**Scales that make us better people:
The effect of scales on the perceived severity of financial misconduct**

Shahar Ayal, Ofer Senderey, and Guy Hochman

School of Psychology, Interdisciplinary Center (IDC), Herzliya, Israel

The current research investigates whether variations in measurement scale might influence the way people judge financial misconduct. For example, do we judge bank clerk who embezzles 3614 shekels differently from bank clerk who embezzles 1000 dollars, even though the amount is identical, as 1$ equals 3.614NIS? The self-maintenance theory of ethical behavior (Ayal & Gino, 2011; Hochman et al., 2016; Mazar, Amir, & Ariely, 2008) suggests that people limit their dishonest behavior to the extent it can be justified. Consequently, small deviations from honesty can be more easily categorized as unconscious mistakes or grey area behaviors that enable people to maintain a positive moral image of themselves as good people. Based on this rationale, we hypothesized that when using a larger measurement scale (dollar compared to shekels), the experienced gap of the same distance from honesty will be narrowed and easier to justify. Results from two experiments confirm this hypothesis and revealed that the same financial deviations from honesty were judged as less severe and punishable when they were formulated by large units compared to small ones. Moreover, the findings indicate that this effect does not stem from culture differences or the degree of familiarity with each scale, but rather it is driven by the effect of the perceived distance of each scale from being honest.