



UNIVERSITÄT
BIELEFELD

Faculty of Business Administration
and Economics



Economics Seminar

Tuesday, 6. Januar 2026, Room H8, 2:30 pm



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„Narratives, Social Norms
and (Im)moral Behavior“

Abstract: Moral narratives - explanations rationalizing actions on moral grounds - pervade public discourse. Across a series of pre-registered experiments with over 9,000 participants, we investigate how they affect lying behavior when dishonesty is more or less justifiable. Our data show that positive narratives which promote truth-telling significantly decrease deception, particularly in low justifiability contexts. Negative narratives favoring deception, in contrast, show little influence across different degrees of justifiability. Mechanism experiments reveal that low justifiability contexts generate stronger normative consensus against lying, while high justifiability contexts produce more ambiguous normative beliefs. Drawing on recent advances in social norms research, we propose a model to explain this asymmetry: narrative influence depends critically on normative consensus.