

Impressions of Milgram's Obedient Teachers: Situational Cues Inform Inferences About Motives and Traits

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The research investigated impressions formed of a "teacher" who obeyed an experimenter by delivering painful electric shocks to an innocent person (S. Milgram, 1963, 1974). Three findings emerged across different methodologies and different levels of experimenter-induced coercion. First, contrary to conventional wisdom, perceivers both recognized and appreciated situational forces, such as the experimenter's orders that prompted the aggression. Second, perceivers' explanations of the teacher's behavior focused on the motive of obedience (i.e., wanting to appease the experimenter) rather than on hurtful (or evil) motivation. Despite this overall pattern, perceptions of hurtful versus helpful motivation varied as a function of information regarding the level of coercion applied by the experimenter. Finally, theoretically important relationships were revealed among perceptions of situations, motives, and traits. In particular, situational cues (such as aspects of the experimenter's behavior) signaled the nature of the teacher's motives, which in turn informed inferences of the teacher's traits. Overall, the findings pose problems for the lay dispositionism perspective but fit well with multiple inference models of dispositional inference.

Keywords: social perception, attribution, Milgram, intention, motive

In his book *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil*, Philip Zimbardo (2007) posed a provocative question: Was prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq due to "bad apples" or "a bad barrel"? Zimbardo championed the bad-barrel argument, citing a long tradition of social psychological research showing that "situations matter." Zimbardo implied that his message is difficult for the public to accept because of lay dispositionism (Ross & Nisbett, 1991), which is the tendency to overestimate the importance of dispositional causes and underestimate the importance of situational causes. In a related vein, the studies in this article examined impressions formed of a "teacher" who obeyed an experimenter by delivering painful shocks to an innocent person (Milgram, 1963, 1974). We explored the extent to which perceivers acknowledged situational explanations for the teacher's behavior and assessed the types of motives and traits that were attributed. In the process, we compared the predictions of lay

dispositionism with the alternative view that social perceivers often pay close attention to situational factors (Kammrath, Mendoza-Denton, & Mischel, 2005; Malle, Knobe, & Nelson, 2007; Reeder, Vonk, Ronk, Ham, & Lawrence, 2004).

Noticing and Appreciating Situational Pressures

The issue of whether or not naïve perceivers notice and fully appreciate the power of situational forces has received considerable attention in the social psychological literature (Bierbrauer, 1979; Miller, 1984; Ross, 1977; Ross & Nisbett, 1991; Sabini, Siepmann, & Stein, 2001; Safer, 1980). In Milgram's (1963, 1974) basic procedure, the experimenter instructed a research participant to play the role of teacher and deliver a series of increasingly painful shocks to another participant (the learner). If the teacher hesitated to obey at any point, the experimenter increased the pressure by issuing a series of social prompts (e.g., "You have no other choice, you must go on"). Milgram reported that approximately 65% of his teachers obeyed the experimenter till the end of the procedure, delivering a 450-V shock to the learner. How do naïve perceivers come to understand the situational pressures emanating from Milgram's experimenter? As described below, there are conflicting viewpoints on this question.

The perspective of lay dispositionism suggests that perceivers have a general tendency to underappreciate the power of situational factors (Ross & Nisbett, 1991). Accordingly, Western perceivers think of dispositional forces as the cause of other people's behavior, and situational forces surrounding that behavior receive relative neglect. Indeed, the results of Milgram's studies have been

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discussed from this perspective, such that perceivers are said to fail to appreciate the powerful pressures applied by the experimenter (Aronson, 2007; Bierbrauer, 1979; Gilbert & Malone, 1995; Gilovich, Keltner, & Nisbett, 2006; Miller, 1984; Miller, Gillen, Schenker, & Radlove, 1974; Ross, 2001; Ross & Nisbett, 1991; Safer, 1980). Two forms of such lay dispositionism can be distinguished in this context. First, perceivers tend to react with surprise when they first hear of the high level of obedience demonstrated by Milgram's participants (Bierbrauer, 1979)—often assuming that they personally would not have succumbed to the experimenter's demands (Miller et al., 1974). This reaction on the part of perceivers seems to imply that they misconstrue at least some aspect of the Milgram situation (Ross, 1988). The studies in the present article, however, concern a second aspect of people's reactions to Milgram's findings. Specifically, how do perceivers explain the behavior of Milgram's obedient teachers? The literature on lay dispositionism strongly suggests that perceivers are likely to overlook the powerful situational pressures emanating from the experimenter and, instead, focus on the traits of the teacher.

Alternative theoretical perspectives, however, imply a number of reasons why perceivers should be more attentive to situational pressures. First, unexpected behavior (e.g., delivering a 450-V shock to an innocent person) usually prompts the perceiver to engage in more elaborate processing (Hastie, 1984; Weiner, 1985). Given a high level of processing, it seems unlikely that perceivers would ignore relevant information. Second, in the Milgram procedure, the pressures applied by the experimenter are hardly subtle and should be highly salient to perceivers who learn about that procedure. Consequently, it would be odd if perceivers ignored salient situational information (Trope & Gaunt, 2000). Third, even in the absence of unexpected behavior, recent reviews have raised questions about whether perceivers are typically prone to overlooking the importance of situational forces (Gawronski, 2004; McClure, 1998). These reviews have suggested that perceivers often see both dispositional and situational factors as necessary to produce behavior (Reeder, 1993; Reeder & Brewer, 1979). Consequently, evidence that perceivers draw strong trait inferences from situationally constrained behavior (e.g., Bierbrauer, 1979; Miller et al., 1974) cannot be taken as evidence that perceivers ignore situational factors. Finally, people's explanations of intentional actions in everyday life focus primarily on the goals, reasons, or motives for those actions (Fein, 1996, 2001; Kammrath et al., 2005; Malle, 1999, 2004, 2006; McClure, 2002; Read & Miller, 1993, 2005; Reeder et al., 2004; Shoda & Mischel, 1993; White, 1991), which often involve beliefs about the situation (Malle et al., 2007).

In summary, there are conflicting views in the literature concerning the importance that naïve perceivers place on situational forces. One of the aims of our research was to examine the possible situational attributions that observers make in the Milgram paradigm. In order for us to investigate this issue empirically, some conceptual clarification is necessary. There are at least two senses in which perceivers can be said to fail to recognize situational forces. First, perceivers may not notice that situational forces exist (e.g., pay no attention to them). In our studies, perceivers received a description of the basic Milgram procedure and then learned about the behavior of one particular teacher named Mark. Immediately following that information, perceivers were invited to explain in their own words why the teacher behaved as he did. We coded these open-ended responses to assess the frequency of three

categories of explanation: situational forces (e.g., the experimenter ordered Mark to deliver shocks), motives (e.g., Mark wanted to harm the learner, Mark wanted to please the experimenter), and traits (e.g., Mark is a jerk, Mark is an obedient person). Our operational definition of situational awareness, then, is based on the frequency of situational explanations that were offered. But mere awareness of situational forces is not the same as grasping their causal significance. Thus, a second sense in which perceivers can fail to recognize situational forces is to view them as lacking causal force. In other words, do perceivers view the situational forces as unlikely to have shaped or directed the teacher's behavior? In an effort to assess this belief, we included close-ended measures asking perceivers to rate the extent they believed the teacher's behavior was due to the situation. Higher ratings on scales of this sort were taken as an index of belief in the causal impact of situational forces.

What has past research revealed with regard to these measures of perceived situational influence? Although several widely cited articles have often been interpreted as showing that perceivers typically fail to appreciate the situational forces operating on Milgram's teachers (Bierbrauer, 1979; Miller et al., 1974; Safer, 1980), two of these investigations did not measure situational attributions directly (Bierbrauer, 1979; Safer, 1980). Consider two of the measures employed by Bierbrauer (1979). One of these measures indicated that perceivers drew strong, overall trait judgments about Milgram's teacher. As noted earlier, however, strong trait judgments need not imply that situational factors were ignored (Gawronski, 2004; McClure, 1998; Reeder & Brewer, 1979). Second, Bierbrauer asked perceivers to predict the level of obedience likely to be shown by other participants who played the role of teacher in the Milgram setting. Bierbrauer assumed that if perceivers underestimated the importance of situational pressures, they would predict lower levels of obedience. In fact, Bierbrauer's perceivers did underestimate the rate of obedience observed in the actual Milgram experiments. Such underestimates, however, provide only indirect evidence concerning perceivers' awareness and appreciation of the situational forces. Underestimates of obedience might have occurred because of *overestimates* of the shock victim's situational influence (Krueger & Funder, 2004). In any case, perhaps perceivers saw the experimenter as placing powerful pressure on the teacher to deliver the painful shocks, with the result that this particular teacher succumbed to that pressure. In other words, perceivers might see the situation as an important causal force that accounts for this *particular* teacher's obedience. This view of the situation's causal impact is not inconsistent with perceivers' belief that other people might be able to resist those same situational pressures.

Unlike the studies by Bierbrauer (1979) and Safer (1980), Miller et al. (1974) measured situational attributions directly. In one of their studies, perceivers were asked to rate the degree of aggressiveness shown by one of Milgram's teachers and explain that rating in their own words. Perceivers' responses were coded into one of three categories: internal (reflecting personal causality), external (reflecting situational causality), and internal-external (reflecting both personal and situational causality). The results indicated that only 24% of the responses reflected internal causality, whereas 55% reflected external causality and 21% reflected internal-external causality. In

other words, 76% of these open-ended explanations focused to some extent on situational causality. Thus, previous studies that are cited as providing evidence for perceivers' underappreciation of situational forces either did not measure situational attributions directly or reported strong data to support perceiver's appreciation of situational forces.

Perceiving the Motives and Traits of Milgram's Obedient Teachers

Our second research question concerned the specific nature of perceivers' impressions of Milgram's teachers. Numerous writers have implied that perceivers hold highly unfavorable views of the teachers (Aronson, 2007; Bierbrauer, 1979; Gilovich et al., 2006; Miller et al., 1974; Ross & Nisbett, 1991; Safer, 1980). This view is certainly intuitive and follows directly from the perspective of lay dispositionism. That is, if perceivers fail to appreciate the situational reasons for the teacher's delivery of painful shocks, the teachers are likely to be seen as especially aggressive and, perhaps, even sadistic. Direct evidence for this view of Milgram's teachers, however, is surprisingly thin. For example, although Bierbrauer (1979) collected ratings on 10 different trait scales, including aggressiveness, obedience, independence, and cooperativeness, he reported only a composite measure of dispositional inference. Therefore, it is impossible to determine the valence of these trait attributions.

Safer (1980) did not collect data on trait attributions, but he did report predicted levels of shock. He reported that after watching the classic Milgram (1965) film *Obedience*, perceivers overestimated the amount of shock people would administer in a control experiment in which Milgram's teachers were free to choose the shock level (without any coercion from the experimenter). Safer viewed these relatively high estimates of shock as evidence that perceivers made harsh dispositional judgments about Milgram's teachers: "After seeing Milgram's Obedience film, students apparently conclude that people are evil and would harm a stranger if given the opportunity" (Safer, 1980, p. 205). A different interpretation of the data is equally plausible. Perceivers may have concluded that aspects of the Milgram situation, apart from the experimenter's coercion, encouraged the teachers to deliver shocks. For example, the very presence of the shock generator implied that shocks were an expected part of the procedure. In other words, it is possible that the overestimates of shock were due to exaggerated situational attributions rather than to exaggerated dispositional attributions.

To the best of our knowledge, Miller et al. (1974) reported the only direct evidence on impressions of Milgram's teachers. In one of their studies, perceivers received written and audio information about a person who was said to have delivered either 450 V of shock to the learner or only 90 V of shock. Perceivers then rated the person on 11 trait dimensions. Perceivers were consistently more positive in their evaluations of the low-shock teacher than they were of the high-shock teacher. Yet this difference is ambiguous with regard to whether the obedient teacher was seen in a negative light or the disobedient teacher was seen in a positive light. Indeed, a close examination of the data indicates that perceivers viewed the obedient teacher as more conforming than morally depraved. For example, on negative traits related to aggression and maladjustment, the obedient teacher was rated on the positive side of the scale (i.e., as nonaggressive and well-adjusted). Thus, the existing literature provides no direct evidence that per-

ceivers morally condemn Milgram's obedient teachers. In addition, previous studies did not assess or compare the specific motives that were attributed to the teachers.

Given the evidence in the existing literature, then, it is not clear whether Milgram's obedient teachers are viewed as motivated by simple conformity/obedience (e.g., wanting to please the experimenter) or by darker motives, such as wanting to hurt the learner. In terms of trait attribution, it is also not clear whether perceivers view the teacher's obedience in morally neutral terms (perhaps as an indication of passivity on the teacher's part) or in harsh, condemning terms. In an effort to clarify these impressions, perceivers in our studies rated both the specific motives and trait-level morality of Milgram's teachers under a variety of circumstance, including different levels of coercion applied by the experimenter. Below we offer a theoretical model suggesting that perceptions of motives lay the groundwork for inferences about traits, such as morality.

Reconceptualizing Relationships Between Perceived Situations, Motives, and Traits

In earlier sections of this article, we focused on situational attributions and inferences of traits but said relatively little about motive inferences. In this section, we give closer scrutiny to perceived motives and how they relate to perceptions of situations and traits. We begin by considering the way traditional theories of dispositional inference have conceptualized the relationship between situational information and trait inferences (for reviews, see Gawronski, 2004; Gilbert, 1998; Krull, 1993; McClure, 1998; Morris & Larrick, 1995; Trope & Gaunt, 2000). When the perceiver has adequate cognitive resources, models of dispositional inference typically assume that situational cues make the perceiver's task more complicated. Gilbert and his colleagues have suggested that, before they can accurately infer a target's attitude or disposition, perceivers tend to *correct* their dispositional inference to reflect the influence of the situation (Gilbert & Malone, 1995; Gilbert, Pelham, & Krull, 1988). According to this correction metaphor, perceivers adjust their dispositional inference up or down a focal trait dimension in direct response to situational information. For instance, if a person is observed behaving anxiously in response to an anxiety-provoking situation (e.g., while being robbed at gunpoint), the perceiver might initially categorize the behavior as "anxious." But at the correction stage, the perceiver tends to subtract the influence of the anxiety-provoking situation from that behavior categorization, with the result being that the perceiver refrains from attributing a high level of anxiety to the person (Gilbert, 1995). Notice, then, that the perceiver seeks to remove the influence of the situation (or control for it). In addition, inferences about the target person are made along a single, focal trait dimension (i.e., anxiety).

In this article we suggest a very different metaphor. We propose that the process of dispositional inference is often better conceptualized as one where situational information *informs* dispositional inferences. Situational forces can inform dispositional inferences by helping to identify the reasons or motives that underlie intentional behavior (Kammrath et al., 2005; Reeder, Kumar, Hesson-McInnis, & Trafimow, 2002). For example, Reeder and his colleagues proposed that perceivers process intentional behavior in the context of situational forces that give it some meaning—implying one or more underlying motives (Reeder et al., 2002,

2004). In turn, perceivers use information about motives to infer where the target stands on one or more trait dimensions. Below, we flesh out the logic that underlies this multiple inference model (MIM) of dispositional inference.

According to MIM, perceivers are often attentive to situational cues because they help to pinpoint a target person's motives. Consider a study in which perceivers read about a soccer player who deliberately injured an opposing team member in response to different forms of situational encouragement (Reeder et al., 2002). When the aggression was in response to provocation (e.g., an insult from the opposing team member), perceivers inferred a revenge motive. In contrast, when the aggression was in response to the exceptionally skillful performance of the opposing player, perceivers inferred that the aggressor was selfish and motivated to win the game. Notice that both situations (provocation vs. skillful performance by the opposing player) encouraged the expression of aggression. But each situation suggested a unique motive. In turn, the motives of revenge versus selfishness led perceivers to different trait inferences: Perceivers judged the aggressor to be higher in dispositional morality if he was motivated by revenge as opposed to self-interest. These findings indicate that perceivers can be quite attentive to the situational forces surrounding aggression and, as a result, the negativity of inferences about motives and traits depends heavily on how those situations are interpreted. In addition, MIM directs attention to perceivers' inferences about both motives and traits, suggesting that perceivers integrate various pieces of information in an effort to create a coherent impression (Asch, 1946; Kammrath et al., 2005; Read & Miller, 1993, 2005; Roeser & Morris, 1999; Shoda & Mischel, 1993; Trope & Gaunt, 2000).

When perceivers learn about the behavior of Milgram's teachers, what situational cues are likely to draw attention? The teachers in the Milgram paradigm were confronted with two potent but conflicting pressures issuing from the experimenter and learner (Blass, 2002; Milgram, 1974; Miller, 1984; Ross, 1988). The experimenter gave a series of commands (e.g., "You must go on! You have no choice!"), while the learner protested the escalation of shocks (e.g., "Experimenter, get me out of here. . . I can't stand the pain"). To the extent that perceivers look to these situational forces for cues about the teacher's motivation, they may see the teacher as struggling with conflicting motivations to (a) please the experimenter (e.g., obey) and (b) help the learner. Both of these motives are more positive, of course, than those suggested by some previous researchers (e.g., Safer, 1980). Thus, by drawing attention to the situational forces surrounding the teacher's aggression, MIM's analysis implies a broader range of motives that perceivers may consider.

MIM implies that perceivers who interpret situational forces differently will infer different motives. For instance, perceivers who ignore the situational forces (or view them as weak) may see the teacher as motivated to hurt the learner. Yet perceivers who focus on the domineering demeanor of the experimenter may stress an obedience motive. Finally, perceivers who focus on the pleas of the learner might stress helpful motivation. For example, seeing or hearing another person cry out in pain can generate a state of empathy in the perceiver (Baron, 1971). It is reasonable for perceivers to expect, therefore, that the cries of the learner might generate feelings of empathy and helpful motivation within Milgram's teacher. Notice that, rather than serving as a nuisance factor in the impression, situational information points the perceiver toward specific inferences about the teacher's motives.

Our analysis assumes that inferences about the teacher's motives will lay the groundwork for trait ratings of morality (Reeder et al., 2004). Thus, inferring hurtful motives should decrease ratings of morality, whereas inferring helpful motives should increase ratings of morality. But what about perceivers who infer an obedience motive? In this case, it is less clear what perceivers will conclude about the teacher's level of morality (Miller, Buddie, & Kretschmar, 2002). However, two interesting possibilities come to mind. On the one hand, perceivers may see the teacher as simply a pawn in the hands of the experimenter and, as a result, refrain from attributing low morality to the teacher. On the other hand, perceivers might view the teacher's obedience as a moral failing and attribute lower levels of morality.

Overview of the Current Research

As described in greater detail below, Studies 1 and 2 were designed to assess the relative importance perceivers placed on different informational cues (situations, motives, and traits) and to examine the specific motives inferred. Study 1 presented written stimuli describing the basic Milgram procedure, whereas Study 2 presented a filmed version of the same material, allowing us to test some alternative interpretations of the Study 1 findings. Studies 3 and 4 introduced manipulations of informational cues that influence impressions of Milgram's obedient teachers. Study 3 varied the information about the experimenter's prompts and the teacher's verbal expressions of concern for the learner's welfare. Finally, Study 4 varied the level of situational pressure (coercion) applied by the experimenter, allowing us to test the prediction that perceptions of the teacher's motives would mediate the impact of situational forces on inferences of morality. In addition, we tested our prediction that perceptions of specific situational cues (e.g., the experimenter took responsibility for shocking the learner) would predict inferences about specific motives within the teacher (e.g., wanting to obey the experimenter).

As an initial test of our ideas, participants in Study 1 received a written description of a target person who played the role of the teacher in Milgram's basic study. Half of the participants were told that the teacher showed total obedience to the experimenter by delivering 450 V to the learner. The remaining participants learned that the teacher disobeyed the experimenter at an early point in the procedure. One of the goals of Study 1 was to assess perceivers' explanations in both open-ended and close-ended formats. Across both formats of assessment, we expected that perceivers would emphasize the importance of the situation for understanding the behavior of the teachers. Study 1 also examined the specific motives that were attributed to the teachers. We assumed that perceivers would attribute motives that corresponded to their interpretation of the situational pressures. Given that the obedient teacher may be perceived as succumbing to pressure from the experimenter, we expected that perceivers would see the teacher as primarily motivated to obey (i.e., "fit in" or please the experimenter). Although this prediction is hardly counterintuitive, it is important to note that previous research highlighted darker motives—motives related to wanting to hurt Milgram's learner (Safer, 1980). Finally, when the teacher was disobedient, we made the straightforward prediction that perceivers would see the teacher as motivated to help the learner.

Finally, MIM implies that perceivers rely on both the type of behavior observed (obedience vs. disobedience) and accompanying situational cues to infer the teacher's motives. In turn, inferences about the teacher's motives tend to shape trait inferences about the teachers. As a preliminary test of this reasoning, Studies 1 and 2 assessed the extent to which motive inferences mediated the relationship between the type of behavior observed and inferences drawn about the teacher's dispositional level of morality. As mentioned above, Study 4 examined the path from situations to motives to traits.

Study 1: Impressions Based on a Written Summary of Milgram's Procedure

Method

Participants. The participants were 52 men ($n = 26$) and women ($n = 26$) from a midsized Midwestern university in the United States. Because preliminary analyses revealed no significant effects of gender, the results of studies presented in this article were collapsed across gender. In the first three studies, we were primarily interested in naïve participants' reactions to Milgram's teachers. Consequently, we sought to eliminate those who had prior knowledge concerning Milgram's findings. Given the high profile of Milgram's name in most discussions of his research, we reasoned that if participants admitted to being unfamiliar with his name, they would be unlikely to possess a sophisticated understanding of his findings. Consequently, participants were asked the following: "Are you familiar with any of Stanley Milgram's experiments?," with "Yes" or "No" as response options. The results described below include only participants who responded "No" (36 of 52 participants).

Procedure. Participants were informed that the study concerned their impressions of a student who participated in a psychological experiment. An introductory paragraph outlined the basic procedure of the voice-feedback version of Milgram's (1974) obedience research, focusing on a fictitious person named Mark who played the role of teacher. The teacher was instructed by an experimenter to deliver increasingly strong electric shocks to another person (the learner) whenever the learner made a mistake on a test of memory. The next paragraph described the experimenter's prompts (commands), the teacher's behavior (e.g., administration of shock and occasional statements of concern for the learner), and the learner's protests (Milgram, 1974). At the 210-V mark, the two experimental conditions diverged. In the disobedient condition, the teacher refused to participate, citing his concern for the learner's welfare.

The man is banging. He wants to get out. I'm sorry; if the man wants to get out I'd just as soon stop. I don't want to administer any more shocks. I'll gladly give you back your check, but I won't harm this man.

In the obedient condition, however, the teacher continued to deliver shocks up to 450 V. The final sentences of the transcript read as follows: "After a final agonized scream at 315 volts the learner was not heard from again. Mark continued delivering the shocks all the way up to the maximum 450 volts."

Dependent measures. Immediately after reading the stimulus materials, participants received an open-ended question about Mark: "In a few sentences, please explain why you believe Mark behaved as he did." Participants were then asked to rate the extent Mark possessed 17 different traits compared to the average person. The set of traits was selected based on a review of past

literature (Bierbrauer, 1979; Miller et al., 1974; Safer, 1980), with the goal of representing a broad array of dimensions. The scale endpoints on the trait scales were labeled 1 (*very much less so*) versus 7 (*very much more*). Following these trait ratings, participants were asked to rate the likelihood of a diverse array of 14 possible motives (or reasons) for the teacher's behavior, with scale endpoints of 1 (*definitely not*) versus 7 (*most definitely*). Participants then responded to items concerning causal attribution to the situation, such as, "To what extent was Mark's behavior due to the situation (for example, what other people, such as the experimenter or other participants, said or did?)," and to dispositional characteristics, such as, "To what extent was Mark's behavior due to his own disposition (for example, his own personality)?" The scale endpoints were labeled 1 (*not at all*) versus 7 (*completely*). Participants then responded to a manipulation check concerning whether the teacher obeyed the experimenter till the very end (by delivering a 450-V shock) and, finally, items asking about familiarity with the Milgram experiments and demographic questions.

Results

Manipulation check. With the exception of 3 people, participants gave the appropriate response concerning whether or not the teacher delivered 450 V. We took the conservative step of retaining the data from all participants. The conclusions of the analyses are not altered by this decision.

Open-ended explanations. According to Malle (2004), perceivers typically explain intentional behavior in terms of its underlying reasons or motives. At a linguistic level, such explanations are sometimes marked explicitly as motives (e.g., statements such as, "Mark wanted . . .," "Mark tried . . .," "Mark's goal was to . . ."). But reason explanations are often unmarked, consisting of statements of belief about the situation (e.g., the experimenter told Mark he had to continue delivering shocks). In our coding scheme, the former type of explanation was coded as a motive, whereas the latter was coded as a situational explanation. Finally, explanations that mentioned enduring characteristics of the teacher were coded as traits (e.g., Mark is a jerk). We coded the frequency of explanations mentioning explicit motives, situational beliefs, and trait-like constructs separately for each participant. The coding was done by both a primary coder and a secondary coder, with adequate reliability obtained for the number of explicit motives mentioned ($\alpha = .85$), number of situational beliefs ($\alpha = .90$), and number of traits ($\alpha = .80$). The data reported below were taken from the primary coder. The explanations provided within each of the three categories (motives, situational beliefs, and traits) were quite varied (e.g., within the explicit motives category, motives such as wanting to hurt the learner, avoid a confrontation with the experimenter, and help the learner were mentioned), preventing us from reporting the open-ended data at a more specific level.

Guided by MIM, we expected that perceivers' open-ended explanations would focus heavily on situational beliefs and explicit motives. The data displayed in Table 1 provide support for this expectation. Perceivers' explanations were dominated by situational beliefs ($M = 0.97$, $SD = 0.94$) and explicit motives ($M = 0.47$, $SD = 0.51$), whereas trait-type explanations were almost nonexistent ($M = 0.03$, $SD = 0.17$), $F(2, 68) = 20.63$, $p < .001$. Thus, the open-ended responses suggested that our perceivers were highly aware of the

Table 1
Types of Explanations, Causal Attributions, Specific Motives,
and Trait Inferences as a Function of Level of Obedience
(Study 1)

Dependent measure	Obedient teacher		Disobedient teacher	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Open-ended explanation				
Situation	1.37	0.96	0.53	0.72
Motive	0.21	0.42	0.76	0.44
Trait	0.05	0.23	0.00	0.00
Causal attribution rating				
Situation	5.53	1.39	5.35	0.86
Disposition	4.16	1.61	4.83	1.63
Specific motive				
To obey	4.81	1.33	3.47	1.30
To help	3.00	1.51	5.21	1.21
To hurt	2.47	1.51	2.11	1.22
Trait inference				
Morality	3.26	1.09	4.29	1.20
Obedience	4.84	1.25	4.73	0.71

situation (as it influenced the teacher's actions), but they did not put much emphasis on the traits of the teacher.

The type of open-ended explanation offered also varied according to whether the teacher was obedient, as opposed to disobedient, as indicated by a significant interaction of motive and level of obedience, $F(2, 68) = 11.83, p < .001$. The behavior of the obedient teacher was most often explained by situational beliefs (e.g., Mark was basing his behavior off that of the experimenter. He probably would not have kept going without the experimenter's encouragement). In contrast, the behavior of the disobedient teacher was explained by both explicit motives (e.g., Mark wanted to help the learner) and situational beliefs (e.g., the learner said he wanted out of the experiment).

Causal attribution ratings. The open-ended data indicated that perceivers were highly aware of situational factors. But did perceivers endow situational forces with causal power? Data from the more structured index of causal attribution suggest an affirmative answer: Perceivers saw the teacher's behavior as primarily due to situational forces ($M = 5.44, SD = 1.16$) rather than personality characteristics ($M = 4.47, SD = 1.63$), $F(1, 34) = 8.16, p = .007$, and this tendency did not interact significantly with level of obedience, $F(1, 34) = 1.60, p = .22$.

Perceived motives. We included structured ratings scales in order to obtain a more fine-grained understanding of perceived motives. We conducted a principal-components analysis on the 14 motive ratings, followed by reliability analyses, resulting in the identification of three factors: a Motive to Obey (e.g., the teacher wanted to avoid looking bad in front of the experimenter, fit in, and look good to the experimenter; $\alpha = .84$), a Motive to Be Helpful (e.g., he wanted to be a helpful responsible person, and wanted to do the moral or "right thing"; $\alpha = .82$), and a Motive to Hurt (e.g., he enjoyed giving shocks to the learner, and wanted to hurt the learner; $\alpha = .80$). Perceptions of motive were subjected to a mixed-design analysis of variance (ANOVA), with level of obedience (obedient vs. disobedient) as a between-subjects factor and type of motive (obedience vs. help vs. hurt) as a within-subjects factor. Perceptions of motive are displayed in Table 1.

Overall, perceivers attributed the teacher's behavior more strongly to motives to obey the experimenter and to help the learner, as compared to a motive to hurt the learner, $F(2, 68) = 20.50, p < .001$. A significant interaction, however, indicated that different motives were attributed across the two obedience conditions, $F(2, 68) = 15.43, p < .001$. The obedient teacher was perceived as significantly more motivated to obey the experimenter than to either help or hurt the learner, $t(18) = 4.32$ and $4.89, ps < .001$, respectively. Attributions to the help motive and hurt motive did not differ significantly, $t(18) = 1.01, p = .33$. Not surprisingly, the disobedient teacher's motives were seen in a more positive light. The disobedient teacher was perceived as primarily motivated by helpfulness, as opposed to either motives to obey, $t(16) = 3.79, p = .004$, or motives to hurt, $t(16) = 7.63, p < .001$. In addition, the disobedient teacher's motive to obey was perceived as stronger than was his motive to hurt, $t(16) = 3.25, p = .005$.

Trait inferences. Trait inferences were subjected to a principal-components analysis, followed by reliability analyses, resulting in the identification of two factors: trait inferences related to morality (i.e., morality, aggression [reverse coded], and concern for others; $\alpha = .83$) and trait inferences related to obedience (i.e., obedient, cooperative, and conforming; $\alpha = .87$). Perceivers saw the obedient teacher as possessing significantly lower morality than the disobedient teacher did, $t(34) = 2.71, p = .011$. Surprisingly, trait inferences of obedience did not vary significantly across the levels of teacher obedience, $t(33) = 0.32, p = .75$. This finding may reflect the fact that even the disobedient teacher obeyed the experimenter for a good part of the procedure.

Do perceptions of motive mediate trait inferences of morality? MIM suggests that motive inferences should mediate the relationship between level of obedience and trait inferences of morality (Kenny, Kashy, & Bolger, 1998). Specifically, we examined the mediating role of the motives to be helpful and obey the experimenter. Separate regressions indicated that the level of obedience predicted ratings of morality ($\beta = .42, t(34) = 2.71, p = .01$, as well as the motive to be helpful ($\beta = .64, t(34) = 4.80, p < .001$, and the motive to obey ($\beta = -.46, t(34) = -3.05, p = .004$). When the obedience manipulation and the two mediators were examined simultaneously as predictors of inferred morality, the direct statistical impact of the obedience manipulation was almost completely eliminated ($\beta = -.02, t(32) = -0.10, p = .925$). In contrast, the effect of the helpful-motive mediator remained statistically significant ($\beta = .48, t(32) = 2.67, p = .012$, and the motive to obey approached significance ($\beta = -.32, t(32) = -1.88, p < .07$). The direction of the standardized coefficients indicates that the motive of wanting to help was positively related to perceptions of morality, whereas the motive of wanting to obey tended to be negatively related to perceptions of morality. The Sobel test indicated a significant path through the motive to help ($z = 2.34, p < .02$) but not through the motive to obey ($z = 1.60, p < .11$). In short, perceived motives mediated impressions of morality.¹

¹ Additional analyses examined the reverse mediational model, whereby trait inferences served as mediators of inferred motives. Although trait inferences were not consistent mediators of motive inferences in our studies, we cannot rule out this reverse path. Given the strong correlations between inferences about motives and traits, the direction of mediation should be interpreted with caution.

Discussion

The open-ended explanations provide a revealing picture of how perceivers think about the behavior of Milgram's teachers. These explanations focused on the situational forces at work (e.g., commands from the experimenter and the cries for help from the learner), as well as the accompanying motives of the teachers. The rather low frequency of trait-like explanations mentioned is consistent with the results from research that investigated open-ended accounts of real-life events (Malle et al., 2007). In addition to indicating high awareness of situational forces, perceivers viewed the situation as having greater causal power than the dispositional characteristics of the teacher had. Furthermore, our structured measures of perceived motives indicate that perceivers saw the obedient teachers as primarily motivated to appease the experimenter (i.e., an obedience motive) rather than to hurt the learner. Disobedient teachers, in contrast, were perceived as primarily motivated to be helpful. Regardless of whether they obeyed or disobeyed the experimenter, however, both teachers were seen as being guided by their beliefs about the situation and their accompanying motives rather than by their personalities. Finally, perceived motives to help the learner and obey the experimenter mediated the different trait impressions of morality that were attributed to the obedient versus disobedient teachers.²

There are at least two alternative interpretations for the findings of Study 1. Of primary interest is the possibility that our written stimuli somehow overemphasized situational cues that could explain the actions of the teachers. By providing statements from the experimenter, such as, "The experiment requires that you go on Teacher" and "I am responsible for this experiment," we may have placed the situational forces on center stage. In this context, our description of the obedient teacher's behavior may have appeared pallid in comparison, which might explain the low level of trait explanations that we observed. If our stimulus materials focused on the situation, that focus might also explain the relatively positive motives that were attributed by perceivers. We wondered whether perceivers would respond differently to these measures if they were allowed to actually see the teacher delivering shocks to the learner. To examine this alternative interpretation, Study 2 presented the stimuli in visual format. Participants watched segments of a film (Milgram, 1965) in which the teacher either disobeyed the experimenter at 150 V or went on to deliver the full 450 V.

By allowing perceivers to view Milgram's (1965) film, we could examine a second alternative interpretation. Perhaps the results of Study 1 were influenced by the fact that we described the teacher as a student, someone with whom our perceivers might empathize. Some previous research has suggested that empathic perceivers are more likely to rely on situational (as opposed to dispositional) explanations for a person's behavior (Regan & Totten, 1975). In Study 2, the teachers who are depicted in Milgram's film are clearly middle-aged (and presumably not students). If the student status of the teacher in Study 1 played a significant role, perceivers in Study 2 should form more negative impressions of the teacher.

Study 2: Impressions Based on Watching the Film *Obedience*

Participants in Study 2 were presented with segments of Milgram's (1965) classic film, titled *Obedience*. In other respects, the

procedure was identical to Study 1 (in which written stimuli were presented). As described above, this change in procedure allowed for a test of the generalizability of our findings.

Method

Participants. The participants were 95 men ($n = 16$) and women ($n = 79$) from a mid-sized Midwestern university in the United States. As in Study 1, data are reported only from participants ($N = 52$) who met the criteria for being unfamiliar with Milgram's studies of obedience.

Procedure. Participants in Study 2 watched segments of Milgram's black-and-white film. All participants viewed a 9 min introductory segment, which outlined the basic procedure. The sequence of events was similar to that of the written version employed in Study 1, with the notable exceptions that the learner described himself as having a heart condition, and the teachers appeared to be middle-aged. Participants in the disobedient condition watched a second film segment (1 min, 35 s) in which the teacher quit the study at 150 V. Participants in the obedient condition watched a different teacher in the second film segment, one who proceeded through the entire experimental protocol, administering the full 450-V punishment (12 min, 35 s). After watching the film, participants responded to the identical set of questions employed in Study 1.

Results

Manipulation check. With the exception of 2 people, participants gave the appropriate response concerning whether or not the teacher delivered 450 V. The conclusions of the analyses are not altered by including data from these 2 participants.

Open-ended explanations. Coding of the open-ended responses obtained adequate reliability for the number of explicit motives mentioned ($\alpha = .79$), number of situational beliefs ($\alpha = .99$), and number of traits ($\alpha = .88$). Overall, perceivers once again attributed the teacher's behavior primarily to explicit motives ($M = 0.88$, $SD = 0.38$) and situational factors ($M = 0.33$, $SD = 0.58$) as opposed to the traits of Milgram's teachers ($M = 0.12$, $SD = 0.32$), $F(2, 100) = 43.57$, $p < .001$.

As in Study 1, these explanations varied according to the teacher's level of obedience, as indicated by a significant interaction of motive and level of obedience, $F(2, 100) = 15.41$, $p < .001$. As displayed in Table 2, the teacher's obedience was explained by a combination of explicit motives and situational explanations rather

² The analyses of Studies 1–3 in this article excluded participants who indicated prior knowledge of the Milgram studies. Our reasoning was that being familiar with Milgram's studies might mean that one had artificially high awareness of the social psychological message that situations matter. But by eliminating these more sophisticated participants, we raise the possibility that our findings represent the perceptions of only those who are unsophisticated or relatively uninformed. To examine this possibility, we conducted preliminary analyses of Studies 1–3 that included familiarity as a factor in the design. In general, few significant effects emerged for the familiarity variable. Where significant trends for familiarity occurred, however, they were in the direction of familiar participants placing relatively greater weight on situational factors and judging Milgram's obedient teacher less harshly. Therefore, the main message of our research is not altered by the exclusion of these participants.

Table 2
Types of Explanations, Causal Attributions, Specific Motives, and Trait Inferences as a Function of Level of Obedience (Study 2)

Dependent measure	Obedient teacher		Disobedient teacher	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Open-ended explanation				
Situation	0.67	0.71	0.04	0.19
Motive	0.75	0.44	1.00	0.27
Trait	0.08	0.28	0.14	0.36
Causal attribution rating				
Situation	5.79	1.06	5.50	1.64
Disposition	4.25	1.36	5.75	1.26
Specific motive				
To obey	4.16	0.83	2.53	0.98
To help	4.40	1.28	5.96	1.15
To hurt	1.54	1.02	1.70	1.09
Trait inference				
Morality	4.18	0.89	5.29	0.85
Obedience	5.11	0.85	3.21	1.12

than by traits. In contrast, disobedience was explained almost entirely by explicit motives (e.g., the teacher wanted to help the learner) rather than by traits or the situation. Thus, perceivers stressed situational explanations only when the teacher was obedient and not when the teacher disobeyed the experimenter. In neither case, however, did perceivers rely much on trait-like explanations.

Causal attribution ratings. The more structured index of causal attribution indicated that perceivers saw the teacher's behavior as primarily due to situational forces ($M = 5.63$, $SD = 1.40$) rather than due to personality characteristics ($M = 5.06$, $SD = 1.50$), $F(1, 50) = 4.83$, $p = .03$. This tendency, however, interacted with level of obedience, $F(1, 50) = 9.29$, $p = .004$. When the teacher was obedient, the findings replicated Study 1, such that perceivers attributed the teacher's behavior significantly more to situational factors than they did to the teacher's personality, $t(23) = 3.82$, $p = .001$. In contrast, when the teacher was disobedient, perceivers thought that both situational and dispositional forces were at work, $t(27) = .596$, $p = .56$.

Perceived motives. Structured ratings of motives were subjected to a mixed-design ANOVA, with condition (disobedient vs. obedient) as a between-participants factor and type of motive (obedience vs. help vs. hurt) as a within-participants factor. Perceptions of motive are displayed in Table 2. Overall, perceivers saw Milgram's teacher as strongly motivated to help ($M = 5.24$, $SD = 1.44$), as moderately motivated to obey the experimenter ($M = 3.29$, $SD = 1.22$), and as not at all wanting to hurt the learner ($M = 1.63$, $SD = 1.05$, $F(2, 100) = 132.48$, $p < .001$). Of greater importance, a significant interaction of motive and level of obedience, $F(2, 100) = 26.74$, $p < .001$, indicated that different motives were attributed across the two levels of obedience. In the obedient condition, perceivers attributed the teacher's behavior significantly more to both helping and obedience than they did to hurting, $ts(23) = 7.58$ and 11.28 , $ps < .001$, respectively. Apparently, the obedient teacher was viewed as being caught between wanting to help the learner and wanting to placate the experi-

menter. Thus, even when perceivers watched the obedient teacher deliver the full 450-V punishment to the learner, they still did not think the teacher wanted to hurt the learner. Not surprisingly, the teacher in the disobedient condition was perceived as primarily motivated to help rather than to either obey or hurt, $ts(27) = 11.14$ and 12.19 , $ps < .001$, respectively. Thus, rather than having conflicting motives, the disobedient teacher seemed driven by the single motive of wanting to help the learner.

Trait inferences. Once again, perceivers saw the obedient teacher as possessing significantly lower morality than did the disobedient teacher, $t(50) = 4.56$, $p < .001$. Although the difference in perceived morality is highly significant in a statistical sense, it is worth noting that even the obedient teacher was rated just above the midpoint of the 7-point scale ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.89$). Given that the ratings compared the teacher to the average person, it appears that the obedient teacher was perceived as fairly typical, whereas the disobedient teacher was perceived as morally superior to most people.

An unexpected result from Study 1 was that the obedient and disobedient teachers were perceived as having similar levels of dispositional obedience. In Study 2, however, perceivers clearly recognized greater trait-level obedience on the part of the obedient teacher than on the part of the disobedient teacher, $t(50) = 6.81$, $p < .001$. The different results across the two studies may be due to the fact that the disobedient teacher in Study 2 displayed an outspoken, rebellious attitude and defied the experimenter at an earlier point in the procedure (disobeying at 150 V in Study 2 vs. 210 V in Study 1).

Mediation. Once again, we assessed the extent to which the motives to be helpful and to obey the experimenter mediated the effect of obedience level on impressions of morality. Separate regressions indicated that the level of obedience predicted ratings of morality ($\beta = .54$), $t(50) = 4.56$, $p < .001$, as well as the motive to be helpful ($\beta = .55$), $t(50) = 4.64$, $p < .001$, and the motive to obey ($\beta = -.67$), $t(50) = -6.37$, $p < .001$. When the obedience manipulation and the two mediators were examined simultaneously as predictors of inferred morality, the statistical impact of the obedience manipulation was reduced to nonsignificance ($\beta = .20$), $t(48) = 1.22$, $p = .23$. In contrast, the effect of the motive to obey remained statistically significant ($\beta = -.42$), $t(48) = 2.76$, $p = .008$, although the effect of the help motive was reduced to nonsignificance ($\beta = .12$), $t(48) = .93$, $p = .36$. The direction of the standardized coefficients indicates that the motive of wanting to obey was negatively related to perceptions of morality. The Sobel test indicated a significant path through the motive to obey ($z = 2.52$, $p = .012$) but not through the motive to help ($z = 0.91$, $p = .363$).

Discussion

The procedure of Study 2 differed from that of Study 1 in two key respects. First, perceivers in Study 2 were allowed to watch a videotape of the teacher delivering painful shocks to the learner. Second, the teachers in Study 2 were middle-aged as opposed to being typical college-aged students. Despite these differences in method, the results of Study 2 closely paralleled those of the earlier study. When the teacher obeyed the experimenter, perceivers downplayed the importance of traits and focused on situational forces. Along with recognizing these situational forces, perceivers

saw the obedient teacher as struggling with conflicting motives of wanting to please the experimenter and wanting to help the learner (Milgram, 1974; Miller, 1984; Ross, 1988). More clearly than in Study 1, perceivers rejected the idea that the teacher wanted to harm the learner.³

Study 3: Decomposing the Informational Elements in the Milgram Paradigm

The fact that our perceivers relied so heavily on situational information when forming an impression of Milgram's obedient teachers raises an important question: What specific elements of the Milgram situation govern the motives that are inferred? We reasoned that if we could identify some of these crucial elements and eliminate them from the procedure, perceivers might form more negative impressions of teachers who deliver 450 V to the learner.

By adhering closely to the script of the *Obedience* film (Milgram, 1965), our studies provided perceivers with two key types of information relevant to the teacher's motives. The first concerns the repeated social demands (or prompts) from the experimenter. MIM suggests that perceivers look to the situation to identify social forces that might have motivated the teacher's behavior. In our earlier studies, perceivers either read or watched as the experimenter issued a series of prompts to pressure the teacher. The presence of strong demands from the experimenter might have led perceivers to conclude that the teacher's own inclination was to avoid hurting the learner. This line of reasoning led us to predict that if the procedure of Study 3 omitted specific reference to these prompts, perceivers would tend to attribute more negative motives to the teacher.

In addition to describing the prompts of the experimenter, Studies 1 and 2 contained another key source of information. Perceivers heard the teacher inquire about the learner's welfare (e.g., "What if something happens to him?"). Such statements of concern opened a window to the mental state of the teacher (Ames, 2004; Kozak, Marsh, & Wegner, 2006; Malle, 2004). Hearing such statements, perceivers probably inferred that the teacher was motivated to help rather than to hurt the learner. In a test of this idea, some conditions of Study 3 omitted any reference to the teacher's concerns about the learner.

In summary, Study 3 was an attempt to decompose the informational elements in the Milgram paradigm into those focusing on the experimenter's prompts and those focusing on the mental state of the teacher. Perceivers in all conditions of the study read a vignette in which a teacher was fully obedient (delivering 450 V to the learner). Within the full-information condition, perceivers learned about both the experimenter's prompts as well as the teacher's expressions of concern for the learner. We expected the results in this condition to replicate those of Studies 1 and 2, such that the teacher would be viewed as having greater motivation to help the learner than to hurt the learner.

A second condition of the study "subtracted" information describing the teacher's concern for the learner. Thus, in the experimenter-prompts condition, perceivers read the same information as those in the full-information condition, except no mention was made of the teacher's statements about the welfare of the learner. We expected that perceivers in this condition would be less convinced that the teacher had greater motivation to help

rather than to hurt the learner. Finally, in the shock-alone condition, perceivers lacked information about both the teacher's concerns for the learner and the experimenter's prompts. In the absence of both of these types of information, we expected that perceivers might see the teacher as relatively more motivated to hurt the learner than to help the learner.

Method

Participants. The participants were 105 male ($n = 12$) and female ($n = 93$) undergraduates from a midsized Midwestern university in the United States. Of the 105 participants, 86 indicated a lack of familiarity with the Milgram studies and comprised the final sample.

Procedure. All participants received the same instructions and introductory paragraph employed in Study 1, which outlined the basic procedure of the Milgram study, including the experimenter's instructions that the learner should receive an increasingly strong shock each time he made a mistake. The second paragraph described the teacher's escalating administration of shock to the learner (up to 450 V) and the learner's protests ("I can't stand it, I can't stand the pain!"). Following each protest by the learner, the response of the teacher was described differently across the three conditions. Participants in the full-information condition learned about both the teacher's statements of concern for the learner, as well as the experimenter's prompts. The specific examples of each type of information (see below) were adapted from the script of the *Obedience* film. The stimuli in the experimenter-prompts condition were identical, except the sections about the teacher's concerns were omitted. Finally, the shock-alone condition was similar, except no mention was made of either the teacher's concerns or the experimenter's prompts.

Shown below are the specific statements included to convey the teacher's concerns for the welfare of the learner:

1. "Mark let out a nervous chuckle and continued on."
2. "Mark stopped and asked the experimenter, 'Do you want me to keep going?'"

³ We conducted another study to explore two other alternative interpretations of the results of Study 1. First, will perceivers attribute less charitable motives when the obedient impression target is described as a group (of Milgram's participants) as opposed to an individual? Second, will a different written version of the Milgram procedure yield different results than those obtained in Study 1 of this article? To examine these possibilities, we copied a description of the Milgram procedure and results from a widely used social psychology textbook (Gilovich et al., 2006, p. 11). The original version described the events at the group level (e.g., "In the end, 62.5 percent of the participants went all the way up to the 450-volt level, delivering everything the shock generator could produce.") We employed this description as the group condition of our study. We created a second, individual version of the stimuli by editing the original so that it described the behavior of a teacher named Mark. When analyzing our data, once again, we focused on participants who had indicated that they were previously unfamiliar with the Milgram studies. The results replicated the major findings of Study 1 but revealed no significant effects for the type of impression target. In particular, regardless of the impression target, perceivers attributed the teacher's behavior more to obedience ($M = 5.38$, $SD = 1.10$) and helpful motives ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 1.07$) than they did to hurtful motives ($M = 2.19$, $SD = 0.97$), $F(2, 37) = 90.11$, $p < .001$.

3. "Mark again halted and complained to the experimenter, 'He can't stand it; I'm not going to kill that man in there! You hear him yelling in there? What if something happens to him? I mean who is going to take responsibility?'"

Shown below are the statements conveying the experimenter's prompts (or demands):

1. "Please go on."
2. "I am responsible for this experiment; the experiment requires that you go on teacher."
3. "It's absolutely essential that you continue. You have no other choice, you must go on."

Dependent measures. The dependent measures were similar to those employed in our earlier studies, except the list of motives for the teacher's behavior in Study 3 was expanded to four items for both the helpful motive (wanting to help the learner, protecting the learner from harm, being helpful, and doing the moral thing; $\alpha = .77$) and the obedience motive (wanting to look good in front of the experimenter, not arguing with the experimenter, doing his duty, and feeling obligated to the experimenter; $\alpha = .77$). In addition, items on the questionnaire were presented in two different orders. Participants who received one of the orders provided trait ratings before motive ratings, whereas this sequence was reversed for the remaining participants. In addition, the order of the individual traits and individual motives was counterbalanced as well. Finally, the order of questions concerning situational versus dispositional causality was counterbalanced.

Results and Discussion

Perceived motives. Because few significant effects emerged for order of the dependent variables, the data were collapsed across this factor. Perceptions of motive were subjected to a mixed-design ANOVA, with information condition (full information vs. experimenter prompts vs. shock alone) as a between-subjects factor and type of motive as a within-subjects factor. As displayed in Table 3, perceivers in all three conditions attributed the teacher's behavior more strongly to an obedience motive than they did to motives to either help or hurt the learner, $F(2, 164) = 101.49, p < .001$. Of greater interest, a significant Information Condition \times Motive interaction revealed that perceivers endorsed different degrees of helpful versus hurtful motives across the three information conditions, $F(4, 162) = 3.78, p = .006$. For example, in the full-information condition, perceivers attributed the teacher's behavior significantly more to helpful motivation than they did to hurtful motivation, $t(28) = 2.08, p = .047$. This pattern replicates the tendencies found in our earlier studies. But when information about the teachers' concern for the learner was omitted in the experimenter-prompts condition, attributions to helpful and hurtful motives were almost identical, $t(29) = -0.15, ns$. Finally, in the shock-alone condition, perceivers attributed the teacher's behavior significantly more to hurtful motives than they did to helpful motives, $t(25) = -2.40, p = .024$. Thus, when minimal information was available, perceivers tended to see Milgram's teachers as motivated more by evil than by good.

Table 3
Specific Motives, Trait Inferences, and Causal Attributions as a Function of Level of Information (Study 3)

Dependent measure	Full information		Prompts		Shock alone	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Specific motive						
To obey	5.50	0.87	5.18	1.02	5.01	1.19
To help	3.51	1.35	3.00	1.10	2.68	0.88
To hurt	2.62	1.22	3.05	1.18	3.40	1.03
Trait inference						
Morality	3.34	1.17	2.79	1.03	2.51	0.78
Obedience	5.40	0.95	5.12	1.11	4.68	1.06
Causal attribution rating						
Situation	5.48	1.06	5.80	0.96	5.44	1.28
Disposition	4.14	1.25	4.23	1.28	4.26	1.20

Note. Participants in the full-information condition learned about the teacher's statements of concern for the learner, the experimenter's prompts, and the shocks that were delivered (up to 450 V in all conditions of the study). Participants in the prompts condition learned about the experimenter's prompts and the shocks. Finally, participants in the shock-alone condition learned only about the shocks.

Perceived traits. Milgram's teacher was also perceived as having differing trait levels of morality, depending on how much information was included in the stimulus materials, $F(2, 82) = 5.01, p = .009$. In particular, ratings of morality tended to increase linearly as information was added about the experimenter's prompts and the teacher's concern for the learner. In addition, there was a similar trend for trait ratings of obedience to increase as more information was added about the experimenter's prompts and the teacher's concern for the learner, $F(2, 82) = 3.44, p = .037$.

Causal attributions. As in our earlier studies, perceivers saw the obedient teacher's behavior as due more to situational factors than to dispositional factors, $F(1, 83) = 47.79, p < .001$. No other significant findings emerged.

In summary, Study 3 identified two key informational cues that governed impressions of Milgram's teacher. Perceivers relied on both the prompts issued by the experimenter and the statements of concern the teacher made about the learner. In the absence of these informational cues, perceivers saw the teacher as more motivated by evil than by good.

Study 4: Perceptions of Specific Situational Factors, Inferences of Motive, and Trait Inferences

Our theoretical analysis suggests that situational cues inform dispositional inference by signaling the nature of the teacher's motives. Study 4 followed two strategies in an effort to test this idea more directly. First, we included a stronger manipulation of the degree of coercion applied by Milgram's experimenter. In Study 4, all participants read about a teacher who was completely obedient (by eventually delivering the full 450 V), but the level of pressure applied by the experimenter varied across the three conditions of the study. In the low-coercion condition, the experimenter provided only written instructions and was not present to directly monitor or prompt the teacher into compliance. In the

moderate-coercion condition, the procedure was similar to Milgram's basic experiment in that the experimenter was present to administer the prompts. Finally, in the high-coercion condition, the experimenter applied additional pressure by threatening to shock the teacher if he did not comply. Unlike Studies 1 and 2 of this article, none of the conditions in Study 4 mentioned the teacher's concerns about the learner's welfare. In the absence of this information, and with low coercion from the experimenter, we assumed that perceivers would tend to see the teacher as relatively more motivated to hurt the learner than to help him. But as the level of coercion from the experimenter increased, we expected that perceivers would tend to see the hurt motive as less likely and would tend to see the help motive as more likely. In turn, we expected that such inferences about motive would mediate trait-level inferences of morality.

Our second strategy to provide more direct evidence for MIM involved the inclusion of measures to tap the perceived importance of specific situational factors. MIM implies that perceivers will look closely at situational cues in order to identify the teacher's motives. The Milgram setting provides perceivers with a variety of situational cues, including domineering behavior by the experimenter, the experimenter's offer to take responsibility (for harming the learner), the money paid to the teacher, and cries of pain issuing from the learner. MIM implies that perceivers who dwell on different situational cues are likely to infer different motives within the teacher. For example, perceivers may think the teacher is more motivated to obey the experimenter to the extent that they stress the importance of the teacher getting paid for his participation. The obedience motive might also be seen as more likely to the extent that perceivers stress the experimenter's orders, his domineering manner, and his offer to take responsibility. On the other hand, perceivers may think the teacher is more motivated to help the learner to the extent that they stress the importance of the learner's cries of pain.

In sum, Study 4 allowed us to investigate two major hypotheses. Of greatest importance, we expected that inferences of motive would mediate the effect of our coercion manipulation on inferences of morality. In addition, we expected that inferences about the teacher's motives would be related to specific situational attributions (e.g., stressing the importance of the experimenter's domineering behavior).

Method

Participants. The participants were 134 male ($n = 35$) and female ($n = 99$) undergraduates from a midsized Midwestern university in the United States. Although 48 of these participants indicated by our criteria that they were familiar with the Milgram studies, two considerations convinced us to include the data from all participants. First, even if participants had foreknowledge of the standard Milgram paradigm, their reactions to our coercion manipulation were still of interest. Second, except where noted in the *Results* section, the familiarity variable produced few significant effects and did not alter the major conclusions.

Procedure. Students in large introductory psychology courses were invited to visit an internet website where they could participate in a secure online survey for extra credit. Participants were informed that the study concerned their impressions of a student named Tom who took part in a psychological experiment. All

participants received an introductory paragraph that outlined the basic procedure of the Milgram study, including the experimenter's instructions that the teacher should deliver an increasingly strong shock each time the learner made a mistake on a memory task.

The stimulus materials diverged at this point such that the teacher was exposed to one of three levels of coercion from the experimenter. Note that none of the conditions in this study mentioned the teacher's concerns for the learner's welfare. In the low-coercion condition, the experimenter handed the teacher written instructions indicating that the shock level should be raised by 15 V whenever the learner made an error. The experimenter said that the teacher would not be monitored during the procedure and that he should simply follow the written instructions. The procedure at this point was similar to Study 1, with the exception that when the learner complained and cried out in pain as the shocks escalated, instead of the experimenter issuing prompts, the teacher was described as hesitating long enough to check over the written instructions. In all conditions of the study, the teacher was described as ". . . delivering the shocks all the way up to the maximum 450 volts."

The stimulus materials in the medium-coercion condition were similar in most respects to those employed in Study 1. That is, when the learner complained, the experimenter responded with several verbal prompts (i.e., "Please go on," "I am responsible for this experiment," "It's absolutely essential that you continue," "You have no other choice, you must go on"). At these points, the teacher halted, listened to the experimenter's prompts, and then resumed giving the shocks.

In the high-coercion condition, after the teacher heard the initial instructions, the experimenter attached electric diodes to the *teacher's* arm. The teacher was told that if he refused to deliver a shock to the learner, the teacher would receive a shock equal to the intensity of that which the learner was to receive. As the procedure got underway and the learner began to complain, the experimenter provided the same verbal prompts as were present in the medium-coercion condition. In addition, however, after presenting the prompts, the experimenter threatened the teacher by either leaning toward the shock lever or gesturing in its direction.

Dependent measures. With three exceptions, the dependent measures were identical to those employed in Study 3. The first addition concerned a rating of the importance of specific situational factors. Participants were asked six questions in the following format: "To what extent was Tom's behavior due to . . ."

1. ". . . the experimenter saying that he would take the responsibility?"
2. ". . . the orders of the experimenter to continue delivering the shocks?"
3. ". . . the fact that the experimenter was domineering?"
4. ". . . the fact that Tom was getting paid to participate in the study?"
5. ". . . the pleas of the learner to stop delivering the shocks?"

6. "... the fact that the experimenter threatened to shock Tom if Tom did not obey?"

Participants rated each situational factor on a scale with endpoints labeled 1 (*not at all*) versus 7 (*completely*). The second addition concerned a manipulation check asking how much pressure was on Tom to continue to deliver shocks to the learner, with endpoints of 1 (*no pressure*) versus 7 (*complete pressure*). The third addition involved a second question designed to assess familiarity with the Milgram studies. As well as being asked whether they had heard about obedience experiments by Stanley Milgram, participants were asked whether they had heard about research where people were asked to deliver a 450-V shock. Participants who provided an affirmative answer to either question were considered to be familiar with Milgram's research. Unlike our earlier studies, participants were not asked to provide an open-ended explanation of the teacher's behavior. Instead, immediately following the information about the teacher's delivery of the maximum level of shock, participants responded to the trait and motive items in counterbalanced order. Participants then responded to global measures of causal attribution (situational vs. personality), specific situational factors, a manipulation check on the coercion variation, familiarity with the Milgram studies, and demographic items.

Results

Because few significant effects emerged for order of the dependent measures, the data reported below were collapsed across this factor. We first report a manipulation check on the coercion variation and then present our results in order of their importance.

Manipulation check. A manipulation check asked participants to rate how much pressure was on the teacher to continue to deliver the shocks. As expected, the situation was perceived as placing increasing pressure on the teacher in the low-coercion ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 1.51$), medium-coercion ($M = 5.05$, $SD = 1.60$), and high-coercion conditions ($M = 5.54$, $SD = 1.55$), $F(2, 131) = 8.49$, $p < .001$.

Mediation. The first hypothesis of Study 4 was that perceptions of motive would mediate the impact of coercion level as it affected trait inferences of morality. Regression analysis indicated that coercion level predicted ratings of morality ($\beta = .31$), $t(129) = 3.69$, $p < .001$, such that perceptions of morality increased as coercion rose from low to high levels. Coercion level also positively predicted perceptions of the motive to help the learner ($\beta = .25$), $t(127) = 2.87$, $p = .005$, and negatively predicted the motive to hurt the learner ($\beta = -.31$), $t(128) = -3.63$, $p < .001$. Coercion level had no significant effect on perceptions of wanting to obey the experimenter ($\beta = -.11$), $t(126) = -1.29$, $p = .20$. When coercion level, perceptions of helpful motivation, and perceptions of hurtful motivation were examined simultaneously as predictors of inferred morality, the statistical impact of coercion level was reduced to marginal significance ($\beta = .15$), $t(121) = 1.93$, $p = .056$. In contrast, perceptions of helpful motivation ($\beta = .43$), $t(121) = 5.29$, $p < .001$, and hurtful motivation ($\beta = -.16$), $t(121) = -2.03$, $p = .045$, remained statistically significant. The Sobel test indicated a significant path through the motive to help ($z = 2.47$, $p = .01$) but not

through the motive to hurt ($z = 1.76$, $p = .078$). As predicted then, perceived motives played a mediating role.

Relationships between specific motives and specific situational attributions. Our second hypothesis was that perceivers would attribute specific motives to the extent they stressed specific situational factors. Supporting our expectations, the data in Table 4 show strong relationships between perceptions of the teacher's motives and specific situational attributions. Thus, perceivers tended to see the teacher as motivated to obey the experimenter to the extent they stressed (a) the experimenter's taking responsibility, (b) the orders of the experimenter, (c) the fact that the experimenter was domineering, and (d) the fact that the teacher was paid. In contrast, perceivers tended to see the teacher as *less* motivated to obey if they believed the teacher was influenced by the pleas of the learner.

Perceptions of motivation to help versus hurt the learner are similarly traceable to specific situational attributions. For instance, perceivers attributed more helpful motivation to the extent they stressed the pleas of the learner and the experimenter threatening the teacher. In addition, perceivers attributed *less* hurtful motivation to the extent that the experimenter was seen as domineering and threatening the teacher.

Perceived motives. Perceptions of motive were subjected to a mixed-design ANOVA, with level of coercion and familiarity as between-subjects factors and type of motive as a within-subjects factor. As displayed in Table 5, perceivers in all three coercion conditions attributed the teacher's actions primarily to an obedience motive rather than to motives to help or hurt the learner, $F(2, 234) = 81.60$, $p < .001$. Nevertheless, a significant Coercion \times Motive interaction revealed that perceivers attributed the teacher's behavior to relatively greater helpful motivation and lower hurtful motivation as the level of coercion increased, $F(4, 234) = 7.55$, $p < .001$. Thus, within the low-coercion condition, perceivers tended to see the teacher as more motivated to hurt the learner than to help him, $t(42) = 1.97$, $p = .056$. Within the medium-coercion condition, attributions to these two motives did not differ significantly, $t(38) = 0.92$, $p = .364$. Within the high-coercion condition, however, perceivers saw the teacher as significantly more motivated to help the learner than to hurt him, $t(44) = 4.44$, $p < .001$.

Finally, the analysis indicated a significant interaction of motive with the perceiver's familiarity concerning the Milgram studies, $F(2, 234) = 6.14$, $p = .003$. Familiar versus unfamiliar perceivers did not differ much with regard to their perceptions of either

Table 4
Zero-Order Correlations Between Perceptions of Specific Motives and Specific Situational Attributions (Study 4)

Specific situational attribution	Specific motive		
	Obey	Help	Hurt
Experimenter took responsibility	.37***	-.09	-.07
Orders of the experimenter	.35***	-.07	-.10
Experimenter was domineering	.28**	-.01	-.17*
Teacher was getting paid	.24**	-.07	.08
Pleas of the learner	-.19*	.23**	.07
Experimenter threatened the teacher	-.04	.26**	-.34***

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

Table 5
Specific Motives, Trait Inferences, and Causal Attributions as a Function of Level of Coercion (Study 4)

Dependent measure	Low coercion		Medium coercion		High coercion	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Specific motive						
To obey	4.88	0.80	5.08	1.11	4.61	1.10
To help	2.94	1.05	3.17	1.16	3.71	1.06
To hurt	3.54	1.12	3.49	1.66	2.49	1.22
Trait inference						
Morality	2.80	1.44	3.19	1.02	3.62	1.03
Obedience	5.08	1.21	5.00	1.14	4.75	0.84
Causal attribution rating						
Situation	4.66	1.45	5.71	1.31	5.11	1.65
Disposition	4.32	1.37	4.15	1.37	3.64	1.64

helpful motivation ($M_s = 3.32$ vs. 3.25 , respectively) or hurtful motivation ($M_s = 2.94$ vs. 3.29 , respectively), but familiar perceivers saw obedient motives as relatively more important than did unfamiliar perceivers ($M_s = 5.26$ vs. 4.61 , respectively).

Perceived traits. As expected, ratings of trait-level morality increased directly in relation to the level of coercion, with the lowest morality attributed when the experimenter applied low coercion and the highest morality attributed when the experimenter applied high coercion, $F(2, 125) = 7.76, p = .001$. The main effect of coercion was qualified by an interaction with familiarity, $F(2, 125) = 5.27, p = .006$. At the highest level of coercion, familiar versus unfamiliar perceivers gave similar ratings of morality ($M_s = 3.56$ vs. 3.65 , respectively). But with moderate coercion, familiar perceivers gave somewhat higher ratings of morality than unfamiliar perceivers did ($M_s = 3.51$ vs. 2.96 , respectively), and at the lowest level of coercion, familiar perceivers gave lower ratings of morality than did unfamiliar perceivers ($M_s = 2.24$ vs. 3.16 , respectively). Finally, no significant effects were observed for ratings of trait-level obedience.

Causal attributions. As in our previous studies, perceivers attributed the teacher's behavior more strongly to situational causality than to dispositional causality, $F(1, 126) = 45.74, p < .001$. This tendency, however, differed across the levels of coercion, $F(2, 126) = 5.74, p = .004$, such that the relative preference for situational causality was magnified in the moderate- and high-coercion conditions, compared to the low-coercion condition. In other words, as the level of coercion increased from low to moderate, perceivers increasingly saw situational factors as more important than dispositional factors. The familiarity variable produced no significant effects.

Perceived importance of specific situational factors. Because several of our specific situational-attribution measures referred to situational cues that were held constant across the coercion manipulation (e.g., the experimenter took responsibility; the pleas of the learner; the teacher was getting paid), we did not expect strong relationships between these measures and the level of coercion. Indeed, the level of coercion had a significant impact on only the item concerning the experimenter threatening to shock the teacher, $F(2, 128) = 15.83, p < .001$, such that higher ratings occurred in the high-coercion condition compared to the other conditions. No

other significant main effects or interactions were observed for the coercion variable on any of the other five situational factors. Familiarity with the Milgram studies produced two significant effects: Perceivers who were familiar (as opposed to unfamiliar) with the Milgram studies thought that the teacher's behavior was influenced more by (a) the orders of the experimenter, $F(1, 128) = 6.00, p = .016$, and (b) the fact that the experimenter was domineering, $F(1, 128) = 6.39, p = .013$. No other significant main effects or interactions were observed.

General Discussion

Three sets of findings emerged in the research. First, perceivers appeared to both recognize and appreciate the importance of situational forces (e.g., the experimenter's orders) that prompted obedient aggression from Milgram's teachers. Second, across a variety of types and levels of coercion directed at the teacher, perceivers' explanations of the teacher's aggression focused on the motive of obedience rather than on hurtful (or evil) motivation. Thus, the teachers were perceived as more subservient than aggressive. Despite this overall pattern, perceptions of hurtful versus helpful motivation were highly sensitive to the presence of situational information. For example, as the level of coercion applied by the experimenter decreased in Study 4, perceivers tended to attribute the teacher's behavior to relatively more hurtful than helpful motivation. Finally, the research sheds considerable light on relationships between perceptions of situations, motives, and traits. Situational cues were found to inform dispositional inferences by signaling the nature of the teacher's motives. Thus, perceivers relied on specific aspects of the situation (e.g., cries of pain from the learner or the fact that the experimenter said that he would assume responsibility) in order to infer specific motives within the teachers. Inferences about motive, then, were strong predictors of trait-level judgments about the teacher's morality. The discussion to follow examines each set of findings in greater detail.

Do Perceivers Notice and Appreciate Situational Pressures in the Milgram Paradigm?

Across four studies, we found strong evidence that perceivers both noticed and appreciated the situational pressures emanating from Milgram's experimenter. Perceivers in Studies 1 and 2 were asked to explain in their own words the aggressive behavior of one of Milgram's obedient teachers. These open-ended accounts frequently mentioned the situational forces impinging on the teacher but rarely commented on traits or dispositional characteristics, as also found by Malle et al. (2007). More structured measures of causal attribution suggest that perceivers endowed these situational factors with causal force. In particular, across all four of our studies, perceivers rated the obedient teacher's behavior as due more to the situation than to the dispositional characteristics of the teacher. Finally, variations in coercion level altered the perceived causal power of the situation. In Study 4, for example, as the experimenter increased the level of coercion, perceivers attributed the teacher's behavior relatively more to situational versus dispositional causality.

How do these conclusions compare to those in the existing literature? The answer depends on the level of analysis. If we

examine just the relevant data reported in earlier studies, our findings both replicate and extend that evidence. For example, Miller et al. (1974) reported the only evidence that bears directly on how perceivers interpret the Milgram situation. Like we did, they found that perceivers' open-ended explanations of the teacher's behavior relied heavily on situational explanations. But if we examine the interpretations offered in previous literature, our conclusions represent a marked departure. As noted earlier, the literature states in strong terms that perceivers tend to ignore situational forces in the Milgram paradigm. As authors of this manuscript, consequently, we find ourselves in the awkward position of simultaneously (a) acknowledging that our findings do not contradict the actual results of directly relevant research and (b) maintaining that our findings contradict the conventional wisdom. We suggest that this apparent paradox can be resolved, however, if it is granted that some earlier findings (i.e., Bierbrauer, 1979; Safer, 1980) were overinterpreted as providing strong evidence of lay dispositionism.

According to Perceivers, What Motivated Milgram's Obedient Teachers?

Our perceivers were quite consistent in citing obedience as the dominant motive for the teacher's behavior. That is, perceivers saw the teachers as aiming to satisfy or please the experimenter. The perceived dominance of this motive makes sense, of course, in light of perceivers' recognition of the powerful situational pressures from the experimenter. In fact, the extent to which perceivers attributed the teacher's behavior to other motives—such as helpfulness versus wanting to harm the learner—depended on the nature of the situational pressures. Thus, as the experimenter's prompts became more salient or as the experimenter increased the coercion by threatening to shock the teacher, perceivers increasingly attributed the teacher's behavior to helpful motives within the teacher. It is noteworthy that hurtful motivation was perceived as dominant over helpful motivation only when the situational pressures were de-emphasized. For instance, relatively high attributions to hurtful motivation occurred only when the stimulus materials failed to mention the prompts of the experimenter (as occurred in the shock-alone condition of Study 3 and the low-coercion condition of Study 4). Finally, Study 3 provided preliminary evidence that perceivers were attentive to verbal cues from the teacher that signified a concern for the learner's welfare. These verbal cues apparently opened a window into the mental state of the teacher (Kozak et al., 2006), allowing perceivers to infer that the teacher did not aim to harm the learner.

How do our conclusions compare to those in the existing literature? To the best of our knowledge, no previously published studies have assessed perceptions of motives in the Milgram paradigm. Moreover, our studies examined perceptions under a much broader set of stimulus configurations. Nevertheless, Miller et al. (1974) reported trait-attribution data that roughly correspond to the findings of Studies 1 and 2 in this article. Their data suggest that perceivers saw the obedient teacher as quite conforming but as not particularly aggressive. Despite Miller et al.'s findings, much of the subsequent literature maintained that perceivers typically draw harsh dispositional inferences about Milgram's teachers. As noted in the introduction of this article, the evidence in support of such harsh judgments is at best equivocal. We are not suggesting

that perceivers endorse or even excuse the behavior of Milgram's teachers. Our data, as well as Miller et al.'s, suggest that the obedient teachers are perceived as less moral than are the disobedient teachers. In particular, the obedient teachers are perceived as moral weaklings who succumbed to the pressures of an authority figure. Note, however, that the teachers are seen as sheep—not wolves.

Although we have been at pains to distinguish our own theoretical approach from that of lay dispositionism, at least one aspect of our data fits both perspectives. For instance, both MIM and lay dispositionism assume that if perceivers are unaware of situational pressures from the experimenter, they should form negative impressions of Milgram's teachers. Indeed, when our studies withheld information about the experimenter's prompts, the teachers were seen as more evil than good. The two perspectives make different predictions, however, when information is available about the experimenter's demands, such that MIM implies greater attention to these demands.

Relationships Between Perceived Situations, Motives, and Traits

Two strikingly different portraits of the social perceiver have emerged in the literature. On the one hand, perceivers are portrayed as "cognitive misers" or lay dispositionists who search for simple and immediate answers (Kihlstrom, 2004; Krueger & Funder, 2004; Ross & Nisbett, 1991; Taylor & Fiske, 1991). In this view, perceivers jump readily to trait inferences about others and give short shrift to powerful, but less obvious, situational forces. On the other hand, the emerging literature has painted a picture of a more sophisticated perceiver who attends carefully to social situations as part of an effort to understand other people's minds, particularly their goals and motives (Kozak et al., 2006; Malle & Hodges, 2005; McClure, 2002; Reeder et al., 2004). Because perceivers draw multiple inferences about situations, motives, and traits, perceivers are likened to social-cognitive theorists (Kammrath et al., 2005; Shoda & Mischel, 1993), folk theorists (Malle, 2004), or constraint satisfiers focused on goals in a connectionist network (Read & Miller, 2005). The present research contributes to this debate by revisiting naïve perceptions of Milgram's obedient teachers (Bierbrauer, 1979; Safer, 1980). The portrait that emerges from our studies is one of a highly sophisticated social perceiver.

From MIM's standpoint, situational information is important to the perceiver because it points the way toward the motives that underlie behavior. In fact, perceivers who stress different situational cues are likely to infer different motives. For instance, Study 4 found that perceivers who stressed the fact that the experimenter took responsibility tended to see the teacher as more motivated to obey the experimenter. Perceivers who stressed the importance of the learner's pleas tended to see the teacher as somewhat less motivated to obey the experimenter and more motivated to help the learner. Finally, perceivers who stressed the threats of the experimenter to shock the teacher tended to see the teacher as relatively more motivated to help the learner and relatively less likely to want to hurt the learner. In turn, we found that these attributions of motive played a mediating role when perceivers made dispositional inferences of morality for the teachers.

These findings suggest two important issues for further research. First, perceivers often make judgments about others who are enmeshed in complex social situations. Thus, the social situation itself may be interpreted in a variety of ways. Perceivers who settle on different interpretations of that situation may see different motives as guiding a target person's behavior. Second, the behavior we observe in others is often complex or ambiguous (Trope, 1986). Perceivers are likely to rely on the situation to interpret the meaning of that behavior, with a particular emphasis on determining the *motives* that underlie the behavior. For instance, a behavior such as helping another person may fit a broad range of motives (Ames, Flynn, & Weber, 2004; Krull, Seger, & Silvera, in press; Reeder et al., 2004), and it is only when the behavior is viewed within a particular situational context that a particular motive suggests itself to the perceiver. An interesting question concerns the conditions under which such disambiguating effects of the situation on motive identification occur relatively automatically, as opposed to requiring more controlled processing.

Limitations

Undoubtedly, there are contexts in which perceivers underutilize situational information. For example, some situations tend to be "invisible" or low in salience and are likely to be neglected (Gilbert & Malone, 1995; Ross, Amabile, & Steinmetz, 1977). Also, when people make *predictions* about their own or other people's behavior, they often make errors that imply they overlooked some aspect of the situation (Bierbrauer, 1979; Milgram, 1974; Miller et al., 1974; Reeder, Fletcher, & Furman, 1989; Ross & Nisbett, 1991). But when people judge others after observing their behavior in its situational context—as in the present research—the evidence for systematic situational neglect is less clear. In this case, the weight of evidence suggests that perceivers typically attend to situations and consider how target persons are motivated by those situations (Gawronski, 2004; Kammrath et al., 2005; Malle, 2006; Malle et al., 2007; Trafimow, 1998).

Nevertheless, it is worth considering whether specific aspects of our procedures overemphasized situational factors. Perhaps the laboratory setting, including asking perceivers for open-ended explanations, produced artificial demands on our participants to consider the situation and exculpatory circumstances (Miller et al., 2002; Miller, Gordon, & Buddie, 1999). This alternative interpretation, however, cannot account for the results of Study 4, which was conducted over the internet while participants were away from our lab. In addition, participants in Study 4 provided their impressions without first being asked for open-ended explanations of the teacher's behavior. Despite these differences in method, perceivers in Study 4 formed impressions that were sensitive to the situational pressures emanating from Milgram's experimenter. In particular, only when information about the experimenter's prompts was withheld did perceivers tend to attribute more hurtful than helpful motives to the teachers.

The Milgram studies are the most famous in social psychology (Kassin, Fein, & Markus, 2008), so it is important to know how aggression is viewed in those studies. Nevertheless, our findings are limited to impressions of only one type of aggression, which involved delivering electric shocks in a scientific experiment. Where other types of aggression are concerned—torture or mass killings in a concentration camp—perceivers may weight situa-

tions differently in relation to dispositional factors and may infer darker motives for the aggression. We hope future researchers will better delineate the boundary conditions of our findings.

Our findings are also limited in that they represent people's controlled or explicit impressions. When providing such self-reports, people may be more mindful or accountable than they are in their private thoughts. In addition, much research has suggested that perceivers draw spontaneous trait inferences upon learning of a target person's behavior (Carlston & Skowronski, 1994; Uleman, Newman, & Moskowitz, 1996). It is possible that such implicit or spontaneous reactions to Milgram's teachers are more negative than those reported here. Our self-report methods did not give us access to such implicit reactions. Nevertheless, we believe our findings—obtained in the lab and over the internet—accurately represent people's thoughtful reactions to Milgram's obedient teachers.

A last caveat relates to the preponderance of motive explanations versus trait explanations that we observed in open-ended accounts of the teachers' behavior. This finding challenges conventional wisdom because traditional models of social perception stress trait attribution. In contrast to traits, motives typically are more directly focused on the mental state of a target person and refer to a more limited time frame (i.e., motives—like thoughts—can be fleeting). But the difference between traits and motives is less than clear cut. Many traits refer to motive or goal-related tendencies (Read, Jones, & Miller, 1990), and a chronic motive (e.g., caring only about oneself) easily translates into a trait (e.g., selfishness). Thus, perceivers' stated motive attributions often imply trait attributions as well. Long ago, Heider (1958) noted that perceivers have good reason to care about traits because they represent the underlying consistencies in human behavior. Indeed our own theoretical model implies that perceivers explain other people's behavior by carefully integrating inferences about situations, motives, and traits (Reeder et al., 2004). Thus, rather than downplaying the place of traits in social perception, we view our findings as *adding* a place for perceived motives.

Final Thoughts

In the introduction of this article, we implied a parallel between perceptions of prisoner abuse in Iraq and perceptions of Milgram's teachers. In both cases, situational forces played at least some role in provoking the aggression that occurred (Zimbardo, 2007). The important question is what lessons can be drawn from our studies to help explain people's likely reactions to events, such as those at Abu Ghraib prison. The main message of our research is that when perceivers are provided with information about situational forces surrounding aggression, they pay attention to that information and incorporate it into their judgments about the motives of alleged aggressors. Often, however, media reports on alleged atrocities contain little information about relevant situational pressures. For example, Zimbardo (2007) noted that the first media coverage of events at Abu Ghraib focused almost exclusively on horrific photographic images of prisoner abuse and provided few clues about the context. In such an informational vacuum, our research suggests that the general public is likely to conclude that the aggressors are indeed more "bad apples" than "good apples."

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