaviors by men and women leaders result in different evaluative consequences, according to their gender. For example, RCT explains the disparately strong sanctions women in leadership face for failing to fulfill commonly held role expectations of women (e.g., being nice, considerate), whereas men face no such sanctions for identical behavior, (i.e., failing to be nice is not incongruous with a man's expected role; Johnson, Murphy, Zewdie, & Reichard, 2008). Specifically, it was predicted that, based on commonly held stereotypes about the moral superiority of women (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Prentice & Carranza, 2002), women face heightened expectations to display integrity, in accordance with their social role expectations (Eagly & Wood, 2011) and would thus receive lower evaluations for identically low integrity (cf. male leaders). Because of the strong empirical overlap between both dimensions of leader integrity and the predicted spillover effects of each dimension, there were no predictions regarding different, specific interaction effects for either the moral integrity or behavioral consistency dimension and leader gender.

*Hypothesis 5: Female leadership candidates, compared to male leadership candidates, will receive lower evaluations for displaying identically low leadership integrity.*

To that end, the role expectations and stereotypes that affect people's perceptions of men and women's behaviors also shape those behaviors such that women and men change their behaviors and attitudes to align best with their designated gender role (Eagly, 2013). So, in addition to demonstrating stronger integrity in their actions (Prinz, 2010), women also demonstrate higher standards of integrity in their evaluations of other's misdeeds. For example, female evaluators are more sensitive to integrity failures in professional settings (Dawson, 1997) and more likely to poorly evaluate ethically ambiguous behaviors by employees (Smith & Rogers, 2000). Similarly, the present research provides an opportunity to investigate the evaluative consequences of leaders' integrity according to the gender of an onlooker and predicts a similar gender effect.

*Hypothesis 6: Evaluator gender will affect evaluations of leaders, with women demonstrating a higher evaluative integrity standard, based on leader ratings.*

## Method

### Sample

All participants ( $N = 781$ ) lived in the United States and were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk and

compensated \$0.60 in return for their participation. Because MTurk-derived samples produce reliable results, show no significant differences from other traditional samples (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011; Goodman, Cryder, & Cheema, 2013), and succeed in recruiting more heterogeneous participant groups (Landers & Behrend, 2015), MTurk has received increasing support for recruiting participants. Participants' reported ages ranged from 19 to 71 years old ( $M = 34.77$  years,  $SD = 11.01$  years). Fifty-six percent of participants reported having completed at least a 4-year college degree, 60% of respondents were men, and 92% of respondents reported holding at least a part-time job (72% reported holding a full-time job) in a number of industries (e.g., technology, STEM, financial, and sales). Participants' reported full-time job tenure ranged from 0 to 50 years ( $M = 10.61$  years,  $SD = 10.17$  years). The sample was 54% white, 31% Asian, 5% Black, with Latino and other groups comprising the remainder.

### Research design

The research employed a 2x3x3 between-subjects factorial design. Regarding the first factor, half of all participants read about a male leadership candidate, whereas the other half read about a female leadership candidate. Moreover, all participants, upon recruitment, reported their gender, such that men and women, respectively, were randomly assigned to all conditions to control for rater gender effects. The second factor, leader behavioral consistency, featured a high level, a low level, and a neutral level. The third factor, leader moral integrity, also featured high, low, and neutral levels.

### Protocol

All participants, after recruitment in MTurk, were directed to Qualtrics, where they provided consent and reviewed their instructions and completed all measures. Participants were instructed to imagine they worked in a large company that was hiring a new VP of Business Development, and they had been asked to serve on a selection committee to review applicant materials for the position. Excepting the content that served to experimentally manipulate independent variables, all participants reviewed the same instructions, fictional job description, candidate résumé and application materials, and responded to the same measures. After reading materials and providing ratings, all participants were debriefed and compensated.

### Applicant materials

Each participant read the application materials (i.e., résumé and three character reference stories) for a single, fictional leadership candidate. The application

materials served to assign participants into one of 18 conditions. The résumé and stories manipulated the candidates' genders (i.e., factor 1). The first character reference story described a very competent candidate and was used to minimize pre-existing, individually held biases about men and women's suitability for leadership jobs. The second story was used to manipulate the behavioral consistency level of leadership candidates (i.e., factor 2), and the third story manipulated the moral integrity level of leadership candidates (i.e., factor 3). These stories were written to include salient demonstrations of moral integrity or behavioral consistency, as outlined by Moorman et al. (2013), while excluding mention or implication of the non-relevant dimension of integrity. Full copies of all candidate application materials used in the study are available upon request from the author. Three pilot tests ( $N = 79$ ;  $N = 80$ ;  $N = 83$ ) were used to evaluate and improve effectiveness and credibility of these stories, as indicated by measures of leader integrity and open-ended feedback. All character reference stories were presented in random order across participants to control for order effects.

### Measures

**Integrity.** First, participants completed Moorman, Darnold, Priesemuth, and Dunn (2012); (2013)) multi-dimensional measure of leader integrity, which was used as a manipulation check. Reported estimates of internal consistencies for the respective scales were good ( $\alpha = .85-.95$ ).

**Trust.** Participants' trust in the leadership candidate was assessed using the Trust Scale developed by Mayer and Gavin (2005). Reported estimates of internal consistencies for the scale were good ( $\alpha = .82$ ).

**Hiring recommendation.** Participants responded to an item designed to assess their recommendation for hiring or not hiring the candidate they evaluated. This item, "Please provide your recommendation to the selection committee regarding the hiring of [Candidate Name]. Based on my evaluations, I would ..." required participants to respond using a 10-point Likert-type scale (1 = *Strongly Recommend Reject/Not Hire*, 10 = *Strongly Recommend Accept/Hire*).

### Demographics

Relevant participant demographic information was also collected, including participant race, gender, employment status, job tenure, education level, and age.

### Data analysis

To address Hypotheses 1a and 1b, a pair of 3-level ANOVAs were conducted. In the first, the effects of behavioral consistency on moral integrity ratings were tested, by using the behavioral consistency factor as a fixed factor, when moral integrity was held neutral. Thus, participants in this 3-level tested only considered differences in behavioral consistency. An analogous ANOVA was conducted to test the effects of leaders' moral integrity differences on behavioral consistency ratings in the absence of any behavioral consistency information.

To test Hypotheses 2 and 3, a pair of  $3 \times 3$  ANOVAs was conducted, using the two integrity factors as independent variables and ratings of leader trust and hiring recommendations as dependent variables. Similar to the tests for Hypotheses 1a and 1b, the independent effects of either integrity dimension on trust and hiring recommendations were tested by conducting 3-level ANOVAs using an integrity factor (e.g., moral integrity) as the independent variable, within the neutral level of the other integrity dimension. All tests began with omnibus tests before proceeding to pairwise comparisons. Hypotheses were addressed through comparing effect sizes. Testing Hypotheses 4a and 4b involved reviewing the effect sizes for the subsequent pairwise comparisons between high, neutral, and low levels of integrity. Finally, to address Hypotheses 5 and 6, a pair of  $2 \times 3 \times 3$  ANOVAs was conducted, with all experimentally manipulated factors included as independent variables, and leader trust ratings and hiring recommendations included as dependent variables.

### Results

Descriptive statistics for, and bivariate correlations between, relevant continuous variables are displayed in Table 1; descriptive statistics for dependent variables, according to conditions are displayed in Table 2. Table 3 displays the results of the full  $2 \times 3 \times 3$  ANOVAs for both dependent variables.

### Manipulation check

Two 3-level ANOVAs, using appropriate ratings of leader integrity dimensions of as dependent variables, indicated the experimental manipulations of integrity were successful.

### Hypotheses tests

Hypothesis 1a was supported. When participants received no moral integrity information, differences in

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics for, and correlations between, continuous variables, collapsed across conditions.

	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Demographic Variables</b>									
1. Age	34.77	11.01	19	71					
2. Years of Full-Time Work Tenure	10.61	10.17	0	50	.85				
<b>Dependent Variables</b>									
3. Leader Behavioral Consistency <sup>a</sup>	5.03	1.38	1.00	7.00	-.12	-.14			
4. Leader Moral Integrity Scale <sup>a</sup>	4.78	1.51	1.00	7.00	-.19	-.21	.74		
5. Leader Trust Scale <sup>a</sup>	4.03	1.14	1.00	7.00	-.15	-.15	.62	.81	
6. Hiring Recommendation Rating <sup>b</sup>	6.92	2.17	1.00	10.00	-.21	-.21	.68	.81	.77

*N* = 781

Note.

All correlations significant at or below  $p = .001$

<sup>a</sup>7-point scale

<sup>b</sup>10-point scale

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics, by condition, for dependent variables.

Behavioral Consistency Level	Trust Ratings (7-point scale)					
	Male Candidate			Female Candidate		
	Moral Integrity Level			Moral Integrity Level		
	High	Neutral	Low	High	Neutral	Low
High	4.74 (0.78)	4.82 (0.73)	3.57 (1.02)	4.65 (0.82)	5.16 (0.96)	3.63 (1.12)
Neutral	4.63 (0.74)	3.34 (1.22)	3.73 (1.03)	4.70 (0.78)	3.66 (1.11)	3.90 (1.13)
Low	4.11 (0.97)	4.14 (0.95)	3.31 (1.18)	4.65 (0.70)	4.05 (0.87)	3.27 (1.22)
Behavioral Consistency Level	Hiring Recommendation Ratings (10-point scale)					
	Male Candidate			Female Candidate		
	Moral Integrity Level			Moral Integrity Level		
	High	Neutral	Low	High	Neutral	Low
High	8.26 (1.23)	8.26 (1.62)	6.53 (1.84)	8.25 (1.59)	8.41 (1.60)	6.32 (2.01)
Neutral	7.97 (1.59)	5.86 (2.21)	6.73 (2.02)	8.12 (1.32)	6.86 (2.08)	6.82 (1.93)
Low	7.24 (1.74)	6.88 (1.87)	5.19 (2.53)	7.19 (1.66)	7.02 (1.74)	5.07 (2.71)

Total *N* = 781

Note.

Standard Deviations are Displayed in Parentheses; Means are displayed outside parentheses

**Table 3.** 3x3x2x2 ANOVA results for leader trust and hiring recommendation ratings.

	SS	df	MS	F	$\eta_p^2$
<b>Leader Trust Ratings</b>					
Behavioral Consistency Level	50.00	2	25.00	25.32***	.06
Moral Integrity Level	106.86	2	53.43	54.12***	.12
Leader Gender	1.04	1	1.04	1.06	.00
Evaluator Gender	3.61	1	3.61	3.76	.01
Behavioral * Moral Integrity Interaction	69.67	4	17.42	17.64***	.09
Behavioral Consistency * Evaluator Gender Interaction	7.29	2	3.65	3.79*	.01
Moral Integrity * Evaluator Gender Interaction	9.24	2	4.62	4.80**	.01
Error	753.28	763	0.99		
Total	154855.09	781			
<b>Hiring Recommendation Ratings</b>					
Behavioral Consistency Level	200.58	2	100.29	56.87***	.07
Moral Integrity Level	370.15	2	185.08	49.59***	.12
Leader Gender	2.77	1	2.77	0.74	.00
Evaluator Gender	18.98	1	18.98	5.23*	.01
Behavioral * Moral Integrity Interaction	139.31	4	34.83	9.33***	.05
Behavioral Consistency * Evaluator Gender Interaction	24.40	2	12.20	3.36*	.01
Moral Integrity * Evaluator Gender Interaction	40.97	2	20.48	5.65**	.02
Error	2847.49	763	3.73		
Total	41132.00	781			

*N* = 781

Note.

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Only results for relevant tests (i.e., main effects and 2-way interactions) are displayed. For the sake of space, none of the non-significant interactions between leader gender and integrity factor are displayed



**Table 4.** Effect sizes (Partial  $\eta^2$ ) for behavioral consistency and moral integrity manipulations, across dependent variables.

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable			
	Behavioral Consistency	Moral Integrity	Trust	Hiring Recommendation
Behavioral Consistency (2 df test)	<b>.18<sup>a</sup></b>	<i>.08<sup>b</sup></i>	<i>.06<sup>c</sup></i>	<b>.07<sup>d</sup></b>
High vs. Low	<b>.24</b>	<i>.07</i>	<i>.06</i>	<b>.07</b>
High vs. Neutral	<b>.07</b>	<i>.02</i>	<i>.02</i>	<b>.01</b>
Neutral vs. Low	<b>.07</b>	<i>.01</i>	<i>.01</i>	<b>.03</b>
Moral Integrity (2 df test)	<i>.04<sup>b</sup></i>	<b>.15<sup>a</sup></b>	<i>.12<sup>c</sup></i>	<b>.12<sup>d</sup></b>
High vs. Low	<i>.05</i>	<b>.19</b>	<i>.16</i>	<b>.15</b>
High vs. Neutral	<i>.02</i>	<b>.03</b>	<i>.01</i>	<b>.02</b>
Neutral vs. Low	<i>.02</i>	<b>.10</b>	<i>.10</i>	<b>.08</b>
Neutral Behavioral Consistency Conditions				
Moral Integrity (2 df test)	<i>.09<sup>a</sup></i>	<b>.17<sup>b</sup></b>	<i>.18<sup>c</sup></i>	<b>.12<sup>d</sup></b>
High vs. Low	<i>.06</i>	<b>.12</b>	<i>.17</i>	<b>.12</b>
High vs. Neutral	<i>.15</i>	<b>.28</b>	<i>.27</i>	<b>.18</b>
Neutral vs. Low	<i>.02</i>	<b>.30</b>	<i>.02</i>	<b>.01</b>
Neutral Moral Integrity Conditions				
Behavioral Consistency (2 df test)	<b>.25<sup>b</sup></b>	<i>.28<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>.27<sup>c</sup></i>	<b>.16<sup>d</sup></b>
High vs. Low	<b>.28</b>	<i>.21</i>	<i>.21</i>	<b>.14</b>
High vs. Neutral	<b>.26</b>	<i>.39</i>	<i>.36</i>	<b>.22</b>
Neutral vs. Low	<b>.00</b>	<i>.08</i>	<i>.07</i>	<b>.02</b>

<sup>a</sup>**Bold-faced font** indicates values for integrity factors' intended effects (e.g., moral integrity factor effects on ratings of moral integrity)

<sup>b</sup>*Italicized font* indicates values for integrity factors' spillover effects (e.g., behavioral consistency effects on ratings of moral integrity)

<sup>c</sup>Underlined font indicates values of comparable effects of integrity factors on ratings of trust

<sup>d</sup>**Bold-faced, underlined font** indicates values of comparable effects of integrity factors on hiring recommendations

Areas of similar grey shading used to group relevant effect sizes for comparison

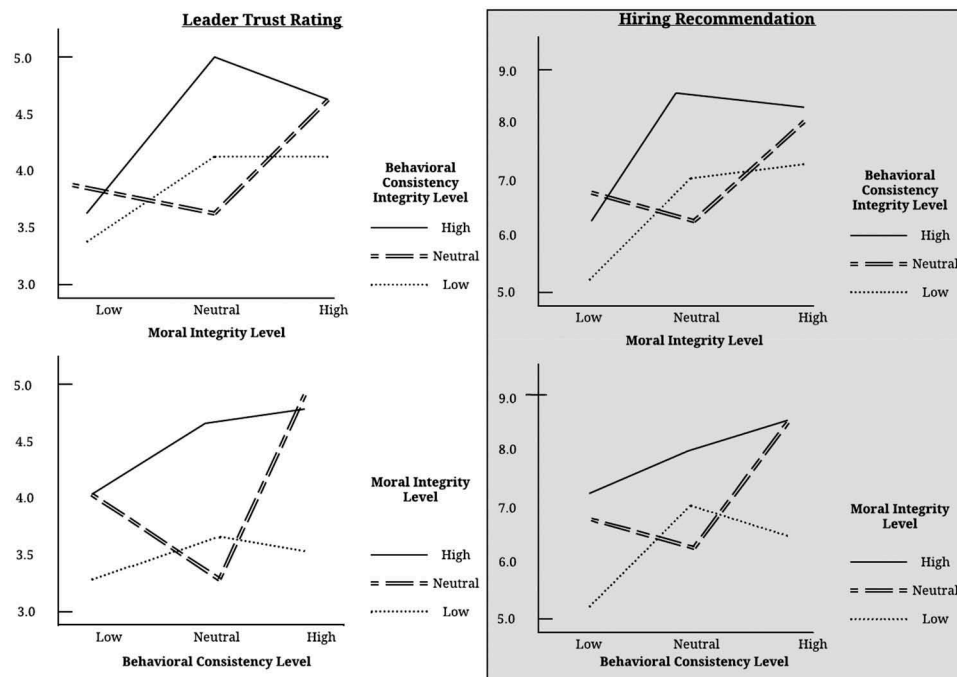
leaders' behavioral consistency produced differences in moral integrity ratings,  $F(2, 279) = 54.59$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .28$ . Pairwise comparisons revealed that, for moral integrity ratings, high behavioral consistency leaders received higher ratings ( $M = 5.91$ ,  $SD = 0.85$ ) than low behavioral consistency leaders ( $M = 4.88$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ),  $t(219) = 7.71$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .21$ , and higher ratings than the neutral consistency leaders ( $M = 4.08$ ,  $SD = 1.44$ ),  $t(162) = 10.23$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .39$ . Moreover, neutral integrity leaders were rated lower than low behavioral consistency leaders,  $t(177) = -4.04$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .08$ .

Hypothesis 1b was also supported. When participants received no behavioral consistency information, differences in leaders' moral integrity resulted in different ratings of behavioral consistency,  $F(2, 197) = 9.73$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .09$ . Pairwise comparisons indicated that, for behavioral consistency ratings, high ( $M = 5.59$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ) and low levels ( $M = 5.00$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ ) of the moral integrity manipulation produced significantly different ratings,  $t(137) = 3.05$ ,  $p = .003$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .06$ . A similar effect existed between the high and neutral levels ( $M = 4.67$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ ) of moral integrity,  $t(122) = 4.63$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .15$ . There were no significant differences in consistency ratings between neutral and low moral integrity leaders.

Hypothesis 2 received mixed support. Table 4 presents the effect sizes for each integrity factor, according to a number of measured variables. When all integrity information was considered together, leaders' moral integrity produced larger effects on trust and hiring recommendations. Main effect tests (i.e., 2 df tests) and pairwise

comparisons (e.g., high vs. low moral integrity leaders) revealed much larger effect sizes for moral integrity differences, with some more than double the magnitude of the analogous effect size of behavioral consistency (e.g., partial  $\eta^2$  values = .12 vs. .06, respectively). However, tests of the independent effects of either dimension of integrity (e.g., the effects of moral integrity, when behavioral consistency was neutral), revealed the opposite pattern. That is, when participants received no moral integrity information, behavioral consistency differences produced stronger effects (partial  $\eta^2$  values range = .02-.36), overall, than moral integrity differences in the absence of behavioral consistency information (partial  $\eta^2$  values range = .01-.27). Hypothesis 3 was supported, such that the interaction terms for the integrity factors were significant. Figure 1 demonstrates how, when the factors were crossed, neutral integrity information yields a very different pattern of ratings than either the high or low integrity information. Specifically, for high and low behavioral consistency leaders, the patterns of effects for moral integrity were similar. For neutral behavioral consistency leaders, however, the pattern differed dramatically.

Hypothesis 4a and 4b each received mixed support. In the  $3 \times 3$  tests, the high vs. neutral integrity effects were the smallest (partial  $\eta^2$  ranging from .01-.02), compared with generally larger effects comparing high and low, or neutral and low, integrity leaders (partial  $\eta^2$  ranging from .01-.16). However, in neutral-integrity tests (i.e., without moral integrity or behavioral consistency information), this pattern did not hold. Across these conditions, the comparison between high and neutral integrity leaders yielded the largest effect sizes (partial  $\eta^2$  ranging from .18-.36),



**Figure 1.** Interaction effects of moral integrity and behavioral consistency factors on leader trust and recommendation ratings.

followed by the high vs. low comparison, and finally the neutral vs. low comparison, where effect sizes were mostly negligible (partial  $\eta^2$  ranging from .01-.07).

Hypothesis 5 was not supported by an omnibus test, such that none of the 2 or 3-way interactions involving integrity factors and gender were statistically significant for either dependent variable (see Table 3 for complete statistics). The hypothesis was also not supported by pairwise comparisons between matched male and female low integrity leaders.

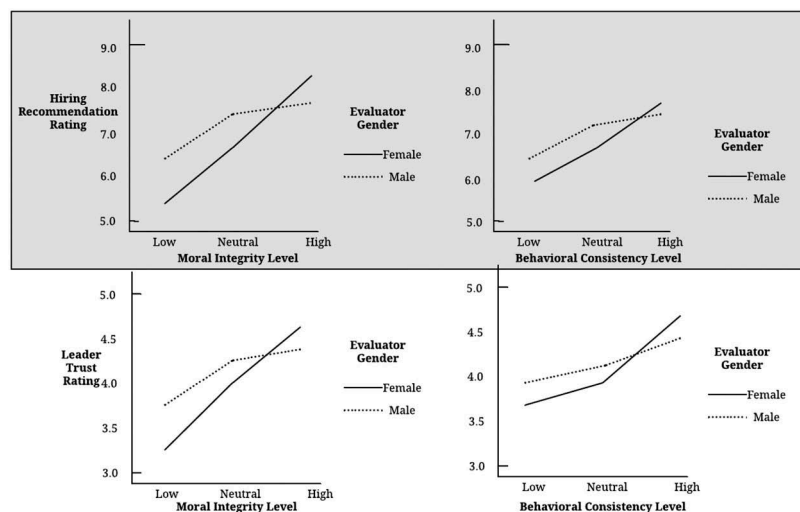
Hypothesis 6 was supported. Across conditions, women gave lower ratings of trust ( $M = 3.95$ ,  $SD = 1.31$ ,  $F = 3.78$ ,  $p = .053$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .01$ ) and hiring recommendations ( $M = 6.71$ ,  $SD = 2.39$ ,  $F = 5.23$ ,  $p = .022$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .01$ ) than men ( $M = 4.09$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ;  $M = 7.07$ ,  $SD = 2.01$ ). Moreover, for both dependent variables, each dimension of integrity interacted with evaluator gender, such that the effects of a leaders' moral integrity or behavioral consistency differed based on the evaluator's gender. For low and neutral levels of integrity, women gave lower ratings of trust and recommendation for leaders, but the high level of integrity yielded a higher rating from female evaluators. Figure 2 displays the interaction effects of evaluator gender and leader integrity level.

## Discussion

Compared with previous research relying on naturally occurring, correlated reports of leader integrity, this research experimentally test the unique causal effects

of leaders' moral integrity and behavioral consistency levels on an important psychological outcome – leader trust – and an applied outcome – a hiring recommendation. It addressed the need for a nuanced investigation of the three guiding principles addressed earlier: (a) followers care a great deal about integrity, such that differences in leader integrity result in effects of similar magnitude as variables like servant leadership behaviors, (Sendjaya & Pekerti, 2010), organizational justice, and participative decision making (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002), and (b) moral integrity and behavioral consistency comprise integrity ratings in a nuanced fashion such that, when both dimensions of leaders' integrity are known, moral integrity differences yield larger effect sizes. However, considered in isolation, leaders' behavioral consistency produces larger effects in evaluations. Finally, (c) leaders can receive equitable evaluative benefits by avoiding low integrity *and* striving for high integrity. Whereas predictions based on LCT theory suggested integrity only matters in its absence, the current research indicated that demonstrating high integrity leadership (cf. neutral, or unknown, integrity) matters as much as avoiding low integrity.

These findings primarily align with, and importantly advance, theory on perceived leadership integrity. The results support a multidimensional perspective of leader integrity, in which moral integrity and behavioral consistency work together to affect stakeholders' perceptions of leaders (Dunn, 2009). They advance this perspective by demonstrating the complicated dynamic



**Figure 2.** Interaction effects of leader integrity and evaluator gender on leader trust and hiring recommendation ratings.

between these dimensions, such that a leader's demonstration of either dimension yields significant effects of moderate magnitude on perceptions of the other. Moreover, they indicate these dimensions interact, such that a leader's level of one integrity dimension conditions the effects of the other dimension, a novel finding that cross-sectional research has not revealed. The use of an experimental design also indicated the absence of clear information for either dimension of integrity can yield unexpected results. Specifically, leaders presented without any integrity information in either dimension were rated almost as poorly as leaders presented as low in both dimensions of integrity. Moreover, when onlookers did not receive information on a leader's moral integrity, the effects of their behavioral consistency were more pronounced (cf. effects of moral integrity differences for neutral-consistency leaders). This finding aligns with previous research on how trust in leaders (and attitudes more generally; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993) is developed, namely through the frequency and qualities of interactions with and the availability of information on the leader (Burke, Sims, Lazzara, & Salas, 2007). For many leaders who interact sparingly with stakeholders, or typically only in response to an urgent situation (Bass & Avolio, 1997; Johnson, Venus, Lanaj, Mao, & Chang, 2012), the current study reveals the importance of minimizing stakeholders' ambiguity about their leaders' integrity.

These findings can serve a variety of organizational stakeholders, including leaders, those responsible for staffing (e.g., sourcing, recruiting, selecting) or developing people in leadership roles, and even those responsible for organizational public-facing communication (Just & Grigler, 2000; Petrick & Scherer, 2003). First, they

reiterate the high consequences of leader integrity, given the dramatic differences in trust and recommendation ratings for leaders who, despite a high level of competence, were evaluated quite differently as a result of relatively tempered descriptions of leader integrity. Given outstanding disagreements about how to evaluate and incorporate leaders' integrity in selection decisions (Kaiser & Hogan, 2010), this finding affirms the evaluative weight raters derive from any integrity information. Otherwise, they must infer this information from other sources (Highhouse, 2008), with relatively unpredictable consequences. Thus, leaders and organizations would be well-advised, as part of selection processes, to provide any relevant, accurate integrity information to selectors. When selectors possess information on both dimensions, moral integrity differences yield larger effects, and leaders should continue to strive to exhibit a respect for the greater good and fairness. However, when evaluators only clearly detect one dimension of a leader's integrity, behavioral consistency reigns, for outcomes like trust and more global perceptions of integrity. This specific effect – the strong impact of behavioral consistency in the absence of moral integrity knowledge – echoes those researchers who prioritize leaders' behavioral consistency specifically because it enables others to reduce their uncertainty. Uncertainty reduction, based on leaders' behavioral consistency, serves to improve the efficiency of decision-making by allowing for the use of existing scripts and schemas of leaders (Palanski & Yammarino, 2007), whereas leaders' morality operates less through cognitive mechanisms and more through affective processes (Moorman et al., 2018). Because the converse effects were far weaker, this result indicates behavioral consistency information conditions the importance of moral

integrity information, when both are considered together, although the effects of behavioral consistency are less dependent on moral integrity information. This novel finding emphasizes the baseline importance of behavioral consistency and demonstrates how it works in conjunction with leader morality.

Finally, the issue of gender in the present study raised a number of interesting points. First, the interaction effects predicted by Hypothesis 4 were observed, although the magnitude of these effects did not meet statistical significance standards. However, participants demonstrated a bias for women's integrity, such that women leaders received higher ratings of integrity, trust, and hiring recommendations, compared to a male leader with identical biographical information. However, for leaders low in moral integrity, women received equivalent, or lower, ratings compared to an identical male counterpart. The present study also made a novel contribution by observing the different evaluative consequences leaders face in the eyes of male or female stakeholders. Leaders of low integrity face harsher evaluative consequences from women, whereas leaders of high integrity receive a greater evaluative bump from women. Findings like this confirm the importance of considering gender as a critical factor in the study of leader integrity and its effects on a number of valued outcomes, such that men and women respond differently to their leaders' integrity. This study advanced existing theory on leader integrity in that the majority of research on perceived leadership integrity to date has not specifically addressed the role of gender – either the leader's or evaluator's. For organizational leaders and practitioners, these findings indicate that not all integrity is perceived equally by men and women. More directly, compared to men, women hold leaders to a higher standard and award them more evaluative benefit for high integrity.

### **Limitations and future directions**

Although the present research aligns with previous studies and existing theory, any experimental vignette research will pose issues regarding generalizability and fidelity (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014). The current research sought to address these concerns using recommended methods for EVM, but participants reading a hypothetical scenario may not behave similarly to followers evaluating their leaders in a real-world setting. Indeed, a great number of social processes in a natural setting (e.g., shared identity, Steffens, Haslam, & Reicher, 2014; follower characteristics, Felfe & Schyns, 2006; situational vulnerability, Lapidot, Kark, & Shamir, 2007) are not present in a vignette. Experimental designs on leadership integrity pose

challenges – including external validity threats (Burke et al., 2006; Colvile, 2016) – not faced by cross-sectional methods. Factors like these are admittedly sacrificed in pursuit of an experimental design to establish a causal order. Moreover, although the neutral integrity vignette materials satisfied manipulation checks for either integrity dimension, they may have not operated identically for both integrity dimensions (i.e., the neutral level of one dimension may be more 'neutral' than the neutral level for the other dimension). Future research may adopt the use of EVM to consider how more specific examples of moral integrity failings (e.g., sexual impropriety, financial wrongdoings) or behavioral inconsistencies (e.g., violation of company policy/espoused values) may affect perceptions of leaders, rather than deriving leader integrity manipulations from conceptual definitions derived from theory.

The sample may also pose a limitation. Because MTurk is an online community of workers, the sample likely featured an over-representation of people in white-collar or knowledge-based occupations. Whereas MTurk has received support from organizational scholars, especially for the diversity of its participant pool (Buhrmester et al., 2011; Goodman et al., 2013; Woo, Keith, & Thornton, 2015), the present study sample likely excludes individuals who do not work with computers during the course of their workday (e.g., blue-collar workers, food service employees). Data collection was constrained to U.S. workers, in order to minimize the effect of cultural differences adding unsystematic cultural variance in participants' responses, but this limits the applicability of findings for non-American settings (Jones, 2010). The online sample may also explain the absence of a leader gender and integrity interaction, based on a pro-women preference observed by researchers who gathered opinion and preference data for male and female leaders in a June 2018 study from a similar source (Deckman, 2018). That is, a more general preference for women, which was observed in the current research, may have negated the role-incongruent effects of low integrity by the leaders in the current research. The dampening of the hypothesized effect may be explained by the shifting standards model of stereotypes (Biernat & Manis, 1994), which has supported how stereotypes for groups create different contexts that people use to judge members of those groups. In the present research, participants, as indicated by their evaluations, demonstrated a stereotype that women are morally superior to men (Glick & Fiske, 1996), and the shifting standards model would suggest this evaluative moral advantage enjoyed by women changes the judgment process participants used in evaluating women (cf. men). Future research may consider how a different sample (e.g., blue-collar



workers), the use of manipulations with more salient gender cues (e.g., photos/videos of an actor of either gender), or research conducted in a different zeitgeist could affect relationships between gender and integrity for evaluations of leaders.

## Conclusions

Information about leaders' misdeeds will likely to grow in availability, because of the technological ease and many incentives of capturing, preserving, and disseminating this type of information (Bughin, Byers, & Chui, 2011; Marr, 2017; Soroka & McAdams, 2015). Primarily this research achieved a novel test of the multidimensional effects of perceived leader integrity, using experimental methods to establish a causal order between leader integrity dimensions and reports of leader trust. Although previous research (e.g., Craig & Gustafson, 1998; Moorman et al., 2018, 2013) has observed relationships between leadership integrity dimensions and trust in leaders, none used an experimental design. The causal effects of either integrity dimension on the other, on ratings of trust, and on a hiring recommendation indicate that: (a) for leaders, integrity matters as much as other highly valued traits and behaviors, (b) both moral and behavioral consistency yield moderate to strong effects, although they do not operate interchangeably or identically, (c) avoiding low integrity and striving for high integrity offer similar benefits (or preventative effects), such that avoiding low integrity alone will not maximize the trust a leader receives from her followers. This study also highlights the value of providing selectors and evaluators any accurate integrity information on leaders, such that its absence can result in unexpected consequences, often to the leader's detriment. Finally, the study reveals how gender, especially the gender of an onlooker, conditions the effects of leader integrity, such that women place higher premiums on the integrity of their leaders and give a greater reward for those leaders of high integrity.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## Notes on contributor

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