


Liars, Damned Liars, and Zealots: The Effect of Moral Mandates on Transgressive Advocacy Acceptance

Social Psychological and
Personality Science
2018, Vol. 9(6) 711–718
© The Author(s) 2017
Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/1948550617720272
journals.sagepub.com/home/spp


Allison B. Mueller¹ and Linda J. Skitka¹

Abstract

This research explored people's reactions to targets who “went too far” to support noble causes. We hypothesized that observers' moral mandates would shape their perceptions of others' advocacy, even when that advocacy was transgressive, that is, when it used norm-violating means (i.e., lying) to achieve a preferred end. Observers were expected to accept others' advocacy, independent of its credibility, to a greater extent when it bolstered their strong (vs. weak) moral mandate. Conversely, observers with strong (vs. weak) moral conviction for the cause were expected to condemn others' advocacy—independent of its credibility—to a greater degree when it represented progress for moral opponents. Results supported these predictions. When evaluating a target in a persuasive communication setting, people's judgments were uniquely shaped by the degree to which the target bolstered or undermined a cherished moral mandate.

Keywords

moral conviction, moral mandates, morality, persuasive communication, deception

In 2012, *This American Life* showcased Mike Daisey's monologue, “The Agony and the Ecstasy of Steve Jobs,” which had 40 productions, been translated into six languages, and downloaded more than 100,000 times (Daisey, 2012). Daisey's monologue described the horrifying exploitation of workers at Foxconn, the Chinese manufacturing company that produces computer components for Apple Inc.: underage workers as young as 12 years old, workers with limbs mangled by malfunctioning factory equipment, and workers whose hands shook uncontrollably due to neurotoxin exposure. He concluded that the costs of globalization and lower manufacturing prices were not worth the ethical sacrifices he documented and that workers' exploitation was a moral atrocity.

After the broadcast, *This American Life* discovered that several of Daisey's “facts” were fabricated. Even when directly confronted with evidence of his fabrication, Daisey refused to acknowledge that he lied to the public. He maintained that his characterization was justified because it served a noble cause: making people care about Foxconn workers' plight (Glass, 2012).

The goal of this research is to explore people's reactions to figures like Mike Daisey who “go too far” to support a cause. We propose that people tolerate and perhaps even embrace others' *transgressive advocacy*—that is, advocacy that involves norm-violating means to achieve a preferred end—when others' norm-violating means (e.g., lying) support a shared moralized goal.

Moral Conviction and Transgressive Advocacy Acceptance

People's own *moral conviction* for a cause—their strong and absolute belief that this position is right or wrong, moral or immoral (Skitka, 2002; Skitka & Mullen, 2002)—may cloud their judgment of others' transgressive advocacy. Unlike non-moral attitudes, attitudes held with strong moral conviction (“moral mandates”) are theoretically associated with perceived universality and objectivity. People believe that their moral positions are equally valid everywhere and are as objectively true as $2 + 2 = 4$ (Morgan, Skitka, & Lytle, 2014). As a result, they are more likely to believe that duties and rights follow from the greater moral purposes that underlie rules, procedures, and authority, than from the rules, procedures, or authorities themselves. In other words, moral convictions are authority and rule independent (see Skitka, 2010 for a review).

Still unclear is whether moral mandates contribute to *norm independence*: a feeling of entitlement to undermine social norms to serve a moral conviction. Norm independence could explain people's tolerance of others' transgressive advocacy.

¹ Department of Psychology, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL, USA

Corresponding Author:

Allison Mueller, Department of Psychology, University of Illinois at Chicago,
1007 W. Harrison (M/C 285), Chicago, IL 60607, USA.
Email: amuelle4@uic.edu

When a moral mandate is at stake, the transgressiveness of specific kinds of advocacy may be trivialized. People may feel that a norm-violating route toward achieving a morally mandated end is legitimate—including tolerating others' lies.

The Legitimizing Effect of Moral Mandates

The legitimizing nature of moral mandates ("the moral mandate effect") is especially apparent when exploring people's perceptions of legal outcomes. When people are morally convicted about achieving an outcome, their moral conviction for that cause—not the fairness of procedures—shapes their perception of that outcome's fairness. Procedural factors that traditionally dominate perceptions of justice and fairness (see Van den Bos & Lind, 2001 for a review) matter little when strong moral convictions are at stake. People perceive "morally right" outcomes as just and fair, and "morally wrong" outcomes as unjust and unfair, regardless of whether the outcome is achieved by a just or unjust procedure (e.g., Skitka & Houston, 2001).

Moral convictions could similarly explain why people may construe *social norm violations* as understandable and potentially necessary. When people's moral convictions are at stake, they may believe that upholding moral principles is more important than adhering to social norms. Consistent with this idea, stronger moral convictions are associated with weaker conformity to group norms (Hornsey, Majkut, Terry, & McKimmie, 2003; Hornsey, Smith, & Begg, 2007) and to majority influence (Aramovich, Lytle, & Skitka, 2012). These findings suggest that people are more likely to tolerate norm violations on behalf of themselves or others when they serve their moral mandates.

Although it may be tempting to assume that moral mandates legitimize *any* behavior that achieves a morally mandated result, there are limits to the moral mandate effect. People do not support others who commit heinous acts to serve a shared moral belief (e.g., bombing abortion clinics to bolster prolife beliefs; Mullen & Skitka, 2006; cf. Zaal, Van Laar, Stahl, Ellemers, & Derks, 2011). Although this finding is seemingly inconsistent with the idea that moral mandates could contribute to people's support for others' transgressive advocacy, low-level forms of transgressive advocacy for a cause (e.g., lying) may be easier for observers to excuse than more extreme forms (e.g., outright violence). People may hesitate excusing violence that bolsters a moral mandate because justifying extreme actions could appear self-serving and potentially hypocritical.

The current study examines how people react to targets who achieve a moralized end using means that are not deemed as overtly extreme or blatantly illegal. Lying is typically perceived as transgressive (Mueller & Skitka, unpublished data), yet it is common in everyday life (DePaulo, Kashy, Kirkendol, Wyer, & Epstein, 1996; Turner, Edgley, & Olmstead, 1975). The transgressiveness of lying as a specific form of advocacy may be ambiguous enough that it is easily trivialized. Moral mandates may therefore guide people to legitimize the lies

(as well as truthful advocacy) of others who uphold their shared moral values.

Although we primarily examine how moral mandates shape people's transgressive advocacy tolerance, we also explored how people respond to moral opponents. Moral mandates guide people to feel outraged by others who engage in oppositional advocacy, regardless of whether it is transgressive (Skitka, Bauman, & Mullen, 2004; Tetlock, Kristel, Elson, Green, & Lerner, 2000). Gains for moral opponents represent an attack to one's own moral code. Therefore, people should voice outrage to moral opponents, regardless of their credibility.

Together, the *moral motivation hypothesis* predicts a significant two-way interaction of perceiver agreement with a target (i.e., whether a perceiver supports or opposes a target's position on the issue) and perceiver moral conviction for that specific issue. Independent of whether the target lies or tells the truth to bolster his or her cause, we hypothesize that higher (vs. lower) levels of moral conviction will be associated with more positive evaluations of the target's behavior when perceivers support the target's cause but will be associated with more negative evaluations when perceivers oppose the target's cause.

Method

Participants

American workers from Amazon's Mechanical Turk participated in Fall 2014 ($N = 383$). This sample size was estimated a priori using G*Power with a predicted small-to-medium effect size and 80% power. A subset of these participants ($n = 40$) completed manipulation check measures. The full sample did not complete these measures by error.

Design

A 2 (target credibility: honest, dishonest) \times continuous (moral conviction about federal/taxpayer funding of women's reproductive services) \times 2 (attitude position congruence with target: agree, disagree) between-subjects design was utilized. Participants' attitude positions and moral conviction for the issue were measured, not manipulated, variables.

Procedure

Participants reported their attitude positions for federal/taxpayer funding of women's reproductive services and their moral conviction for the issue. We only retained participants who had an opinion on the issue (i.e., endorsing at least *slightly* when asked how much they support or oppose the issue) for analyses. Participants who did not have an opinion on the issue were excluded from subsequent analyses ($n = 26$). All participants read the same monologue in support of federal/taxpayer funding of women's reproductive services. Thus, supporters for the issue agreed with the speaker's attitude position ($n = 251$), whereas opposers disagreed with the speaker ($n = 106$).

Participants were told the purpose of the study was to investigate how people interpret political monologues. They read:

Now more than ever, we need to focus on political issues that concern women. There is much to lose if we turn a blind eye to politics that are blatantly anti-women and ultimately undemocratic. I am taking a stand now: I pledge to fight for federal funding of women's reproductive services.

Planned Parenthood is an organization that uses federal funding to provide reproductive services to women. Its services include gynecological checkups and contraceptive counseling, among others. Many politicians claim that Planned Parenthood primarily provides abortion services and therefore should not receive federal funding. Their claim is simply not true. Planned Parenthood focuses on prevention. Eighty percent of their clients receive services to prevent unintended pregnancy, and only 3% of all Planned Parenthood health services are abortion services. Ultimately, this preventive care saves money for families, businesses, government, and everybody.

Regardless of its focus on preventative care, attacks on Planned Parenthood persist. These attacks come at a time when the poverty rate among women is the highest in nearly two decades and 1 in 5 women under 65 don't have access to health care. Some states have even eliminated gynecological cancer screenings for uninsured women and offered no alternatives. And what's really astonishing about these budget cuts for women's care is that men don't suffer the same cuts. In fact, there are many health insurance plans that will cover Viagra but won't cover birth-control medication.

This disparity does not reflect public opinion regarding preventative care. A clear majority of Americans want to eliminate the insurance deductibles and co-pays currently associated with prescription contraceptive coverage. A majority of Americans want to maintain safe and affordable reproductive services for women. The American public needs to stand up for what is right, and not just remain silent while politicians wield enormous power at our expense.

I believe in federally funded family planning because it helps to prevent unintended pregnancies. I believe that there is no place for politics in a woman's healthcare decisions. I believe in promoting health and well-being among men and women alike and providing basic care to individuals who cannot afford it. Finally, I believe that women have the right maintain their dignity and privacy while using reproductive services. These services should not be shameful or demeaning.

What do you believe in? Now is the time to act.

Next, they were randomly assigned to one of two feedback conditions: either learning that the excerpt was true or that it was false. Participants read: "Several fact-checking organizations agreed that the monologue you just read is mostly false (mostly true). It was broadcasted over public radio in 2012 to garner support for this issue. The monologue was eventually retracted (replayed) because of the quality of the speaker's claims. In a subsequent interview over public radio, this speaker reiterated that she felt completely justified in airing her original monologue, citing the importance of the issue. Besides airing over public radio, this monologue was available online for anyone to download for free. In the first 48 hours after it was posted, it was downloaded 42,000 times."

Measures

Attitude position. Participants' attitude positions on federal/taxpayer funding of women's reproductive services were assessed with the question, "Do you support or oppose (issue)?" Participants responded with the options *support*, *uncertain/unsure*, *oppose*. Participants who responded with *uncertain/unsure* were then asked, "If you had to choose if you support or oppose (issue), which way would you lean?" Response options included *lean toward supporting*, *lean toward opposing*, and *neither/neutral*.

Attitude congruence with the speaker. Based on participants' measured attitude positions, they were categorized as in agreement or in disagreement with the speaker. Supporters of federal/taxpayer funding of women's reproductive services were categorized as "in agreement with the speaker" and opponents as "in disagreement with the speaker."¹

Moral conviction. Participants were asked, "To what extent is your position on (issue)..." followed by four completions: "a reflection of your core moral beliefs and convictions?", "a reflection of your fundamental beliefs about right and wrong?", "a moral stance?", and "based on strong moral principles?" Response options included *not at all*, *slightly*, *moderately*, *much*, and *very much*. The internal reliability of the moral conviction measure was $\alpha = 0.95$.

Speaker evaluations. Participants' beliefs that the speaker was justified in communicating her monologue were measured with "To what extent do you feel that the speaker was justified in communicating her monologue?" and "To what extent do you feel that people are entitled to speak their minds regarding political issues, like in this monologue?" Response options included *not at all*, *slightly*, *moderately*, *much*, and *very much*. Participants' perceptions that the monologue was permissible were assessed by asking "To what extent do you feel the speaker's monologue was acceptable or unacceptable?" and "To what extent do you feel that monologues like the one you just read are appropriate or inappropriate?" Response options included *very unacceptable (inappropriate)*, *moderately unacceptable (inappropriate)*, *slightly unacceptable (inappropriate)*, *neither acceptable nor unacceptable (appropriate nor inappropriate)*, *slightly acceptable (appropriate)*, *moderately acceptable (appropriate)*, and *very acceptable (appropriate)*.

Finally, participants were asked whether the speaker should be rewarded or punished because of her monologue: "To what extent do you feel that the speaker should be rewarded or punished because of the *content* of the monologue?" and "To what extent do you feel that the speaker should be rewarded or punished because of the *credibility* of the monologue?" Response options included *very punished*, *moderately punished*, *slightly punished*, *neither rewarded nor punished*, *slightly rewarded*, *moderately rewarded*, and *very rewarded*.

Perceptions of the speaker's moral character. The degree to which participants perceived the speaker to be a moral person was assessed with an adaptation of Aquino and Reed's (2002) Moral Identity Scale. Participants assessed the following statements: "The speaker is caring," "The speaker is compassionate," "The speaker is fair," "The speaker is friendly," "The speaker is generous," "The speaker is hard-working," "The speaker is helpful," and "The speaker is kind," with the point labels *not at all*, *slightly*, *moderately*, *much*, and *very much*. The internal reliability of the adapted Moral Identity Scale was $\alpha = 0.95$.

Principal components analysis of dependent measures. A principal components analysis with varimax rotation was conducted on the dependent measures (i.e., evaluations of the monologue and the speaker's moral character). Factor loadings suggested that there was a single factor underlying these items, ranging from negative to positive evaluations of the speaker (total variance explained: 66.499%). Six of seven items had high factor loadings onto the factor. One item ("To what extent do you feel that people are entitled to speak their minds regarding political issues, like in this monologue?") had a low factor loading ($\leq .50$), and it was dropped from analyses. Although perceptions of the speaker's moral image had a high factor loading, we nonetheless deemed that it was conceptually distinct from the other evaluation measures and therefore necessary to analyze separately. The five remaining items had different response scales and were converted to z-score units. They were then averaged into a composite measure of evaluation toward the speaker. The internal reliability of the average evaluation measure was $\alpha = 0.91$.

Instructional manipulation checks. Participants completed three instructional manipulation checks (IMCs) during the study. IMCs tested whether participants paid attention and followed directions. For each IMC correctly answered, participants scored a point. Thus, the maximum (most attentive) score was three, whereas the minimum (least attentive) score was zero.

Manipulation checks. A subset of participants was asked two questions assessing whether they found the credibility manipulation believable. They were asked, "To what extent do you think that the monologue was true or false?" with response options *very true*, *moderately true*, *slightly true*, *neither true nor false*, *slightly false*, *moderately false*, and *very false*. Next, they were asked, "Do you think the monologue included lies?" Response options were *yes* or *no*.

Results²

Preliminary Analyses

IMCs. Most participants ($N = 319$) passed at least two out of three IMCs, suggesting that they were attentive. Results did not vary as a function of whether participants who failed multiple IMCs were included or excluded in

Table 1. Correlations Between Perceiver Moral Conviction, Perceiver Attitude Congruence with the Speaker, Credibility Feedback, Evaluations of the Speaker, and Evaluations of the Speaker's Moral Character.

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Perceiver MC	3.58	1.21	—			
2. Attitude congruence	—	—	−0.05	—		
3. Credibility feedback	—	—	0.01	0.01	—	
4. Evaluations of speaker	0.00	0.86	0.04	0.40**	0.56**	—
5. Moral character	3.20	1.05	0.10	0.49**	0.34**	0.78**

Note. Attitude congruence was dummy-coded (0 = *disagree with speaker*; 1 = *agree with speaker*), as was credibility feedback (0 = *false feedback*; 1 = *true feedback*). Evaluations of the speaker were measured in z-score units.

[†] $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

analyses. Subsequent analyses are reported retaining all participants.

Manipulation checks. Participants interpreted the manipulation in the way we intended: Participants assigned to the false condition ($M = 4.40$, $SD = 2.06$) believed the monologue was more false than participants assigned to the true condition ($M = 2.65$, $SD = 1.95$), $t(38) = 2.75$, 95% CI: [0.46, 3.04], $p = .01$. Similarly, participants in the false condition were more likely to believe the monologue contained lies than those in the true condition, $\chi^2(1, N = 40) = 6.67$, $p = .01$.

Testing the Moral Motivation Hypothesis

If the *moral motivation hypothesis* is true, a two-way interaction should emerge between attitude agreement with the actor and moral conviction: Independent of the speaker's credibility, people who supported the speaker's position with stronger moral conviction should have made more positive evaluations for the speaker, whereas people who opposed the speaker's position with stronger moral conviction should have made more negative evaluations.

The moral motivation hypothesis was tested using hierarchical moderated regression (Aiken & West, 1991). We entered the predictors in three blocks, mean-centering all continuous predictors. Block 1 contained the dummy-coded credibility feedback condition (mostly true vs. mostly false), the dummy-coded attitude agreement variable (agree vs. disagree with the speaker), and perceiver moral conviction. In block 2, we entered the two-way interaction terms, and the third block contained the three-way interaction term. We ran two regression models to predict two different criterion variables: average evaluations of the speaker and participants' perceptions of the speaker's moral image (see Table 1 for correlations between all variables).³

Average evaluations of the speaker. A main effect of credibility feedback revealed that participants in the true (vs. false) feedback condition evaluated the speaker more positively, $B = 0.96$, $SE = 0.07$, $t(333) = 14.02$, 95% CI: [0.83, 1.09].

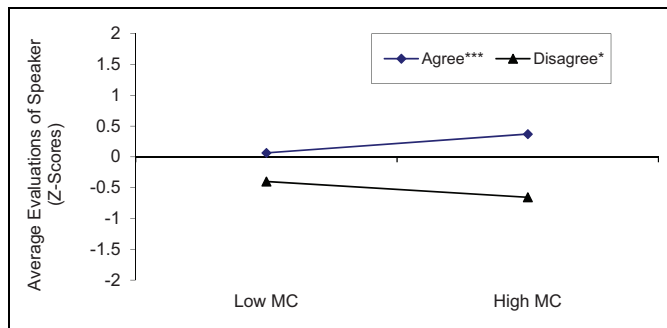


Figure 1. The two-way interaction of perceiver moral conviction and attitude agreement with the speaker predicting evaluations of the speaker. $^{\dagger}p < .10$; $*p < .05$; $**p < .01$; $***p < .001$.

Furthermore, a main effect of attitude agreement emerged: People who agreed (vs. disagreed) with the speaker evaluated her more positively, $B = 0.75$, $SE = 0.08$, $t(333) = 9.91$, 95% CI: [0.60, 0.89].

As hypothesized, we observed a two-way interaction between perceiver moral conviction and attitude agreement with the speaker, $B = 0.23$, $SE = 0.06$, $t(330) = 4.05$, 95% CI: [0.12, 0.35], $p < .001$ ($R^2_{\text{change}} = 2.9\%$). Simple slopes analyses revealed that, independent of credibility feedback, stronger moral conviction predicted less favorable evaluations when participants disagreed with the speaker, $B = -0.11$, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CI: [-0.19, -0.02], $t(330) = -2.36$, $p = 0.02$, but more favorable evaluations when they agreed with the speaker, $B = 0.13$, $SE = 0.04$, 95% CI: [0.06, 0.20], $t(330) = 3.55$, $p < .001$ (see Figure 1). No other interaction terms were significant.

Perceptions of the speaker's moral image. Greater moral conviction, true (vs. false) credibility, and agreement (vs. disagreement) with the speaker's attitude position all independently predicted greater perceived speaker moral image (see Supplemental Materials for details). More importantly, the two-way interaction between perceiver moral conviction and attitude agreement with the speaker was significant, $B = 0.33$, $SE = 0.08$, 95% CI: [0.18, 0.49], $t(330) = 4.34$, $p < 0.001$ ($R^2_{\text{change}} = 3.5\%$). Simple slopes analyses revealed that, independent of speaker credibility, stronger moral conviction predicted more favorable evaluations of the speaker's moral image when participants agreed with the speaker, $B = 0.23$, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CI: [0.14, 0.33], $t(330) = 4.85$, $p < .001$, and marginally predicted less favorable evaluations of the speaker's moral image when participants disagreed with her, $B = -0.10$, $SE = 0.06$, 95% CI: [-0.22, 0.02], $t(330) = -1.69$, $p = 0.09$ (see Figure 2). No other interaction terms were significant.

Summary. Taken together, the moral motivation hypothesis was largely supported. Although honest targets were perceived more positively than dishonest targets, target credibility did not moderate the moral conviction by agreement interaction. Stronger moral conviction predicted more positive evaluations of

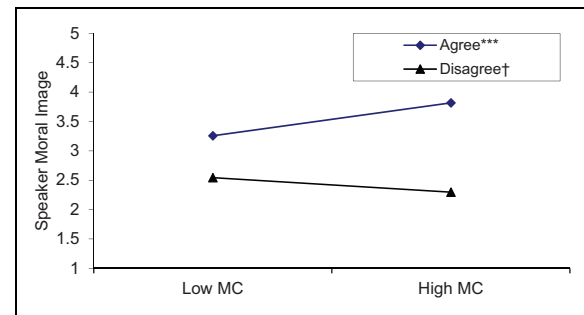


Figure 2. The two-way interaction of perceiver moral conviction and attitude agreement with the speaker predicting evaluations of the speaker's moral image. $^{\dagger}p < .10$; $*p < .05$; $**p < .01$; $***p < .001$.

like-minded speakers, and more negative evaluations of non-like-minded speakers, regardless of whether the speakers lied or not—a result that supports the notion that moral convictions are norm independent.

Discussion

People's perceptions of others' transgressive advocacy were uniquely shaped by their moral convictions. Although honesty was positively valued by all respondents, transgressive advocacy that served a shared moral (vs. nonmoral) end was more accepted, and advocacy in the service of a nonpreferred end was more condemned, regardless of its truth value.

These findings expand our knowledge of the moral mandate effect in two key ways. First, this work suggests that the moral mandate effect extends to specific individuals, not just institutions and authorities. Moral mandates may shape people's perceptions of any target who engages in norm-violating behaviors that uphold moralized causes: co-workers, politicians, or CEOs. Second, this research suggests that, although people are not comfortable excusing others for heinous crimes that serve a moralized end (Mullen & Skitka, 2006), they appear comparatively tolerant of norm violations like lying.

A troubling and timely implication of these findings is that political figures may be able to act in corrupt ways without damaging their images (at least in the eyes of their supporters). This was blatantly apparent in the 2016 Presidential election. *PolitiFact*, a trusted fact-checking organization, provided data on the validity of various claims made in the election cycle: Over 75% of Donald Trump's claims were ranked as "mostly false," "false," or "pants on fire" lies. Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders' claims both hovered around 30% false (PolitiFact, 2016). One reason why candidates appear to be able to get away with mild truth bending, and sometimes even outrageous lies, appears to be because those lies are perceived by supporters as an acceptable and perhaps necessary means to achieve a higher moral end.

It is important to acknowledge that our interpretation of the data requires accepting a null three-way interaction between moral conviction, attitude agreement with the speaker, and

credibility feedback. That is, our conclusion that the interaction of moral conviction and attitude agreement is norm independent is based on interpreting a null hypothesis. Although the possibility that speaker credibility interacts with moral conviction and attitude agreement cannot be completely ruled out, power analyses indicated we had ample statistical power to detect effects if they were present.⁴ We therefore argue that our results shift the burden of proof to those who believe that the interaction of moral conviction and attitude agreement is norm dependent (see Greenwald, 1975, on the power of null hypothesis results to shift burdens of proof).

Relation to Neighboring Concepts

One could be tempted to argue that motivated reasoning (Kunda, 1990) accounts for our findings. People blindly accept information that bolsters a preferred conclusion (Kunda, 1987), and they may accept any means necessary to reach a preferred end. Conversely, people conduct biased memory searches and creatively integrate accessed knowledge to challenge information that is inconsistent with preferred conclusions (e.g., Kahan, Peters, Dawson, & Slovic, 2013)—something that could explain why people denigrate their moral opponents. However, if motivated reasoning alone could account for our findings, we should have only found a main effect of attitude congruence with the target, whereby people would make positive (vs. negative) evaluations of a target whose behavior is consistent (vs. inconsistent) with their attitude positions on the issue. People's moral convictions, however, explained additional variance in lie acceptance than what was accounted for by attitude congruence alone (cf. Mullen & Skitka, 2006). People's moral convictions therefore appear to be associated with especially strong psychological pressure to engage in motivated reasoning.

These findings are also relevant to literature on misinformation effects: When information is retracted, it has a continued influence on people's attitudes (Lewandowsky, Ecker, Seifert, Schwarz, & Cook, 2012). For example, despite a multitude of contradictory evidence, some people still believe that former President Obama was not born in the United States (Barr, 2011; Travis, 2010). Our results supplement this literature by suggesting that people are not only resistant to updating false information, but also resist updating their impressions of targets who deliver false information, especially when they are morally motivated.

Finally, our results relate to moral licensing via observers: when a target's prior moral behavior makes observers more willing to excuse their subsequent transgressions (Effron & Monin, 2010). It remains unclear whether people are willing to excuse others not based on their upstanding behavioral history, but simply because their moral conviction for an issue is seen as noble in and of itself. Our findings are suggestive that people see others' convictions as providing moral standing. People appear to license a target's lies more when she has the correct moral viewpoint, even if she does not necessarily have an upstanding behavioral history.

Future Directions

Future research should clarify the motivational underpinnings of transgressive advocacy tolerance. Is acceptance of transgressive advocacy driven more by people's prescriptive or proscriptive moral concerns (e.g., Skitka, Hanson, & Wisneski, 2017)? Clarifying the motivation behind transgressive advocacy tolerance could reveal ways to attenuate or exaggerate it, depending on the normative stance taken toward transgressive advocacy tolerance.

One could argue that transgressive advocacy tolerance is maladaptive for society because public figures will not be held accountable for corruption, at least among their morally convicted supporters. Under this negative view of transgressive advocacy tolerance, it could be valuable to explore ways to attenuate it: by removing people's motivation for accepting transgressive advocacy. If transgressive advocacy tolerance is driven by prescriptive moral concerns, one way to counteract it would be to affirm people's sense that progress toward that moral ideal has already been made; they may then perceive that it is unnecessary to tolerate transgressive advocacy to serve utopian ideals. Alternatively, if transgressive advocacy acceptance is driven by proscriptive moral concerns, one could attenuate it by having people recall the ways in which their dystopian fears are unlikely to ever materialize. People may then no longer perceive transgressive tolerance as a tool to protect against moral atrocities.

However, transgressive advocacy tolerance could be adaptive. One could argue that transgressive advocacy tolerance expedites much-needed social change. Small lies could be a small price to pay compared to the societal gains won after a critical mass of support is garnered for change. Assuming this rosy perspective of transgressive advocacy acceptance, we could benefit from exaggerating it. If it is driven more by prescriptive moral concerns, people may be more inclined to tolerate transgressive advocacy when they perceive that considerable progress is still needed to reach their moral ideals. Conversely, if it is underpinned by proscriptive moral concerns, people may be more likely to accept transgressive advocacy when they perceive that their dystopian moral fears are coming true.

Future research should also explore the boundary conditions of transgressive advocacy tolerance. Would people be willing to accept a lie, for example, if others would suffer as a result? Manipulating the extent to which victims suffer from lies that propagate a moralized agenda could reveal when people are no longer comfortable tolerating them: The more that moral mandates visibly hurt others, the less willing people may be to legitimize norm-violating behaviors in the name of those beliefs.

Acknowledgments

We thank the UIC Morality, Values, and Politics Lab for their feedback on this work.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Supplemental Material

The supplemental material is available in the online version of the article.

Notes

1. We dichotomized attitude agreement with the speaker rather than scaling it as a continuous predictor because the distribution was U-shaped (see Supplemental Materials). That is, most of our sample either strongly agreed or strongly disagreed with the issue, rendering few participants in the middle of the distribution. Although dichotomization is generally discouraged due to a loss of information about people who fall in the middle of the distribution, one situation in which it is defensible to dichotomize a continuous variable is when its distribution is non-normal (MacCallum, Zhang, Preacher, & Rucker, 2002). Thus, in the analyses that follow, attitude congruence is dichotomized (i.e., those who agree vs. disagree with the speaker).
2. Nonsignificant interactions are not described to conserve words, but are discussed in Supplemental Materials. See Supplemental Materials for full regression tables.
3. Given the nonnormal nature of the attitude agreement variable, it is more statistically appropriate and interpretable to report the results of the models containing the dichotomized form of the variable (MacCallum et al., 2002). Nonetheless, we report results of models containing a continuous form of the attitude congruence variable in the Supplemental Materials.
4. See Supplemental Materials.

References

- Aiken, L. S., & West, S. G. (1991). *Multiple regression: Testing and interpreting interactions*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Aquino, K., & Reed, A., II. (2002). The self-importance of moral identity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 83, 1423–1440.
- Aramovich, N. P., Lytle, B. L., & Skitka, L. J. (2012). Opposing torture: Moral conviction and resistance to majority influence. *Social Influence*, 1, 21–34.
- Barr, A. (2011). Poll: 51 percent of GOP primary voters think Obama born abroad. *Politico*. Retrieved from <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0211/49554.html>
- Daisey, M. (2012, January 6). *Mr. Daisey and the Apple factory*. [Web Log Post]. Retrieved from <http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/454/mr-daisey-and-the-apple-factory>
- DePaulo, B. M., Kashy, D. A., Kirkendol, S. E., Wyer, M. M., & Epstein, J. A. (1996). Lying in everyday life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 70, 979–995.
- Effron, D. A., & Monin, B. (2010). Letting people off the hook: When do good deeds excuse transgressions? *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 36, 1618–1634.
- Glass, I. (2012, March 16). *Retracting "Mr. Daisey and the Apple Factory"*. [Web Log Post]. Retrieved from [canlife.org/blog/2012/03/retracting-mr-daisey-and-the-apple-factory](http://www.thisameri)
- Greenwald, A. G. (1975). Consequences of prejudice against the null hypothesis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 82, 1–20.
- Hornsey, M. J., Majkut, L., Terry, D. J., & McKimmie, B. M. (2003). On being loud and proud: Non-conformity and counter-conformity to group norms. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 42, 319–335.
- Hornsey, M. J., Smith, J. R., & Begg, D. (2007). Effects of norms among those with moral conviction: Counter-conformity emerges on intentions but not behaviors. *Social Influence*, 2, 244–268.
- Kahan, D. M., Peters, E., Dawson, E. C., & Slovic, P. (2013). *Motivated numeracy and enlightened self-government* (Yale Law School, Public Law Working Paper, no. 307). New Haven, CT: Yale Law School.
- Kunda, Z. (1987). Motivated inference: Self-serving generation and evaluation of causal theories. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 53, 636.
- Kunda, Z. (1990). The case for motivated reasoning. *Psychological Bulletin*, 108, 480–498.
- Lewandowsky, S., Ecker, U. K. H., Seifert, C. M., Schwarz, N., & Cook, J. (2012). Misinformation and its correction: Continued influence and successful debiasing. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 13, 106–131.
- MacCallum, R. C., Zhang, S., Preacher, K. J., & Rucker, D. D. (2002). On the practice of dichotomization of quantitative variables. *Psychological Methods*, 7, 19–40.
- Morgan, G. S., Skitka, L. J., & Lytle, B. L. (2014). *Objectively and universally true: Psychological foundations of moral conviction*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology, Austin, TX.
- Mueller, A. B. (2015). *Licensed to lie: Evidence for moral licensing in persuasive communication contexts* (Unpublished Master's thesis). University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL.
- Mullen, E., & Skitka, L. J. (2006). Exploring the psychological underpinnings of the moral mandate effect: Motivated reasoning, identification, or affect? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 90, 629–643.
- Politifact. (n.d.). Retrieved from www.politifact.com
- Skitka, L. J. (2002). Do the means always justify the ends or do the ends sometimes justify the means? A value protection model of justice reasoning. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 28, 588–597.
- Skitka, L. J. (2010). The psychology of moral conviction. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 4, 267–281.
- Skitka, L. J., Bauman, C. J., & Mullen, E. (2004). Political tolerance and coming to psychological closure following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks: An integrative approach. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 30, 743–756.
- Skitka, L. J., Hanson, B. E., & Wisneski, D. C. (2017). Utopian hopes or dystopian fears? Understanding the motivational underpinnings of morally motivated political engagement. *Personality and Social Psychological Bulletin*, 43, 177–190.
- Skitka, L. J., & Houston, D. (2001). When due process is of no consequence: Moral mandates and presumed defendant guilt or innocence. *Social Justice Research*, 14, 305–326. [Reprinted in T.

- Tyler (Ed.) (2005), *The International library of essays in law and society: Procedural Justice II* (pp. 525–533), Surrey, England: Ashgate].
- Skitka, L. J., & Mullen, E. (2002). Understanding judgments of fairness in a real-world political context: A test of the value protection model of justice reasoning. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 28, 1419–1429.
- Tetlock, P. E., Kristel, O. V., Elson, S. B., Green, M. C., & Lerner, J. S. (2000). The psychology of the unthinkable: Taboo trade-offs, forbidden base rates, and heretical counterfactuals. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 78, 853–870.
- Travis, S. (2010). *CNN poll: Quarter doubt Obama was born in U.S.* Retrieved from <http://politicalticker.blogs.cnn.com/2010/08/04/cnn-poll-quarter-doubt-president-was-born-in-u-s/>
- Turner, R. E., Edgley, C., & Olmstead, G. (1975). Information control in conversations: Honesty is not always the best policy. *Journal of Sociology*, 11, 69–89.
- Van den Bos, K., & Lind, E. A. (2001). The psychology of own versus others' treatment: Self-oriented and other-oriented effects on perceptions of procedural justice. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 27, 1324–1333.
- Zaal, M. P., Van Laar, C., Stahl, T., Ellemers, N., & Derks, B. (2011). By any means necessary: The effects of regulatory focus and moral conviction on hostile and benevolent forms of collective action. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 50, 670–689.

Author Biographies

Allison B. Mueller is a doctoral candidate at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC). Her research focuses on the “dark side” of morality: how and why people behave immorally in everyday life, and the role that moral conviction may play in those processes. Allison’s research has been supported by the UIC Chancellor’s Graduate Research Award and by a travel grant provided by the Society for Personality and Social Psychology.

Linda J. Skitka is a professor of psychology at the University of Illinois at Chicago, whose research interests are at the intersection of social, political, and moral psychology. She has authored more than 100 publications, served as president of the International Society for Justice Research, the chair the consortium that launched *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, on the executive committees for the Society for Personality and Social Psychology and the Society for Experimental Social Psychology and on the editorial boards of many of the social psychology’s top journals.

Handling Editor: Jesse Graham