

Victims, Perpetrators, or Both?

The Vicious Cycle of Disrespect and Cynical Beliefs about Human Nature

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Abstract

We tested how cynicism emerges and what maintains it. Cynicism is the tendency to believe that people are morally bankrupt and behave treacherously in order to maximize self-interest. Drawing on literatures on norms of respectful treatment, we proposed that being the target of disrespect gives rise to cynical views, which predisposes people to further disrespect. The end result is a vicious cycle: cynicism and disrespect fuel one another. Study 1's nationally-representative survey showed that disrespect and cynicism are positively related to each other in 28 of 29 countries studied, and that cynicism's associations with disrespect were independent of (and stronger than) associations with lacking social support. Study 2 used a nationally-representative longitudinal dataset, spanning 4 years. In line with the vicious cycle hypothesis, feeling disrespected and holding cynical views gave rise to each other over time. Five preregistered experiments (including two in the supplementary materials) provided causal evidence. Study 3 showed that bringing to mind previous experiences of being disrespected heightened cynical beliefs subsequently. Studies 4 and 5 showed that to the extent that people endorsed cynical beliefs, others were inclined to treat them disrespectfully. Study 6's weeklong daily-diary study replicated the vicious cycle pattern. Everyday experiences of disrespect elevated cynical beliefs and vice versa. Moreover, cynical individuals tended to treat others with disrespect, which in turn predicted more disrespectful treatment by others. In short, experiencing disrespect gives rise to cynicism and cynicism elicits disrespect from others, thereby reinforcing the worldview that caused these negative reactions in the first place.

Keywords: cynicism; disrespect; hostility; bidirectional effects

1 observations raise the question of why people adopt cynical views in the first place. The
2 present research aimed to address how cynicism emerges and what maintains it.

3 Given that cynicism's defining features revolve around beliefs about others, we looked
4 for its potential roots in the interpersonal domain. Cynical individuals¹ have rocky
5 interpersonal lives. To the extent that people hold cynical beliefs, they experience conflict in
6 the workplace, marital problems, and low social support (Baron et al., 2007; Kaplan, Bradley,
7 & Ruscher, 2004; Li, Zhou, & Leung, 2011). Drawing from literatures on norms of respectful
8 treatment (Dunning, 2017; Dunning, Anderson, Schlösser, Ehlebracht, & Fetchenhauer, 2014;
9 Leary, Diebels, Jongman-Sereno, & Fernandez, 2015; Miller, 2001), our investigation focused
10 on a particular type of social transgression – disrespect. We propose that being the target of
11 disrespect gives rise to beliefs about people's nefarious nature (thus inciting cynical views),
12 which predisposes people to further disrespect from others. The end result points to a vicious
13 cycle: cynicism and disrespect fuel one another.

14 **Experiencing Disrespect Could Elicit Cynical Beliefs**

15 The importance of respectful treatment has been recognized in the social sciences for
16 some time. Kant (1790/1987) asserted that every person deserves respect simply by virtue of
17 being human. This type of respect has been referred to as recognition respect (Darwall, 1977;
18 Grover, 2014; van Quaquebeke, Henrich, & Eckloff, 2007), unconditional respect (Lalljee,
19 Laham, & Tam, 2007), categorical respect (Janoff-Bulman & Werther, 2008), or generalized
20 respect (Rogers & Ashforth, 2017). Here, we use the term owed respect (Rogers, 2018).
21 Owed respect originates from the Kantian view (also D. T. Miller, 2001; Rawls, 1971) and
22 differs from earned respect, which is accorded on the basis of achievements and other
23 socially-valued talents and characteristics (Janoff-Bulman & Werther, 2008; Rogers &
24 Ashforth, 2017). Owed respect is not contingent on one's status or achievements but rather is

¹ For ease of discussion we use the terms cynical individuals, cynical people, or cynics interchangeably. The construct operates on a continuum and is measured as such in our work.

1 granted based on one's "membership in [...] the human community" (Janoff-Bulman &
2 Werther, 2008, p. 3). Hence, every human being deserves respect and should be accorded
3 equal moral worth (Lalljee et al., 2007). The concept of owed respect is at the heart of
4 contemporary human rights' tenets outlining "the inherent dignity and [...] the equal and
5 inalienable rights of all members of the human family" (United Nations, 1948).

6 People are highly sensitive to interactions and instances that deny them respectful
7 treatment (Leary et al., 2015). Given the belief that they are owed respect simply because they
8 exist (Janoff-Bulman & Werther, 2008), disrespect is experienced as being particularly
9 unjustified and unfair (Miller, 2001). Experiences of mistreatment are known to elicit
10 attempts to understand why it occurred, attempts that often center on the perpetrator's moral
11 character (Uhlmann, Pizarro, & Diermeier, 2015). For example, ethnic minorities tend to
12 attribute social rejection to others' prejudice (Crocker & Major, 1989) and offensive
13 behaviors in the workplace are viewed as reflecting the offender's self-interested motives
14 (Crossley, 2009). These findings are consistent with a broader literature on attributions and
15 motivated reasoning. For example, according to the motivated reasoning literature, people's
16 desire to see themselves in a positive light renders them more likely to call on self-serving
17 explanations for life outcomes (Kunda, 1990). Relatedly, the actor-observer bias contends that
18 people tend to attribute their own negative outcomes to external causes (Jones & Nisbett,
19 1971; Malle, 2006); in instances of disrespect, that would include the perpetrator's moral
20 character.

21 People are inductive reasoners and take social interactions as indicative not only of their
22 interaction partner but also people in general (Dasgupta, 1988). Using specific social
23 experiences as the basis for broad assumptions about social relationships is common (Bowlby,
24 1982; Corey, Troisi, & Nicksa, 2015; Dzuka & Dalbert, 2007; Fasel & Spini, 2010). With
25 repeated experiences of disrespect, people may extrapolate their cynical beliefs about specific
26 perpetrators' moral character to inform their views on human nature. Existing research hints

1 at this idea. For instance, cynics' recollections of their childhood are replete with memories of
2 parental rejection and emotional coldness (Meesters, Muris, & Esselink, 1995). As the first
3 proposition of the vicious cycle theory, we predicted that experiencing disrespectful treatment
4 might shake one's faith in the moral character of people in general, begetting and cementing
5 cynical views of human nature.

6 **Cynicism Could Elicit Experiences of Disrespect**

7 We proposed that feeling disrespected promotes the development of cynical beliefs. At
8 the same time, holding cynical beliefs might increase the likelihood of receiving disrespectful
9 treatment from others. Together, those patterns would amount to support of the vicious cycle
10 theory.

11 Cynicism involves distrust and suspiciousness of others' motives (Kurman, 2011;
12 Miller, Jenkins, Kaplan, & Salonen, 1995). Actions that reflect those views violate social
13 norms stipulating that people be accorded trust and respect until there is evidence indicating
14 otherwise (Deutsch, 1973; Dunning et al., 2014). Hence, to the extent that cynics behave in a
15 manner that reflects that dark view of human nature, they may trigger mistreatment by others.
16 For example, reactions to people who behave selfishly (selfishness being a central attribute of
17 cynicism) include disrespectful treatment such as a willingness to humiliate and insult them
18 (Allen & Leary, 2010).

19 In line with this reasoning, people prone to cynicism exhibit behaviors to which others
20 are likely to react negatively. People holding cynical beliefs exude low sociomoral traits, such
21 as low interpersonal warmth and high conflict proneness (Hardy & Smith, 1988; Li et al.,
22 2011), are more likely to let their anger and irritation get out of control (Haukkala, Kontinen,
23 Laatikainen, Kawachi, & Uutela, 2010), neglect partners in their time of need (Kaplan et al.,
24 2004) and provide less social support (Hart, 1999). These behaviors often are understood as
25 signifying poor moral character (Haidt, 2008).

26 **Overview of the Studies**

1 We posited that being disrespected and endorsing cynical views may give rise to each
2 other, resulting in a vicious cycle of escalation. Cynicism might develop as a reaction to
3 experiences of disrespectful treatment, fueling suspicion and doubts about the goodness of
4 others. To the extent that a cynical worldview comes to inform people's actions, as in
5 behaviors that convey assumptions of self-interest, corruption, and mistrust, cynics may find
6 themselves disrespected all the more — resulting in the perpetrator becoming the victim as
7 well.

8 We combined cross-national, longitudinal, experimental, and daily diary methodologies
9 to test the proposed interrelations between cynicism and experiences of disrespect. First, we
10 explored basic associations between cynical beliefs and experience of disrespect using
11 nationally-representative survey data from 29 countries (Study 1). We also tested the
12 specificity of the role of disrespect by contrasting it with another negative social experience,
13 that one lacks social support. Second, to test the reciprocal prospective associations between
14 cynicism and disrespect, we made use of a large-scale longitudinal dataset (Study 2). This
15 dataset allowed us to test whether a cynical view of human nature is prospectively associated
16 with more frequent experiences of disrespect over time, as well as whether experiences of
17 disrespect are prospectively associated with the development of cynical beliefs.

18 Third, five experiments (three reported in the manuscript and two in the supplementary
19 materials) enabled causal conclusions about the bidirectional effects of disrespect and
20 cynicism. Two experiments (Studies 3 and S1) tested whether experiencing disrespect gives
21 rise to cynical beliefs. Three experiments investigated whether cynical individuals are more
22 likely to elicit the feeling of disrespect (Study 4) and actual disrespectful treatment from
23 others (Studies 5 and S2). Last, using a daily diary methodology, Study 6 investigated
24 whether the perception of being treated with disrespect turns cynical individuals from victims
25 into perpetrators of disrespect or whether cynical beliefs predict committing acts of disrespect

1 even at baseline, jeopardizing cynical individuals' social relationships and exposing them to
2 further disrespect.

3 All of the experiments were pre-registered and all of the studies were exempt from
4 ethics review as they were secondary data analyses or deemed minimal risk. All materials,
5 data, and computer code can be downloaded from
6 https://osf.io/snq34/?view_only=581e49426cb54acd9fb1adfade3b5b38.

7 **Study 1**

8 Study 1 sought to examine basic associations between cynicism and the experience of
9 disrespect. We used large nationally-representative survey data from 29 countries (n=53,333)
10 that allowed us to test whether the relationship between cynicism and disrespect holds across
11 different countries. It also gave us the possibility to conduct some initial explorations of the
12 specificity of the proposed relationship between cynicism and disrespect by comparing
13 disrespect's effect against the effect of another negative social experience, perceived lack of
14 social support.

15 **Method**

16 **Participants.** The data were collected as part of the European Social Survey (ESS,
17 2012). ESS is a large-scale international survey conducted every two years since 2002 in over
18 30 European countries. It tracks people's values and beliefs using a repeated cross-section
19 design, meaning that every wave recruits new nationally-representative samples in
20 participating countries. Respondents are selected using random probability methods and the
21 data are collected in face-to-face interviews. The data can be downloaded
22 (<https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/about/>).

23 Because measures of disrespect were included only in wave 6 (year 2012), the present
24 analyses used data from this wave only. The sample consisted of 53,333 individuals ($M_{\text{age}} =$
25 48.23, $SD_{\text{age}} = 18.55$, 45.7% male) residing in 29 countries. According to G*Power 3.1
26 analyses (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009), this sample is large enough to detect even

1 small associations ($r = .01$) with 80% power ($\alpha = .05$, two-tailed test). The list of countries
2 and the country descriptive statistics are shown in Table 1.

3 **Measures.** The survey included the following three items originating in the Faith in
4 People Scale (Rosenberg, 1956), a measure commonly used in cynicism research (e.g.,
5 Stavrova & Ehlebracht, 2019; Wrightsman, 1964). Each item comprised of two statements
6 pitted against each other in a manner akin to a semantic differential, to which respondents
7 registered their agreement using a scale from 0 to 10: “Generally speaking, would you say
8 that most people can be trusted, or that you can’t be too careful in dealing with people?”, “Do
9 you think that most people would try to take advantage of you if they got the chance, or
10 would they try to be fair?”, and “Would you say that most of the time people try to be helpful
11 or that they are mostly looking out for themselves?” We recoded the scores such that higher
12 values indicated more cynicism and averaged them into a scale (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .78$).

13 To assess feelings of disrespect, participants indicated “to what extent they feel that
14 people treat them with respect,” using a 7-point scale (0 = not at all, 6 = a great deal). We
15 recoded this item such that higher values indicate stronger perceptions of disrespect. To
16 measure lack of social support, participants rated the “extent they receive help and support
17 from people they are close to when they need it” (0 = not at all, 6 = completely). We recoded
18 the responses such that higher values indicated a stronger perceived lack of social support.

19 When noted, analyses controlled for major socio-demographic and economic variables:
20 gender (1 = male, 0 = female), age (in years), education (number of years), whether the
21 respondents belong to an ethnic minority group in their country (1 = yes, 2 = no), and
22 household income (“Which of the descriptions on this card comes closest to how you feel
23 about your household’s income nowadays? 1= Living comfortably on present income, 2 =

1 Coping on present income, 3 = finding it difficult on present income, 4 = Finding it very
2 difficult on present income²; recoded such that higher values correspond to a higher income²).

3 **Results**

4 Within-country correlations showed that both disrespect and a lack of social support
5 were positively and significantly associated with cynicism in 28 out of 29 countries (Table 1;
6 Figure 1). The associations between disrespect and cynicism ranged from $r = .04$ ($p = .17$,
7 Kosovo) to $r = .40$ ($p < .001$, Iceland), with an average correlation across all countries of $r =$
8 $.23$ ($p < .001$). The correlation between cynicism and lack of social support varied from $r =$
9 $.01$ ($p = .73$, Kosovo) and $r = .24$ ($p < .001$, Finland), with an average of $r = .15$ ($p < .001$)
10 across all countries. Last, perceived disrespect and perceived lack of social support were
11 positively related to each other as well (average $r = .30$, $p < .001$).

12 We tested whether the effect of perceived disrespect on cynicism was independent of
13 the effect of lack of social support. To account for the nested nature of the data (individuals in
14 different countries), we used multilevel regression analysis. Cynicism was the dependent
15 variable and disrespect and lack of social support both were predictors. All variables were
16 standardized before analyses so that the obtained coefficients are equivalent to standardized
17 regression coefficients. The model included random intercept and random slopes of both
18 disrespect and lack of social support.

19 While perceptions of disrespect and lacking social support both were positively
20 associated with cynicism ($\beta = .32$ and $\beta = .13$, respectively, both $ps < .001$), the effect of
21 disrespect was significantly stronger than the effect of lack of social support ($z = 7.29$, $p <$
22 $.001$). In the next step, we added the socio-demographic control variables. The effects of both

² The survey also included a question asking the respondents to place themselves in one of 10 income deciles. Because 17.6% of the sample had missing values, we decided not to include it in the main analysis. Nevertheless, analyses using this measure of income produced similar results as the income measure in the main text ($\beta_{\text{disrespect}} = .32$ and $\beta_{\text{support}} = .11$, both $ps < .001$; $z = 9.59$, $p < .001$).

1 cynicism and lack of social support remained significant ($\beta = .29$ and $\beta = .10$, both $ps < .001$,
2 respectively). As before, disrespect was a stronger predictor of cynicism scores than lacking
3 social support ($z = 7.81$, $p < .001$).

4 **Discussion**

5 A study of more than 50,000 residents of 29 countries provided initial evidence for the
6 link between disrespect and cynicism. Disrespect and cynicism were positively and
7 significantly related to each other in all countries but one, an effect that held even after
8 statistically accounting for the influence of lacking social support. Additionally, while
9 cynicism was positively related to perceived lack of social support (as well as disrespect), its
10 association with feeling disrespected was significantly stronger.

11 Taken together, these findings suggest that disrespect may be a route to cynicism
12 beyond and apart from other negative social experiences, such as feeling that one lacks
13 support from others. An obvious limitation of a lack of perceived social support as a control
14 variable is that it is more likely to be a result of an act of omission (i.e., other people not
15 giving one a positive treatment), while being disrespected is more likely to be a result of an
16 act of commission (i.e., other people giving one a negative treatment). Hence, in further
17 studies (Study 3), we continued testing the experience of disrespect relative to other negative
18 social experiences in order to address additional possible alternate explanations.

19 **Study 2**

20 While Study 1 demonstrated positive associations between disrespect and cynicism, the
21 cross-sectional nature of the data did not allow for a proper test of the vicious cycle
22 hypothesis, which states that experiencing disrespect and adopting a cynical view of human
23 nature may reinforce each other over time. Accordingly, Study 2 used a longitudinal design
24 spanning four years to test the hypothesized bidirectional associations between cynical beliefs
25 and experiencing disrespect.

26 **Method**

1 **Participants.** We analyzed data from the Health and Retirement Study (HRS), which is
2 a nationally-representative longitudinal survey of Americans aged 50 and older (HRS, 2018).
3 The study has been conducted since 1992, with the measures of interest included since 2006.
4 Half of the sample completed these measures in 2006, and the other half in 2008. We
5 combined these two sub-samples to form the baseline assessment. The measures we re-
6 administered four years later (that is, in 2010 for the 2006 subsample and 2012 for the 2008
7 subsample). The questionnaire and data are available online (HRS, 2018).

8 Overall, 19,922 people ($M_{\text{age}} = 65.15$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 11.97$, 41.3% male) completed measures
9 of cynicism or disrespect in at least one of the two waves. Of those, 14,732 people
10 participated at T1 ($M_{\text{age t1}} = 68.84$, $SD_{\text{age t1}} = 10.54$, 40.7% male), 15,706 people participated at
11 T2 ($M_{\text{age t1}} = 63.29$, $SD_{\text{age t1}} = 11.31$, 41.0% male), and 10,516 ($M_{\text{age t1}} = 67.55$, $SD_{\text{age t1}} = 9.70$,
12 40.1% male) completed both waves. Full maximum likelihood estimation methods were used
13 to deal with missing values. We used the overall sample to increase the precision of the
14 estimation of both concurrent and lagged effects. According to G*Power 3.1 analyses (Faul et
15 al., 2009), a sample of 10,516 was large enough to detect even small effects ($r > .03$) with
16 80% power ($\alpha = .05$, two-tailed test).

17 **Measures.** The survey included a 5-item version of the Cook-Medley cynical distrust
18 scale (Cook & Medley, 1954; Greenglass & Julkunen, 1989; Appendix A). Its items are: Most
19 people will use somewhat unfair means to gain profit or an advantage rather than lose it; I
20 think most people would lie in order to get ahead; I commonly wonder what hidden reasons
21 another person may have for doing something nice for me; no one cares much what happens
22 to you; and most people dislike putting themselves out to help other people (1= strongly
23 disagree; 6 = strongly agree; Cronbach's alpha = .79 at both baseline and follow-up).

24 Three items measured perceived disrespect. Participants indicated how often they are:
25 treated with less courtesy or respect than other people; threatened or harassed; and treated as

1 if they are not smart (1=never; 6=almost every day; Cronbach's $\alpha = .71$ at baseline and $.72$ at
2 follow-up).

3 **Analytic strategy.** Before examining the structural relations among the variables, we
4 tested the measurement model of cynicism and disrespect. The model yielded an appropriate
5 fit, $\chi^2 (90) = 3388.08, p < .001, CFI = .95, RMSEA = .04, SRMR = .04$. We assessed the
6 measurement invariance of cynicism and disrespect over time by comparing the model with
7 free factor loadings to the model in which factor loadings of the same items were constrained
8 to be the same between T1 and T2. The differences in incremental fit indices between the free
9 and constrained model were smaller than the usual cutoff values for model comparison
10 (Cheung & Rensvold, 2002), as seen in Table 2. Hence, measures of cynicism and disrespect
11 reached the level of metric measurement invariance (Little, Preacher, Selig, & Card, 2007).

12 To examine the reciprocal relationships between disrespect and cynicism, we conducted
13 a cross-lagged panel analysis using the R package lavaan (Rosseel, 2012). We fit a model that
14 specified both cross-lagged and stability (autoregressive) effects of disrespect on cynicism
15 and cynicism on disrespect (Figure 2). We used robust (White-Huber) standard errors. The
16 comparative fit index (CFI), standardized root mean square residuals (SRMR), and root-
17 mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) provided evidence of overall model fit (Hu &
18 Bentler, 1999; Marsh, Hau, & Grayson, 2005).

19 **Results**

20 Descriptive information on the variables is presented in Table 3. The zero-order
21 associations suggest that cynicism was positively associated with reports of experiencing
22 disrespect at both T1 and T2 ($r = .29, p < .001$).

23 The path model had appropriate fit, $\chi^2 (90) = 3388.08, p < .001, CFI = .95, RMSEA =$
24 $.04, SRMR = .04$ (Figure 2). Examination of the cross-lagged effects showed that disrespect
25 at baseline positively predicted cynicism four years later, controlling for cynicism at baseline
26 ($\beta = .07, p < .001$). Moreover, cynicism at baseline positively predicted perceived disrespect

1 four years later, controlling for disrespect at baseline ($\beta = .08, p < .001$). Both paths remained
2 unchanged when controlling for baseline reports of age, gender (1 = male, 0 = female),
3 ethnicity (1=Caucasian, 0=other), education (1 = lower than high school, 2 = generational
4 educational development degree, 3 = high school diploma, 4 = some college, and 5 = college
5 and above), and income at T1 (household income in dollars, log-transformed) (Figure 3).

6 **Discussion**

7 Study 2 tested and found evidence of reciprocal associations between perceived
8 disrespect and cynical beliefs. At baseline, the more people felt that they had been the target
9 of disrespect, the more cynical they were four years later. In parallel, the more cynical people
10 were at baseline, the more often they reported being the victim of disrespect four years on.
11 These reciprocal bidirectional effects provide first evidence of a vicious cycle of disrespect
12 and cynicism. It should be noted though that our reliance on perceived self-reported measures
13 of disrespect constrains the strength of our conclusions. Studies 3 – 5 addressed this
14 limitation.

15 **Study 3**

16 Study 3's central aim was to test whether the link from feeling disrespected to cynical
17 beliefs was causal in nature. Study 2 showed that initial feelings of disrespect predicted
18 growing levels of cynicism over time. Although the longitudinal design garners confidence in
19 the proposed processes by providing temporal patterns, the correlational nature of those data
20 does not warrant full confidence in the proposed causal direction. Therefore, Study 3 used an
21 experimental manipulation of disrespect.

1 Participants recalled an experience of feeling disrespected (experimental condition)
2 versus guilty³ (control condition) and then responded to a measure of cynicism. Just like
3 feeling disrespected, feeling guilty is a negative experience based on social interactions
4 (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1994; Russell & Mehrabian, 1977). Hence, comparing
5 feeling disrespected to feeling guilty enabled us to test whether the specific experience of
6 disrespect (rather than any negative interpersonal experience) elicits cynical beliefs. To
7 address the possibility that our results may be affected by demand effects (e.g., participants in
8 the experimental condition might be more likely to guess the hypothesis and report higher
9 cynicism scores as a result), participants completed the Perceived Awareness of the Research
10 Hypothesis scale (Rubin, Paolini & Crisp, 2010; Rubin, 2016).

11 Measures, data collection, and analyses were preregistered
12 (<https://aspredicted.org/blind.php?x=uk59jz>). No part of the study deviated from the
13 preregistered plan in any way, unless stated otherwise

14 **Method**

15 **Participants.** To be able to detect a small-to-medium effect ($d = .40$) at $\alpha = .05$ (two-
16 tailed) with 80% power, we aimed to collect at least 200 responses (G*Power 3.1, Faul et al.,
17 2009). We recruited more than the $N=200$ targeted sample to ensure that we would have
18 ample power after excluding participants who failed an attention check.

19 A sample of 232 American adults were recruited on an electronic job-sourcing site,
20 Prolific, in exchange for a small payment. Nine participants failed an attention check (see

³ In an additional study (Study S1 in the Supplementary materials), participants recalled an experience of feeling bored vs. disrespected. Participants reported higher cynicism after recalling the experience of being disrespected than bored.

1 below) and were removed, resulting in a final sample of 223 (53.8% male, $M_{\text{age}} = 39.42$, SD_{age}
2 = 11.41).

3 **Procedure.** The study had two between-subjects conditions. Participants in both
4 conditions described an event from their lives. In the disrespect condition, participants
5 responded to the following prompt: “Please describe in detail a time when you felt
6 disrespected by someone else. Perhaps you felt treated with less courtesy than others, or you
7 were slighted by someone, for example. Please, indicate where and when this happened and
8 provide the initials of the person(s) who treated you that way, if possible.” The text in the
9 control condition was similar to the disrespect condition, in that they described a time in
10 which they felt guilty over something that happened between them and another person.
11 After the essay task came manipulation check items. Participants indicated the extent to which
12 reliving the experience they wrote about made them feel guilty and, separately, disrespected
13 (1=not at all, 7=a lot).

14 Afterwards, participants completed the cynical distrust scale (Greenglass & Julkunen,
15 1989), which was the dependent variable. Sample items include, “Does reliving the
16 experience you wrote about make you think that most people would lie to get ahead?” and
17 “Does reliving the experience you wrote about make you think that it is safer to trust
18 nobody?” (8 items; 1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree; $\alpha = .85$; Appendix A). Items were
19 averaged to form a cynicism index.

20 To assess whether the expected conditional differences on cynicism were not due to
21 demand effects, participants completed the Perceived Awareness of the Research Hypothesis
22 Scale (PARH: Rubin, 2010). The scale is comprised of four items. Sample item: “I knew what
23 the researchers were investigating in this research.” (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly
24 agree; $\alpha = .84$).

25 Last, participants responded to an attention check question (“To monitor data quality,
26 please select the middle of the scale here”) and a basic demographic questionnaire.

1 **Results**

2 *Manipulation check.* Participants in the disrespect condition reported feeling more
3 disrespected ($M=4.53$, $SD=1.99$) than participants in the control condition ($M=2.90$,
4 $SD=1.83$), $t(220)=6.34$, $p < .001$. Similarly, participants in the control condition reported
5 feeling more guilt ($M=5.12$, $SD=1.64$) compared to participants in the experimental condition
6 ($M=2.09$, $SD=1.56$), $t(221)=14.11$, $p < .001$. The manipulation had the intended effect.

7 *Cynicism.* An independent sample t-test showed that participants in the disrespect
8 condition reported a higher level of cynicism ($M=3.90$, $SD=1.29$) than participants in the
9 control condition ($M=3.40$, $SD=1.22$), $t(221)=2.95$, $p = .004$, $d=.40$.

10 *Demand effects.* Rubin (2016) outlined four ways that PARH scores could be used to
11 assess demand effects: comparing participants' responses on the PARH scale to the scale's
12 theoretical midpoint; excluding positive outliers (+3 SD) on the scale; testing associations
13 between PARH scores and the independent and the dependent variables; and including PARH
14 as a covariate in the main hypothesis test analysis. We performed all four suggested analyses⁴.

15 First, participants' responses to the PARH scale did not differ from the scale midpoint
16 (4): $M=4.11$, $SD=1.42$), $t(222)=1.15$, $p = .25$. Second, there were no positive outliers on
17 PARH in our data (the maximum PARH score was 2.04 SD above the scale mean). Third,
18 even though PARH showed a positive correlation with cynicism ($r = .16$, $p = .016$), it was not
19 stronger in the experimental than in the control condition (condition x PARH interaction:
20 $F(1,219)=.02$, $p = .88$); also, the experimental manipulation did not affect PARH scores,
21 $t(221)=.84$, $p = .40$. Fourth, the effect of the experimental condition on cynicism was robust

⁴ Initially, we intended to only examine the correlation between PARH and cynicism (s. preregistration).

However, this analysis cannot show whether the difference in cynicism scores between the experimental and control conditions is driven by demand effects (i.e., by PARH scores). Therefore, we eventually decided to report all the analyses suggested by Rubin (2016).

1 when PARH scores were used as a covariate (ANCOVA: $F(1,220)=8.09, p = .005, \eta_{\text{partial}}^2 =$
2 $.035$). Overall, these analyses suggest that the difference in cynicism scores between the
3 experimental and control conditions cannot be attributed to demand effects.

4 **Discussion**

5 Study 3 built on the findings of Studies 1 and 2, which showed that cynicism and
6 disrespect give rise to one another over time. Study 3, using an experimental design, provided
7 causal evidence for the role of disrespect as a source of cynicism: People who had been
8 reminded of a time when they were treated disrespectfully later reported elevated levels of
9 cynicism compared to people reminded of a time when they felt guilty.

10 **Study 4**

11 Pre-registered Study 4 pursued three goals. First, while Study 3 showed that being a
12 target of disrespect leads to cynical worldview endorsement, Study 4 tested the reverse,
13 namely whether holding a cynical worldview increases the probability of becoming victim of
14 disrespect. This test is central to the vicious cycle hypothesis, which proposes that being
15 disrespected and adopting a cynical worldview mutually influence one another.

16 Second, Studies 1 – 3 relied on participants' self-reports of experiencing disrespect,
17 leaving open the possibility that perhaps cynical individuals are not, in fact, being
18 disrespected but instead perceive neutral interactions as being disrespectful. Study 4's design
19 enabled us to measure disrespectful behavior toward cynics independent of those individuals'
20 perceptions of having been disrespected. We presented participants with profiles of people
21 who expressed cynical versus non-cynical beliefs, and measured willingness to behave
22 disrespectfully toward them. In doing so, this design disentangled self-reports of both the
23 independent and dependent variables, thereby avoiding common method variance concerns.

24 Third, building upon existing literatures linking cynicism to antisocial behavioral
25 tendencies (Barefoot et al., 1989; García-León et al., 2002), we tested whether cynical
26 individuals would be especially willing to treat others disrespectfully. We expected that

1 participants' cynicism scores would predict willingness to be disrespectful toward the other
2 (faux) study participant. Exploratory analyses tested whether participants' own cynicism
3 interacted with the target's cynical versus non-cynical views to predict their willingness to be
4 disrespectful toward the target.

5 Overall, we expected that people would be more willing to display disrespect towards a
6 cynical (vs. non-cynical) target person and, further, that cynical individuals would be more
7 likely than others to engage in disrespectful treatment. If so, those results would provide a
8 replication and add causal heft to the results of Study 2.

9 We preregistered all measures, data collection, and analyses
10 (<http://aspredicted.org/blind.php?x=5gp5u2>). The study did not deviate from the preregistered
11 plan in any way.

12 Method

13 **Participants.** Power analyses were conducted using G'power 3.1 (Faul et al., 2009).
14 To be able to detect small-to-medium effects ($d = .40$ for comparisons between the conditions
15 and $r = .20$ for dispositional cynicism and willingness to display disrespectful treatment
16 correlations) with 80% power ($\alpha = .05$, two-tailed), we aimed to collect at least 200 responses.
17 To account for potential exclusions due to the anticipation that some participants would fail
18 the attention check question, we recruited slightly more participants than needed.

19 In total, 231 American adults completed the study on MTurk. Participants who
20 participated in Study 3 were not eligible for Study 4. In the current sample, 13 failed an
21 attention check question (the same as in Study 3), resulting in a final sample of 218 (64.4%
22 male, $M_{\text{age}} = 35.66$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 11.27$).

23 **Procedure.** Participants imagined they worked for a large company and that a new
24 colleague, Cory, was joining their department. Depending on condition, participants learned
25 that their new colleague holds either cynical or non-cynical beliefs.

1 Participants read the following instructions (non-cynical condition text in
2 parentheses): “Imagine that you work at a large company. A new colleague – Cory – is
3 joining your department today. You two meet and have a conversation, where you learn that
4 Cory holds a cynical (vs. positive) view of human nature. Cory believes that people are selfish
5 (vs. altruistic); that most of them would (vs. would not) lie, cheat, and betray if they could
6 somehow gain by it; and that even when people are helpful, they are still seeking some kind
7 of personal benefit from it (vs. that people are helpful because they genuinely care about
8 others' well-being).”

9 Afterwards, participants indicated how likely they would be to treat Cory
10 disrespectfully on 11 items presented in a random order (sample items: treat Cory
11 disrespectfully; make demeaning or derogatory remarks about Cory; talk down to Cory; $\alpha =$
12 $.88$; 1=very unlikely, 7=very likely; Appendix B includes the full list).

13 To measure participants' dispositional cynicism, we used the cynical distrust scale from
14 Studies 2 and 3 (Greenglass & Julkunen, 1989; sample items: It is safer to trust nobody; Most
15 people inwardly dislike putting themselves out to help other people; 8 items; $\alpha = .92$,
16 1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree, Appendix A). The order in which participants
17 completed the cynical distrust scale versus the experimental component was counterbalanced.
18 As procedural order was unrelated to any measures in the study (all $ps > .30$), we did not
19 consider it further. Last, participants completed demographic questions.

20 **Results**

21 Participants reported that they would be more willing to show disrespectful behaviors
22 toward a cynical ($M = 2.70$, $SD = 0.99$) than a non-cynical target person ($M = 2.19$, $SD =$
23 1.04), $t(216) = 3.69$, $p < .001$, $d = .50$, suggesting that holding a cynical worldview may elicit
24 disrespectful behavioral intentions from others.

25 Next, we tested whether individuals who score higher on dispositional cynicism were
26 more willing than less cynical individuals to treat the target person disrespectfully. Indeed, a

1 look at zero-order correlations between cynical distrust scale and the willingness to treat the
2 target person disrespectfully suggests that cynical individuals are more likely not only to be a
3 victim but also a perpetrator of disrespect ($r=.32, p < .001$).

4 *Preregistered secondary analyses.* To examine whether cynical individuals' willingness
5 to treat the target disrespectfully depended on the target being described as either holding a
6 cynical vs. a non-cynical view, we conducted a moderated regression analysis with the
7 experimental condition (1=cynical target, -1=non-cynical target), participants' dispositional
8 cynicism (mean centered) and their interaction term as predictors.

9 The main effects of dispositional cynicism and experimental conditions explained
10 15.8% of variance in disrespectful treatment, $F(2,215)=21.36, p < .001$. Both main effects
11 were significant ($\beta_{\text{condition}} = .26, p < .001, \beta_{\text{cynicism}} = .33, p < .001$). Adding the interaction term
12 to the model explained an additional 3.6% of the variance, $F(1,214)=9.64, p < .001$; the
13 interaction term was significant $\beta_{\text{condition}} = -.19, p = .002$. As shown on Figure 4, dispositional
14 cynicism was more strongly associated with the willingness to treat the target person
15 disrespectfully if the target person did not endorse a cynical worldview ($\beta = .55, p < .001$)
16 than when the target was a cynic ($\beta = .17, p = .041$).

17 Discussion

18 Studies 1 and 2 demonstrated that cynical individuals report experiencing disrespect
19 more often than do others. Study 4 validated those findings by testing how people react and
20 intend to treat others who express cynical (vs. non-cynical) views. It showed that people
21 holding cynical views, compared to people devoid of cynicism, are more likely to elicit
22 disrespectful behaviors by others. In addition, Study 4 showed that people with dispositional
23 cynical tendencies are more willing to treat others — particularly non-cynics — with
24 disrespect.

25 The interaction between participants' cynicism and the purported cynicism of the person
26 they were rating showed that disrespectful treatment is not restricted to cynical targets.

1 Rather, people who hold cynical beliefs appear to be even more willing to be disrespectful
2 toward others who are not cynical compared to fellow cynics, a finding that might shed light
3 on how cynicism spreads within communities.

4 **Study 5**

5 Study 4 provided evidence that expressions of cynicism might yield disrespectful
6 reactions from others, but it suffered from two limitations. Study 5, which was pre-registered,
7 aimed to address them. First, Study 4 measured intentions to treat cynical (vs. non-cynical)
8 others disrespectfully, leaving unanswered the question of whether actual disrespectful
9 behavior would occur. People's reports of what they would do are not always faithful
10 representations of their actual behavior (Baumeister, Vohs, & Funder, 2007) and therefore it
11 was important to test a behavioral outcome, which Study 5 did.

12 Second, Study 4's manipulation of target's cynicism could have been confounded with
13 merely exhibiting socially inappropriate behavior. Expressing a cynical worldview upon first
14 meeting someone might be considered rude, odd, or otherwise inappropriate, and that (rather
15 than cynicism) could have elicited a willingness to treat that person with disrespect. In
16 addition, Study 4 did not include a control (moderate or intermediate level of cynicism)
17 condition and thus could not test whether being non-cynical elicits less disrespect or whether
18 being cynical elicits more disrespect (relative to intermediate avowals of cynicism). Study 5
19 addressed these limitations by using a behavioral measure of disrespect (using binding
20 monetary decisions), manipulating targets' cynicism in a more straightforward and
21 ecologically-valid manner, and examining people's reactions to multiple targets espousing
22 cynicism to various degrees.

23 A version of the trust game served as the context for Study 5. In it, one person in a pair
24 (here, the participant) decides whether to send over money to another person with the
25 understanding that the receiver would get a multiple of the amount transferred (here, triple)
26 and can send back some or none of it to the initial player. On the basis of work arguing that

1 the first players' decision not to send over any money in the trust game signals disrespect
2 towards the partner (Dunning et al., 2014), we used only the first stage and thusly measured
3 whether people transferred money to the ersatz partner. The ostensible partner was portrayed
4 as espousing different levels of cynicism, which allowed us to test the hypothesis that people
5 would be less likely to transfer money to a player described as holding more (vs less) cynical
6 views of human nature.

7 To boost the ecological validity of the study, we used people's statements describing
8 their beliefs about human nature as stimulus materials. A sample of 100 people described
9 their beliefs about human nature and completed a cynicism scale. We used all 100 statements
10 as stimuli for the main study⁵. This design had two advantages. One, by retaining all
11 statements, we avoided the issue of stimulus selection. Two, we could examine whether the
12 anticipated effect of targets' cynicism on participants' disrespect was driven primarily by
13 cynical individuals being more likely to get disrespected (relative to moderately cynical
14 people) or non-cynical individuals being less likely get disrespected (relative to moderately
15 cynical people). We achieved that by testing not only a linear but also a non-linear (quadratic)
16 effect of target cynicism on disrespectful behavior by participants.

⁵ In an additional study (Study S2 in the Supplementary materials), we selected a statement by one participant whose cynicism score was above the empirical median and a statement by one participant whose score was below the median. These statements served as stimuli materials for S2's main study, resulting in a between-subjects (cynical vs. non-cynical) design. The results showed that participants were more likely to distrust a cynical than a non-cynical target.

1 Last, to provide additional support for the role of disrespect, we assessed an attitudinal
2 measure of disrespect towards the cynical (vs. non-cynical) partner. We anticipated it would
3 mediate the effect of target cynicism on monetary transfer decisions.

4 We preregistered all measures, data collection, and analyses
5 (<https://aspredicted.org/blind.php?x=nq36fk>). The study did not deviate from the
6 preregistered plan in any way.

7 Method

8 Phase 1: Stimulus materials.

9 For the manipulation in the trust game, we sought to provide those participants with
10 statements about human nature that were actually produced by more versus less cynical
11 individuals. To gather those statements, a sample of MTurk workers ($N = 100$, 70.0% male,
12 $M_{age} = 34.81$, $SD_{age} = 9.71$) reported their views on human nature. Participants read the
13 following instructions: “Are most people good, honest, and trustworthy or are they egoistic,
14 deceitful, and evil? People differ in how they answer this question. We’d like to hear from
15 you about your views. Please write at least 3 sentences (more would be great) on your views
16 of other people.” Afterwards, participants completed the cynical distrust scale used in Studies
17 2 – 4 (Greenglass & Julkunen, 1989; 1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree, responses were
18 averaged into a scale, $\alpha = .93$. These statements served as stimuli materials for the main study.

19 Phase 2: Trust game.

20 **Design and participants.** The study used a mixed-model design where participants
21 and stimuli represented crossed random factors (Judd, Westfall, & Kenny, 2012). Each
22 participant was exposed to multiple stimuli and each stimulus was displayed to multiple
23 participants. To avoid cognitive overload, each participant was shown five stimulus texts and
24 made five decisions as to whether to trust the author of each statement. Each stimulus text
25 was shown to 10 participants, resulting in a sample of 200 participants. A simulation analysis
26 (using R package *simr*; with 1,000 simulations) showed that this sample size gives a 100%

1 power to detect an effect of stimuli's cynicism on participants' trust of the size of $OR = 1.5$
2 (which corresponds to a small effect). As pre-registered, in order to compensate for the
3 possibility of having to exclude participants on the basis of failing the comprehension
4 question, the study was completed by 250 individuals on Prolific, an online platform for study
5 participants. Of those, 26 (10.4%) failed the trust game understanding question, resulting in a
6 final sample of 226 (42.0% male, $M_{age} = 33.30$, $SD_{age} = 11.44$).

7 **Procedure.**

8 Participants first read that they would make decisions affecting their payoff and that of
9 other participants, and that 10 randomly-selected participants would be paid a bonus
10 according to their decisions after the study was complete. In the end, 10 randomly-selected
11 participants were actually paid.⁶

12 All participants were assigned to the role of trustors in a trust game. They were given an
13 endowment of £1 and decided whether to transfer it to the other participant (trustee).
14 Participants learned that if they chose to transfer, the amount would be tripled (£3.00) and
15 given to trustees who could either give back half of the total amount (£1.50) or keep the entire
16 sum for themselves. As a comprehension check, participants reported what would happen if
17 they transferred £1 and their partner transferred back half of the total amount? (Response
18 options: a) You earn £1.5, Person 2 earns £1.5; b) You earn £0, Person 2 earns £3; c) You
19 earn £0, Person 2 earns £1.)

20 Participants then learned that they would make the decision as Person 1 five times, with
21 respect to five different other players. They learned that the other players were part of a multi-
22 stage study and, as such, earlier had shared their general view on human nature. Before
23 making each trust decision, participants were shown statements written by the respective
24 interaction partner. For each interaction partner, they indicated whether they transfer their £1

⁶ Payoff was determined based on participants' decisions in the game (for each participant, we randomly selected one decision) and the assumption that Player 2 reciprocated by transferring them half of the total amount.

1 to him/her or keep it. These decisions served as the main dependent variable (behavioral
2 disrespect).

3 Participants also responded to four items measuring disrespectful attitudes toward each
4 interaction partner (“I don't feel much respect for [other player's initials].” “I don't think that
5 [other player's initials] is a respectable person,” “I question [other player's initials]'s ethics,”
6 and “I admire [other player's initials]” (reverse-coded); 1=very unlikely, 7=very likely).

7 Ratings were averaged to form an attitudinal index of disrespect (average $\alpha = .81$).

8 Last, as a manipulation check, we assessed participants' perceptions of targets' views
9 on human nature using two items: What is your impression of [other player's initials]? This
10 person thinks negatively of other people; thinks positively of other people (reverse-coded);
11 1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree). Ratings were averaged to form a manipulation check
12 index (average $r = .83$).

13 **Results**

14 To assess the effect of targets' cynicism on participants' behavioral disrespect and
15 disrespectful attitudes, we used multilevel regression (cross-classified models), with
16 participants and stimuli as random effects. All models included random intercepts at the level
17 of participants and stimuli. We standardized the variables before the analyses, so that the
18 coefficients can be interpreted in terms of standard deviations.

19 *Manipulation check.* We regressed participants' judgments of targets' views on other
20 people (manipulation check questions) on targets' cynicism scores. Based on the texts they
21 read, participants perceived that targets who scored higher (vs. lower) on cynicism held more
22 negative views about others ($\beta = .54, p < .001$). Hence, the manipulation was successful.

23 *Behavioral disrespect.* We regressed participants' decision to transfer money to the
24 other player (1 = keep, 0 = transfer) on the other player's cynicism score in order to test
25 whether cynicism predicts being disrespected by others. In line with predictions, participants
26 were more likely keep the money (and hence not exhibit trust) with partners who had higher

1 cynicism scores, $OR = 2.5$ ($p < .001$). In other words, a one standard-deviation increase in the
2 other player's cynicism was associated with a 150% higher probability that they would
3 receive no money in the trust game (Figure 5). Given that the decision to withhold trust
4 signals disrespect (Dunning et al., 2014), these findings suggest that expressing a cynical
5 worldview can elicit behavioral disrespect from others.

6 *Disrespectful attitudes.* The same pattern emerged regarding participants' disrespectful
7 attitudes towards the other player. More cynical targets were viewed with more disrespect, β
8 = .34, $p < .001$. Expressions of disrespect towards the other player in turn were associated with
9 a higher likelihood of deciding to keep the endowment for themselves ($OR = 2.72$, $p < .001$).

10 *Mediation analyses.* We examined whether disrespectful attitudes toward the target
11 mediated the effect of the target's cynicism on participants' behavioral disrespect (i.e., the
12 decision not to trust). We estimated the effect of the target's cynicism on participants'
13 disrespectful attitudes towards them (path 'a') and the effect of participants' disrespectful
14 attitudes on their choice of whether to trust (path 'b') in separate multilevel regression
15 equations. We computed the indirect effect by multiplying 'a' and 'b' and used the Monte
16 Carlo estimation method to calculate its confidence interval (Selig & Preacher, 2008). The
17 indirect effect was significant (0.86, 95% CI [0.58, 1.16]), providing evidence for the
18 mediation.

19 *Testing non-linear effects.* To examine whether the effect of target cynicism on
20 participants' disrespect was driven by cynical targets being more likely to elicit disrespect or
21 non-cynical targets being less likely to elicit disrespect, we tested a quadratic effect. We
22 regressed participants' disrespectful behavior on both the linear and quadratic terms of
23 targets' cynicism. Both effects were significant ($OR_{linear}=2.27$, $p < .001$, $OR_{squaredr}=1.45$, $p =$
24 $.008$), pointing to a non-linear pattern. We repeated these analyses with disrespectful attitudes
25 as the dependent variable. Again, both the linear ($\beta=.28$, $p < .001$) and quadratic effects
26 ($\beta=.14$, $p < .001$) reached significance.

1 disrespectful toward others and that cynics are treated with disrespect because they behave
2 disrespectfully toward others in the first place.

3 Study 6 sought to address these possibilities using a daily diary method that allowed us
4 to investigate how people's social experiences on one day affected them the following day.
5 Daily surveys measured the frequency of being both victim and perpetrator of disrespectful
6 treatment. Individual differences in cynicism were measured during an intake survey, which
7 took place on the day before the first daily assessment. To examine experiences of disrespect
8 on subsequent cynicism development, cynicism was assessed again directly after the last daily
9 assessment, seven days later.

10 The study design allowed us to test three key hypotheses. First, in an attempt to
11 complement the findings from Studies 1-3 showing that perceived disrespect contributes to
12 cynicism, we assessed changes in cynicism over time depending on people's experience of
13 being disrespected during the seven days from the start to the end of the study.

14 Second, making use of the intensive longitudinal data structure, we tested whether
15 cynical people's experience of being victims of disrespect led to them being disrespectful
16 toward others the following day. Being the victim of negative treatment by others can result in
17 undesirable changes in the victims' behavior, such as aggression directed at unrelated third
18 parties (DeBono & Muraven, 2014; Lee, Kim, Bhave, & Duffy, 2016). Even minor negative
19 behaviors, such as rudeness, can spread from one person to another in the workplace like the
20 common cold (Foulk, Woolum, & Erez, 2016). In a similar manner, we expected that being
21 the victim of disrespect would incite disrespectful behavior in return. We tested a longitudinal
22 mediation model in which being a victim of disrespect on any given day mediated the
23 relationship between cynicism scores and perpetrating disrespect the following day (Figure 6,
24 Panel A).

25 Third, given cynical individuals' tendency to read unkind, malicious intent in others'
26 actions even when there are none (Barefoot et al., 1989; Holt-Lunstad, Smith, & Uchino,

1 2008), we tested whether cynical people are, at baseline, inclined to treat others
2 disrespectfully. If so, then others' disrespectful behavior toward cynics may follow as a
3 consequence of their (the cynics) initially disrespectful actions. To test this possibility, we
4 used a longitudinal mediation model in which being perpetrator of disrespect on any given
5 day mediated the association between cynicism scores and becoming a victim of disrespect
6 the following day (Figure 6, Panel B).

7 **Method**

8 **Participants.** American adults (N=536) were recruited via MTurk in exchange for a
9 small payment. Of these, n=30 did not pass the attention check item (from Studies 4-5) and
10 were not further considered. Of the 506 remaining participants, 462 completed one or more
11 daily assessment and thus constituted our sample (52.6% male, $M_{\text{age}} = 36.43$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 11.60$).
12 This sample size was large enough to detect even small effects ($r > .12$) with 80% power ($\alpha =$
13 $.05$, two-tailed test; G*Power 3.1, Faul et al., 2009). On average, participants completed 5.55
14 ($SD = 1.89$) out of 7 daily assessments. This study was not required to have ethics approval.

15 **Procedure.** Participants were sent an online link to each daily assessment at 4 p.m.
16 Eastern Standard Time. On average, participants completed each daily survey within 3.62 (SD
17 $= 4.76$) hours after the link was sent, with 75% of surveys completed within 4.87 hours.
18 Surveys were closed 24h after the link was sent.

19 The day before the first daily diary assessment and directly following the last daily
20 assessment, participants completed the 8-item cynical distrust scale, as in Studies 2 – 5 (Cook
21 & Medley, 1954; Greenglass & Julkunen, 1989) (Appendix A). Reliabilities were high
22 (Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$ at intake; $.93$ at follow up; test-retest $r = .80$, $p < .001$).

23 For the daily assessments, participants reported experiences of disrespect using two
24 items. They indicated whether, within the last 24 hours, someone treated them disrespectfully
25 and made demeaning or derogatory remarks about them in front of others (1 = not at all, 7 = a
26 lot). Responses were averaged to create an index of being the target of disrespect (average $r =$

1 .80). Using similarly-worded items, participants rated their own behavior to assess their
2 disrespectful treatment of others. Ratings were averaged to form an index representing being a
3 perpetrator of disrespect (average $r = .85$). The order of items measuring being a target and
4 perpetrator of disrespect was fully randomized across participants and assessments.

5 The study included measures of constructs for research projects unrelated to the present
6 research question. These constructs included: attitudes towards science and technology, free-
7 will beliefs, self-control, labor valuation, greed, power, religiosity, and political ideology. The
8 study materials can be seen at the study's OSF page
9 (https://osf.io/snq34/?view_only=581e49426cb54acd9fb1adfade3b5b38).

10 **Analytic strategy.** Because daily assessments were nested within participants, we
11 applied multilevel regression methodology. Making use of the information on daily variations
12 in participants' experiences, we used day-to-day spillovers of being a victim to predict
13 becoming a perpetrator of disrespect and the converse.

14 First, we tested whether cynicism scores would predict experiences of disrespect
15 (replicating Studies 1, 2, 4, and 5), and whether this experience would shape participants'
16 behavior the next day by increasing acts of disrespect toward others. Specifically, we
17 estimated a model that assessed whether the relationship between endorsement of cynical
18 views and perpetrating disrespect would be mediated by perceptions of being disrespected on
19 the previous day. To accommodate the longitudinal aspect of the data and ensure temporal
20 precedence, the mediation model statistically controlled for acts of perpetrating disrespect on
21 the previous day (Figure 6, Panel A).

22 Second, we used a model to test whether cynical individuals' experience as a victim of
23 disrespect is a result of their own disrespectful behavior on the previous day. The model
24 assessed whether the influence of cynicism on becoming a victim of disrespect was mediated
25 by behaving disrespectfully toward others on the prior day. To help ensure temporal
26 precedence, the experience as victim of disrespect on the previous day was included as a

1 control variable (Figure 6, Panel B). In other words, we tested whether displays of
2 disrespectful behavior explain why cynical individuals are treated in a disrespectful manner
3 by others. In both mediation models, we followed recommendations for longitudinal
4 mediation analyses by Preacher (2015) and estimated paths a and b in a series of multilevel
5 regression equations. All paths at Level 1 (daily experiences), including path b , were modeled
6 as a random effects so that they could vary among participants.

7 **Results**

8 Table 4 displays descriptive information. On average across the test week period, initial
9 levels of cynicism predicted reports of being victims as well as perpetrators of disrespectful
10 treatment ($r = .29$ and $r = .23$, $p < .001$, respectively).

11 *Mediation analyses: Cynicism -> victim of disrespect -> perpetrator of disrespect*
12 (Figure 6, Panel A). Cynicism scores predicted reports of being the victim of disrespect on
13 one day ($b = 0.19$, $p < .001$), which in turn increased the likelihood of treating others with
14 disrespect the following day ($b = 0.18$, $p < .001$). To estimate the significance of the indirect
15 effect, we used the Monte Carlo method (Bauer, Preacher, & Gil, 2006; Selig & Preacher,
16 2008). The indirect effect amounted to .03, 95% CI [0.02; 0.06], indicating a significant
17 mediation pattern.

18 *Mediation analyses: Cynicism -> perpetrator of disrespect -> victim of disrespect*
19 (Figure 6, Panel B). The more that people held cynical beliefs, the more likely they were to
20 report behaving disrespectfully toward others on a given day, ($b = 0.14$, $p < .001$), which was
21 associated with elevated reports of receiving disrespectful treatment by others the following
22 day ($b = 0.20$, $p < .001$). The indirect effect was estimated at .03, 95% CI [0.01; 0.05],
23 indicating that acting as a perpetrator of disrespect mediated the effect of cynicism on
24 experiencing disrespect from others.

25 *Does experiencing disrespectful treatment predict change in cynicism over a week? We*
26 fit a structural equation model (SEM) in which cynicism scores at intake predicted

1 experiences of being the victim of disrespect in the next 7 days, which in turn predicted more
2 cynicism on day 8 (Figure 7). All variables were modeled as latent constructs. The model fit
3 the data well: $\chi^2(124) = 315.82$, CFI = .96, RMSEA = .06, SRMR = .04.

4 The model had support. Initial cynicism scores positively predicted the cumulated
5 experiences of being a victim of disrespect over the next 7 days ($b = 0.26$, $\beta = .31$, $p < .001$),
6 which in turn predicted greater endorsement of cynical worldview at the end of the study ($b =$
7 0.17 , $\beta = .12$, $p = .001$). The indirect effect was $b = .04$, $p = .002$, 95% CI [.02; .07], pointing
8 to a significant mediation effect.

9 **Discussion**

10 Study 6 demonstrated that cynical people, compared to less cynical people, are both
11 targets and perpetrators of disrespectful treatment. Does the perception of being treated with
12 disrespect turn cynical individuals from victims into perpetrators? Yes. Mediation analyses
13 showed that feeling like the victim of disrespect mediated the effect of cynicism on behaving
14 disrespectfully toward others on the following day. Does behaving disrespectfully turn cynical
15 individuals into victims of disrespect? Yes. Behaving disrespectfully toward others mediated
16 the effect of cynicism on becoming the victim of disrespect the following day.

17 In brief, these results suggest that experiencing disrespect from others turns cynical
18 individuals from victims into perpetrators of disrespect. At the same time, cynical (vs. less
19 cynical) individuals are more likely to commit acts of disrespect in the first place, increasing
20 their likelihood of being treated with disrespect by others in response.

21 Adding to these patterns were findings that people who reported being disrespected,
22 totaled across the weeklong diary period, showed a significant rise in cynicism over the
23 course of a week, closing the vicious cycle of disrespect and cynicism.

24 **General Discussion**

25 Cynicism presents a risk factor for financial hardship, poor health, and premature
26 mortality (Barefoot et al., 1989; Niaura et al., 2002; Smith, 1992; Stavrova & Ehlebracht,

1 2016). While poor social relationships figure prominently among the deleterious
2 consequences of cynicism (Hart, 1999; Hart & Hope, 2004; Kaplan et al., 2004; McCann,
3 Russo, & Benjamin, 1997), we proposed that negative social experiences are not just a mere
4 consequence of a cynical worldview but in fact could give rise to cynicism in the first place.

5 Drawing from the literature on norms of respectful treatment (Cropanzano, Goldman, &
6 Folger, 2005; Dunning, 2017; Miller, 2001; Rousseau, 1995), we focused on a particular
7 social experience, the experience of being disrespected. We advanced a vicious cycle
8 hypothesis in which experiencing disrespect and adopting cynical beliefs mutually reinforce
9 each other over time.

10 As people feel that, by default, they are owed respectful treatment by others (Miller,
11 2001; Rawls, 1971), disrespectful treatment feels undeserved and unjustified. Consequently, it
12 is likely attributed to the flaws in the perpetrator's moral character and by extension people in
13 general, promoting a cynical worldview. Yet, to the extent that cynicism implies
14 suspiciousness, distrust, and devaluation of others, endorsing a cynical view of human nature
15 represent itself might trigger disrespect.

16 To examine whether the relationships between disrespect and cynicism follow the
17 proposed vicious cycle pattern, we applied a variety of methods, using longitudinal,
18 experimental and daily diary studies. We tested how perceived disrespect and cynicism shape
19 each other over the course of 4 years (Study 2) and 7 days (Study 6). We tracked how
20 cynicism affects individuals' daily experiences of disrespect. Longitudinal analyses showed
21 that experiences of disrespect promoted a cynical worldview and that the more cynical people
22 became the more likely they were to report further disrespect (Studies 2 and 6), attesting to
23 the vicious cycle hypothesis. These findings were further corroborated by overall five
24 experiments (three reported in the manuscript and two in the Supplementary materials)
25 showing that reminding people of previously experienced disrespect resulted in increased
26 levels of cynicism (Studies 3 and S1) and that endorsing cynical views increases the odds of

1 being disrespected by others (Studies 4, 5 and S2). Additionally, a large-scale survey of
2 53,333 individuals in 29 countries showed the links between disrespect and cynicism to be
3 nearly culturally universal and even stronger than cynicism associations with another
4 powerful negative social experience, lacking social support (Study 1).

5 Are cynical individuals unjust victims of disrespect or do they have a hand in eliciting
6 disrespect from others? It seems that both might be true. The results of a week-long daily
7 diary study provided evidence for both pathways (Study 6). Longitudinal mediation analyses
8 showed that cynical individuals were more likely to feel like victims of disrespect and,
9 consequently, showed a stronger propensity to behave disrespectfully toward others. At the
10 same time, cynicism was positively associated with perpetrating disrespect at baseline,
11 suggesting that cynical individuals' propensity to treat others with disrespect in the first place
12 could have resulted in them being treated disrespectfully by others.

13 The present research has a number of strengths, such as the use of diverse and large
14 samples and different methods, including cross-national and longitudinal surveys,
15 experiments, incentivized economic games, and daily diaries. This combination of methods
16 allowed us to show how cynicism and perceived disrespect mutually reinforce over time and
17 to substantiate these findings by exploring how people treat others who have stronger (versus
18 weaker) cynical beliefs.

19 It is also important to note the present studies' limitations. Although the causal nature of
20 the associations between cynicism and being target of disrespect was substantiated by both
21 self-report and behavioral data (e.g., Study 5), the links between cynicism and treating others
22 disrespectfully are based on self-reported behavior as perpetrators of disrespect. Additional
23 work testing that link using a measure of disrespectful behavior would be welcome. Further,
24 following existing practices (e.g., Erez et al., 2009; Sleebos, Ellemers, & de Gilder, 2007), we
25 treated disrespect as a construct implying that a lack of respect is equivalent to disrespect.

1 Nevertheless, it is an open question as to whether a lack of respect is psychologically similar
2 to being disrespected, one that warrants investigation.

3 While the present research focused on individual-level predictors of cynicism, it might
4 be promising to explore what societal and cultural factors contribute to a cynical worldview.
5 Given recent findings on the effect of a range of societal indicators, such as income
6 inequality, poverty, and violent crime rates as driving forces behind the decline in social
7 capital (Twenge, Campbell, & Carter, 2014), exploring whether these socio-cultural indicators
8 add to the development of cynical beliefs might be promising as well. Also, while the present
9 work has focused on owed respect (as it reflects the judgment of moral character and so does
10 cynicism), future work might consider examining the effect of earned respect, as well as other
11 types of interpersonal mistreatment, as predictors and potential consequences of cynicism, as
12 well.

13 The present findings contribute to the emerging literature on how individuals' beliefs
14 emerge and stabilize (e.g., Milfont, Milojev, & Sibley, 2016). Our findings suggest that
15 cynical individuals tend to see other people as lacking integrity and goodwill, and other
16 people's behavior towards them seems to confirm the maliciousness of human nature. This
17 pattern has been seen with other interpersonally-relevant traits as well. For example, Hales et
18 al. (2016) showed that disagreeable individuals are more likely to be ostracized, which in turn
19 strengthens their disagreeableness. Similarly, victim justice sensitivity (sensitivity to being
20 treated unfairly by others; Schmitt, Gollwitzer, Maes, & Arbach, 2005) might stabilize after
21 being victimized; Gollwitzer, Süßenbach, & Hannuschke, 2015) and produce antisocial
22 behavior (Gollwitzer, Rothmund, Pfeiffer, & Ensenbach, 2009).

23 Endorsing cynical views might represent a defensive strategy. Cynicism and the
24 associated negative social behaviors, such as denying others respect, might represent a
25 preemptive strike aimed at protecting oneself from victimization. Yet, as we show, this
26 strategy is not just doomed to fail, it can backfire: people react negatively to signs of

1 cynicism, tend to mistreat cynical individuals, and respond to signs of disrespect with further
2 disrespect — which only serves to reassure cynics of their worldview.

3 While we have shown perceived disrespect to contribute to cynicism development,
4 identifying situational and personality factors that could help curb the vicious cycle of
5 disrespect and cynicism would be an important endeavor for future studies. Recent research
6 shows that perceiving one has control over one's life is associated with decreasing levels of
7 cynicism (Stavrova & Ehlebracht, 2018b). Drawing from research on coping with peer
8 victimization (Betts, Houston, Steer, & Gardner, 2017; Kochenderfer-Ladd & Skinner, 2002),
9 it may be that perceptions of personal control can prevent sliding into cynicism as a reaction
10 to perceived disrespect.

11 **Conclusions**

12 We opened the article with observations that cynicism is on the rise. So too is
13 disrespect. National polls suggest that over three-quarters of Americans report having been
14 treated disrespectfully and more than half admit to treating others disrespectfully (Williams,
15 2016). A survey of about 20,000 employees found that over half of the sample reported to feel
16 disrespected by their bosses (Porath, 2014).

17 From airports and airplanes (DeCelles & Norton, 2016), to the workplace (Foulk et al.,
18 2016), to the crumbing of general civility in everyday life (Williams, 2016), people often feel
19 that their concerns, needs, and personhood simply do not matter. Our results suggest that
20 cynicism is born of disrespect as well as invites disrespect, thereby eliciting the very behavior
21 that gave rise to it in the first place.

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Table 1, *Within-country zero-order correlations, Study 1*

Country	N	(a) Cynicism and disrespect	(b) Cynicism and lack of support	(c) Disrespect and lack of support
Albania	1181	.129***	.095***	.179***
Belgium	1862	.328***	.168***	.319***
Bulgaria	2202	.157***	.145***	.357***
Switzerland	1487	.299***	.135***	.306***
Cyprus	1104	.186***	.092***	.199***
Czech Republic	1899	.204***	.107***	.379***
Germany	2947	.321***	.152***	.284***
Denmark	1628	.312***	.178***	.273***
Estonia	2321	.279***	.199***	.254***
Spain	1804	.176***	.108***	.225***
Finland	2167	.332***	.238***	.297***
France	1893	.273***	.193***	.216***
United Kingdom	2239	.330***	.194***	.278***
Hungary	1955	.196***	.180***	.428***
Ireland	2567	.274***	.172***	.410***
Israel	2423	.149***	.119***	.343***
Iceland	736	.395***	.183***	.323***
Italy	947	.220***	.116***	.260***
Lithuania	1970	.195***	.148***	.402***
Netherlands	1828	.340***	.206***	.268***
Norway	1614	.325***	.184***	.325***
Poland	1830	.133***	.086***	.250***
Portugal	2090	.094***	.150***	.390***
Russian Federation	2392	.228***	.189***	.290***
Sweden	1836	.340***	.134***	.255***
Slovenia	1243	.193***	.158***	.316***

Slovakia	1819	.155***	.116***	.288***
Ukraine	2083	.183***	.144***	.312***
Kosovo	1266	.039	.010	.311***

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

Table 2, *Measurement invariance analyses*

	χ^2	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR
Measurement model, Study 2						
Free loadings	3388.08	90	< .001	.954	.043	.039
Constrained loadings	3393.97	96	< .001	.954	.042	.040
Model difference	5.89	6	.44	.000	.001	.000
Measurement model, Study 6						
Free loadings	276.40	95	< .001	.961	.064	.037
Constrained loadings	279.16	102	< .001	.962	.061	.040
Model difference	2.76	7	.91	-.001	.003	-.003

Table 3, Means, standard deviations and correlations among the variables, Study 2

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1 Cynicism T1	2.97	1.15	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2 Disrespect T1	1.72	0.86	.285***	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
3 Cynicism T2	2.97	1.14	.565***	.248***	-	-	-	-	-	-
4 Disrespect T2	1.70	0.89	.246***	.504***	.286***	-	-	-	-	-
5 Age T1	65.15	11.97	-.085***	-.175***	-.122***	-.164***	-	-	-	-
6 Gender	0.41	0.49	.147***	.052***	.139***	.025***	.028***	-	-	-
7 Ethnicity	0.77	0.42	-.152***	-.088***	-.161***	-.086***	.186***	.045***	-	-
8 Education	3.24	1.37	-.241***	-.038***	-.230***	-.047***	-.149***	.035***	.137***	-
9 Income T1	66251.81	267367.52	-.019*	-.010	-.024**	-.028**	-.073***	.034***	.042***	.103***

Note. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$. Gender (1=male, 0=female); Ethnicity (1=Caucasian, 0=other).

Table 4, *Means, standard deviations and correlations among the variables, Study 6*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3
1 Cynicism, day 1	3.85	1.28	-	-	-
2 Cynicism, day 8	3.58	1.39	.80***	-	-
3 Disrespect, victim	1.50	0.92	.29***	.34***	-
4 Disrespect, perpetrator	1.42	0.84	.23***	.26***	.86***

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Correlations with disrespect measures are average correlations across daily surveys.

Figure 1, Zero-order correlations (*r*) between disrespect and cynicism across 29 countries, Study 1

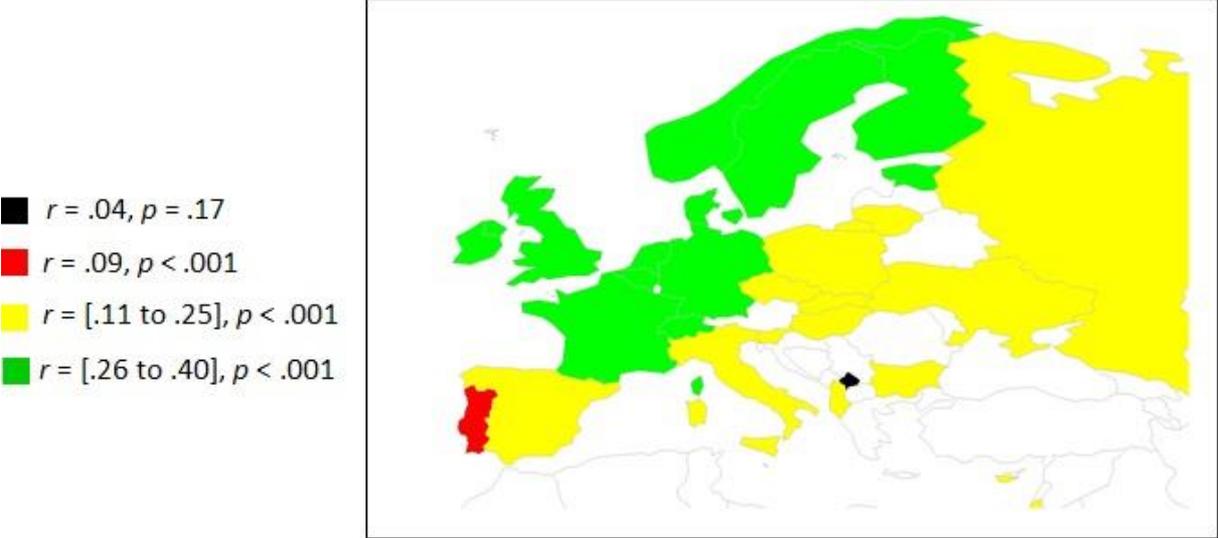
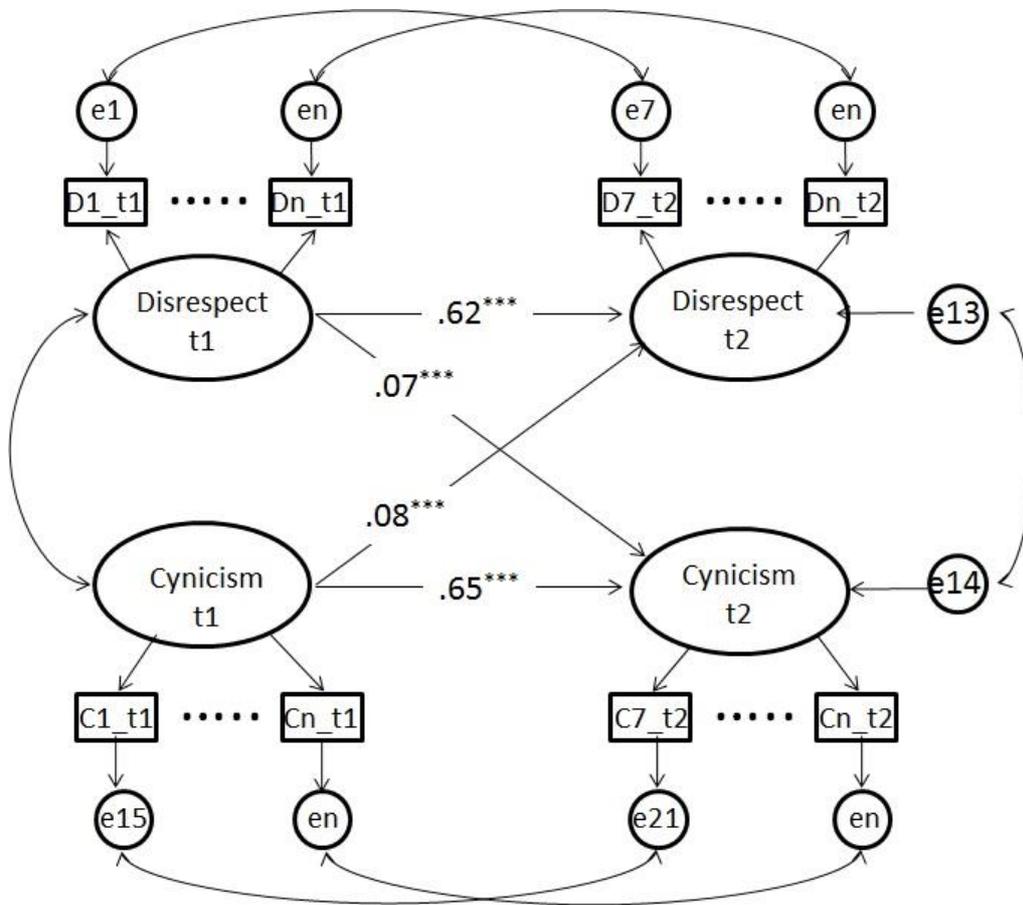
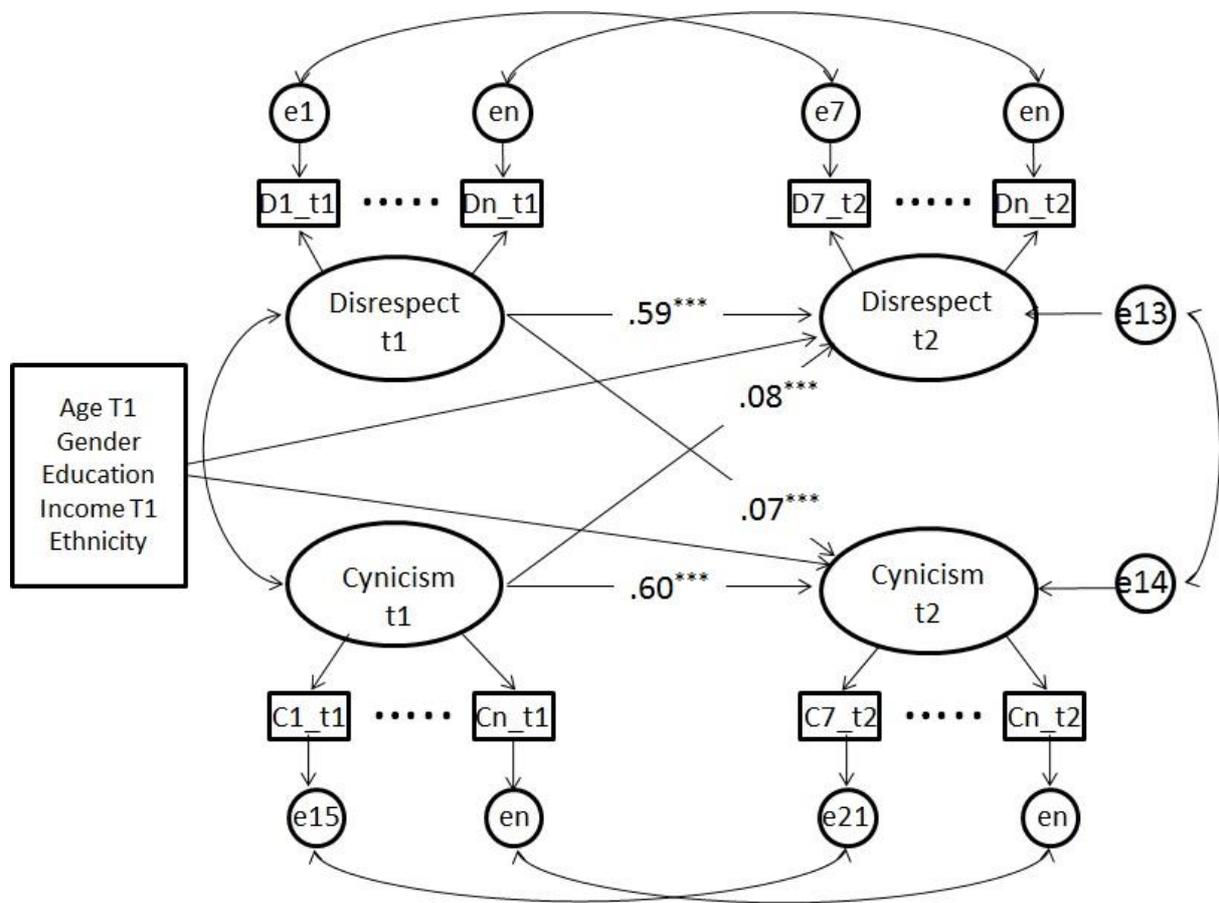


Figure 2, *Reciprocal associations (standardized coefficients) between perceived disrespect and cynical beliefs, Study 2*



Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Fit indices: $\chi^2 (90) = 3388.08$, $p < .001$, CFI = .95, RMSEA = .04, SRMR = .04.

Figure 3, *Reciprocal associations (standardized coefficients) between perceived disrespect and cynical beliefs, with control variables, Study 2*



Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Fit indices: $\chi^2 (160) = 5882.43$, $p < .001$, CFI = .91, RMSEA = .05, SRMR = .06.

Figure 4, *Effect of participants' dispositional cynicism on willingness to treat the target person with disrespect, depending on the target person's (ostensible) cynicism, Study 4*

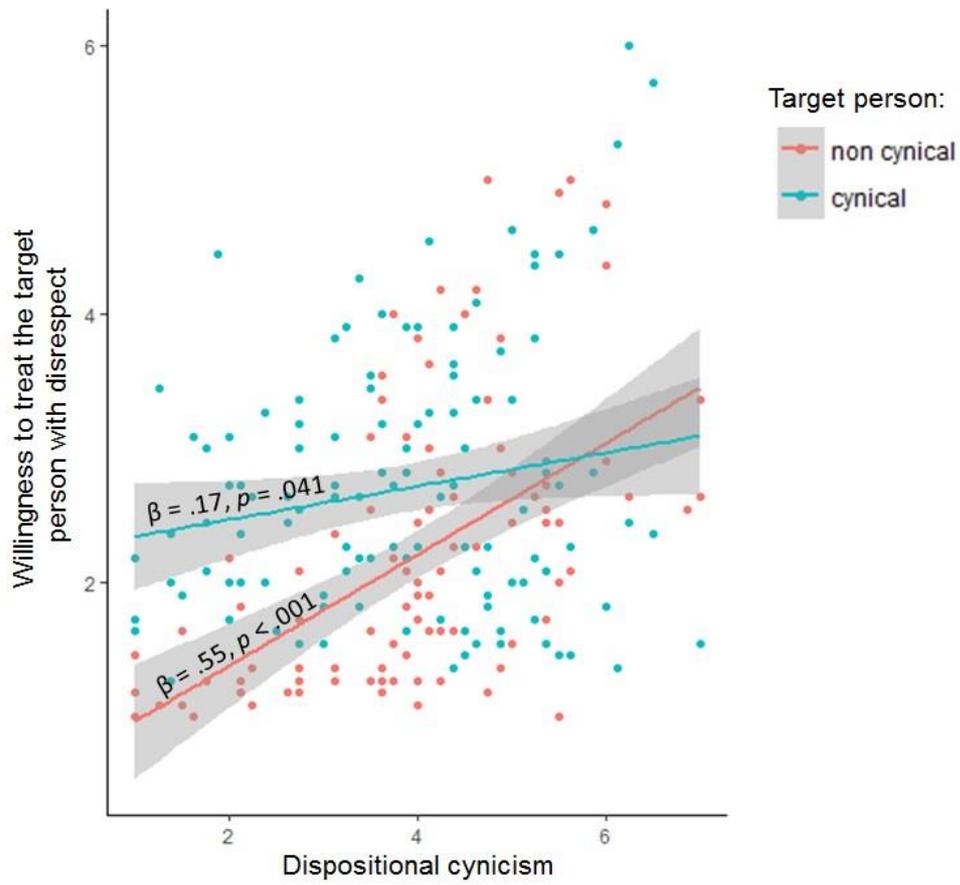
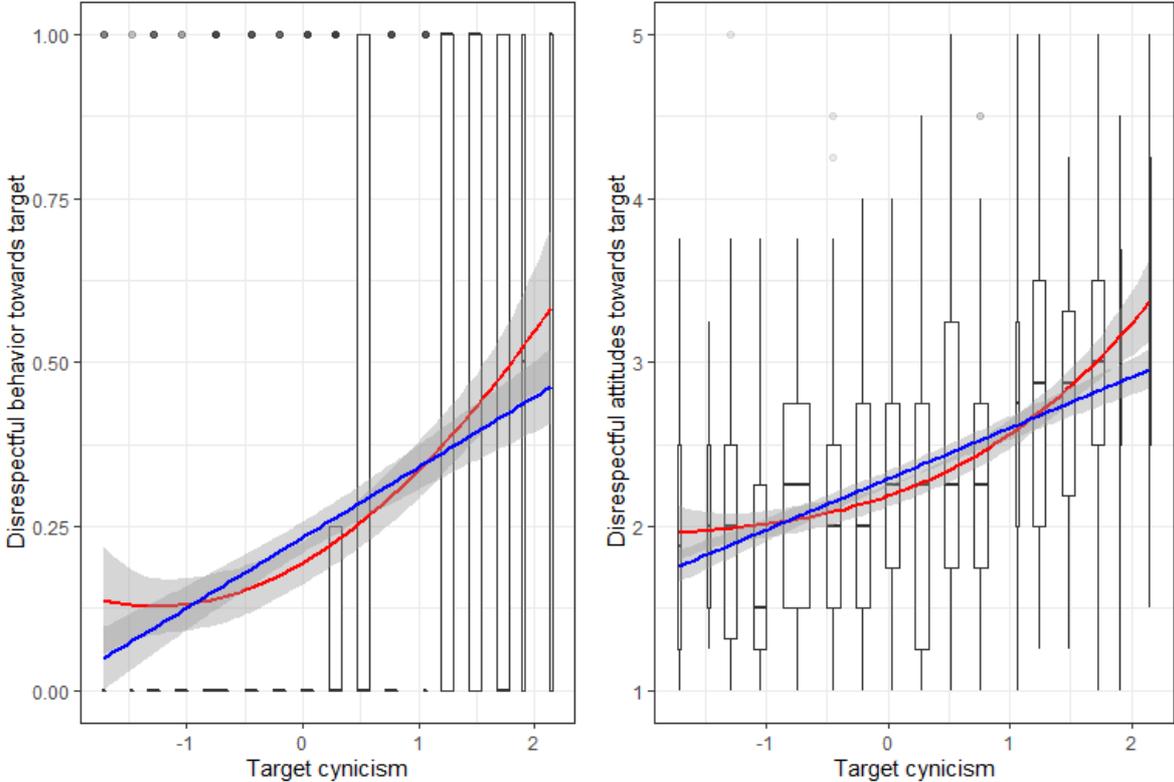


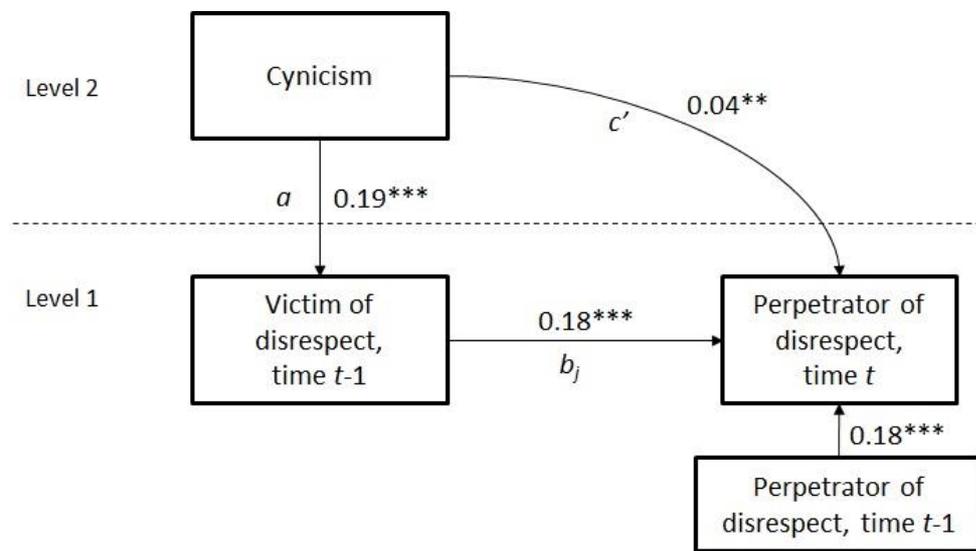
Figure 5, *Linear (blue line) and quadratic (red line) effects of targets' cynicism on participants' disrespectful behavior (left) and attitudes (right) towards the targets, Study 5*



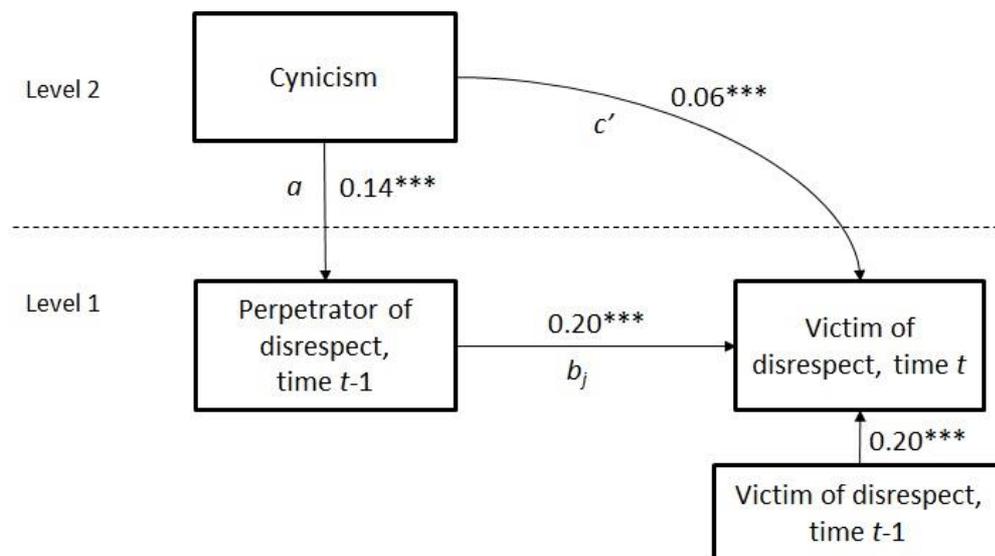
Note. Boxes represent box plots for each value of target's cynicism.

Figure 6, *Mediation analysis in Study 6*

Panel A



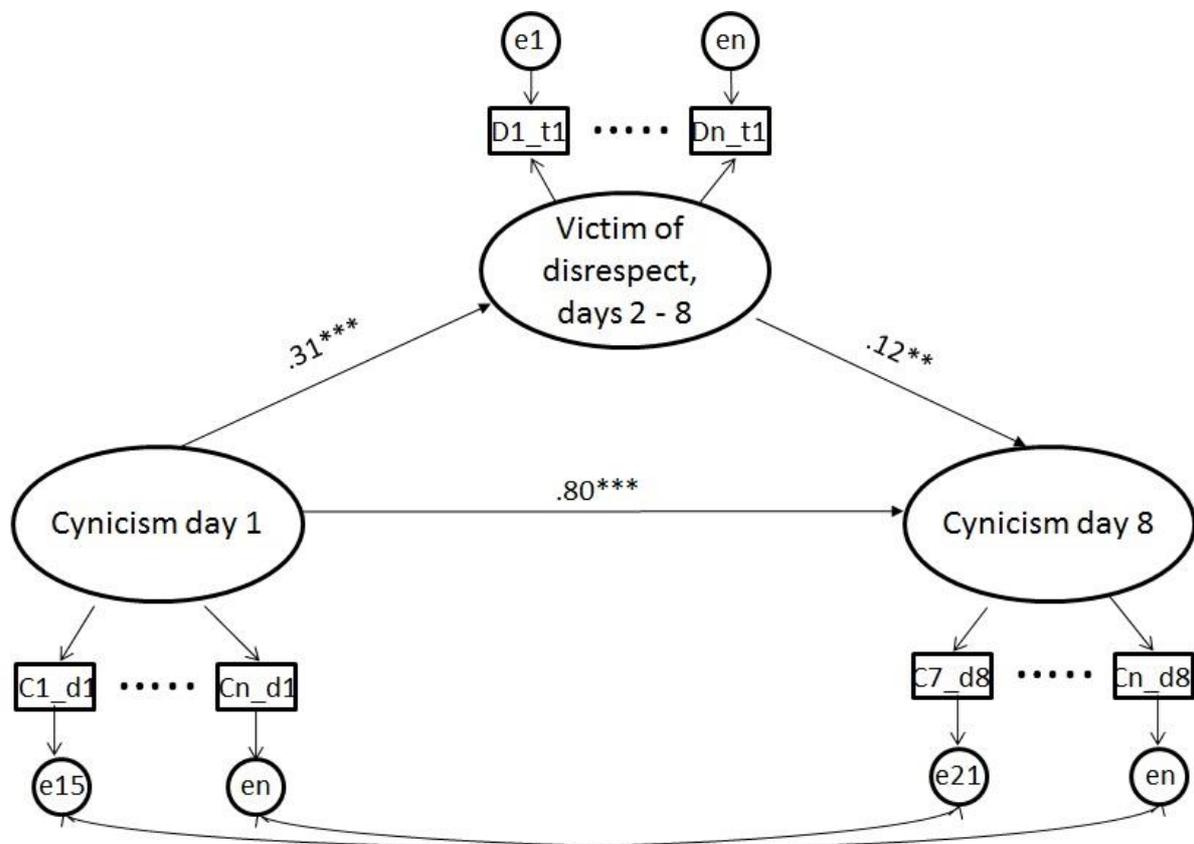
Panel B



Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. b_j is a random effect, as its estimation varies across Level 2 units (persons); all effects at Level 1 are modeled as random.

Figure 7

Mediation analysis in Study 6



Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Standardized path coefficients. Fit: $\chi^2 (124) = 315.82$, CFI = .96, RMSEA = .06, SRMR = .04. Indirect effect: $b = .04$, $p = .002$, 95% CI [.02; .07]. Total effect: $b = .93$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.83; 1.04]

Appendix A

Cynical Distrust Scale

Studies 2-6

Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements.

1. I think most people would lie to get ahead.
2. Most people inwardly dislike putting themselves out to help other people.
3. Most people make friends because friends are likely to be useful to them.
4. It is safer to trust nobody.
5. No one cares much what happens to you.
6. Most people are honest chiefly through fear of being caught.
7. I commonly wonder what hidden reasons another person may have for doing something nice to me.
8. Most people will use somewhat unfair means to gain profit or an advantage rather than lose it.

Items 1, 2, 5, 7 and 8 were used in the Health and Retirement Study (HRS, 2018) and hence the current manuscript's Study 2.

All 8 items were used in Studies 3 - 6.

* The scale originally included a ninth item, "When a man is with a woman he is usually thinking about things related to her sex", that was not included in the current studies as it lacks face-validity.

Appendix B

Willingness to treat the target person disrespectfully:

In your future dealings with Cory, how likely would you be to...

...treat Cory disrespectfully

...talk down to Cory

...put Cory down

...be condescending to Cory

...insult Cory

...make demeaning or derogatory remarks about Cory

...belittle Cory's opinions in front of others

...pay little attention to Cory's statements

...show little interest in Cory's opinion

...treat Cory with respect (reverse-coded)

...look up to Cory (reverse-coded).

Items were presented in a random order.