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Chapter 4

SELF-INTEREST IN SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PERCEPTION¹

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ABSTRACT

Compared to other areas of psychology, social cognition has been somewhat indifferent to the role played by self-interest. In this chapter we present a thesis that self-interest is a prominent factor shaping interpersonal perceptions and attitudes, especially attitudes toward politicians and voting intentions. We review several studies showing the dominance of moral information in person perception and the dominance of competence-related information in self-perception, and discuss them as an indirect support for the idea that self-interest underlies processes of person and self-perception. We also present a series of studies directly showing a strong influence of self-interest on attitudes toward politicians and voting intentions, as well as its influence on more descriptive interpersonal perceptions, including moral judgments. Results are discussed in relation to candidate-centered approach to voting.

Maximizing self-interest is the basic fact of life, as well as a prominent presumption of many important concepts and tenets of psychology, like reinforcement, self-presentation and self-serving biases, prejudice and discrimination, social dilemmas and conflicts, or subjective utility models of decision making and attitudes, to name just a few. Most theories involving those concepts simply would not make sense without the assumption of a strong and universal motivation to maximize self-interest. By comparison, social cognition theorizing and research seem to be relatively void of self-interest concerns. But we suspect that social perceivers are as much driven by their self-interests as self-presenters or decision makers – all the time these are the same people after all. To support this argument we review our research on differential processing of information on morality and competence which indirectly suggests the prominent role of self-interest in person perception.

In the present work we apply these findings to clarify certain phenomena in the field of political perception and voting preferences in contemporary Poland. In line with previous research, we probe into the role played in voting intentions by political candidates' competence and their acting for own and constituency's interests. The results are discussed in relation to the candidate-centered approach. We also present recent empirical evidence showing that monitoring of self-interest (but not the interest of others) constitutes an important basis of voter judgments of politicians' morality. Although the presumable main function of morality is to curb self-interest and subdue it to interests of other people or to non-egoistic rules of conduct, we discuss the idea that actually moral judgments are strongly underlain by perceiver's self-interest.

INDIRECT EVIDENCE FOR THE PROMINENCE OF SELF-INTEREST

Ubiquity of Evaluation

A large amount of research evidences that evaluation is part and parcel of social information processing, including person perception. Evaluative responses are ubiquitous, primary, and partially independent of the access to stimuli descriptive meaning, effortless, unconscious, very fast, inescapable and independent of intention, automatically related to behavioral and perceptual tendencies (cf. Bargh & Ferguson, 2000; Zajonc, 2001). The

ubiquity and prominence of evaluation was shown in early studies of Osgood, Suci and Tannenbaum (1957) showing that evaluation is the single most important dimension of meaning of most, if not all, social concepts. Evaluation is also deeply built into the very language people use to describe each other. The frequency distribution of simple person-descriptive terms as a function of their evaluative meaning is bimodal with numerous positive, and even more negative, but virtually no neutral trait-adjectives (as shown by Anderson, 1968, for English; by Lewicka, 1983, for Polish; and by Ostendorf, 1994, for German). Using a natural language, it is simply impossible to say anything about another person without revealing at least implicit approval or disapproval of him or her.

Two Dimensions of Interpersonal Perception: Morality and Competence

The ubiquity and prominence of evaluation is generally agreed to be a consequence of the basic function of social cognition – discerning between beneficial and harmful social objects or environments in the service of approach vs. avoidance behavior. It ensues that evaluation should be strongly underlain by concepts instrumental in locating others (target persons) on the approach-avoidance dimension. Peeters (1992) called such concepts other-profitable traits, i.e., traits which have a direct and unconditional bearing on well-being of other people surrounding the trait possessor (the perceiver included), like kind or aggressive. Peeters discerned them from self-profitable traits which have a direct and unconditional bearing for trait possessors themselves, like intelligence or inefficiency (whatever one does, it is better to do it efficiently; others may gain or lose from this efficiency depending on the goals of the trait possessor). Wojciszke, Dowhyluk and Jaworski (1998) demonstrated that out of a dozen of possible criteria only these two predicted reliably the global favorability of traits. Moreover, these two features of traits explained together nearly all the variance of favorability ratings as illustrated in Table 1. Benefits and costs brought by traits to their possessors and persons who interact with them, practically exhaust antecedents of the trait valence.

Table 1. Self-profitability and other-profitability of traits as predictors of their global favorability (N = 200 Polish trait names) (Wojciszke, Dowhyluk & Jaworski, 1998)

Predictor	B (LL - UL)	β
Other-profitability	.63 (.56 .70)	.58***
Self-profitability	.42 (.35 .48)	.42***
R ² (adjusted)	.97	

LL – lower limit of the unstandardized B coefficient confidence interval

UL – upper limit of the unstandardized B coefficient confidence interval

Whereas morally relevant traits (such as honest, fair, or unjust) are the most important class of other-profitable traits; competence-related traits (such as intelligence or inefficiency) are the most important class of self-profitable traits. Ratings of the trait morality-relatedness correlate strongly with their ratings of other-profitability, while competence-relatedness is correlated with self-profitability (Wojciszke et al., 1998). Self-interest is strongly implicated

in both these classes of traits, though in a different way. In the case of moral traits this is the interest of an observer, who is preoccupied with morality of perceived persons as a possible recipient of their actions. In the case of competence-related traits this is the interest of an actor, who is preoccupied mainly with own goal-attainment which depends on his or her competence.

It is well-known that goals are capable of directing cognition (cf. Moskowitz, 2005). As far as self-interest is a chronically accessible goal which is differently served by moral and competence qualities in the actor vs. observer perspective, two propositions may be advanced. First, for an observer morality of others is more important than their competence. Second, for an actor own competence is more important than morality. These propositions have numerous and far reaching consequences studied in the research program reported here.

The assumption of self-interest prominence leads to the prediction that attitudes toward other persons should be more strongly influenced by the information on morality than competence of others. Even if moral and competence-related traits of a target person are equally saturated with evaluative meaning (i.e., balanced in their out-of-context valence) information on others' morality should influence evaluative impressions to a higher degree because it is more directly relevant for the observer's self-interest than information on others' competence. The idea that global evaluative impressions are to a higher degree influenced by moral than competence-related information on target persons was tested in a series of studies using various methods and pertaining to various phases of the impression formation process (Wojciszke, 1994; 1997; Wojciszke, Bazinska, & Jaworski, 1998). It was predicted and found that: (1) Chronically accessible descriptors of others were more strongly related to morality than competence; (2) Moral traits were much more desired in others than competence traits of comparable favorability; (3) When forming global impressions of others, participants were more interested in gathering information on moral than competence-related traits; (4) When others' actions were amenable both to moral and competence interpretations they were construed to a higher degree in terms of morality; (5) Global impressions of real persons were better predicted from the moral than competence trait ascriptions (and these two types of ascription accounted for 53% and 29% of the variance of global evaluations); (6) Global evaluative impressions of target persons were based mainly on the moral content of their behavior, while competence information served only as a relatively weak modifier of impression intensity; (7) Whereas evaluative meaning of moral information was strong and stable, evaluative meaning of competence information was much weaker and dependent on the accompanying moral information.

On the other hand, there is also evidence for a parallel dominance of competence over morality in processes of self-perception and self-evaluation. An extensive program of research (Wojciszke, 2005) showed that: (1) Chronically accessible descriptors of the self were more strongly related to competence than morality; (2) Competence-related qualities were more desired for self than moral virtues of comparable favorability; (3) When the perceiver's own actions were amenable to both moral and competence interpretations they were construed to a higher degree in terms of competence; (4) Global self-evaluation (self-esteem) was better predicted from the self-ascribed competence than morality; (5) Events influencing self-esteem had stronger bearings on the perceiver's own competence than morality; (6) Events pertaining to own competence (i.e., successes and failures) instigated more extreme affective responses than events pertaining to own morality (i.e., moral transgressions and norm-maintenance behavior).

Altogether, this series of studies has shown that the descriptive content of input information plays an important role in shaping global evaluations, beyond and above the influences of a merely evaluative meaning (in contrast to the traditional cognitive algebra approach, which assumes that evaluative meaning of input information is processed independently of its descriptive content). Many researchers found that global evaluation depends to a higher degree on moral than on competence-related information (De Bruin & Van Lange, 1999; Martijn, Spears, Van der Pligt & Jakobs, 1992; Vonk, 1996) and that other-relevant traits are given automatically more attention than self-relevant traits of comparable valence (e.g. in the Stroop paradigm – Wentura, Rothermund, & Bak, 2000).

Though impressions of others are more strongly influenced by information on their morality than competence, this regularity should be context-sensitive. The self-interest notion allows a prediction that this regularity should cease to be true when the target's competence contributes to the perceivers' well-being as much as their own abilities do, as in the case of competence of "my lawyer" or "my boss". In such a case, global impressions of others would resemble self-evaluations – i.e., they should depend to higher extent on competence than morality. This hypothesis was tested and confirmed in a study of employees' perceptions of their supervisors in two different organizations – a business firm (where the supervisor's competence contributes to subordinates' gains) and a bureaucratic institution (where the supervisor's competence does not influence outcomes of subordinates) (Wojciszke, Baryla, & Mikiewicz, 2005). Both competence and morality perceptions (of a supervisor) contributed to global evaluations of supervisors in both organizations. However, the contribution of competence was higher in the business (.61) than bureaucratic (.29) organization, while the opposite was true for contribution of the perceived morality (.35 and .63 respectively). These results show that the dominance of morality over competence in evaluation of other persons may be reversed when the perceiver's interests depend directly on other person's competence.

Prominence of Morality and Competence in Perception of Politicians

The candidate-centered research on voting behavior constitute one of prominent and fruitful research fields in political psychology (Wattenberg, 1991; Ottati, 2001; Funk, 1997; 1999). It has been found that vote choices do not depend solely – as it had been claimed – on issues, ideologies, or party identifications, but rather, the candidate evaluations appear to be based on such cues as physical appearance or trait characteristics ascribed to them by voters (Kinder & Fiske, 1986; Funk, 1999). Numerous studies traced psychological processes underlying the political choice, representations of information on the candidate, and the role of positive-negative evaluations of candidates (Ottati, 2001; Rasinski & Tyler, 1988; McGraw, Pinney, & Neumann, 1991). It is well-known that competence and moral integrity constitute two most important sets of qualities ascribed (or denied) to politicians. Moral and competence-related traits frequently appear in voters' open ended commentaries on political candidates (Page, 1978) and Kinder and Sears (1985) claimed the two constitute separate and basic clusters of traits in the perception of political figures, because both integrity and capability are indispensable for a successful performance as a political leader. In a similar vein, Kinder and Fiske (1986) found that morality and competence made two most important categories of personal traits, which American voters seek in their President as well as in other politicians, while Wojciszke and Klusek (1996) found that these two types of qualities were

lacking in Polish politician in opinion of Polish voters. From different positions, Wattenberg (1991) also mentions morality and competence as crucial trait categories – besides physical appearance and charisma – of a successful (being actually elected) candidate.

We believe that moral and competence-related qualities are so important in political perception (and person-perception in general – cf. Wojciszke, 2005), because these two types of contents strongly underlie global evaluations due to their self- and other-profitability as discussed previously. Interestingly, politicians are also a group of targets perceived with a special focus on their competence, not only morality. This is because constituency are frequently dependent on the competence of political leaders and the latter serve as vicarious agents in realization of the constituency goals. This is the reason why competence is a strong predictor of presidential approval in addition to the perceived morality of a president (as found e.g. by Wojciszke & Klusek, 1996). It may be speculated that the relative weight of moral integrity and competence may vary as a function of current prominence of these two types of values. In times of external threat accompanied by relative prosperity, moral integrity seems to acquire special prominence (like in the 2004 United States presidential campaign). In times of economical misery and necessity of reforming the economical and political system (like in Poland during 90s), competence may acquire more significance than moral integrity of political leaders.

DIRECT EVIDENCE FOR THE PROMINENCE OF SELF-INTEREST

Because moral information is more relevant than competence-related information to the observer's interest, the findings of observers' impressions being driven to a higher extent by morality than competence constitute an indirect evidence for the significant role of self interest in person-perception. Similarly, the stronger saturation of self-concept with competence than morality is also such an evidence, because own competence is more directly relevant for self-interests than morality. However, both these types of data constitute merely an indirect evidence for the role of self-interest.

Self-Interest and Social Judgments

More direct data on the role of self-interest in impressions of others are presented in Table 2. Employees of two firms (a high tech firm and a bank) rated the global evaluation of their supervisors, the degree to which the latter acted for the formers' interests (perceived interest) as well as some other qualities of the supervisors. The perceived interest remained a strong predictor of global evaluations even when other potentially important predictors were included into the regression equation, such as the perceived expertise of the supervisors (high tech firm) or their perceived status within a firm (bank tellers). Interestingly, the perceived interest influenced also more descriptive judgments of the supervisor's competence and morality. Especially, the ratings of supervisor's morality appeared very strongly influenced by the degree to which he or she acted for the interest of employees.

Despite data of this sort, social cognition researchers tend to pay relatively small attention to self-interest as underpinning of social perception processes and the same seems to be true

for political perception. Miller and Ratner (1998; 2001) presented a theory of the self-interest norm, which stresses the role of widespread beliefs in people being self-interested (at least in the US). According to this theory, self-interest affects attitudes and behavior to a lower degree than it is socially believed, and the reason for this is a powerful norm of self-interest – an assumption that people’s behaviors and opinions are and should be driven by their narrowly defined (especially material) self-interest. To support this theory, Miller and Ratner accrued several results showing that actual opinions of attitude holders were less influenced by their self interests than it was expected for other persons. For example, smokers vs. non-smokers differed less in their opinions about various anti-smoking measures than was expected by participants, or financial incentives to blood donation influenced donating behavior to smaller extent than it was expected by observers.

Table 2. Employees’ evaluations of their supervisor as a function of the latter’s acting for the interests of employees and other variables (each panel presents results of a separate regression analysis) (Wojciszke & Baryla, 2006)

Predictor	B (LL - UL)	β
<i>Dependent measure: Global evaluation</i>		
<i>(N = 120, high tech firm)</i>		
perceived interest		
perceived expertise	.52 (.30 .75)	.39***
	.59 (.36 .82)	.43***
<i>Dependent measure: Global evaluation</i>		
<i>(N = 60, bank tellers)</i>		
perceived interest	.80 (.63 .98)	.73***
perceived status	.34 (.06 .62)	.20*
<i>Dependent measure: Ascribed competence</i>		
<i>(N = 60, bank tellers)</i>		
perceived interest	.23 (.10 .35)	.40***
perceived status	.38 (.18 .57)	.41***
<i>Dependent measure: Ascribed morality</i>		
<i>(N = 60, bank tellers)</i>		
perceived interest	.67 (.54 .79)	.83***
perceived status	.07 (-.13 .26)	.05

LL – lower limit of the unstandardized B coefficient confidence interval

UL – upper limit of the unstandardized B coefficient confidence interval

On the other hand, many other authors obtained results indicating the crucial role of self-interest in attitudes toward social and political issues. For instance, Rasinski and Tyler (1988) showed that in the 1984 US presidential election voting preferences depended on voters’ concerns about the candidates’ ability to benefit them as well as on their judgments of the procedural (but not distributive) fairness of the candidates. Feldman (1982) found the economic self-interest to be a good predictor of vote choice, when people believed that their well-being depended on the shape of national economy. But when they regarded themselves responsible for their own well-being, their vote choices could not be predicted on the basis of their economic self-interest.

Self-Interest as Predictor of Attitudes Toward Politicians And Voting Intentions

An overwhelming majority of studies probing the role of self-interest – regardless of their actual results – was based on correlational designs (Sears, Hensler & Speer, 1979; Sears & Funk, 1990; Rasinski & Tyler, 1988; Green & Gerken, 1989; Feldman, 1982; Crano, 1997). Similarly, the data presented in Table 2 is correlational in nature, so it is unclear whether the self-interest indeed influences other evaluative judgments or rather these attitudinal judgments influence the perception of how actions of other persons affect the perceiver’s self-interest. The line of studies presented below, based on experimental designs, is an attempt to directly operationalize and manipulate self-interests of participants.

In the first of these studies (Cislak & Wojciszke, 2005a), a fictitious candidate to Polish Parliament was introduced to participants by means of mock newspaper clippings. Information on the politician’s competence (high vs. low) and information on his program regarding interests of the retired persons (for vs. against these interests) was varied in a factorial design. In the low competence condition he was described as a beginner in politics, poorly educated, unsuccessful in managing his own firm, and finally going bankrupt. In the high competence condition he was described as an experienced Member of Parliament, well-educated, and expert in the field of economics. In the “for” pensioners’ interest condition he was described as a strong proponent of increases in the pensions (which in Poland are financed by the state budget), improvements in medical care and of an additional governmental support for those in need, especially the old-age pensioners. In the “against” condition the candidate was described as a strong opponent of increases in the pensions, proposing introduction of payment for medical care (which in Poland was free at the time of the study), and increases in government spending on culture and art instead on the further support of those in need (especially old-age pensioners). Approximately half of participants were retired persons (i.e., members of a group whose interests were directly involved) and another half were university students (i.e., members of a group whose interests were not related to the politician’s program). Participants were asked to read clippings which described the target politician and then rated their intention to vote for him and estimated his morality, competence, as well as a degree to which they liked and respected him.

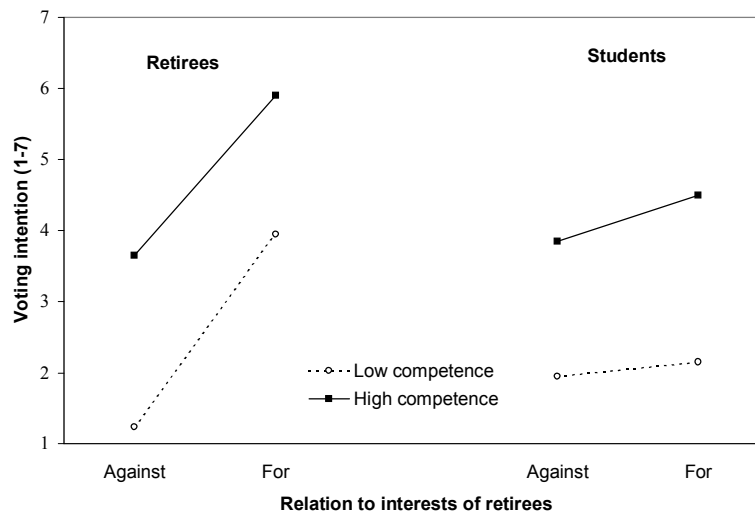


Figure 1. Voting intentions as a function of a politician's competence and his acting for vs. against interests of retirees in the retired and student groups (Cislak & Wojciszke, 2005a).

As can be seen in Figure 1, voting intentions of the two groups showed strikingly different patterns (which were found for global attitudes toward the target politician as well). Whereas voting intention of the retired was driven by both competence and interests, voting of the students was influenced only by the candidate's competence. Although both groups were influenced by competence to the same degree (estimates of the effect size η^2 were .34 and .37) only the retired were influenced by the interest manipulation ($\eta^2 = .40$). Evidently, students did not care about the relation of the politician's program to interests of the retired, presumably because these were not interests of their own group. This interpretation was corroborated by the perceived morality data: the retired perceived the politician acting for their interest as moral and the politician acting against their interests as immoral. But students' perceptions of morality were unaffected by this factor, instead, they were influenced positively by the manipulated competence of the target politician.

These results were then replicated and extended in a more comprehensive study with high school teachers and law students as participants (Wojciszke, Baryla, 2006). They responded to a politician whose status (high versus low) was manipulated, as well as his acting for or against the interests both teachers and law students. The two types of interests were orthogonally varied in an inter-individual design which involved, then, three factors: status (high vs. low), relation of the politician's program to teachers' interests (acting for vs. against these interests) and relation of the politician's program to law students' interests (acting for vs. against these interests). This allowed us to operationalize the interest variable in a more balanced way, i.e., both teachers and students responded to political figures who varied in their actions and programs with respect to interests of both own and other group. To simplify analyses and interpretations, the two interests were recoded into two variables. The first was "own group interest" (in such a way that for students the "against" condition meant a politician acting against students' interests, for teachers "against" meant a politician acting against teachers' interests, etc.) and the second was "other group interests" (i.e., for students the "against" condition included a politicians acting against teachers' interest, while for teachers this condition included a politician acting against students' interests and so on).

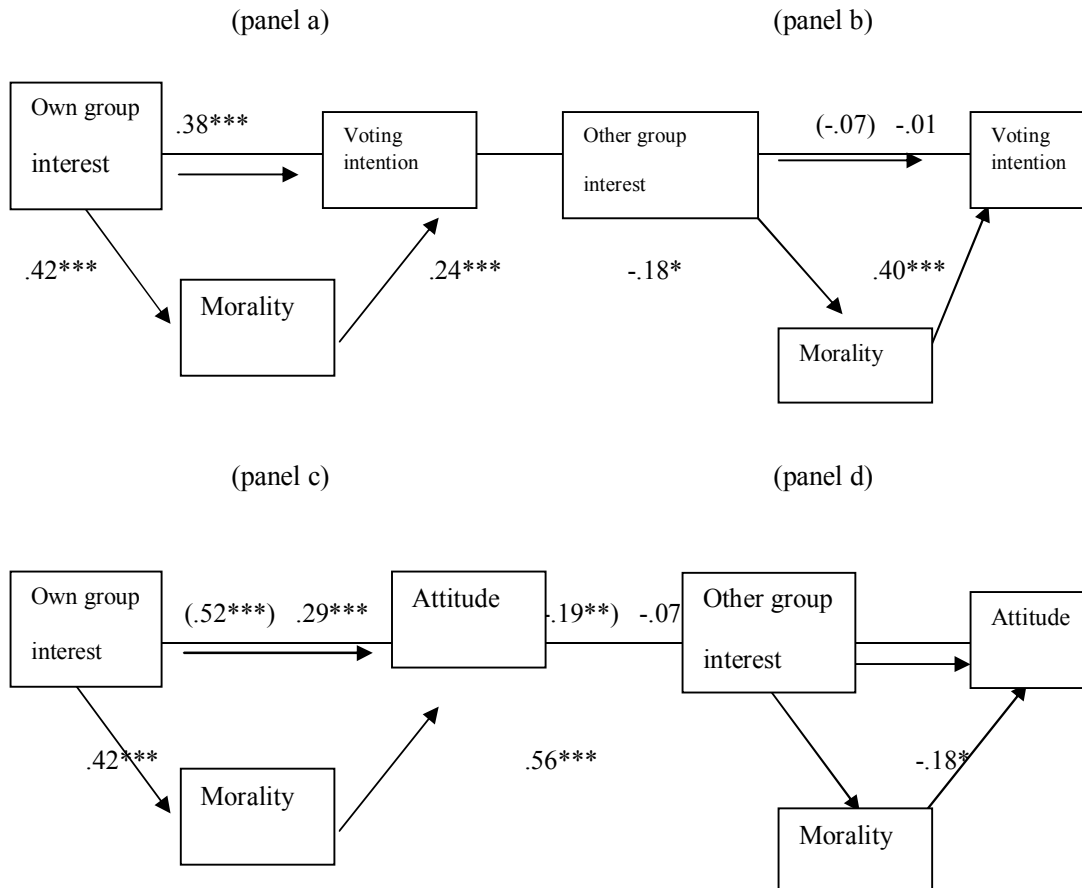


Figure 2. Mediation analyses of perceived morality on the relation between interests and voting intentions (upper part) and attitudes (lower part) toward a politician. Panel (a) shows mediation for the interest of own group on voting, panel (b) shows mediation for the interest of other group on voting, panel (c) shows mediation for the interest of own group on attitudes, and panel (d) shows the mediation for the interest of other group on attitudes. Unmediated effects are shown in parentheses (standardized regression coefficients, Wojciszke & Barylak, 2006).

Separate analyses were performed on voting intention and a general attitude toward the politician as dependent variables because the two yielded different patterns despite their correlation. As can be seen in Figure 2, the interest of own group strongly influenced the voting intention (panel a) and this influence was significantly, though only partially, mediated

by the perceived morality of the politician (i.e., the drop from .48 to .38 was significant). Panel *b* of the same figure shows that the interest of other group did not influence voting intentions at all, although it weakly (but significantly) influenced morality judgments. Panel *c* shows that attitudes toward the politician were influenced by the own group interests much in the same way as voting intentions were. Finally, panel *d* shows that other group interests negatively influenced attitudes toward the politician and this influence was relatively weak (-.19) and entirely mediated by the perceived morality.

Altogether, own group interests strongly influenced both voting intentions and attitudes toward a politician and these two influences were partially mediated by higher morality ascribed to the politician acting for the perceiver's own group. In neither case was the mediation complete – obviously some additional (to morality ascription) factors decided on the positive influence of interests on voting intention. Partially, these were competence ascriptions: Additional analyses showed that the own group interest led to positive inference of competence of the candidate. However, the interest influence on voting (and attitudes) remained significant even after controlling for ascriptions of morality and competence. One may speculate that in response to the political candidate's acting for (or against) interests of the perceiver's own group, a positive (or negative) affect is born and this purely affective response (unmediated by any perceptions of the candidate's virtues) influences voting and attitudes on its own (cf. Fazio & Williams, 1986).

The influence of other group interests appeared much weaker. This variable did not influence voting intentions (so the initial condition of the mediation analysis was not met) and it only weakly influenced attitudes via the morality ascription. Interestingly, this influence was negative – political candidates acting for interests of some other groups may be disliked and perceived immoral, even if these groups are not in conflict with the perceiver's own group (as was the case in the present study – high school teachers and law students do not have any conflicting interests). This may reflect an implicit view on life as a zero sum game on a group level – a conviction that when some group gains, other groups (including the perceiver's own group) lose, a belief which is widespread in contemporary Poland according to a national survey (cf. Wojciszke & Baryla, 2005).

Yet another set of mediation analyses concerned the role of the manipulated status and perceived competence of the target politician. Status and competence are closely related because competence enables individuals to acquire high status positions within groups (cf. Ridgeway, 2001) and because perceptions of competence are frequently formed in a way which justifies and reinforces the existing status differentiation (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002; Jost & Hunyady, 2002). Indeed, as can be seen in Figure 3, competence appeared to be strongly inferred from status. The perceived competence completely mediated the influence of status on voting intentions, suggesting that the willingness to vote for high status politicians is entirely based on the belief that they are competent. Most interestingly, however, the perceived competence not only mediated the influence of status on attitudes, it also seemed to decide on whether the attitude was positive or negative. As illustrated in the right panel of Figure 3, after controlling for competence, the status influence on attitude changed from the positive .36 to negative -.24. This strongly suggests that in addition to positive competence also something negative is inferred from the high status.

What negatives may be inferred from high status? In contemporary Poland attitudes toward politicians are strongly negative and politicians occupy one of the lowest positions in the prestige hierarchy of professions (Wojciszke & Baryla, 2005). Also in the present study

the general mean of the attitude was 2.83, well below the neutral point on the 1-7 scales used. Politicians are generally suspected of being egoistic and prone to nepotism and corruption, probably due to numerous press and police revelations of prominent Polish politicians' scandalous actions in the year of the study (2004). Therefore, our expectation was that it was immorality which could be inferred from high status information. To test this hypothesis, we performed a path analysis on the present study results treating the manipulated status (low vs. high) as an exogenous variable. As illustrated in Figure 4, indeed, status led to negative inferences of morality despite leading to positive inferences of competence, and these two sorts of inferences completely mediated the status influence on attitudes.

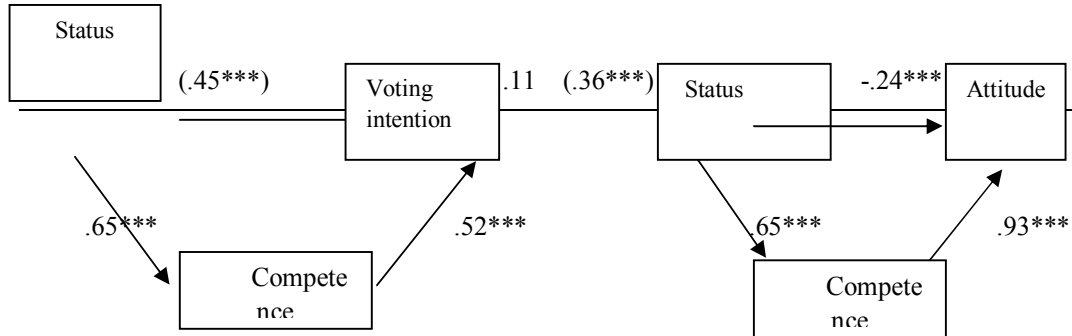


Figure 3. Mediation analyses of perceived competence on the influence of status on attitudes toward a politician. Unmediated effects are shown in parentheses (standardized regression coefficients, Wojciszke et al., 2005).

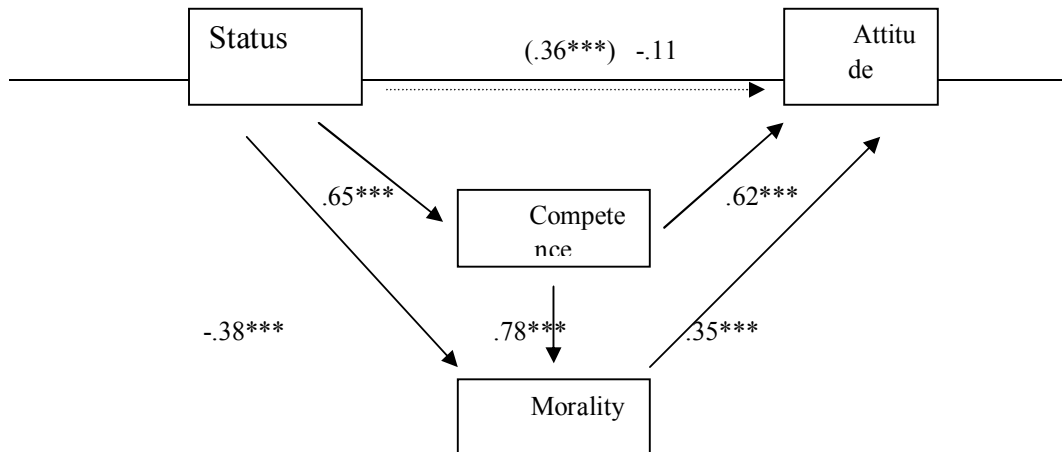


Figure 4. Path analysis of relationships between the manipulated status, the ascription of competence and morality and attitudes toward a politician. The unmediated effect is shown in parentheses (standardized regression coefficients, Wojciszke et al., 2005).

High political status clearly is a mixed blessing for political candidates in contemporary Poland. On the one hand, it leads to inferences of competence, which increases the chance of being elected. On the other hand, it leads to inferences of immorality, which, of course, decreases the chance of being elected. No wonder that in time when this chapter was written

(beginning of 2005) none of the three persons leading in presidential surveys was a professional politician (one was a popular TV personality; the other was a famous professor of cardiology, and the third... a wife of the current president of Poland).

In more theoretical terms, these results evidence lack of legitimacy of the current political system in Poland. Whereas numerous research conducted in the last decade on American samples showed that social beliefs, ideologies, and stereotypes are formed in a way that justifies the existing social order (e.g. low-status groups are stereotyped as lacking competence and motivation – cf. Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004) in contemporary Poland the opposite seems to be true. That is, instead of developing beliefs justifying the existing social system, Poles develop ideologies which delegitimize the system. In a recent survey on a national sample (Wojciszke & Baryla, 2005) a legitimacy scale (Kay & Jost, 2003) was included. Only 6.52% believed the current Polish system to be legitimate, but 79.4% believed that the social order was extremely unjust (as measured by a separate scale). The high status groups are generally perceived as not deserving their position and there is a widespread belief in income inequalities being too large and in need of state interventions, such as rising taxes and constraining salaries of (relatively) wealthier groups (Wojciszke & Baryla, 2005).

The idea that inferring immorality from the high status reflects delegitimization beliefs got support in a replication of the study presented in Figures 2-4 (Wojciszke, Mikiewicz, & Baryla, 2005). The replication used a similar design, manipulations, and measures but the latter were extended to include a belief in the unjust social world (i.e., that the virtue is not rewarded, crime and indecency goes unpunished, etc.). The level of this belief appeared to moderate negative inferences of morality from high vs. low status. For participants who strongly believed in the unjust world, the path from status to morality (with inferences of competence controlled) was moderately strong (standardized beta coefficient was $-.41$). For participants who moderately or weakly believed in the unjust world these paths were nonsignificant though still negative ($-.23$ and $-.20$). In all these three groups the coefficients for the path leading from status to competence inferences were invariably positive and high (from $.75$ to $.80$) and virtually all other results presented in Figures 3-5 were replicated.

In yet another experiment information on acting for vs. against other people's interests which was crossed with information on a politician's acting for vs. against his own interest. Once again participants received mock newspaper clippings introducing a candidate to the Polish Parliament. Each article contained information on a politician's actions which were harmful or beneficial to his own self-interest and to his potential voter's interests. The design was 2 (against vs. for potential voters' interests) x 2 (against vs. for the politician's own interest) with all factors varying between participants. In order to control effects of the specific content of actions, the materials were prepared in two versions: the first described his actions as a firm manager in the first paragraph and his actions as a foundation manager in the second one; the second version – the other way round. In the "against" own interest condition the candidate was described either as an unsuccessful in managing his own firm and in money investments in the first version, or so involved in managing the foundation that he was lacking in time for his political career and private life. In the "for" own interest condition the candidate was described either as a successful manager, luckily investing his own money, or a popular foundation manager, frequently appearing on TV, establishing valuable connections with people, popularity stimulating his political career. In the "for" other people's interest he was described as a very considerate boss, known to help his employees and partners in business or a considerate foundation manager, additional help provided by him where it was

needed most. In the “against” other people’s interests condition he was a ruthless employer and business partner, described by the people that known him as deliberately harming others or as keeping back the money collected by foundation and not helping when the foundation help was needed.

Participants were asked to rate their intention to vote for the candidate, their attitude towards him, and to evaluate the candidate on a number of dimensions. Voting intention depended on the politician’s action toward others ($\eta^2 = .48$) and to a much smaller extent on his pursuing of his own interest ($\eta^2 = .08$). A similar pattern was found for the general attitude toward the politician: it was influenced by his actions toward others ($\eta^2 = .33$) and only marginally by realization of his own interest ($\eta^2 = .04$). As illustrated in Figure 5, strikingly different patterns though were revealed for politician’s perceived competence and morality.

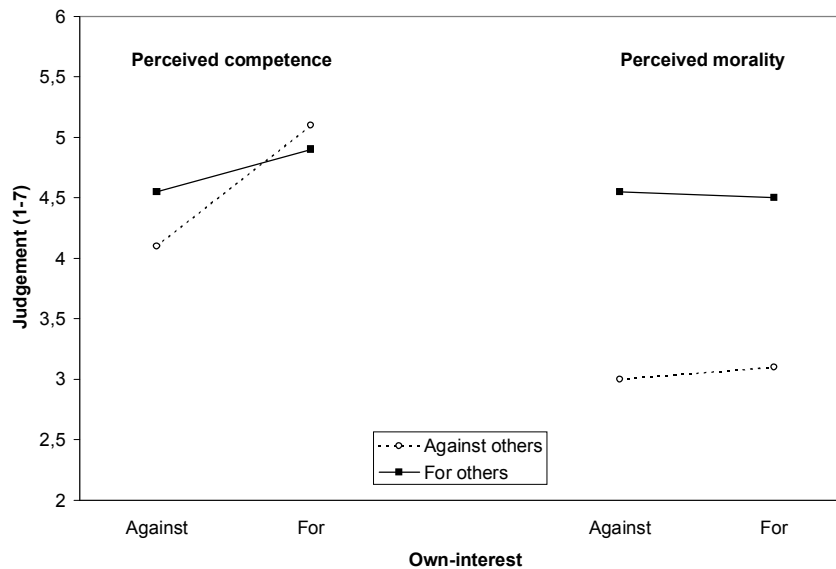


Figure 5. Perceived morality and competence of a politician as a function of his acting for vs. against his own interest and interests of other people (Cislak & Wojciszke, 2005b).

Perceived morality of the politician depended solely on his realization interests of other people ($\eta^2 = .40$), whereas his perceived competence depended on whether he realized his own interests ($\eta^2 = .12$). These results are very much in line with the concept of self- vs. other-profitability difference between moral and competence-related categories of person perception, demonstrating that the perception of morality is based on the target person’s pursuing goals of other people, while the perception of competence is based on the realization of his or her own goals. Clearly, only the pursuit of self-interest appeared to lead to inferences of competence. When exactly the same actions were serving interests of other people (rather than own interests of the target person) competence was not inferred despite the identical efficiency of actions. This suggests that efficiency is not the only basis of competence judgments – it must be efficiency in the service of self interests.

Self-Interest and Moral Judgments

An interesting result repeatedly found in the present line of research is a very strong influence of self-interest on judgments of others' morality. Given that the presumable main function of morality is to curb self-interests, this finding is a bit paradoxical. However, the strong influence of self-interests on morality ascription is paradoxical mainly from the cognitive-developmental view of moral reasoning advanced by Kohlberg and other researchers representing the rationalistic approach to moral judgments. In this tradition, well-entrenched in the traditional psychology of morality, moral reasoning (underlying the moral judgment) is postulated to be context-independent and to involve several steps in conscious, language-based thinking (Kohlberg, 1971). Numerous studies on moral reasoning notwithstanding, it is far from clear that rule-related reasoning constitutes the actual cause of moral judgment. An increasing amount of evidence suggests that moral reasoning is frequently a post-hoc construction generated only (if at all) after the moral judgments has already been made (Haidt, 2001). Like other kinds of evaluations, moral judgments are frequently based on emotional intuitions ("gut feelings" of right or wrong), they emerge without intention or effort and much faster than allowed by the assumption of a deliberate multistage processing. For example, judgments of morally right or wrong emerge instantly even when it is hard for the perceiver to supply them with any rule-related justification (Haidt, 2001), and outcome or procedural justice judgments appear significantly based on the person's own affective states in the absence of the rule-related information (Van den Bos, 2003).

Extending this line of thinking, one may assume that moral judgments are frequently influenced by affective responses of the perceiver and these responses may have (genetically) nothing to do with moral meaning of the observed behavior. The bearing of other's action on the perceiver's self-interest seems to be one of the strongest sources of affective responses (cf. Jones, 1990). Affect driven by self-interest may constitute an automatically used basis of moral judgments (cf. Epley & Caruso, 2004, for extended discussion). Spontaneous moral judgments frequently take the form of ascribing moral traits to the observed person (this person is unfair, dishonest, a crook, etc.) rather than of an abstract statement of the rule-behavior fit (this is an unfair way of goods distribution). Because traits are ascribed automatically and unintentionally in early stages of person perception (Uleman, Newman, & Moskowitz, 1996) they seem to better suit the role of the basis of automatic moral judgments than abstract statements which may require deliberative thinking, especially when there are novel aspects of the situation and the evaluation of behavior in question has not become yet automatized. At the extreme, it is even possible that the self-interest-driven affect dominates moral trait ascriptions and general prescriptive (moral) rules of behavior influence judgments only when there is no a strong, self-interest based affective response.

We do not have the data to support such an extreme position, however, we have obtained data showing that effects of moral rule maintenance or breaking may be nullified by self-interests when moral judgments are reached (Cislak & Wojciszke, 2005b). We presented our participants with vignettes describing several cases of breaking the rule of fairness for the interest of a specific person (e.g. a student receives a fellowship though he is not the best of the candidates) or maintaining the rule at the expense of interests of a specific person (e.g. despite his pledges, a student does not receive a grant because he is not the best candidate). Half participants were asked to imagine that it was their own interest which was benefited by

the norm breaking or dwarfed by the norm maintenance, while the remainder imagined those were interests of a non-specified person. The dependent variables were judgments of the perpetrator's morality and attitudes toward the perpetrator.

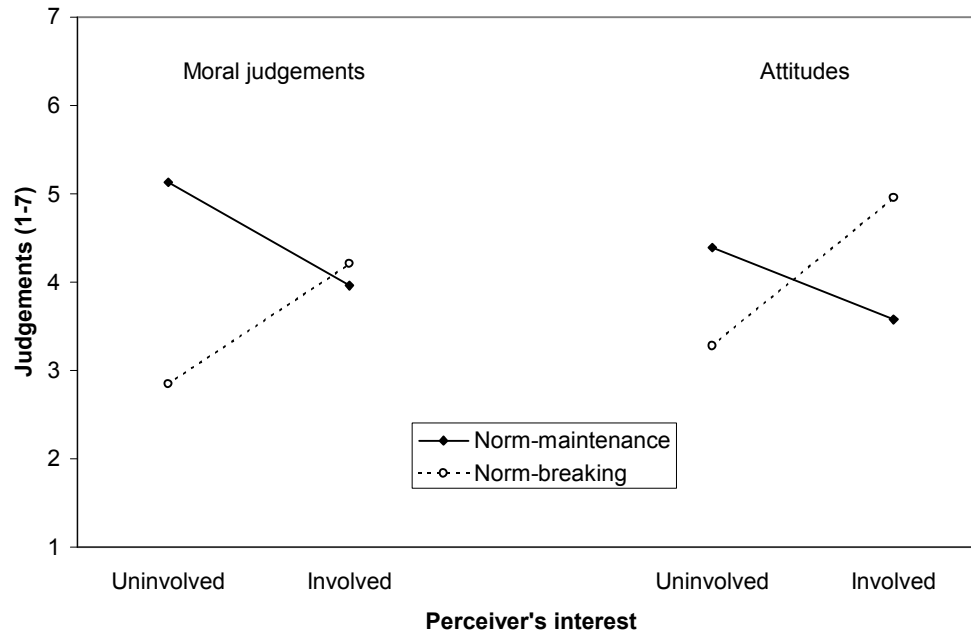


Figure 6. Moral judgments and attitudes toward a person who breaks a norm to satisfy a specific person's interests or who maintains the norm at the expense of such interest for perceivers whose personal interests are involved or not (4 is the neutral value for both dependent measures; Cislak & Wojciszke, 2005b).

As can be seen in the left panel of Figure 6, as long as personal interests were not involved, participants based their judgments solely on moral rules. Target persons who maintained the rules in their behavior were perceived as moral, while persons breaking the rules were perceived as immoral and the former were also better liked generally. The pattern changed dramatically when self-interest of the perceiver became involved. The consequences of targets for the perceivers' interests clearly nullified normative influences. Persons, who maintained the rules at the expense of the perceiver's own interest, were judged as neither moral nor immoral, just like the persons who broke the rules for the perceiver's interest. In both cases the ambivalence was present within, not between the perceivers – judgments of morality were unimodal with the “hard to say” (i.e., 4) option dominating the distribution of responses (had the ambivalence been present between perceivers, two modes should have emerged – one for perceivers basing their judgments on norms and one for perceivers basing their judgments blatantly on the self-interest). It should be noted that the self interest manipulation was very weak in this study – participants were only asked to imagine their interests were involved. (However, perspective-taking seems to be a sufficient factor influencing egocentrically our judgments – cf. Babcock, Loewenstein, Issacharoff, & Cremer, 1995). Therefore, it is not a far reaching conjecture to expect that when vital interests of the perceivers are actually involved, the influence of interests will be stronger. Possibly so strong, that it might even overcome the role of norms totally and everything serving

perceivers' interests would be judged moral while actions dwarfing those interests would be judged immoral, the moral norms notwithstanding.

The left panel of Figure 6 shows attitudes or global evaluations. When own interests were not involved, persons who maintained the rules were liked to higher extent than those who broke them. Exactly the opposite was true, however, when perceivers' interests were involved. Norm-maintaining persons who acted against the (imagined) interests of the perceivers were disliked by them, whereas norm-breakers who acted for the perceiver's interests were well-liked. In the case of attitudes, the interests appeared stronger antecedents than moral norms.

CONCLUSION

We reviewed a substantial amount of evidence, both direct and indirect, showing that self-interest considerations play a prominent role in interpersonal perception and attitudes, especially in political perception. When forming impressions of others, people tend to seek information on their morality rather than competence, and these judgments are frequently based on self-interest heuristics: "what feels good for me is good" which indicates the crucial role of self-interests in socio-political considerations.

The politician or candidate image has recently become one of the most prominent factors taken into account by political rulers as well as contemporary researchers and theorists (Jamieson, 1996; Funk, 1999; Ottati, 2001). Political ideologies and party identifications – once claimed critical factors in analyzing voting behavior – seem now overcome by candidates' characteristics ascribed to them by voters. Numerous studies in the field of political psychology has recently traced the psychological processes underlying political choices, representations of information on politicians, and the role of candidate evaluations on the positive-negative dimension (Rasinski & Tyler, 1988; McGraw, Pinney, & Neumann, 1991; Funk, 1999; Cwalina, Falkowski, & Kaid, 2000). The results of our studies demonstrate that these ascriptions and evaluations are highly dependent on perceivers' (or potential voters') interests – the same information on candidate induces different interpretations and actions among its recipients. The better understanding of these problems may add to better explanation of the shape of the political scene in Poland, as well as social conflicts resolution.

From an evolutionary point of view, locating others on the approach-avoidance dimension is a default option of processing information on other persons. Possibly, concern with one's own efficiency in goal attainment (and, in effect, own competence in general) may be such an option in self-perception. There are probably many more default options in social information processing beyond the mere approach-avoidance. Their existence may be evidenced by some reliable and ubiquitous phenomena, like the "us-them" distinction or pan-cultural sex differences in what people want from, and perceive in their mates. Default options are, of course, easy to be replaced by alternatives imposed by the individual's current task, context, or by a current state of mind and body. Nevertheless, when nothing changes them, they operate and unraveling such default options may be a reasonable avenue for social cognition research.

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