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When Your Friend is My Friend: How Loyalty Prompts Support for Indirect Ties in Moral Dilemmas

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Abstract. How are some criminals able to get away with wrongdoing for months or even years? Here, we consider the role of loyalty in facilitating networks of support for wrongdoers, examining whether the obligations of loyalty to direct ties (here, brokers) transfer through individuals' social networks to their indirect ties, prompting them to support those indirect ties in moral dilemmas. Integrating research on brokering, loyalty, relational identity, and social norms, we propose that loyalty to a broker will prompt an individual to support an indirect tie accused of wrongdoing because loyalty activates one's relational identity with the broker, which highlights the descriptive and relational injunctive norms associated with their role, leading them to view the broker's request to support an indirect tie accused of wrongdoing as falling within the bounds of their loyalty-based obligations to the broker. Specifically, these norms reveal to the actor their benevolence-based trust in the broker, their value alignment with the broker, and relational concerns for not granting the broker's request. We further demonstrate how a broker's history of creating divisions between people moderates how the actor sees the broker and reduces their willingness to grant the request. Across 11 preregistered studies ($n = 2,249$)—10 experiments and a field study—we found support for our hypotheses: the obligations of loyalty to brokers did indeed transfer to indirect ties accused of wrongdoing, regardless of the type of wrongdoing or strength of evidence presented against the accused.

Supplemental Material: The online appendix is available at <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2023.18003>.

Keywords: loyalty • morality • behavioral ethics • ethical voice • social norms • trust • social networks • brokering • organizational behavior • social cognition

Organizational wrongdoing is often facilitated by those who are close associates of the wrongdoer who condone or support their behavior. For example, a growing body of research on loyalty suggests that people tend to protect their loyal ties—that is, a person to whom one is loyal—from the consequences of their wrongdoing (Lee and Holyoak 2020, Weidman et al. 2020) and may even engage in unethical behavior to help them (Hildreth et al. 2016). In this context, people view the unethical behavior of a loyal tie more leniently because they are motivated to rationalize it (Forbes and Stellar 2022). The prevailing assumption in this research is that loyalty obligates people to support their loyal ties and that their loyal ties are the only beneficiaries of this loyalty. But what if your loyal tie asked you to support their close friend, who you do not have a relationship with (i.e., your indirect tie) and who engaged in wrongdoing? Would your loyalty to your loyal tie obligate you to go out of your way to protect their friend, your indirect tie?

Some prior work related to indirect ties, brokering, and referrals speak to when and why individuals

support and help indirect ties. Research related to indirect ties suggests that when indirect ties are connected by someone to whom both individuals trust or admire, this will facilitate trust between them (Ferrin et al. 2006), leading to increased cooperation and information sharing among other benefits (Krackhardt 1992, Levin et al. 2016). Related research on brokering suggests that when brokers connect two otherwise disconnected individuals (Simmel 1950), they facilitate help and cooperation between these individuals (e.g., Obstfeld 2005, Lingo and O'Mahony 2010, Kaplan et al. 2016, Halevy et al. 2019). In addition, decades of research related to employee referrals and recommendations suggest that vouching for a third party can be highly valuable to an organization or other individual (for review, see Schlachter and Pieper 2019). Specifically, referrals are valued and seen as legitimate in the eyes of organizations and hiring professionals, in part because the referrer is staking their reputation with the referral and should therefore only refer someone who protects or enhances their reputation (Rees 1966, Fernandez and

Weinberg 1997, Smith 2005). Taken together, this work suggests that brokers have the ability to facilitate help and cooperation between two otherwise disconnected individuals.

Although research on indirect ties, brokering, and referrals is informative, it primarily focuses on the perspective of the broker rather than one or more actors being brokered (i.e., alters) (Kwon et al. 2020, Brass 2022), which is the focus of the current research. This is important to highlight because in our context the broker's request introduces imbalance into the context that may impact what the actor chooses to do. Specifically, when the broker attempts to broker support for someone accused of unethical behavior, the positive signal of the broker's vouching is in conflict with the negative signal of the indirect tie's character or behavior, which creates imbalance (Heider 1958). This imbalance is a problem in the brokering context because balance is considered an important part of how brokering processes take shape (Krackhardt 1992). Hence, considering an alter's perspective in this context will better help us understand when and why the brokerage is successful (or not). Furthermore, granting the broker's request in this context is highly risky for the actor, as the request requires actors to stake their reputation on supporting someone accused of unethical behavior, which represents a larger degree of personal and professional risk to the actor than that explored in other brokering contexts (e.g., job referrals).

Research on voice in the workplace also finds that speaking up on behalf of coworkers can be risky (Morrison 2014, 2023), particularly when speaking up is in response to a moral issue, otherwise referred to as "ethical voice" (Chen and Treviño 2023). Speaking up about an ethical issue is risky because doing so can lead to negative judgment and behavior from others (Monin 2007, Monin et al. 2008, Minson and Monin 2012), such as lower support from coworkers (Chen and Treviño 2022), reputational damage (Berry et al. 2023), harassment and social isolation (Mesmer-Magnus and Viswesvaran 2005), and retaliation (Near and Miceli 1985, 2008; Rehg et al. 2008; Sumanth et al. 2011), which can lead to mental health issues (van der Velden et al. 2019). Taken together, individuals may view the broker's request to support the accused as reputationally risky, which may reduce their willingness to grant the broker's request and speak up in support of the accused. Thus, considering the actor's perspective in this potentially reputationally risky context, we expect brokers to be less effective in brokering help and support for the accused.

What happens when individuals are loyal to the broker? One possibility is that loyalty may exacerbate the risk associated with supporting the accused and therefore reduce the likelihood of providing support. Brokering processes are considered fragile, as individuals may

fear being exploited by a broker (Stovel et al. 2011). When an actor is loyal to the broker, this might exacerbate a fear of exploitation because the broker is, by definition, operating between group boundaries (Halevy et al. 2019). Seeing the broker operating between group boundaries may threaten the actor's loyalty to the broker because it makes salient the broker's divided loyalties (Kunst et al. 2019) and leads the actor to question the strength of their alliance (DeScioli and Kurzban 2009). This may, in turn, reduce the actor's felt need to fulfill their loyalty-based obligations to the broker. Indeed, when people perceive another's behavior as threatening their relationship with that other, they are far less likely to support the other or the other's behavior (Trevino and Victor 1992, Kundro and Nurmo-hamed 2021). Moreover, seeing the broker operating between group boundaries may highlight to the actor that the broker has other ties that they can call upon to support the accused, which may dilute the responsibility the actor feels for supporting the broker's request.

To better understand when and why people support indirect ties accused of wrongdoing when loyal to a broker that connects them, we draw on relational identity theory (Brewer and Gardner 1996, Sluss and Ashforth 2007) and social norms theory (Kahneman and Miller 1986, Reno et al. 1993). Specifically, we theorize that the broker's request will activate the actor's relational identity with the broker, highlighting descriptive and relational injunctive norms related to the request. We argue that the salience of descriptive norms associated with fulfilling the broker's request will prompt the actor to consider more deeply their benevolence-based trust in the broker and the degree of value alignment they share with the broker. Similarly, we argue that the salience of relational injunctive norms associated with fulfilling the broker's request will increase the actor's relational concerns with the broker for not granting their request. We also consider how the broker's reputation might influence the actor's support and argue that brokers with a history of divisive brokering (i.e., creating conflicts between others) will be less influential because their reputation will undermine the actor's benevolence-based trust in and perceived value alignment with the broker, as well as reduce the actor's relational concerns with the broker for not granting their request.

This research makes several important contributions to the literature on loyalty, brokering, social norms, and ethical voice. First, this work advances what we know about the moral psychology of loyalty by pushing against the prevailing and implicit assumptions that loyalty obligates people to help and support *only* those to whom one is directly loyal and that one's loyalty *always* leads to supporting loyal ties (Hildreth et al. 2016, Berry et al. 2021). Second, this work makes important contributions to the brokering literature (Halevy et al. 2019, Halevy et al. 2020) by taking an "alter-

centric” view of brokering processes, which has largely been overlooked (Kwon et al. 2020, Brass 2022). In so doing, this work demonstrates when and why brokers can effectively broker help and cooperation between two otherwise disconnected individuals in a reputationally risky context that produces negative organizational outcomes. This work further contributes to the brokering literature by demonstrating how utilizing one brokering orientation in the past can influence the effectiveness of utilizing a different brokering orientation in the future. Third, our work advances what we know about the intersection of social norms and ethics (Gino et al. 2009, Moore and Gino 2013, Zlatev et al. 2019) by demonstrating how this type of moral dilemma reveals both descriptive and relational injunctive norms about the situation, leading to an increase in benevolence-based trust in the broker, higher value alignment with the broker, and higher relational concerns with the broker for not supporting an indirect tie. Fourth, we contribute to the growing literature on ethical voice (Chen and Treviño 2022, 2023) by demonstrating how and why employees can engage in ethical voice in support of an indirect tie at work accused of wrongdoing, in contrast to prior literature, which predominantly focuses on the consequences of ethical voice, answering recent calls to more closely explore nuanced forms of voice behaviors at work (Morrison 2023). Finally, our work has important practical implications related to preventing and managing unethical behavior in the workplace, which we discuss in detail in the general discussion.

Theory and Hypotheses

In the current research, we focus on a simplified “brokered” triadic relationship between actor, broker, and the accused, where the actor and accused both have prior relationships with the broker (they are connected, i.e., direct ties), but not with each other (they are disconnected, but connected through the broker, i.e., indirect ties). We examine how the relationship between actor and broker affects the actor’s willingness to support the accused—an indirect tie accused of wrongdoing—and specifically, whether loyalty between actor and broker increases the actor’s willingness to help the accused. Although accusations of misconduct and wrongdoing do not equate to convictions of wrongdoing, they generate mixed responses from others. For example, when Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh was accused of sexually assaulting Dr. Christine Blasey Ford, many stood in support of Justice Kavanaugh, and many stood in support of Dr. Ford, far in advance of collated evidence to support or debunk the accusations. The research here considers how loyalty shapes people’s willingness to support an indirect tie accused of wrongdoing, especially engaging in ethical voice on their behalf.

In this project, we define support as any verbal expressions in support of the individual accused of wrongdoing, at the expense of remaining impartial. Support for the accused may take on a variety of forms ranging from active, such as when someone tries to cover up a loyal tie’s wrongdoing (Kundro and Nurmohamed 2021) or lies to others about what their loyal tie did (Lee and Holyoak 2020), to the more passive, such as when people choose to remain silent about what happened (Waytz et al. 2013, Weidman et al. 2020). Here, we focus on active forms of support, and specifically vocal support; that is, any verbal expression made in support of the individual accused of wrongdoing at the expense of remaining impartial because such active support more clearly addresses our aim of identifying how or why actors in wrongdoers’ broader social networks help to facilitate or support wrongdoers’ behavior, rather than simply failing to intervene. This emphasis also addresses recent calls by voice scholars to advance our understanding of more nuanced forms of voice, specifically ethical voice (Morrison 2023). Recent research by Chen and Treviño (2023) differentiates forms of ethical voice: active vocal support, including “promotive ethical voice,” which comprises expressions of solidarity with the accused or publicly acknowledging support for the accused, and “prohibitive ethical voice,” which comprises condemning the accusations made against the accused. Thus, in the current research, we focus not just on actors’ willingness to vocally support the accused, but on their willingness to engage in both promotive and prohibitive ethical voice on the accused’s behalf. In so doing, we complement and advance existing work that has explored other manifestations of support toward those to whom one is loyal.

Loyalty and Loyalty Dilemmas

We define loyalty as moral partiality, that is, the principle that one should prioritize the needs of the target of loyalty because one believes such actions are moral (Hildreth 2016, Hildreth et al. 2016). This moral partiality can manifest in many forms, including feelings of obligation to support loyal ties in times of need, and the provision of that help even if the loyal must sacrifice their own personal well-being for the good of the target of their loyalty (Scott 1965, Shweder et al. 1997, Zdaniuk and Levine 2001, Haidt and Joseph 2004, Hildreth 2016, Hildreth et al. 2016, Berry et al. 2021). Past research on loyalty suggests that people feel an obligation to support their loyal ties and provide help to those loyal ties in times of need (Hildreth et al. 2016). Prior research also shows that people tend to help their loyal ties more than they help others, even at the expense of others (Amato 1990, Levine et al. 2005, Stürmer et al. 2005). Even in situations where foregoing one’s loyalty would benefit the individual or yield an attractive outcome, people tend to remain loyal and prioritize the needs of

their loyal ties rather than help others (Zdaniuk and Levine 2001, Van Vugt and Hart 2004).

In some cases, one's loyalty comes into conflict with another moral value, such as when a loyal tie requests that you remain silent about something unethical they did at work (e.g., Weidman et al. 2020). This request for support places the actor in a type of "right-right" moral dilemma (Kidder 1995). Right-right moral dilemmas are moral dilemmas in which a moral value (e.g., loyalty) is in conflict with some other moral value (e.g., fairness) and both options are morally justified. These are different than "right-wrong" moral dilemmas, which have received the majority of attention in behavioral ethics and moral psychology research (Zhang et al. 2018), where self-interest or some other nonethical consideration is in conflict with a moral value. When loyalty is in conflict with another moral value, this is considered a loyalty dilemma, which is one of the four paradigmatic types of right-right moral dilemmas that someone can face (Kidder 1995). Recent research has begun to explore how people navigate loyalty dilemmas, demonstrating, in many cases, that people often side with their loyalty at the expense of another moral value (for review, see Berry et al. 2021). For example, people are willing to remain silent about wrongdoing committed by those to whom they are loyal (Weidman et al. 2020) and even lie to help cover up the wrongdoing (Lee and Holyoak 2020). Although little work has explored mechanisms for why people side with their loyalty in loyalty dilemmas, recent work suggests that people may side with their loyalty in these dilemmas because they rationalize the behavior of those to whom they are loyal (Forbes and Stellar 2022, Hildreth 2024). That is, the nature of their relationship obligates the individual to support the wrongdoer, which motivates them to rationalize the person's behavior and side with their loyalty.

Despite the growing research on how loyalty obligates compromising other moral values in loyalty dilemmas, the prevailing assumption of this work is that people compromise a moral value for loyalty only when the beneficiary is the person to whom they are loyal. This work has overlooked cases in which an actor's loyalty may be called upon to benefit not the person to whom they are loyal but someone to whom the actor is not loyal or even directly connected to (i.e., an indirect tie). In such a case, the actor is faced with deciding whether to side with their loyalty to benefit an indirect tie (i.e., someone they do not know and who has precarious moral character) or side with fairness and remain impartial while the justice process takes shape.

Although it is not obvious that an actor's loyal obligations should necessarily transfer to an indirect tie, we draw on research related to brokering, loyalty, and relational identity to argue that one's loyalty-based obligations will transfer to an indirect tie. The request to an

actor to support an indirect tie renders the requestor a broker, and we know from prior work that brokers are often held in high regard and trusted given their ability to connect otherwise disconnected individuals (Halevy et al. 2020, Kwon et al. 2020, Mell et al. 2021). Brokers can positively affect relationships between disconnected individuals, facilitating various forms of cooperation and help between them (Obstfeld 2005, Lingo and O'Mahony 2010, Anik and Norton 2014, Kaplan et al. 2016). In this context, however, the actor faces a request to support someone accused of wrongdoing, which is potentially reputationally risky and unethical for the actor absent information absolving the accused. When the actor is loyal to the broker making the request, we suggest that their loyalty will make them more likely to comply with the broker's request given the moralized obligations inherent in loyalty. Indeed, the stronger the relationship between the broker and the actor, the more likely the actor will comply with their requests (Feng and MacGeorge 2006), including when such requests are unethical in nature (e.g., Hildreth 2024). Given loyalty is one of the strongest forms of bonds between individuals (Felten 2012), and in light of its moralized nature (Hildreth et al. 2016), we argue that loyalty between actor and broker should increase the actor's willingness to support an indirect tie accused of wrongdoing.

Research on relational identity is also consistent with this thesis. Social identity and self-categorization theories (Tajfel et al. 1971, Tajfel and Turner 1979, Turner et al. 1983) highlight that individuals can have a range of identities, including personal, relational, and collective identities (Brewer and Gardner 1996), which can become more or less salient depending on the context. When brokers make requests of actors, they make salient the actor's relational identity with the broker (e.g., Oyserman 2009, Oyserman and Lewis 2017), which highlights the role-based expectations of both parties in that relationship, including what is appropriate behavior in a given context (Sluss and Ashforth 2007). Prior research finds that the presence of loyalty can also activate one's relational identity with the target of their loyalty and increase the extent to which they relationally identify with the target (Hildreth 2024). The more individuals relationally identify with a target, the more willing they are to engage in unethical behavior on behalf of the target or comply with the target's unethical requests (Mesdaghinia et al. 2019), even helping members of their outgroups (Brewer and Gardner 1996, Vos and Van Der Zee 2011), including disconnected others. Thus, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 1. *Actors will be more likely to support indirect ties accused of wrongdoing when their relationship is brokered by a direct tie to whom they are loyal (compared*

with when their relationship is brokered by a direct tie they are just colleagues with or are not loyal to).

Why Loyal Obligations Transfer from Direct to Indirect Ties

Relational identity refers to the role-relationship between two parties (e.g., actor-broker), which constitutes how each individual is to “enact their roles vis-à-vis each other” (Sluss and Ashforth 2007). We argue that the broker’s request activates the actor’s relational identity with the broker, which will make salient to the actor both the descriptive and relational injunctive norms associated with enacting their role in the relationship, and these norms, in turn, guide the actor in deciding whether to grant the broker’s request. Specifically, we argue that the descriptive norms will focus the actor on both their benevolence-based trust in the broker and their perceived value alignment with the broker, whereas the relational injunctive norms will focus the actor on relational concerns with the broker for not granting their request and thus fulfilling their loyalty-based obligation to them.

Social norms theory argues that individuals are influenced, often unconsciously, by social norms about what is appropriate or normative behavior in a given situation (Kahneman and Miller 1986, Reno et al. 1993). The theory differentiates between descriptive and injunctive norms, where descriptive norms relate to what others do (or do not do) in a given situation, and injunctive norms relate to what one is expected to do (or not do) in a given situation (Cialdini et al. 1990, Bergquist and Nilsson 2019). Descriptively, people look to similar others and those with whom they share a relationship (Cialdini and Trost 1998, Burger et al. 2004); the more similar or familiar the other is, the more likely they are to imitate their behavior in a certain context (Emswiller et al. 1971; Burger et al. 2001, 2004). This is also the case in the moral domain, where the (un)ethical behavior of similar others shapes individuals’ intentions and decisions to do the same (Moore and Gino 2013). However, in our context, the actor faces a loyalty dilemma where two moral values are in conflict and fulfilling the broker’s request is risky. As such, we argue that this will lead the actor to consider more deeply who the broker is and their relationship to them before deciding whether to grant the request (Mushtaq et al. 2011). Specifically, we argue that the actor will consider both the benevolence-based trust in the broker, as well as the extent to which their values are in alignment with the broker’s values, to ensure the broker is someone like them whose intentions toward them they can trust. We argue that loyalty to the broker will manifest in increased benevolence-based trust in and perceived value alignment with the broker, which will increase the broker’s influence.

Prior research finds that loyalty between direct ties increases trust between those ties because people expect others to fulfill their loyalty-based obligations (Everett et al. 2016), whereas failure to fulfill one’s loyalty-based obligations has been shown to decrease trust, even when there is a moral justification for failing to uphold those obligations (Everett et al. 2016, 2018; Hughes 2017; McManus et al. 2020). However, this research has not considered the specific forms that such trust might take. Prior research suggests that trust involves “trusting intentions” and “trusting beliefs,” where the latter is comprised of perceived benevolence, integrity, and competence that shapes the former, that is, one’s willingness to be vulnerable to someone in the presence of risk (McKnight et al. 1998, Kim et al. 2004). These distinct trusting beliefs are, together, antecedents for trusting a target, but each offers unique aspects to the perceived trustworthiness of the target (Mayer et al. 1995); ability-based trust refers to trusting another based on the perception that they can do what they say they will in a given domain, integrity-based trust refers to trusting another based on the perception that they uphold the principles they express, and benevolence-based trust refers to trusting another based on the perception that they have one’s best interests at heart (Colquitt and Salam 2012). Although loyalty may be an antecedent to all three of these trusting beliefs, we argue it is more likely to promote benevolence-based trust because loyalty is associated with self-sacrifice, dependability, fidelity, and faithfulness (Royce 1995, Zdaniuk and Levine 2001, Berry et al. 2021). That is, loyalty represents an expectancy belief (Bowlby 1982, Hildreth 2016) that those to whom one is loyal will prioritize one’s welfare over others, regardless of the cost. In contrast, it is less obvious that loyalty would promote integrity-based trust, particularly in a loyalty dilemma where loyalty is in conflict with another moral value, as it may be unclear which value is more important and whether the broker is upholding that particular value. Similarly, loyalty may not facilitate ability-based trust in a loyalty dilemma, given that the actor is the one who needs to act, and they are not reliant upon the broker’s abilities to do so. Thus, we argue that loyalty to the broker will help increase benevolence-based trust in the broker helping to reassure the actor that the broker’s intentions toward them are honorable and will thus increase their willingness to comply with the broker’s request and support the accused.

Descriptively, we also argue that loyalty to the broker will promote the actor’s perceived similarity with the broker and, specifically, the perception that the actor and broker’s values are aligned. Previous research suggests that whereas people vary in the degree to which they endorse loyalty as a moral value (Haidt and Joseph 2004; Graham et al. 2009, 2011), they also expect their loyalty to be reciprocated (Royce 1995, Hartman 1996,

Reichheld 2001); thus, when actors feel loyal to a broker, they are likely to perceive that the broker should reciprocate that felt loyalty toward them and thus perceive the broker to be in alignment with this shared moral value. In addition, prior research has shown that when loyalty is primed, it helps make other moral values more salient (Hildreth et al. 2016). And to the extent that perceived similarity in one dimension tends to increase perceived similarity in other dimensions (McPherson et al. 2001, Collisson and Howell 2014), then we argue that loyalty to the broker should increase the actor's perceived value alignment with the broker across other moral values. This, in turn, will lead them to be more willing to grant the broker's request because higher value alignment leads to greater helping and cooperation (Meglino and Ravlin 1998, Tomlinson et al. 2014, Matta et al. 2015).

Hypothesis 2a. *Benevolence-based trust in the broker will mediate the effect of an actor's loyalty to the broker on their likelihood of supporting the accused.*

Hypothesis 2b. *Perceived value alignment with the broker will mediate the effect of an actor's loyalty to the broker on their likelihood of supporting the accused.*

The activation of the actor's relational identity with the broker will not only make salient descriptive norms associated with fulfilling the broker's request, but will also make salient relational injunctive norms concerning the request. This is especially likely to be the case in a loyalty dilemma where there are at least two moral values that can be used to guide and justify behavior. We argue that the presence of loyalty in the relationship between the actor and broker will highlight relational injunctive norms concerning the broker's expectations about the actor's behavior, specifically the moralized relational obligations entailed in loyalty (i.e., you are obligated to support your loyal ties, and doing so is the morally right thing to do (Hildreth et al. 2016)). People expect others to hold them accountable for their behavior, including their adherence or nonadherence to social norms, and such expectations shape behavior (Tetlock 1983, 1992; Lerner and Tetlock 1999). Prior research finds that individuals expect others to fulfill their loyalty-based obligations (Weidman et al. 2020), and failure to fulfill one's loyalty-based obligations is considered immoral (Hughes 2017; McManus et al. 2020, 2021) and, by definition, disloyal (Berry et al. 2023). Failure to act on one's loyalty-based obligations can lead to negative consequences for the disloyal, such as being viewed as less moral and trustworthy (Everett et al. 2018) and more selfish and rude (Travaglino et al. 2014), and it can damage their reputation and standing with their loyal ties (Shaw et al. 2017), which may lead to derogation (Pinto et al. 2010) and punishment (Kundro and Nurmohamed 2021). Thus, we argue that the activation of one's relational identity with the broker will make

salient relational injunctive norms relating to the broker's expectations that the actor should fulfill their loyalty-based obligations, as well as the negative relational consequences the actor may face for failing to fulfill those obligations.

Hypothesis 2c. *Relational concerns with the broker for not granting their request will mediate the effect of an actor's loyalty to the broker on their likelihood of supporting the accused.*

Our theorizing suggests that the actor considers information about the broker and their relationship to them in deciding whether to grant the broker's request. Thus, we argue that the broker's brokering reputation and, specifically, how negative (or positive) that brokering reputation is, should moderate the effects of loyalty on the actor's likelihood of supporting the accused. Research on brokering differentiates between three distinct brokering orientations (i.e., brokers' brokering reputations): intermediary, conciliatory, and divisive (Halevy et al. 2019, 2020). Intermediary brokering involves connecting neutral or disconnected ties and turning them into positive ties (e.g., for help and cooperation), conciliatory brokering involves transforming negative ties into positive ties, and divisive brokering involves transforming neutral or positive ties into negative ties (Halevy et al. 2020). These differing forms of brokering orientation impact social evaluations in unique ways. For example, intermediary brokering leads to higher status evaluations, conciliatory brokering leads to higher trust and prestige evaluations, and divisive brokering leads to higher dominance evaluations (Halevy et al. 2020). In the current research, we focus on divisive brokering and argue that if a broker has a reputation for divisive brokering, an actor will see the broker as dominance seeking (Halevy et al. 2020), which will reduce the actor's benevolence-based trust in the broker because dominance-seeking behavior can harm relationships (Kelley et al. 2003). In addition, we argue that divisive brokering will lower the loyal actor's perceived value alignment with the broker because they will be more likely to judge the broker's behavior as selfish and the values that support it as objectionable, which may also reduce their relational concerns about failing to grant the broker's request and the impact such noncompliance will have on their relationship to the broker. Consistent with this thesis, recent research on leaders' loyalty calls finds that when followers make selfish attributions about their leaders' motivations in making unethical requests, it leads to backlash and reduces their likelihood of complying with those requests (Hildreth 2024). Taken together, we suggest that actors will be less likely to grant the broker's request when loyal to a broker with a history of divisive brokering compared with a broker without such history.

Hypothesis 3. *The actor will be less likely to support the accused when loyal to a broker with a history of divisive brokering compared with no history.*

Overview of Studies

We tested our hypotheses in 11 preregistered studies, including 10 experiments and a field study (seven studies are reported in the Online Appendix). In Study 1, we tested the focal loyalty prediction Hypothesis 1, using a mixed (within- and between-subjects) experimental design and then tested the robustness of the findings to alternative comparison conditions (Study S1), perspectives (Study S2), and source of the request (Study S3). In Study 2, we replicated and extended the findings of Study 1 using a between-subjects experimental design and tested the mechanism, Hypotheses 2a–c. In Study 3, we tested for moderation (Hypothesis 3) using a between-subjects experimental manipulation. Finally, in Study 4, we conducted a field study to test Hypothesis 1. Across studies, we employed a variety of methodologies and contexts to enhance the internal and external validity and generalizability of our research (Campbell and Fiske 1959), using methods that have been used extensively in prior research examining ethical dilemmas at work (Hildreth et al. 2016, Dungan et al. 2019, Bergemann and Aven 2023). An overview of the studies and summary of findings is set out in Table 1.

Transparency and Openness

In all studies, the sample size was determined before any data analysis, and we report all measures, manipulations, data exclusions, and sample size rationales. The study design, sample size, inclusion/exclusion criteria, and planned analyses for Studies 1–4 (and all supplemental studies) were preregistered on AsPredicted.org. We report all preregistered analyses in the manuscript unless noted. Across all studies, we aimed to recruit at least 50 participants per condition (unless noted) based on sample sizes used in prior loyalty research (Hildreth et al. 2016, Hildreth and Anderson 2018) or on power analyses of the effect sizes observed in pilot testing. As preregistered, participants were excluded for failing basic attention checks. In Study 1 and most of our supplemental studies, after removing participants who failed the attention checks, we sampled additional participants, continuing to sample participants in batches until the target sample size had been reached (no analyses nor review of descriptive statistics were conducted prior to reaching the target sample size). Given this method of recruiting, we often ended up with a final analytic sample size above the target sample size in these studies. All participants who took part in a study, including those who failed attention checks and were resampled, were barred from taking our future studies. This research was conducted in accordance with established ethical guidelines and was approved by the

Institutional Review Board at Cornell University. All data, preregistrations, and analysis scripts are available on the Open Science Framework.¹ Full text for all vignettes for all studies can be found in the appendix on the Open Science Framework page.

Study 1

The aim of Study 1 was to test Hypothesis 1 with a causal design across a range of types of wrongdoing using a stimulus sampling technique (Wells and Windschitl 1999).

Method

Participants. We recruited 530 full-time employees (47% female, 51% male, 2% nonbinary; $M_{\text{age}} = 41.13$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 11.91$; 20 industries represented) via Prolific. As preregistered, an a priori power analysis based on an effect size observed in piloting suggested that at least 75 participants for each between-subjects condition were needed to achieve 80% statistical power (two-tailed; $\alpha = 0.05$), leading us to set the target sample size as 525 participants (reflecting seven between-subjects conditions described below).

Procedure. This study employed a 2 (Relationship to Broker: loyal, control) \times 7 (Type of Wrongdoing: sexual harassment, theft, false advertising, fraud, bribery, plagiarism, dishonesty) mixed factorial design where the relationship to the broker was a within-subjects factor and the type of wrongdoing was a between-subjects factor. Participants were asked to identify two colleagues at work who they had known for a few years and liked and to complete a survey about each one in turn. In the loyal to broker condition, they identified a colleague they were loyal to, whereas in the control condition, they identified a colleague who they had no relationship with. The order of conditions was randomly assigned, and although participants completed the first survey about the first-condition colleague, they were not aware they would be subsequently completing another survey about a second-condition colleague. For the first-condition colleague, participants were asked to name the colleague, confirm how long they had known them, describe their relationship with them, and provide their colleague's gender. Participants then read a hypothetical scenario about their colleague's friend ("the accused," an indirect tie at work who they did not know) who had allegedly engaged in wrongdoing at work. They were asked to imagine that their colleague had asked them to support the accused and were then prompted to answer several questions, including whether they would grant their colleague's request to support the accused and engage in ethical voice on behalf of the indirect tie as well as a few exploratory measures. Participants then repeated the exercise for

Table 1. Overview of Studies and Summary of Findings

Study	Number of participants	Context	Evidence	Conditions	Support for hypotheses				
					Hypothesis 1 (main)		Hypothesis 2 (mediation)		Hypothesis 3 (moderation)
					Loyalty	A. Benevolence trust	B. Value align	C. Relational concerns	
1	530	Stimulus sample: seven types of UB	1 accusation	Loyal, Control	✓	—	—	—	
2	186	Sexual harassment	1 accusation	Loyal, Control	✓	✓	✓	—	
3	286	Sexual harassment	1 accusation	2 (Loyal, Control) × 2 (Divisive, Control)	✓	—	—	✓	
4	50	Financial misappropriation	1 accusation	Correlational (field study)	✓	✓	—	—	
Robustness test of Study 1									
S1	232	Sexual harassment	1 accusation	Loyal, Not Loyal	✓	—	—	—	
S2	161	Sexual harassment	1 accusation	Loyal, Not Loyal, Control	✓	—	—	—	
S3	201	Financial misappropriation	1 accusation	2 (Loyal, Not Loyal) × 2 (Broker, Not Broker)	✓	—	—	—	
Testing the generalizability of Hypothesis 1									
S4	149	Sexual harassment	2 accusations	Loyal, Not Loyal, Control	✓	—	—	—	
S5	142	Plagiarism	2 accusations	Loyal, Not Loyal, Control	✓	—	—	—	
S6	159	Sexual harassment	1 accusation plus public support	Loyal, Not Loyal, Control	✓	—	—	—	
S7	153	Sexual harassment	1 accusation plus video proof	Loyal, Not Loyal, Control	✓	—	—	—	
Total	2,249								

Notes. Overview of manuscript and SOM studies. “✓” confirms supported, “X” confirms not supported, and “—” means not applicable for study. “UB” stands for unethical behavior.

their second-condition colleague. Participants were randomly assigned to read that their colleague's close friend had been accused of one of seven types of wrongdoing, including sexual harassment, theft, false advertising, fraud, bribery, plagiarism, and dishonesty. These types of wrongdoing were selected from reviews of prior work on unethical behavior in the workplace (Near et al. 2004, Hofmann et al. 2018).

Measures

Manipulation Check. Participants were asked to evaluate their loyalty to each colleague by indicating to what extent they felt loyal to [colleague], felt committed to [colleague], and felt an obligation to [colleague] ($\alpha = 0.96$; 1 = not at all, 7 = extremely). The results of a paired samples *t*-test suggest that the manipulation was successful, as participants indicated being far more loyal to their colleague to whom they were loyal ($M = 5.73$, $SD = 1.13$) than their colleague they did not have a relationship with ($M = 3.02$, $SD = 1.63$, $t(529) = 35.63$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 1.93$).

Outcome Measures. The primary outcome measure was the likelihood that participants would grant their colleague's unethical request (granting request; 1 = extremely unlikely, 7 = extremely likely). To examine the nature of this support, two additional outcome measures were collected, including participants' willingness (1) to speak up publicly in support of the accused (promotive ethical voice), and (2) to speak up and condemn the accusations made against the accused (prohibitive ethical voice) (adapted from Chen and Treviño 2022; 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

Although we did not anticipate an interaction between the relationship to the broker manipulation and the type of wrongdoing manipulation on our outcome measures, we included two exploratory measures that we would use to probe a potential interaction. Specifically, we measured the (1) perceived moral intensity (Jones 1991) of the two decisions participants were asked to make: supporting their loyal colleague's request and supporting the request of their colleague they do not share a relationship with, and (2) the perceived importance of the ethicality concerning the wrongdoing (Robin et al. 1996). Details of these measures can be found in the Online Appendix.

Results

Descriptive statistics for Study 1 are shown in Table 2. A mixed ANOVA revealed there was not a significant interaction between relationship to broker and the type of wrongdoing for any of our three focal outcomes (Grant Request: $F(6, 523) = 0.47$, $p = 0.833$; Promotive Voice: $F(6, 523) = 0.12$, $p = 0.944$; Prohibitive Voice: $F(6, 523) = 1.04$, $p = 0.395$), and we therefore collapsed across type of wrongdoing in our subsequent analyses. We

conducted paired-sample *t*-tests to test the effect of relationship to broker on our three outcome measures.

In support of Hypothesis 1, participants indicated being significantly more likely to grant the broker's request when they were loyal to the broker ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 1.87$), compared with being just colleagues ($M = 2.39$, $SD = 1.57$, $t(529) = 22.06$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.86$). Further probing the implications of granting the request, they were also more likely to engage in promotive ethical voice on behalf of the accused when loyal to the broker ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 1.77$) compared with being just colleagues ($M = 2.29$, $SD = 1.49$), $t(529) = 17.56$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.71$) and more likely to engage in prohibitive ethical voice on behalf of the accused when loyal to the broker ($M = 3.52$, $SD = 1.77$) compared with being just colleagues ($M = 2.40$, $SD = 1.53$, $t(529) = 16.76$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.67$) (see Figure 1).

Discussion

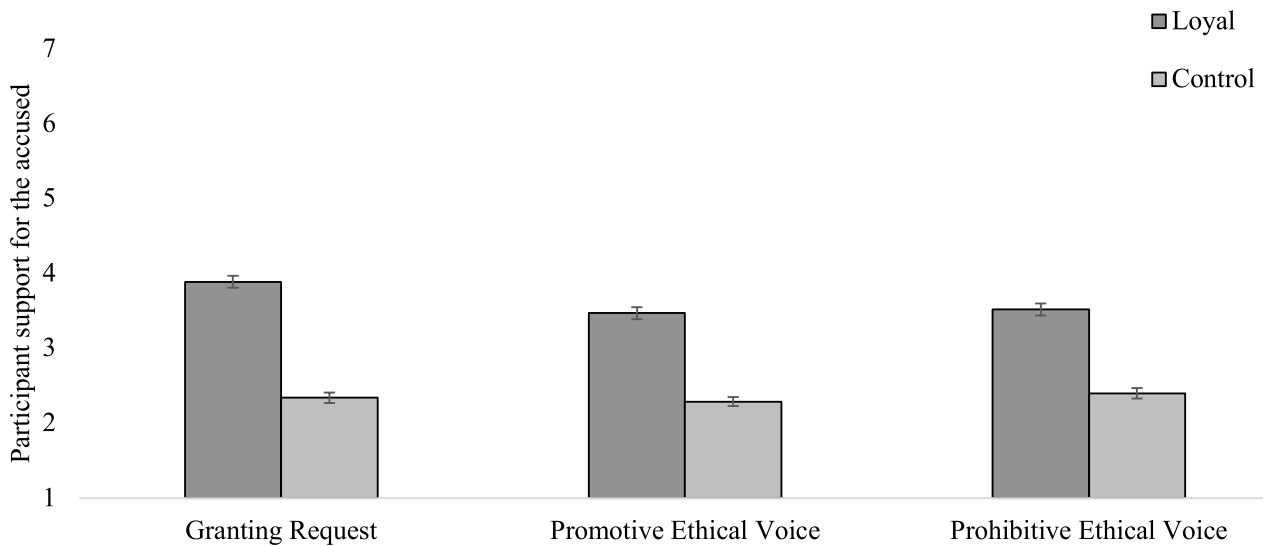
Study 1 found initial support for Hypothesis 1: employing stimulus sampling of a variety of different types of wrongdoing, we found that participants were far more likely to support the accused when they were loyal to the broker compared with when they were just colleagues. In addition, the results clarified the nature of this support by demonstrating that participants loyal to the broker were far more likely to engage in both promotive ethical voice (i.e., speaking up publicly in support of the accused) and prohibitive ethical voice (i.e., speaking up to condemn the accusations made against the accused) on behalf of the accused.

Robustness Tests

Three additional preregistered studies suggest the robustness of the findings reported in Study 1. First, in Study S1, we replicated all of the results of Study 1 comparing the loyalty condition to a condition where the individual is not loyal to the broker (rather than a control condition where they were just colleagues). Second, in Study S2, we examined an alternative outcome measure in which participants indicated what they *thought* an actor in the same situation would do (rather than what they themselves would do) and found consistent results to those of Studies 1 and S1. Finally, in Study S3, we examined whether participants would support the accused when the broker asked them (like in Study 1) and when the accused asked them directly without the

Table 2. Means, Standard Deviations, and Bivariate Correlations for Study 1

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1. Condition (1 = loyal, 0 = control)	0.50	0.50	—	—	—
2. Granting Request	3.14	1.88	0.40	—	—
3. Promotive Ethical Voice	3.88	1.74	0.34	0.85	—
4. Prohibitive Ethical Voice	2.96	1.75	0.32	0.83	0.87

Figure 1. Mean Levels of Support for the Accused by Relationship to Broker Condition in Study 1

Notes. Error bars represent the standard error of the mean. The likelihood of granting a request was assessed on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *extremely unlikely* to 7 = *extremely likely*. Promotive and prohibitive ethical voice were assessed on seven-point Likert scales ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*.

broker's intervention and found consistent results. In summary, we found consistent support for Hypothesis 1 regardless of whether the effects of participants' loyalty were compared with a control or to a not-loyal condition, regardless of whether they were asked what they would do in the situation or what they thought others would do, and regardless of whether the broker asked for their support or the accused bypassed the broker to ask for support directly. These results can be found in the Online Appendix.

Study 2

The aims of Study 2 were to replicate the findings of Study 1 and to test the mediation, Hypotheses 2a–c.

Method

Participants. As preregistered, an a priori power analysis based on an effect size observed in piloting suggested that a minimum sample size of 75 participants was needed to achieve 80% statistical power (two-tailed; $\alpha = 0.05$). However, given sample size recommendations for replication studies (Simmons et al. 2011), we aimed to recruit 200 participants (100 per cell). We therefore recruited 200 participants from Prolific, but 14 participants failed the attention checks, leaving a final analytical sample size of 186 participants who were U.S.-based full-time employees (51% female, 47% male, 1% nonbinary; $M_{\text{age}} = 40.71$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 11.73$; 18 industries represented).

Procedure. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two relationship conditions (Loyal versus

Control). They read a scenario that varied by relationship condition. In part 1 of the scenario, they were asked to imagine working for a large tech company with a fellow colleague at work who they were either loyal to (Loyal condition) or had no relationship with (Control condition). Participants read that this colleague was close friends with someone in their workplace who they do not personally have a relationship with. Participants then completed a measure of perceived group cohesiveness for the three individuals in the scenario, including themselves. In part 2 of the scenario, they then read that their colleague's close friend was accused of sexual harassment at work and that their colleague requested that they support the accused. Participants then answered several questions about the scenario and how they would respond to the request.

Measures

Outcome Measures. Our outcome measures were identical to those used in Study 1. Participants indicated the likelihood they would grant their colleague's request, engage in promotive ethical voice on behalf of the accused, and engage in prohibitive ethical voice on behalf of the accused.

Mediator Measures. After reading the scenario and evaluating whether they would grant the colleague's request and engage in ethical voice on the accused's behalf, participants evaluated the following measures designed to tap into the mechanisms for granting the request (they also evaluated additional measures for exploratory purposes, which we report in the Online Appendix):

Benevolence-Based Trust in the Broker. Participants indicated to what extent (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*): “[the broker] is concerned about my welfare,” “my needs and desires are very important to [the broker],” and “[the broker] really looks out for what is important to me,” ($\alpha = 0.98$; Mayer and Davis 1999).

Integrity-Based Trust in the Broker. Although we did not theorize the role of integrity-based trust in the broker in mediating the loyalty effect, we preregistered including it in this study. Participants indicated to what extent (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*): “I never have to wonder whether [the broker] will stick to their word,” “[the broker] tries hard to be fair in dealings with others,” and “[the broker] tries hard to ensure their behaviors are consistent with their words” (Mayer and Davis 1999).

Perceived Value Alignment with the Broker. Participants indicated to what extent they perceive their personal moral values as in alignment with the broker’s by evaluating (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*): “my values are closely aligned to [the broker’s] values,” and “my moral principles are similar to those of [the broker],” ($r = 0.96$; adapted from Abdurahman et al. 2023).

Relational Concerns with the Broker. Participants evaluated the relational concerns with the broker for not granting their request. Specifically, participants indicated, “if I chose not to support [the accused], I would be:” “... worried about damaging my reputation with [the broker],” “... concerned that [the broker] would judge me as disloyal or untrustworthy,” and “... concerned about harming my relationship with [the broker]” ($\alpha = 0.97$; 1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

Results

Descriptive statistics for Study 2 are shown in Table 3.

In support of Hypothesis 1 and replicating the results of Study 1, participants indicated being significantly more likely to grant the broker’s request when they were loyal to the broker ($M = 2.89$, $SD = 1.84$) compared with when

they were just colleagues ($M = 1.95$, $SD = 1.29$, $t(161) = 4.03$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.60$). Further probing the implications of granting the request, participants indicated being significantly more likely to speak up publicly in support of the accused (promotive ethical voice) when they were loyal to the broker ($M = 2.60$, $SD = 1.95$) compared with when they were just colleagues ($M = 1.95$, $SD = 1.31$, $t(169) = 2.95$, $p = 0.004$, $d = 0.44$). Participants also indicated being significantly more likely to speak up and condemn the accusations made against the accused (prohibitive ethical voice) when they were loyal to the broker ($M = 2.70$, $SD = 1.74$) compared with when they were just colleagues ($M = 2.19$, $SD = 1.39$, $t(172) = 2.22$, $p = 0.028$, $d = 0.33$) (see Figure 2).

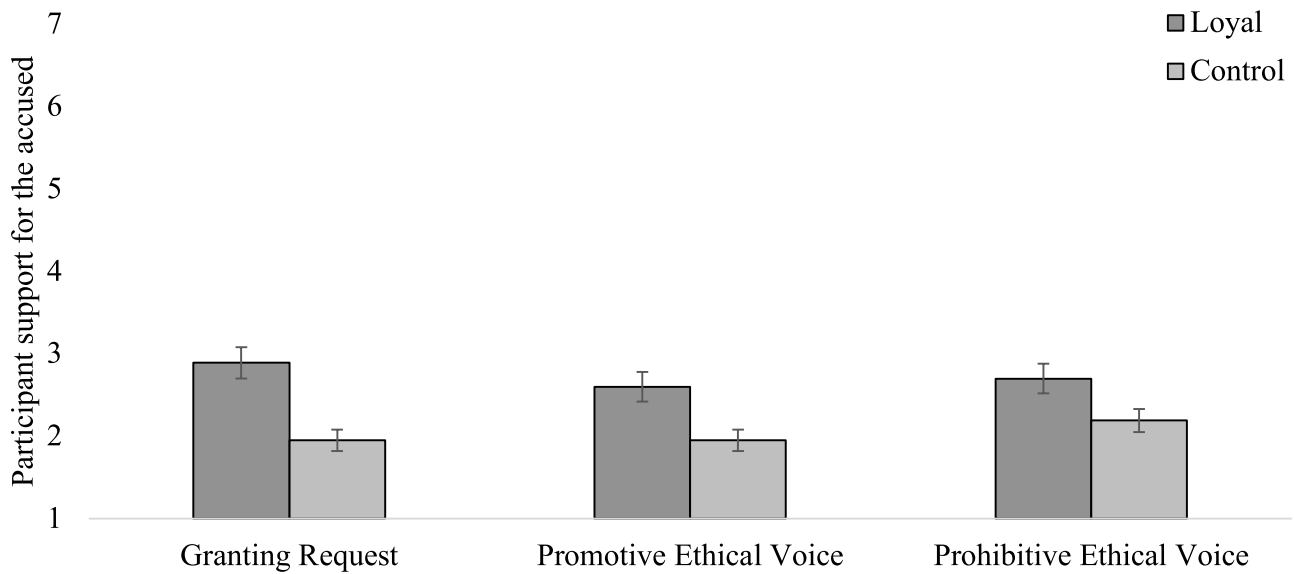
Mediation. We conducted bootstrapped analyses of the conditional indirect effects of the four proposed mediators (benevolence-based trust in the broker, integrity-based trust in the broker, perceived value alignment with the broker, and reputational concerns with the broker for not supporting the accused) on the effect of relationship to broker condition (Loyal versus Control) on each outcome measure.

For the likelihood of granting the request, we found that the 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals (CIs) for the simultaneous indirect effects of three of the four proposed mediators excluded zero, including that of benevolence-based trust in the broker ($B = 0.59$; *standard error* (SE) = 0.14, $CI_{95\%} = [0.32, 0.86]$, $p < 0.001$), perceived value alignment with the broker ($B = 0.41$; $SE = 0.11$, $CI_{95\%} = [0.20, 0.63]$, $p < 0.001$), and relational concerns with the broker for not supporting the accused ($B = 0.40$; $SE = 0.13$, $CI_{95\%} = [0.15, 0.65]$, $p = 0.002$). However, the 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals for the simultaneous indirect effect of integrity-based trust in the broker included zero ($B = 0.04$; $SE = 0.11$, $CI_{95\%} = [-0.18, 0.25]$, $p = 0.738$).

For promotive ethical voice, we found that the 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals for the simultaneous indirect effects of the same three out of four proposed mediators excluded zero including that of benevolence-based trust in the broker ($B = 0.58$; $SE = 0.13$, $CI_{95\%} = [0.32, 0.84]$, $p < 0.001$), perceived value alignment with the broker ($B = 0.38$; $SE = 0.10$, $CI_{95\%} = [0.18, 0.57]$,

Table 3. Means, Standard Deviations, and Bivariate Correlations for Study 2

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Condition (1 = loyal, 0 = control)	0.50	0.50	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
2. Granting Request	2.41	1.65	0.29	—	—	—	—	—	—
3. Promotive Ethical Voice	2.27	1.54	0.21	0.87	—	—	—	—	—
4. Prohibitive Ethical Voice	2.44	1.59	0.16	0.74	0.78	—	—	—	—
5. Benevolence-Based Trust in Broker	2.85	1.73	0.55	0.57	0.54	0.46	—	—	—
6. Integrity-Based Trust in Broker	3.79	1.60	0.52	0.53	0.50	0.41	0.76	—	—
7. Perceived Value Alignment with Broker	3.53	1.75	0.42	0.57	0.54	0.40	0.67	0.73	—
8. Relational Concerns with Broker	3.70	1.88	0.54	0.45	0.40	0.34	0.51	0.55	0.45

Figure 2. Support for the Accused by the Relationship to Broker Condition in Study 2

Notes. Error bars represent standard errors of the mean. The likelihood of granting the request was assessed on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *extremely unlikely* to 7 = *extremely likely*. Promotive and prohibitive ethical voices were assessed on seven-point Likert scales ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*.

$p < 0.001$), and relational concerns with the broker for not supporting the accused ($B = 0.33$; $SE = 0.12$, $CI_{95\%} = [0.10, 0.57]$, $p = 0.006$). Again, the 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals for the indirect effect of integrity-based trust in the broker included zero ($B = 0.06$; $SE = 0.11$, $CI_{95\%} = [-0.15, 0.27]$, $p = 0.584$).

For *prohibitive ethical voice*, we found that the 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals for the simultaneous indirect effects of just two of the four proposed mediators excluded zero, including that of benevolence-based trust in the broker ($B = 0.60$; $SE = 0.15$, $CI_{95\%} = [0.31, 0.89]$, $p < 0.001$) and relational concerns with the broker for not supporting the accused ($B = 0.33$; $SE = 0.13$, $CI_{95\%} = [0.07, 0.59]$, $p = 0.014$). This time, the 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals for the indirect effect of perceived value alignment with the broker ($B = 0.18$; $SE = 0.10$, $CI_{95\%} = [-0.01, 0.37]$, $p = 0.066$), as well as that for integrity-based trust in the broker ($B = 0.11$; $SE = 0.12$, $CI_{95\%} = [-0.13, 0.35]$, $p = 0.352$) both included zero.

Discussion

Study 2 replicated the results of Study 1 in a between-subjects design by finding evidence that participants were far more likely to support the accused and engage in ethical voice on behalf of the accused when loyal to the broker compared with when they were just colleagues. Study 2 extended the findings of Study 1 by finding evidence for the proposed mechanisms: benevolence-based trust in the broker, perceived value alignment with the broker, and relational concerns with the broker for not supporting the accused all explained significant variance in the relationship between the

relationship to the broker and the three outcome variables (though the mediating effect of perceived value alignment on prohibitive voice did not reach statistical significance). However, no support was found for the mediating role of integrity-based trust in the broker.

Study 3

The goal of Study 3 was to test moderation Hypothesis 3, exploring how the broker's history of brokering influences intentions to support the indirect tie when loyal to the broker.

Method

Participants. As preregistered, an a priori power analysis based on an effect size observed in piloting suggested that approximately 36 participants per cell were needed to achieve 80% statistical power (two-tailed; $\alpha = 0.05$). However, given sample size recommendations about replication studies (Simmons et al. 2011), we aimed to recruit 400 participants (100 per cell). We therefore recruited 400 participants from Prolific, of which 114 failed basic attention checks and were removed, leaving a final analytic sample size of 286 participants who were U.S.-based full-time employees (49% female, 34% male, 1% nonbinary; $M_{\text{age}} = 39.21$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 11.67$; 20 industries represented).

Procedure. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in a 2 (Relationship to Broker: loyal, control) \times 2 (Broker's Brokering History: divisive, control) between-subjects factorial design. The relationship to broker manipulation was similar to that used in

Study 2, where participants were asked to imagine that they worked for a fictitious technology company and had a colleague they were either loyal to (Loyalty condition) or had no relationship with (Control condition). Participants then went on to read the same scenario they read in Study 2, where they learned that their colleague had a close friend, who they did not know and who was accused of sexually harassing someone at work. To manipulate the broker's history of brokering, participants either learned nothing about the broker's past history of brokering (Control condition) or learned that the broker had a history of creating conflicts between people (Divisive condition) at the end of the scenario.

Measures

Participants responded to the same outcome measures used in Studies 1 and 2, where they indicated the likelihood they would grant the broker's request and engage in promotive and prohibitive ethical voice on behalf of the accused. Participants also completed measures of the four proposed mediators from Study 2: benevolence-based trust in the broker ($\alpha = 0.97$), integrity-based trust in the broker ($\alpha = 0.92$), perceived value alignment with the broker ($r = 0.95$), and relational concerns with the broker for not granting their request ($\alpha = 0.95$). These measures were included to explore how the broker history manipulation would impact them, and we report the results in the Online Appendix.

Results

Descriptive statistics for Study 3 are displayed in Table 4, and means with standard error bars are displayed in Figure 3. We conducted a 2 (Relationship to Broker: loyal, control) \times 2 (Broker's Brokering History: divisive, control) ANOVA for each of the three outcome measures and then conducted planned contrasts to test Hypotheses 1 and 3.

For the main outcome, granting the request, we found a significant main effect of relationship to broker, $F(1,282) = 14.02, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.048$, and a significant main effect of broker's history of brokering, $F(1,282) = 8.15, p = 0.005, \eta^2 = 0.028$, but not a significant

interaction $F(1,282) = 0.81, p = 0.370, \eta^2 = 0.003$. We conducted planned contrasts to test Hypotheses 1 and 3. In support of Hypothesis 1, and replicating Studies 1 and 2, when there was no information about the broker's brokering history, participants indicated being more willing to support the broker's request when they were loyal to the broker ($M = 2.45, SD = 1.70$) compared with when they were just colleagues ($M = 1.72, SD = 1.43, t(282) = 3.33, p = 0.001, d = 0.469$). In support of Hypothesis 3, when participants were loyal to the broker, they were less likely to support their request when the broker had a history of divisive brokering ($M = 1.86, SD = 1.12$) compared with no history of divisive brokering ($M = 2.45, SD = 1.70, t(282) = 2.65, p = 0.008, d = 0.412$).

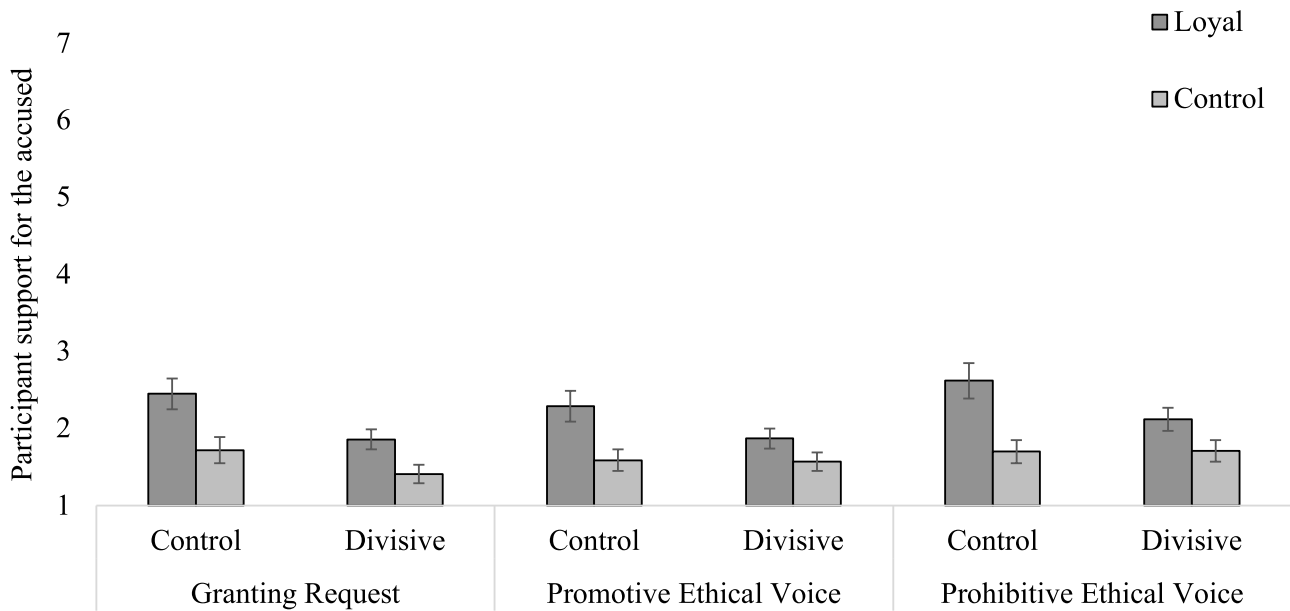
For engaging in promotive ethical voice, we found a significant main effect of relationship to broker, $F(1,282) = 10.53, p = 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.048$, but not a significant main effect of the broker's history of brokering, $F(1,282) = 2.09, p = 0.149, \eta^2 = 0.007$, nor a significant interaction $F(1,282) = 1.58, p = 0.210, \eta^2 = 0.006$. We conducted planned contrasts to test Hypotheses 1 and 3. In support of Hypothesis 1 and replicating Studies 1 and 2, when there was no information about the broker's brokering history, participants indicated being more willing to engage in a promotive ethical voice when they were loyal to the broker ($M = 2.29, SD = 1.74$) compared with when they were just colleagues ($M = 1.59, SD = 1.19, t(282) = 3.23, p = 0.001, d = 0.465$). In support of Hypothesis 3, when participants were loyal to the broker, they were slightly less likely to engage in promotive ethical voice when the broker had a history of divisive brokering ($M = 1.87, SD = 1.12$) compared with no history of divisive brokering ($M = 2.29, SD = 1.74, t(282) = 1.91, p = 0.057, d = 0.283$).

For engaging in prohibitive ethical voice, we found a significant main effect of relationship to broker, $F(1,282) = 16.22, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.055$, but no significant main effect of broker's history of brokering, $F(1,282) = 1.51, p = 0.221, \eta^2 = 0.005$, nor a significant interaction, $F(1,282) = 1.61, p = 0.205, \eta^2 = 0.006$. We conducted planned contrasts to test Hypotheses 1 and 3. In support of Hypothesis 1 and replicating Studies 1 and 2, when there was no information about the broker's brokering history,

Table 4. Means, Standard Deviations, and Bivariate Correlations for Study 3

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Relationship Condition (1 = loyal, 0 = control)	0.50	0.50	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
2. Brokering History Condition (1 = divisive, 0 = control)	0.50	0.50	0.01	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
3. Granting Request	1.86	1.39	0.21	-0.16	—	—	—	—	—	—
4. Promotive Ethical Voice	1.83	1.33	0.19	-0.08	0.83	—	—	—	—	—
5. Prohibitive Ethical Voice	2.06	1.50	0.23	-0.07	0.63	0.72	—	—	—	—
6. Benevolence-Based Trust in Broker	2.50	1.65	0.55	-0.29	0.49	0.43	0.36	—	—	—
7. Integrity-Based Trust in Broker	2.96	1.54	0.38	-0.56	0.48	0.40	0.30	0.73	—	—
8. Perceived Value Alignment with Broker	2.54	1.60	0.31	-0.47	0.53	0.48	0.34	0.69	0.78	—
9. Reputational Concerns with Broker	3.43	1.82	0.56	-0.12	0.47	0.36	0.33	0.52	0.47	0.43

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Figure 3. Support for Accused by Relationship to Broker Condition and Broker History Condition in Study 3

Notes. Error bars represent standard errors of the mean. The likelihood of granting request was assessed on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *extremely unlikely* to 7 = *extremely likely*. Promotive and prohibitive ethical voice were assessed on seven-point Likert scales ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*.

participants indicated being more willing to engage in prohibitive ethical voice when they were loyal to the broker ($M = 2.62$, $SD = 1.74$) compared with when they were just colleagues ($M = 1.70$, $SD = 1.33$, $t(282) = 3.80$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.552$). However, there was only directional support of Hypothesis 3, as when participants were loyal to the broker, they were less likely to support their request when the broker had a history of divisive brokering ($M = 2.12$, $SD = 1.1.29$) compared with no history of divisive brokering ($M = 2.62$, $SD = 1.93$), but this difference did not reach statistical significance ($t(282) = 1.77$, $p = 0.079$, $d = 0.262$).

Finally, per our preregistration, we conducted exploratory analyses on all mechanism measures and found results consistent with the outcome measures: when participants were loyal to the broker with a history of divisive brokering, they thought the broker was lower in benevolence-based and integrity-based trust, perceived lower value alignment with the broker, and reported slightly lower relational concerns for not supporting the broker compared with when loyal to a broker with no history of divisive brokering (though we note that the difference on relational concerns did not reach statistical significance). The full write-up of the results can be found in the Online Appendix.

Discussion

Study 3 replicated the results of Studies 1 and 2 by finding evidence that participants were far more likely to support the accused and engage in ethical voice on behalf of the

accused when loyal to the broker compared with when they were just colleagues. Study 3 extended these findings by demonstrating an important boundary condition around them: the broker's history of brokering. When participants learned that the colleague to whom they are loyal had a history of divisive brokering (i.e., brokering conflicts and rivalries between two otherwise disconnected individuals), this reduced their willingness to support the broker's request compared with when loyal to a broker with no such history. This same pattern emerged for willingness to engage in promotive and prohibitive ethical voice on behalf of the indirect tie, but the difference did not reach statistical significance.

Study 4

The aim of Study 4 was to test Hypothesis 1 in a field context where we could explore people's actual behavior. Specifically, rather than focus on what people say they would do in the situation (Studies 1–3) for an indirect tie, in Study 4, we explore actors' actual behavior in a context where many people are loyal to one another, that is, fraternities.

Method

Participants. We approached three fraternities at the same university to take part in the research. One fraternity agreed to participate, and the other two declined, citing the COVID-19 pandemic. All members of the fraternity were eligible to take part in the study except for the fraternity president, who helped recruit fraternity

members, and the broker, a senior member of the fraternity recruited to perform the “broker” role, and four other members of the fraternity who were familiar with the research. In total, 60 members of the fraternity were eligible to take part in the study as “actors,” of whom 50 (all male, $M_{\text{age}} = 20.04$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 1.12$) completed relevant measures of loyalty and were therefore considered to be participants in the study in accordance with the preregistered methodology.

Procedure. The study involved a member of the fraternity (the broker) requesting support from their fraternity brothers (the actors) on behalf of a friend of the broker (the accused) who fraternity brothers did not know directly, who had been accused of misappropriating the financial funds of an on-campus college group. A separate survey sent by the house president collected measures of loyalty to the broker, interpersonal trust, and general risk.

Broker Selection. The broker was selected by the fraternity president on the basis of the following criteria: (1) the broker had at least one year of membership in the fraternity so that other brothers knew who he was; (2) the broker did not, nor ever had, held a significant position of authority in the fraternity (e.g., house president or house treasurer) so that brothers would not feel compelled to comply with his requests; (3) the broker was not the most popular nor least known member of the fraternity so that there would be variation in the degree of brothers’ loyalty to the broker.

Broker’s Request. The broker was tasked with sending separate emails to each of the 60 eligible brothers, requesting them to sign a petition on behalf of a close friend who was being accused of financial misappropriation. Each email included a link to a Google Doc petition where the brother could provide their support by writing their name, signature, and date. Importantly, each brother was sent a unique Google Doc link, which was only accessible to that brother and the experimenter. This allowed us to mitigate peer effects, as every participant opened their unique link and only saw the requestor’s name and signature in the petition. Each brother would therefore be the second signatory to the petition if they chose to sign. Three days after the initial request was made, a reminder email was sent by the broker to all brothers.

Posttask Survey. One week after the initial request, brothers’ access to the Google Docs was ended, and the house president sent all members of the fraternity an ostensibly unrelated survey to complete. The survey included measures of loyalty to the broker, interpersonal trust, risk, and demographic characteristics. The house president sent several reminder emails in the subsequent week requesting house members complete the

survey. Of the 60 eligible brothers who received a request to support from the confederate, 50 completed the survey. Stimuli are included in the appendix.

Measures

The focal outcome measure comprised participants signing their name on the petition of support for the accused, coded 1 if participants signed the petition and 0 otherwise. Participants also evaluated how loyal they were to the broker (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*), which they evaluated alongside their loyalty to three other brothers in the house chosen at random to maintain the cover story. We also included several additional measures that participants evaluated to control for when assessing the effects of loyalty to the broker on their willingness to sign. Participants reported how much they liked and knew the brother (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*) and how long they had known each named brother (in semesters), as well as several measures relating to their relationship with their fraternity. Participants also evaluated their trust in the accused and the perceived risk in supporting the accused as potential mechanisms that we summarize in the Online Appendix.

Results

The descriptive statistics for Study 4 are shown in Table 5.

Twenty of the fifty participants (40%) signed the Google Doc providing support for their indirect tie—the confederate’s accused friend. Of the 10 eligible brothers who failed to complete the follow-up survey, two (20%) signed their support.

To evaluate the effect of loyalty to the broker on brothers’ support, we regressed the decision to sign (versus not; sign = 1, not sign = 0) on their reported loyalty to the broker. As displayed in Model 1 in Table 6, we found that loyalty was a significant predictor of signing, $B = 0.94$, $SE = 0.36$, $p = 0.009$, odds ratio = 2.56, providing support for Hypothesis 1. To test the robustness of this effect, we repeated the analysis controlling for how well participants reported knowing the broker, liking the broker, and for how many semesters they have known the broker, and found that loyalty remained a significant predictor of signing support, $B = 1.09$, $SE = 0.40$, $p = 0.007$, odds ratio = 2.98 (see Model 2 in Table 6). None of the controls

Table 5. Means, Standard Deviations, and Bivariate Correlations for Study 4

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. <i>Signed</i>	0.40	0.50	—	—	—	—	—
2. <i>Loyalty to Broker</i>	5.98	1.08	0.40	—	—	—	—
3. <i>Knows Broker Well</i>	6.00	0.99	−0.17	0.17	—	—	—
4. <i>Likes Broker</i>	6.18	1.14	0.01	0.22	0.62	—	—
5. <i>Time Known Broker</i>	3.48	1.69	0.03	−0.10	−0.16	−0.28	—
6. <i>Loyalty to House</i>	6.27	1.08	0.35	0.38	0.08	0.05	−0.24

significantly predicted signing support. Finally, when participants' loyalty to the house was added as a control, the effect of loyalty to the broker remained marginally significant, $B = 0.81$, $SE = 0.44$, $p = 0.070$, odds ratio = 2.23 (see Model 3 in Table 6).

Taken together, the results demonstrate that the obligations of loyalty transfer to indirect ties in ethical dilemmas, in a real-world context where loyalty is highly valued.

Testing the Generalizability of Hypothesis 1

We conducted several additional studies to assess the generalizability of Hypothesis 1, which we report in detail in the Online Appendix. We explored how different and stronger evidence (in the form of additional accusations, public support for the victim, and videotaped evidence), which often comes to light in these cases of wrongdoing, might impact the effects of loyalty on judgments of an actor's support for the indirect tie accused of wrongdoing. In Studies S4 and S5, we examined whether the effects of loyalty on an actor's support for an indirect tie accused of sexual harassment (Study S4) or plagiarism (Study S5) would continue when stronger evidence in the form of a second accusation from another alleged victim was made. In Studies S6 and S7, we changed the stronger evidence provided in Study S4 to public support for the alleged victim of sexual harassment from a third party (Study S6) and definitive videotaped proof of sexual harassment (Study S7). We found consistent support for Hypothesis 1 in these studies (see the Online Appendix and Figure 4).

General Discussion

Across 11 preregistered studies, including 10 experiments (Studies 1–3 and S1–S7) and a field study (Study 4), we found that people were more likely to support an

indirect tie accused of wrongdoing when they were loyal to the broker that connected them compared with when they were just colleagues with the broker, as well as compared with when they were not loyal to the broker. We also found support for our mediation hypotheses: actors were more likely to support an indirect tie accused of wrongdoing because loyalty to the broker connecting them increased benevolence-based trust in the broker, perceived value alignment with the broker, and relational concerns with the broker for not supporting the accused. Finally, we found evidence for the moderating role of the broker's reputation: people were much less willing to support an indirect tie accused of wrongdoing when loyal to a broker who had a history of divisive brokering.

To test the robustness of the effect, we manipulated several different aspects of the context including the nature of wrongdoing, who made the request, and the strength and type of evidence against the accused. We found that loyalty increased willingness to support the accused whether the request for support came from the broker acting on behalf of the indirect tie (Studies 1–4; S1–S7) or directly from the indirect tie accused of wrongdoing (Study S3). We also found support for the effect in a range of accusations, including sexual harassment, theft, false advertising, fraud, bribery, plagiarism, dishonesty, and financial misappropriation. The effect was also robust to stronger evidence being provided, whether that information comprised a second accusation from a different alleged victim (Studies S4–S5), additional public support for the victim from a third party (Study S6), or definitive videotape evidence that proved the accused was guilty (Study S7). Moreover, given the gendered nature of some of our scenarios, we conducted exploratory analyses using participant gender to see if gender moderated the results. In Study 1,

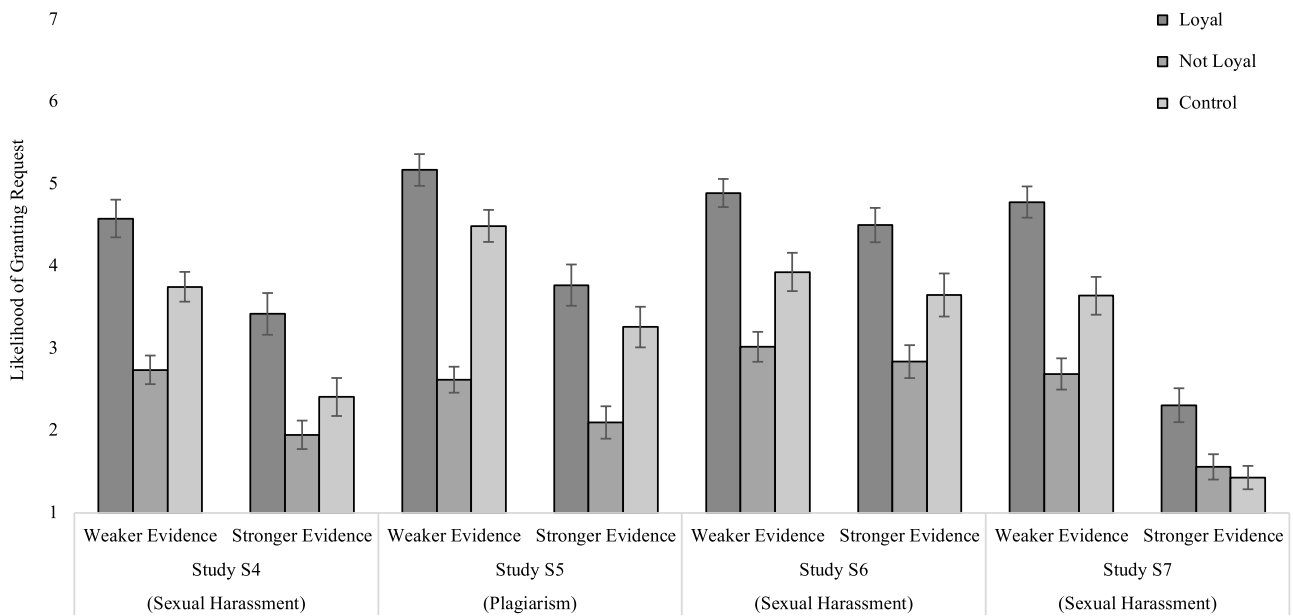
Table 6. Effect of Loyalty to Broker on Pledging Support for Study 4

Predictor	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Estimate (SE)	Odds ratio	Estimate (SE)	Odds ratio	Estimate (SE)	Odds ratio
<i>Loyalty to Broker</i>	0.94** (0.36)	2.56	1.09 ** (0.40)	2.98	0.81^ (0.44)	2.23
<i>Knows Broker Well</i>	—	—	−0.80 (0.45)	0.45	−0.90^ (0.47)	0.41
<i>Likes Broker</i>	—	—	0.24 (0.37)	1.27	0.43 (0.40)	1.54
<i>Time Known Broker</i>	—	—	0.08 (0.20)	1.08	0.23 (0.22)	1.26
<i>Loyalty to House</i>	—	—	—	—	1.27^ (0.70)	3.58
Log likelihood	−29.24		−27.25		−24.50	
McFaddens R^2	0.13		0.19		0.27	
Cox and Snell R^2	0.16		0.23		0.31	

Note. Standard error is represented in parenthesis underneath each estimate.

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$; ^ $p < 0.10$.

Figure 4. Likelihood of Granting Unethical Requests for Weaker and Stronger Evidence Across Studies



Notes. The likelihood of granting unethical requests was measured on seven-point Likert scales across studies (1 = *extremely unlikely*, 7 = *extremely likely*). Error bars represent the standard error of the mean. Weaker evidence in each study comprised the first accusation. Stronger evidence in Studies S4 and S5 comprised a second accusation from another alleged victim; in Study S6, it comprised public support from a third party; and in Study S7, it comprised videotape evidence of the alleged misconduct.

both within the sexual harassment scenario and across all scenarios, we found support for Hypothesis 1 within both men and women (we note that very few participants reported identifying with another gender, so we conducted analyses comparing men and women). However, across scenarios, men indicated slightly greater likelihood of granting the broker's request than did women in both the loyal and control conditions. We report these exploratory analyses in the Online Appendix.

Contributions and Implications

This research makes several important contributions to the research literature and has significant practical implications for groups and organizations. First, this work contributes to research on loyalty in two ways. The prevailing assumption in loyalty research is that loyalty obligates one to support the person to whom one is directly loyal and that this person is the only beneficiary of that loyalty (e.g., Hildreth et al. 2016, Hildreth and Anderson 2018, McManus et al. 2020). Prior work has failed to consider how loyalty might operate through a broader social network, perhaps because by definition loyalty's effects are limited to specific others to whom one is more partial, but this is surprising given the preponderance of indirect ties within social networks (Granovetter 1973, Burt et al. 2013, Kelley et al. 2003, Halevy et al. 2019, Costello and Srivastava 2021). The research presented here begins to address this lacuna in the literature and pushes against this prevailing assumption by demonstrating how loyalty can

actually obligate someone to support an indirect tie, who they do not know, and who is accused of wrongdoing. In addition, this work demonstrates an important moderation effect to the obligations of loyalty, at least to indirect ties. Existing work on loyalty assumes that loyalty always obligates people to do things to benefit their loyal ties, which is why a growing body of research finds people engaging in unethical behavior to help and protect their loyal ties (Hildreth et al. 2016, Lee and Holyoak 2020, Weidman et al. 2020, Berry et al. 2021, Hildreth 2024). However, here we demonstrate how someone's previously divisive behavior can negatively impact how people loyal to them view them and what they are willing to do for them. This suggests that perhaps the reputation of someone to whom one is loyal can, in some contexts, reduce one's willingness to fulfill certain loyalty-based obligations to them. Together, these findings help to explain how webs of deceit can proliferate in social networks and between otherwise disconnected individuals.

Second, our work contributes to research on brokering in two ways. First, our work takes an alter-centric view of a triadic brokering configuration, in which a broker places an alter into a moral dilemma that they have to navigate. Taking an alter-centric perspective allows us to better understand when and why an alter may (or may not) engage with a broker's request and render the brokerage successful. This perspective builds on brokering and social networks research, which has predominantly centered the broker's perspective in understanding

brokering processes (Kwon et al. 2020, Brass 2022), adding to a developing line of research on the alter-centric perspective (Kleinbaum et al. 2015). Second, we contribute to work on brokering orientations (Halevy et al. 2020), which suggests that people can implement various types of brokering orientations, and that these orientations “... are likely to be mutually exclusive within a given triadic configuration... [but] are not mutually exclusive personality types” (Halevy et al. 2020, p. 8). This suggests that brokers can implement different brokering orientations in different situations, but previous work has yet to consider how past use of a brokering orientation can shape responses to brokering with a different orientation. Our work demonstrates a positive consequence (at least from an organizational perspective) of an otherwise negative brokering orientation. Specifically, we demonstrate that brokers with a history of divisive brokering, creating conflicts between the people they broker, might be less effective at brokering, and in this context, less effective at eliciting support for an indirect tie accused of wrongdoing, regardless of the strength of relationship they have with those they request support from. Although this research focused on facilitating cooperation to support someone accused of wrongdoing (i.e., negative domain), future work might consider how a history of divisive brokering may impact a broker’s ability to facilitate cooperation in positive domains such as innovation and creativity, as it is possible that utilizing a divisive orientation in the past weakens a broker’s ability to facilitate cooperation across positive and negative domains in the future.

Third, our work contributes to research at the intersection of social norm theory and moral psychology. Previous research suggests that social norms guide how people think about right and wrong (Zlatev et al. 2019, Berry and Lucas 2024) and that moral dilemmas highlight descriptive norms about the situation that help determine whether to engage in (un)ethical behavior (Moore and Gino 2013). For example, people tend to engage in unethical behavior when someone like them has done the same (Gino et al. 2009). However, this research focuses on contexts where the person deciding what to do is in a “right-wrong” moral dilemma where they have a self-interested reason to engage in unethical behavior (e.g., a financial incentive), which motivates them to look for a reason to satisfy their interest (i.e., a descriptive norm). We advance this work by demonstrating how “right-right” moral dilemmas, and specifically loyalty dilemmas (Kidder 1995), can reveal both descriptive norms and relational injunctive norms to the actor about the situation. In the current research, the descriptive norms manifested in increases in benevolence-based trust in the broker and greater perceived value alignment with the broker, whereas relational injunctive norms raised the actor’s relational concerns with the broker for not granting their request. This work advances what we know at the

intersection of social norms and ethics, demonstrating how certain types of moral dilemmas reveal different types of social norms that shape behavior.

Fourth, our work contributes to the growing body of research on ethical voice (Chen and Treviño 2023). Much of what we know about ethical voice has focused on how ethical voice is perceived in organizations, focusing on when and why employees support different types of ethical voice (Chen and Treviño 2022), as well as how such voice can lead to retaliation versus not (Wellman et al. 2016, Kundro and Rothbard 2023). We build on this prior work by exploring how and why people will engage in forms of ethical voice on behalf of an indirect tie accused of wrongdoing, based on their relationship to a direct tie who connects them. Moreover, our work answers a recent call for research on specific forms of voice behaviors at work and, in particular, ethical voice (Morrison 2023).

Finally, our work has several practical implications for organizations. Unethical behavior and corruption can proliferate in organizations when others enable or fail to act on such wrongdoing. Indeed, the cost of such cover-ups is extremely high for organizations (King and Hermodson 2000, Treviño et al. 2014). Previous work has established the role of loyalty between direct ties in facilitating unethical behavior (Berry et al. 2021), as well as the potential solutions to this issue (Hildreth et al. 2016); however, the current work highlights that this narrow focus may address only one part of a much broader problem. As we have shown in the current work, loyalty can have a network effect, such that those indirectly tied to perpetrators are affected by their loyal obligations to others and can feel compelled to help and facilitate the unethical behavior of indirect ties, even when those brokering such relationships are unaware. Thus, organizational solutions that focus narrowly on the corrupting effects of loyalty between direct ties may be doomed to failure and must therefore be expanded to consider the broader effects of loyalty on wider networks in the workplace.

Limitations and Future Directions

In the current research, we found support for one potential moderator, that is, the broker’s history of divisive brokering, but failed to find support for a second moderator, that is, the broker’s split loyalties or the relative strength of the broker’s alliance with the actor compared with that with the accused. In pilot testing, we explored whether knowledge that the broker valued their alliance with the accused more highly than their alliance with the actor would reduce the actor’s willingness to comply with the broker’s request. However, the results of the pilot study did not support this prediction, though we note that the pilot study and analyses were exploratory. Future research should explore additional moderators for the effect. For example, whether the

effects of interpersonal loyalty apply in other loyalty dilemmas, such as conflicts between competing loyalties, where interpersonal loyalty with the broker conflicts with their loyalty to the organization. When the broker calls upon the individual's loyalty to support the accused, they might see supporting the accused as negatively impacting the broader organization and be less likely to support the accused in light of their loyalty to the organization (i.e., a conflict between loyalties may reduce willingness to fulfill one's specific loyalty-based obligations). Future work might also consider how the effort required to support the accused could moderate the effects. Our work drew on the voice literature to focus on verbal expressions of support, specifically ethical voice (Chen and Treviño 2022). However, there are a variety of other types of behavior that people might engage in to support someone to whom they are loyal that range in their effort (e.g., Lee and Holyoak 2020, McManus et al. 2020, Weidman et al. 2020). Perhaps as the effort required to support an indirect tie increases, the actor's willingness to see the behavior as falling within their obligations to the broker reduces, undermining their willingness to support the accused. Future work might also consider how manipulating a broker's ability to hold the actor accountable may moderate the effect. As our results indicate, one reason why loyal actors grant the broker's request is because of the relational concerns for not granting the request that their loyalty induces; that is, they appear concerned about being held accountable by the broker for failing to fulfill their loyalty-based obligations. Thus, if brokers cannot or will not be able to hold the actor accountable for their actions, perhaps because actors' actions are made in private, then actors' relational concerns may be reduced and their willingness to support the indirect tie diminished. Finally, future work might consider how certain types of relationships between the broker and accused affect the results. In all studies, information about the accused is limited in that participants only learn that the broker is close friends with the accused. Given that our results are all about obligations of loyalty to the broker transferring to the accused, we do not think that degrees of closeness between the broker and accused would impact the results. However, it is possible that a relationship between broker and accused that raises questions about the intentions the broker has toward the actor may impact the results. For example, if the broker requests support for someone who they themselves dislike or are in conflict with, this may lead the actor to question the broker's intentions toward them in making the request, reducing their likelihood of granting the request.

In the current research we focused on the transfer of loyalty-based obligations between first-order indirect ties, that is, those who were one tie removed from the actor—"a friend of a friend." Future research should

examine the extent to which loyalty's obligations apply to second-order (e.g., a friend of a friend of a friend) and even higher-order indirect ties. On the one hand, actors may assume brokers' knowledge of their own direct ties (i.e., actor's first-order indirect ties) is reasonably strong, whereas brokers' knowledge of their own indirect ties (i.e., actor's second-order and higher-order indirect ties) is relatively weak. And to the extent that an actor's support for a broker's request on behalf of an indirect tie depends on the actor's perception of the broker's knowledge of that tie, then the actor may be less willing to grant the request for second-order and higher-order indirect ties because the broker's knowledge of those ties is relatively poor. On the other hand, to the extent that loyalty blinds actors to the consequences of their ethical actions (Hildreth et al. 2016, Hildreth and Anderson 2018), perhaps it also blinds them to the quality of information they receive from the broker, prompting the actor to care less about how well the broker knows an indirect tie and how far removed that indirect tie is from the actor. Future research should examine the possibility of loyalty's obligations transferring in the context of higher-order network effects.

Future work should also consider interventions aimed at reducing loyalty's potential negative impact at work. The results of this research suggest that loyalty may aid in building networks of support around wrongdoers, enabling their behavior for long periods of time. This is a problem given the importance placed on developing loyalty at work, both between employees and to the organization itself. Indeed, prior research points to the many benefits that loyalty at work can yield (Hirschman 1970, Fehr et al. 2015, Berry et al. 2021). Future work should consider how organizations can thoughtfully emphasize the importance of loyalty while reducing its potential to yield support for unethical employees. For example, organizations might build programs that educate people on the benefits of loyalty and also its potential to corrupt, emphasizing the importance of maintaining other moral values (e.g., honesty, fairness) whenever loyalty is in conflict with them. In addition, organizations should ensure that they have ethical leaders throughout its ranks that value a range of moral values. This could help prevent the negative effects of loyalty because the values held by ethical leaders have the potential to trickle down to subordinates and positively shape their behavior (Mayer et al. 2009, Mayer et al. 2012). Leaders who believe that loyalty should not be given preference over other moral values in loyalty dilemmas might be able to effectively instill this value in employees, reducing the potential for loyalty to create negative outcomes at work.

Finally, in Study 4, we conducted a field study and found support for Hypothesis 1. However, because of limitations placed on in-person sampling at the time of data collection (COVID-19 lockdown rules), we were

only able to recruit 50 participants. Although the results were consistent with our hypothesis, the small sample size places constraints on generalizing the behavioral results. Future work should further explore this effect in the field by recruiting a larger sample that also allows for testing Hypotheses 2 and 3.

Conclusion

Too often, we discover that individuals accused of ethical transgressions have gotten away with their misdeeds for long periods of time. Although much prior research has considered how the relationships between the accused and their close ties help facilitate such coverups, less is known about how broader webs of deceit arise and aid in such corruption. In the current research, we found that loyalty to direct ties can give rise to obligations to indirect ties accused of wrongdoing, prompting the loyal to support wrongdoers they do not know or have ever met. Thus, loyalty may play an important role in facilitating corruption by fostering broader webs of deceit.

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Appendix. Study Materials

A.1. Materials for Study 1

Wrongdoing Language

"... implicated in allegations of ..."

- sexual harassment. A female intern at the company is accusing Chris of sexually harassing her in the workplace
- theft. An employee is accusing Chris of stealing thousands of dollars of office furniture to resell and make money from
- false advertising. An employee is accusing Chris of lying to their customers about current and future product features, just to make extra sales
- fraud. An employee is accusing Chris of falsifying expense accounts for his own personal gain
- bribery. An employee is accusing Chris of bribing local government officials to ensure they buy the company's products
- plagiarism. An employee is accusing Chris of copying large amounts of code from other employees without informing or crediting the employee's work

- dishonesty. An employee is accusing Chris of lying about his performance and work productivity, just to impress his boss

Vignette: Loyal

Imagine that one day at work, you discover that one of [colleagues]'s close friends, Chris, has been implicated in allegations of [wrongdoing]. This allegation is being investigated, but no charges have been brought against Chris.

Troubled by this, [colleague] reaches out to you for help. [Colleague] tells you, "Chris is a close friend, and he is a good guy who would never [wrongdoing details]." [Colleague] then asks you, "Would you be willing to stand with Chris and support him? I'm afraid that he will step down or be fired because of these allegations."

As you consider what to do, consider your loyalty to [colleague].

Vignette: Control

Imagine that one day at work, you discover that one of [colleagues]'s close friends, Chris, has been implicated in allegations of [wrongdoing]. This allegation is being investigated, but no charges have been brought against Chris.

Troubled by this, [colleague] reaches out to you for help. [Colleague] tells you, "Chris is a close friend, and he is a good guy who would never [wrongdoing details]." [Colleague] then asks you, "Would you be willing to stand with Chris and support him? I'm afraid that he will step down or be fired because of these allegations."

You do not know Chris and do not have a relationship with him.

A.2. Materials for Study 2

Vignette: Loyal

We would like you to imagine that you work in sales for a major technology company in the United States. You have many sales colleagues, one of whom is Alex. Alex has been a colleague of yours for a few years. Alex is a close friend who you are very loyal to. Alex's close friend Chris also works at the company, but you do not know Chris.

One day, Alex finds out that Chris, one of his closest friends, has been implicated in allegations of sexual harassment. A female intern at the company is accusing Chris of sexually harassing her in the workplace. These allegations are being investigated, but no charges have been brought against Chris.

Troubled by this, Alex reaches out to you for help. Alex tells you, "Chris is one of my closest friends, and he is a good guy who would never sexually harass someone." Alex then asks you, "Would you be willing to stand with Chris and support him? I'm afraid that he will step down or be fired because of these allegations."

As you consider what to do, remember that loyalty is a key aspect of your relationship with Alex.

Vignette: Control

We would like you to imagine that you work in sales for a major technology company in the United States. You have many sales colleagues, one of whom is Alex. Alex has been a colleague of yours for a few years. You do not have a relationship with Alex and do not know him. Alex's close friend Chris also works at the company, but you do not know Chris.

One day, Alex finds out that Chris, one of his closest friends, has been implicated in allegations of sexual

harassment. A female intern at the company is accusing Chris of sexually harassing her in the workplace. These allegations are being investigated, but no charges have been brought against Chris.

Troubled by this, Alex reaches out to you for help. Alex tells you, “Chris is one of my closest friends, and he is a good guy who would never sexually harass someone.” Alex then asks you, “Would you be willing to stand with Chris and support him? I’m afraid that he will step down or be fired because of these allegations.”

A.3. Materials for Study 3

Vignette: Loyal

We would like you to imagine that you work in sales for a major technology company in the United States. You have many sales colleagues, one of whom is Alex. Alex has been a colleague of yours for a few years. Alex is a close friend who you are very loyal to. Alex’s close friend Chris also works at the company, but you do not know Chris.

One day, Alex finds out that Chris, one of his closest friends, has been implicated in allegations of sexual harassment. A female intern at the company is accusing Chris of sexually harassing her in the workplace. These allegations are being investigated, but no charges have been brought against Chris.

Troubled by this, Alex reaches out to you for help. Alex tells you, “Chris is one of my closest friends, and he is a good guy who would never sexually harass someone.” Alex then asks you, “Would you be willing to stand with Chris and support him? I’m afraid that he will step down or be fired because of these allegations.”

[Divisive brokering manipulation added to the end of the scenario in the divisive brokering condition]: Alex has a history of connecting people in the workplace, but these connections often result in conflict and rivalries between employees who otherwise do not know each other. Alex’s coworkers know him as someone who often pits people against one another, creating conflicts between individuals who otherwise have no conflict with one another. For example, the other week, he apparently lied to one employee about what another employee said, which generated animosity and distrust between the two individuals. When trying to connect two people, he often appears to do so in order to preserve his own dominance and status at work.

Vignette: Control

We would like you to imagine that you work in sales for a major technology company in the United States. You have many sales colleagues, one of whom is Alex. Alex has been a colleague of yours for a few years. You do not have a relationship with Alex and do not know him. Alex’s close friend Chris also works at the company, but you do not know Chris.

One day, Alex finds out that Chris, one of his closest friends, has been implicated in allegations of sexual harassment. A female intern at the company is accusing Chris of sexually harassing her in the workplace. These allegations are being investigated, but no charges have been brought against Chris.

Troubled by this, Alex reaches out to you for help. Alex tells you, “Chris is one of my closest friends, and he is a good guy who would never sexually harass someone.” Alex then asks you, “Would you be willing to stand with Chris and

support him? I’m afraid that he will step down or be fired because of these allegations.”

[divisive brokering manipulation added to the end of the scenario in the divisive brokering condition]: Alex has a history of connecting people in the workplace, but these connections often result in conflict and rivalries between employees who otherwise do not know each other. Alex’s coworkers know him as someone who often pits people against one another, creating conflicts between individuals who otherwise have no conflict with one another. For example, the other week he apparently lied to one employee about what another employee said, which generated animosity and distrust between the two individuals. When trying to connect two people, he often appears to do so in order to preserve his own dominance and status at work.

Materials for Study 4

Below is the email that the broker sent out to members of their fraternity:

“[Email address]

Quick request

Hi [first name],

I hope you are well!

Forgive the random email, but I have a quick request:

A close friend of mine (a treasurer for another fraternity not at XX) has just been accused of misreporting finances to nationals for personal gain. Obviously, I don’t think he did this—I think he was just doing it to help his house. I’m putting together a letter of support vouching for his good character, which I’m going to send to his fraternity leadership.

Would you be willing to sign on too?

If so, I’m attaching a letter of support [Google Doc link] where I’m hoping to gather lots of signatures saying that he didn’t misreport finances for his personal gain. You would just need to add your name and online signature.

Important note: Please keep this confidential—I’m not asking everyone to sign.

No worries if you’d rather not!

Best,

[name]”

Endnote

¹ See https://osf.io/3h6vc/?view_only=8801892e162e48c0b2a7ab366dce48a5.

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