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The what, how, and why of moralization: A review of current definitions, methods, and evidence in moralization research

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Abstract

Moralization has major social and political implications. Although there is a depth of research on the nature and implications of moral attitudes and moral convictions, there has been less of a focus on the psychological processes by which actions, attitudes, or entities become moralized, or move from lesser to greater moral significance, and the research that does exist is highly fragmented. In the present paper, we provide a two-factor structure for understanding the current state of research on moralization, categorizing extant moralization research by (1) whether it examines judgments of actions, attitudes, or entities and (2) whether it captures moral recognition (the shift from neutral to moral), or moral amplification. Using this framework, we then consider the various routes through which moralization may occur, discuss emerging research on the influence that social norms can have on this process, and address future areas of research. Overall, we hope to provide some initial steps toward developing a more integrated framework for understanding moralization.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Morality changes over time. This change can occur at the microlevel/individual level, such as when someone embraces ethical vegetarianism or changes their attitudes toward abortion or having a baby out of wedlock. It can also occur at the macrolevel, societal level, such as the marked shift in moral attitudes toward gay marriage over the last 15 years (Gallup, 2019). Although moral change certainly occurs with potentially major social and interpersonal

consequences, the academic study of moralization, or increases in the *degree* to which moral relevance is attached to issues, actions or entities, is still relatively new and fragmented.

Over a decade of research has documented the nature and implications of categorizing an act as morally relevant (Rozin, 1999; Ryan, 2014; Skitka, 2010; Skitka, Bauman, & Sargis, 2005; van Bavel, Packer, Haas, & Cunningham, 2012). Acts that are viewed as morally relevant are perceived by individuals as universally wrong or right (Skitka et al., 2005; van Bavel, Packer, Haas, & Cunningham, 2012), akin to objective facts (Goodwin & Darley, 2008), and beyond compromise (Skitka, 2010). Once an act is labeled as immoral, this categorization has important social implications. Moral conviction regarding a collective cause is a core motivator for individuals to engage in collective action (van Zomeren, 2013; van Zomeren, Postmes, Spears, & Bettache, 2011) and leads to increased hostility toward ideological out-groups (Brandt et al., 2016; Brandt, Crawford, & Van Tongeren, 2017).

Despite the fact that moral beliefs are often perceived as akin to objective facts (Goodwin & Darley, 2008; Goodwin & Darley, 2012), considerable variability can exist between societies in the types of issues that are considered morally relevant (e.g., Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009; Vauclair & Fischer, 2011). Moral theories have explained cultural differences by appealing to variation in moral foundations (Graham et al., 2009; Haidt & Graham, 2007), relationship models (Rai & Fiske, 2011), or behavioral inhibition tendencies (Janoff-Bulman, Sheikh, & Hepp, 2009). These theories each provide comprehensive approaches to modeling moral diversity. However, these models have not empirically demonstrated how attitudes change over time.

As the number of studies on moralization have increased (e.g., Brandt et al., 2016; Feinberg, Kovacheff, Teper, & Inbar, 2019; Skitka, Wisneski, & Brandt, 2017), it has also become increasingly apparent that the literature contains fragmentation in the way that moralization is defined, conceptualized, and measured. This paper aims to provide a general review of the current landscape of moralization research. More specifically, we review current methods applied to the study of moralization and discuss how the phenomenon has been studied in terms of judgments of discrete actions, attitudes, and entities (see Figure 1). We also discuss inconsistencies in how moralization has been defined across these different foci and observe that—while not typically acknowledged—moralization has been studied in two forms: moral recognition and moral amplification. Finally, applying this conceptual distinction between

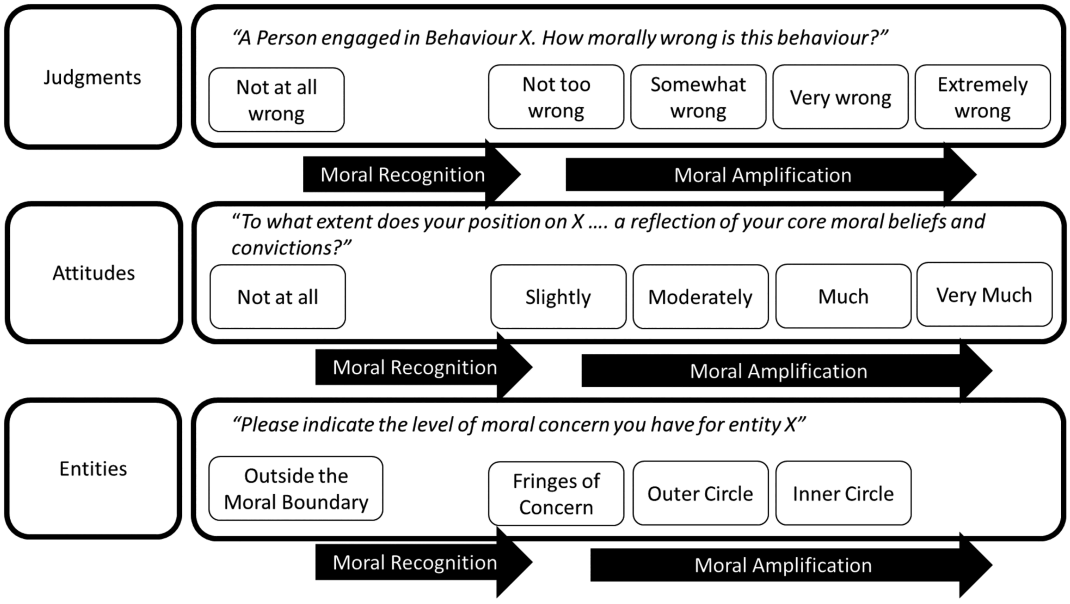

FIGURE 1 Illustrations of moral recognition and moral amplification across judgments, attitudes, and entities. Attitudes item is taken from Skitka, L. J., Bauman, and Sargis, E. G. (2005). Entities item is taken from Crimston et al. (2016)

moral recognition and moral amplification (see Figure 1), we conduct a review of the empirical literature to date and discuss the evidence for psychological mechanisms pertaining to these two forms of moralization. Our aim is not to advocate for any particular approach to studying moralization but to provide a broadened platform from which to understand and study the general processes underlying moralization. To this end, we also propose a broader definition of moralization which better encapsulates the various ways in which it has been researched and understood—that is, an increase in the degree to which moral relevance is attached to issues, actions, or entities.

2 | PAST AND PRESENT DEFINITIONS OF MORALIZATION

The term moralization appeared intermittently in a number of social psychology publications in the early 20th century, with perhaps the most notable examples coming from the early efforts of John Dewey to define a scientific framework for the study of morality (Dewey, 1902; Dewey & Tufts, 1932). A key part of Dewey's framework was the idea that data on how norms and moral goals were formed in the past could shed light on the processes of moralization (Dewey, 1902). The term moralization was also used more formally as a research construct within the framework of Kohlberg's cognitive-development account, in which it was used to describe an individual's progress through discrete stages of moral reasoning ability (Kohlberg, 1976).

By far, the most commonly used definition of moralization in research today (Brandt et al., 2016; Lovett & Jordan, 2010; Skitka et al., 2017) comes from the seminal work of Rozin and colleagues, who investigated changes in moral attitudes toward smoking and vegetarianism (Rozin, 1997, 1999; Rozin, Markwith, & Stoess, 1997; Rozin & Singh, 1999). Based on observations from his own research, Rozin et al. (1997) noted that the moral status of an activity may ebb and flow over time and that this constituted a meaningful psychological phenomenon that merited scholarly investigation and analysis. Within this conceptualization, Rozin defined moralization as a process which "involves the acquisition of moral qualities by objects or activities that previously were morally neutral" (Rozin, 1999; Rozin et al., 1997; Rozin & Singh, 1999). There are two important points to note in this definition. First, Rozin explicitly stipulates that moralization starts with a morally neutral state. Next, Rozin's approach to moralization, is both descriptive and value-neutral (Lovett & Jordan, 2010), aiming to understand the psychological precedents or antecedents of an individual attributing subjective moral significance to something previously considered nonmoral.

As the field of moral psychology has blossomed, researchers have drawn on Rozin's definition of moralization as a means of studying moral change (Brandt et al., 2016; Lovett & Jordan, 2010). However, developments in the field of moral psychology research—in particular, an increased focus on how moral values vary at the level of the individual (Bloom, 2010; Haidt, 2007)—have led to the use of a variety of methods and approaches for conceptualizing and measuring individuals' moral positions, in turn leading to some ambiguity in how moralization should be understood.

In the next section, we present an overview of some of the notable methods that have been applied to the study of moralization, before engaging in a more formal discussion of the definitional ambiguities that have arisen and how to navigate them.

3 | METHODS OF STUDYING MORALIZATION

Empirical work on moralization has tended to apply one of three broad approaches to the study of moral change: cross-sectional; experimental; and longitudinal. Cross-sectional methods were used extensively in early studies of moralization by Rozin and colleagues (Rozin et al., 1997; Rozin & Singh, 1999). For example, Rozin and Singh (1999) captured the process of moralization by sampling three different generations of participants (students, their parents, and their grandparents) and having them rate their current attitudes regarding cigarette smoking, such as whether "cigarette smoking is immoral" or "cigarette smoking is disgusting," then asking them how they would have responded to the attitude items 20 or 40 years prior (Rozin & Singh, 1999).

The most common contemporary method of studying moralization has been to apply experimental manipulations which test specific mechanisms predicted to influence moral processes. These studies infer that factors which are able to produce significant group differences in the moral wrongness or perceived moral significance of an action or issue may also bring about changes in moral values within the individual (Horberg, Oveis, Keltner, & Cohen, 2009; Wisneski & Skitka, 2016). However, because moralization research is interested in changes in individuals' moral perceptions, the highest standard of evidence for moralization is considered to come from longitudinal designs, in which measures of individuals' current moral position, and relevant predictors of interest are measured at multiple timepoints (Brandt et al., 2016; Brandt, Wisneski, & Skitka, 2015; Feinberg et al., 2019; Skitka et al., 2017).

Cutting across these methodological differences, studies of moralization have also differed in the way that they conceptualized and how they have measured people's moral states. Here, we overview three notable approaches to measuring individuals' moral states that currently appear in the literature—namely, via judgments, attitudes, and entities (see Figure 1).

3.1 | Moral judgment of specific actions

The most common approach to observing individuals' moral states has been to measure their moral judgments of specific actions. This approach generally starts by presenting participants with an example of hypothetical (e.g., Clifford, Iyengar, Cabeza, & Sinnott-Armstrong, 2015) or real-world (e.g., Lindstrom, Jagard, Selbing & Olsson, 2018) behavior that could be construed as a moral violation (e.g., "Person X takes money out of a wallet they find on the street.") and then prompting them to indicate how morally wrong they perceive the action to be (usually on a scale from "not at all morally wrong" to "extremely morally wrong"). Moral judgment approaches can be particularly well-suited to investigating how reasoning ability (Royzman, Landy, & Goodwin, 2014), heuristics (Haidt, 2001; Haidt, Koller, & Dias, 1993), social-learning (Davidson, Turiel, & Black, 1983), and transient contextual factors such as affective states (Schnall, Haidt, Clore, & Jordan, 2008; Wheatley & Haidt, 2005) may influence individuals' engagement with moral scenarios. However, one of the limitations in operationalizing moralization by differences in the severity of moral condemnation of a single action is that it provides little information about what exactly has been *moralized* in a more general sense (i.e., beyond condemning the individual action), making it difficult to determine how this change might influence future judgments or behavior (Clifford et al., 2015).

3.2 | Moral attitudes

An increasingly prominent method of studying moralization is to investigate changes in the degree to which individuals ascribe moral significance to their attitudes on issues (e.g., gun control) or behaviors (e.g., smoking; Skitka, 2010; Skitka et al., 2005; Skitka et al., 2017). While moral judgments ask participants to indicate the moral wrongness of a specific instance of behavior, moral attitude approaches focus on the application of morality at a more abstract level (for illustration of differences, see Figure 1). For example, while a judgment measure may ask participants to indicate how morally wrong they perceive a person smoking to be, an attitude measure would ask how morally wrong they consider smoking as a general behavior (Rozin & Singh, 1999).

The most extensive recent research into the moralization of attitudes has come via an extension of the moral conviction program (Skitka, 2010; Skitka et al., 2005; Wisneski & Skitka, 2016), where there has been a focus on factors that may account for upward shifts in participants' self-reported level of moral conviction regarding their position on an attitude object (e.g., one's position on abortion). The defining characteristic of moral conviction is how central the attitude is to individuals' core moral beliefs and convictions or fundamental beliefs about right and wrong (Skitka et al., 2005).

This approach to measuring moral attitudes can be particularly advantageous in identifying factors which contribute to moralization in the context of highly polarized issues such as abortion (Wisneski & Skitka, 2016) or political elections (Brandt et al., 2016), allowing the same scale to be used to measure moral changes occurring for both

opponents and supporters (e.g., "To what extent does your position on abortion reflect your core moral beliefs and convictions?").

3.3 | Entities

An emerging perspective in the study of moralization has been to investigate differences in the level of moral concern for *entities* (Crimston, Bain, Hornsey, & Bastian, 2016; Crimston, Hornsey, Bain, & Bastian, 2018). This conceptualization of moralization is defined by a focus on whether an entire category of groups (e.g., criminals, out-groups, and family members) or entities (e.g., redwood trees, dolphins, and rivers) are perceived as generally deserving of moral concern (Crimston et al., 2016) or can be considered moral patients/victims (Schein & Gray, 2014, 2016). The advantage of this approach is that it can potentially simultaneously predict the attachment of, or increase in, moral significance of a number of attitudes or actions (for example items, see Figure 1). For example, once it was recognized that animals were capable of suffering and classified as potential moral patients, a number of attitude objects such as animal product testing, animal consumption, and animal mental health also came to be seen as moral issues (Rozin et al., 1997; Schein & Gray, 2016).

4 | REVISITING ROZIN'S DEFINITION

Perhaps because the various methods outlined in the previous section are also attached to different theoretical positions (for example, much of the research on moralization in terms of changes in moral judgment emerged as an extension of the social intuitionist model; Haidt, 2001), there has been little formal engagement with how these methods are related to one another, and in turn, what empirical insights arising from each method may mean for understanding moralization as a general process. As a consequence, there remains a certain degree of inconsistency in the type of phenomena that are viewed as constituting moralization.

While most contemporary researchers cite Rozin's definition of moralization (Feinberg et al., 2019; Horberg, Oveis, & Keltner, 2011; Skitka et al., 2017)—that is, the acquisition of moral qualities by objects or activities that previously were morally neutral—there is a great deal of variability in the type of empirical evidence seen to constitute this phenomenon. Most notably, researchers investigating changes in moral judgment have tended to make a distinction between *moralization* and *moral amplification.* According to this distinction, something would be considered moralization if a morally neutral act enters the moral sphere, while a shift from seeing a slightly wrong act as more wrong would be considered moral amplification (Avramova & Inbar, 2013; Landy & Goodwin, 2015; Pizarro, Inbar, & Helion, 2011).

On the other hand, recent research on moralization using the moral conviction paradigm has tended to employ a less restrictive standard when using the term moralization. For example, a number of key studies investigating moralization using the moral conviction approach have reported increases from "moderate" levels of moral conviction regarding an issue (Brandt et al., 2015; Wisneski & Skitka, 2016), making it difficult to suggest that the study demonstrated a change from the nonmoral to moral domain. Even among studies of moral judgment, the use of the term moralization has tended to be inconsistent. For example, while citing Rozin et al. (1997), Horberg et al. (2009) described moralization as a process "*amplify[ing]* the importance of different moral domains during moral judgments," as opposed to judging a previously nonmoral action as morally wrong.

Such differences in the use of the term moralization make it difficult to see how findings that have applied these different approaches may be reconciled. Should research that fails to demonstrate a change from nonmoral to moral be completely excluded from any general account of moralization? We believe that to do so would unduly restrict the range of empirical work that could be considered in the formation of more general theories of moralization. Yet we also believe that the lack of conceptual clarity that is currently present in moralization research needs to be addressed.

Thus, for the purposes of the review below, we use a broader definition of moralization—that is, increases in the *degree* to which moral relevance is attached to issues, actions, or entities. We believe this broadening of the definition of moralization will mean that a greater range of empirical findings can be drawn on to leverage insight into the processes of moralization. However, for the sake of conceptual and theoretical clarity, and because it may provide greater insight into the processes of moralization, we also refer to two kinds of phenomena within this broad concept of moralization: (1) the psychological attachment of moral significance to an action, attitude, or object (*moral recognition*) and (2) the process by which the moral significance of an action, attitude, or object becomes more extreme (*moral amplification*).

4.1 | Evidence for moral recognition: A process of attachment and detachment of moral significance

As we note, we use the term *moral recognition* to describe the psychological process of attaching moral significance to a given action, attitude, or entity. Although the attachment (or detachment) of moral significance to a particular issue has often been considered in terms of long-term sociocultural change (e.g., societal views on smoking; Rozin, 1999; Schein & Gray, 2018), there is now increasing evidence to suggest that it may be a more dynamic process. Notably, at the level of making moral judgments, there is now a growing field investigating the phenomenon of *ethical fading* (Tenbrunsel & Messick, 2004)—where the ethical dimensions of certain decisions are not recognized (Sezer, Gino, & Bazerman, 2015). Such studies have revealed that situational and cognitive factors such as the salience of monetary interests (Gino & Mogilner, 2014) and previous engagement in the same behavior (Shu & Gino, 2012), can lead to moral detachment, whereby people no longer see the moral significance of a given action. This work indicates that moral recognition may be influenced by contextual factors as well as individual motivations and that the attachment and detachment of moral significance may fluctuate over time and across situations within individuals. In concrete terms, for the purposes of this review, we have included studies under the umbrella of moral recognition if they contain evidence of changes in moral position from a complete lack of moral significance (see Figure 1).

4.1.1 | Moral recognition through incidental emotions

As previously mentioned, only a handful of empirical studies on moralization have demonstrated the process of moral recognition (Avramova & Inbar, 2013). The most promising early work came from studies that were heavily influenced by the social intuitionist model of morality (Haidt, 2001), which posits that intuitions and emotions (rather than deliberative reasoning) are the preliminary drivers of moral judgment. This account was tested using "incidental emotion" paradigms (Bodenhausen, 1993), where participants were usually asked to make a moral judgment after being induced to feel an emotion (most often disgust) by a completely irrelevant stimulus (e.g., fart gas, pictures of dirty rooms).

For example, Wheatley and Haidt (2005) hypnotically primed one group of participants to feel disgust after reading the word "often," and the other group to feel disgust after reading the word "take," and found that participants were harsher in their moral condemnation of actions portrayed in vignettes containing their specific disgust-priming word. Although most of the vignettes presented to participants by Wheatley and Haidt (2005) portrayed moral violations, this study is most widely cited for demonstrating moral recognition by showing increased moral condemnation for the following nonmoral vignette:

Dan is a student council representative at his school. This semester he is in charge of scheduling discussions about academic issues. He [tries to take/often picks] topics that appeal to both professors and students in order to stimulate discussion.

More specifically, when no disgust-inducing words were present, participants rated this vignette $M = 2.7$, on a 100-point scale (0 = *not at all morally wrong* and 100 = *extremely morally wrong*), however, when disgust-inducing words were present moral condemnation rose to $M = 14.0$.

Despite the initial promise of incidental affect accounts, there has been very little subsequent work clearly demonstrating moral recognition following an incidental affect induction. In a recent meta-analysis conducted by Landy and Goodwin (2015), it was found that incidental affect inductions did appear to have a small but significant effect on moral recognition (d = .21, p = .01, 95% CI [.05, .37]). However, the interpretation of this effect size was limited by the small number of studies (k = 13). Further, of these studies, seven were unpublished, and the weighted mean effect for these unpublished studies was nonsignificant (d = .14, p = .18, 95% CI [−.06, .34]), suggesting some presence of publication bias. Although such findings do not unequivocally discount incidental affect as a mechanism leading to moral recognition, they do make the importance of this mechanism unclear.

4.1.2 | Moral recognition through moral emotions and moral piggybacking

Feinberg et al. (2019) recently conducted the only longitudinal study to date which demonstrated a process that could be viewed as *moral recognition*. Of particular note was Study 3, where participants were presented with an initial screening question: "Overall, how much do you believe eating meat is immoral?" and were only included in the study if they indicated a "1" or "*not at all*," on a seven-point scale thus ensuring that only the phenomena of moral recognition was observed. These participants then took part in a seven-session study. In alternating sessions, participants were either measured on their current moral attitudes regarding meat eating and key hypothesized predictors of moralization or presented with videos that viscerally portrayed the suffering of animals inflicted by the meat-consumption industry, which was intended as a way of inducing moralization.

Cross-lagged structural equation modeling analyses revealed two important predictors of moralization at subsequent timepoints: moral emotions and moral piggybacking. More specifically, controlling for participants' already existing level of moralization: the degree to which participants felt moral emotions (e.g., disgust) at the thought of eating meat at a given timepoint; and moral piggybacking (e.g., the extent to which killing animals for meat was associated with larger moral principles they live by) positively predicted increases in the moral significance they attributed to meat-eating attitudes. It was also found that moral emotions and moral piggybacking fully mediated the effect of other predictors of moralization such as the perceived suffering inflicted on animals by the meat-industry and the perception that animals and humans are similar.

4.1.3 | Summary

The small amount of empirical work directly examining the process of moral recognition (as opposed to amplification) means that there is still little that is known about the underlying processes. While the evidence suggests the incidental affect may play a smaller role than initially thought (Landy & Goodwin, 2015), the work of Feinberg et al. (2019) identifies two promising mechanisms for moral recognition research—namely moral emotions and moral piggybacking.

4.2 | Evidence for moral amplification: Changes in extremity

While the term "moral amplification" is well-established within studies of moral judgment (Landy & Goodwin, 2015), as we note, it has not been formally considered as a process relevant to the study of moralization. By linking it to work on moralization, we offer a broader perspective on what kinds of targets moral amplification may be applied to. We define moral amplification as changes in the degree of extremity or importance of an already moral position. In more concrete terms, for the purposes of this review, we have included studies under the umbrella of moral amplification if the baseline measure of participants' moral position was above the lowest point in the relevant scale (see Figure 1).

4.2.1 | Amplification through incidental emotions

In contrast to studies of moral recognition, there have been a number of studies demonstrating that incidental affect—in particular disgust—can lead to moral amplification of wrongness judgments (Johnson et al., 2016; Pizarro et al., 2011; Schnall et al., 2008). However, a recent meta-analysis by Landy and Goodwin (2015) found these effects to be small (d = .11, p = .002, 95%CI [.04, .19]). Interestingly, it was also found that studies inducing olfactory (i.e., bad odors) or gustatory (i.e., bad tastes) forms of disgust appeared to demonstrate the most reliable moral amplification effects (d = .37, 95% CI [.15, .60]), compared to other forms of disgust induction such as visual (e.g., a video showing a disgusting toilet) or imaginary (e.g., recalling an event that made them feel disgusted).

The strong effect of olfactory or gustatory disgust inductions appears consistent with pathogen-avoidance accounts, which predict that the sensory modalities of smell and taste may be strongly associated with disgust (Schaller & Park, 2011). Although, it should also be noted that the number of olfactory and gustatory disgust inductions considered in the meta-analysis was much smaller (k = 8) than visual (k = 35) or imaginary (k = 17) inductions. Further, given the small size of these effects, even if incidental affect does influence moral wrongness judgments, it is unlikely that it is a primary driver of moralization.

4.2.2 | Amplification through attitude-specific emotions

Notwithstanding the limited effect of incidental affect inductions, there remains strong empirical support for the general relevance of emotions in moral amplification where the emotion can be consciously tied to a specific attitude object. This was demonstrated in a longitudinal study conducted by Brandt et al. (2015), who sought to investigate whether certain emotions or beliefs could predict changes in the degree of moral conviction that participants felt for their preferred and nonpreferred presidential candidates in the weeks leading up to the 2012 U.S. Presidential Election. Contrary to influential accounts of moralization (e.g., Schein & Gray, 2018), it was found that beliefs regarding the potential harms (for nonpreferred) or benefits (for preferred) of a given candidate at Time 1 was not a significant predictor of changes in moral conviction for those candidates. Instead, it was found that changes in moral conviction regarding candidates between Time 1 and Time 2 were predicted by enthusiasm (indicated by emotions such as happy or excited) at Time 1 (for preferred candidates) and hostility (indicated by emotions such as anger or disgust) at Time 2 (for nonpreferred candidates).

Wisneski and Skitka (2016) sought to experimentally investigate the potential influence of incidental affect by presenting participants with disgust-inducing images that were abortion relevant (e.g., images of fotuses); related to a moral issue but not to abortion (e.g., of suffering animals); or nonmoral (e.g., overflowing toilets). The mean level of moral conviction in each of the image groups were then compared with a control condition where participants simply viewed images of mundane objects (e.g., tables, pencils). It was found that participants in both the nonabortion related disgust conditions did not report significantly higher levels of moral conviction regarding abortion compared to participants in the control condition. On the other hand, participants in the abortion-related disgust condition did report elevated levels of moral conviction regarding abortion compared to the control group. Furthermore, it was found that this difference in moral conviction was fully mediated by differences in the self-reported level of disgust experienced by participants but not by other commonly proposed mechanisms of moralization such as differences in self-reported anger or the perceived harmfulness of abortion (Skitka et al., 2017). Such findings suggest that it was the specific evocation of disgust in the context of attitude-relevant images that led to moral amplification.

4.2.3 | Amplification through moral communication

Another promising area of research on moral amplification has examined the influence of receiving messages framed using moral language. For example, in a recent study, Clifford (2018) found that presenting participants with a persuasive message argued in terms of both disgust (e.g., that farmed animals live around their own urine and feces) and

harm (e.g., that pig-farmers break the tips of pigs' teeth to prevent biting) resulted in increased levels of moral conviction compared to a control group (where participants were not presented with any messages). Importantly, it was found that these differences in moral conviction persisted at a 2-week follow up. Further, participants who had been exposed to the harm-based persuasion frame—but not the disgust-based frame—reported significantly higher levels of support for food-related policies and said that they would be more upset if a family member disagreed with them on the issue of natural-food, when compared to a control condition.

A similar process was demonstrated in a study of children by Rottman, Young, and Kelemen (2017). In this study, participants were presented with a series of 12 pictures portraying aliens engaging in novel behaviors (e.g., sticking cotton balls in their ear). Depending on their assigned condition, participants were also induced to experience disgust via exposure to fart spray; presented with a description which framed the behavior as disgusting (e.g., "Acting like this is really gross"); or presented with a description framing the behavior as anger-inducing (e.g., "Acting like this is really irritating."). It was found that, compared to participants in a control condition (who saw only the images), participants who were presented with descriptions of the behaviors in "disgusting" or "anger-inducing" terms were more likely to rate the behaviors as "wrong," however, this difference was not observed for participants who were induced to feel disgust using fart spray.

Both of these studies demonstrate that receiving communication from others which makes salient, the moral features of a given attitude or action may be an important avenue for moral amplification. Indeed, at least when it comes to children, it appears that receiving communication that expresses others' moral emotions (e.g., disgust or anger) regarding an action may be more strongly linked to moral amplification than the general induction of disgust.

4.2.4 | Amplification through descriptive norms.

Social factors may play a role in moralization beyond communication processes. Group norms refer to social rules or standards for behavior (Terry & Hogg, 1996), which can either be descriptive or injunctive in nature. Descriptive norms refer to perceptions of behaviors that are performed by the majority of others within a relevant referent group, while injunctive norms are perceptions of behaviors that the majority of others approve or disapprove of (Cialdini et al., 1991). Although moralization is often conceptualized as the conversion of descriptive regularities in behavior to injunctive norms (Morris & Liu, 2015), recent research has found that information regarding behaviors that constitute the descriptive norm may have a powerful effect on the degree to which they are seen as moral. For example, within a public goods game paradigm (a multiplayer game where players that are initially endowed with a certain sum of money can choose to invest some of their money to a shared fund), Lindström, Jangard, Selbing, and Olsson (2018) manipulated the perceived "commonness" of sharing behavior by varying the rate at which fictional players were represented as contributing to the shared fund across multiple rounds. It was found that, in conditions where sharing behavior was common (i.e., players shared 80% of the time), participants were more likely to condemn the failure to share and were more likely to incur personal cost to punish the behavior (see also: Monroe, Dillon, Guglielmo, & Baumeister, 2018).

4.2.5 | Summary

Incidental emotions appear to have small effects on moral amplification of judgments, although in the case of disgust, this may be moderated by the way in which it is induced, with some evidence suggesting that olfactory or gustatory inductions of disgust may have a particularly strong influence on moral amplification. Although incidental emotions appear to have no effect on attitudes, moral amplification does appear to be predicted by the activation of emotions that can be tied to the relevant attitude. Converging evidence also suggests that framing behaviors or issues in emotional or harm-based terms can lead to moral amplification for both judgments and actions. Finally, an emerging body of empirical evidence suggests that moral amplification may also be driven by perceptions that a given action represents a descriptive norm—that is, behaviors that are performed by the majority of individuals.

5 | FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In this review of the growing field of moralization research, we have sought to contribute to future research and theorizing by bringing together the extant literature within an organizing conceptual framework. Here, we lay out three specific directions for future research that we believe are highlighted by our review.

5.1 | Interplay between moral judgments, attitudes, and entities

Our discussion of moralization across three different domains—namely, judgments, attitudes, and entities may provide a platform for future research seeking to identify mechanisms that are most applicable to a specific domain of moralization. In our review of the empirical evidence on moralization across these domains, it is apparent that while certain mechanisms may apply to all three (e.g., moral emotions and morally framed communication), others may be domain specific. For example, as discussed above, the inducement of incidental disgust appears to have a small but significant effect on the moral amplification of judgments but have no influence on the moral amplification of attitudes.

Greater understanding of which mechanisms are most relevant to moralization of a given domain and how moralization occurring in a specific domain may influence other relevant domains, may lead to particularly important insights for political and social movements seeking to bring about widespread changes in moral concern. For example, where there is difficulty shifting individuals' level of moral concern for out-groups, the path of least resistance may be to start by targeting relevant moral judgments or vice versa.

5.2 | Moral amplification versus moral recognition

The introduction of a formal conceptual framework for separating moral recognition from moral amplification, and thereby the inclusion of existing research on moral amplification within the conceptual domain of moralization, may also lead to new directions for moralization research. To be clear, by introducing this framework, we do not make the claim that the two phenomena are empirically distinct. Indeed, it is highly likely that the psychological factors influencing moral amplification may also be relevant for moral recognition—as our review suggests. However, conceptualizing recognition and amplification as distinct processes may lead to future research into factors that are more strongly applicable to one process or the other. For example, it is possible that cognitive mechanisms underlying moralization such as moral piggybacking (Feinberg et al., 2019) or appraisals of harm (Schein & Gray, 2018) may be more relevant to the process of moral recognition (see also, Skitka et al., 2017), while emotional mechanisms may play a greater role in the process of moral amplification.

5.3 | Integrating insights from demoralization

Finally, a generative direction for future research and theorizing may be to integrate insights arising from research on processes underlying demoralization. Indeed, Rozin originally defined the concept of moralization by reference to its inverse, which he termed *amoralization* (Rozin, 1997; Rozin et al., 1997), suggesting that he envisaged one process as informed by the other. In this regard, one particularly informative area of demoralization research may be the growing field investigating the phenomenon of *ethical fading* (Tenbrunsel & Messick, 2004), which documents the various factors which may lead people to no longer see the moral significance of a given action. (Gino & Mogilner, 2014; Sezer et al., 2015; Shu & Gino, 2012). Such research may inform the future study of moralization by identifying psychological barriers that may prevent moralization from occurring, even when moralization-inducing factors are present. This approach was recently tested by Feinberg et al. (2019) who proposed that an individual's position on a moral attitude may represent an equilibrium between processes “pushing” toward greater moralization (e.g., moral

emotions) and "pull" forces which seek to avoid unpleasant changes which may accompany moralization (e.g., hedonistic desires). Consistent with this account, Feinberg et al. (2019) found that self-reported hedonic motivations such as the perceived tastiness of meat and seeing meat eating as a natural part of life were both negative predictors of moralization.

Future moralization research may also investigate whether cognitive mechanisms may also be applicable to the moralization process. In this regard, one particularly important subset of demoralization research may be studies investigating various processes by which entities may be viewed as lacking in morally relevant attributes, in order to make actions which cause them harm or issues which negatively affect their interests less morally troublesome. For example, once reminded of past atrocities against an outgroup, members of the perpetrating group have been found to dehumanize members of the outgroup, making their ill treatment seem less morally troublesome, and thereby restoring psychological equanimity (Castano & Giner-Sorolla, 2006; Vaes, Paladino, & Puvia, 2011). Other work on phenomena such as the "meat paradox" (Bastian, Loughnan, Haslam, & Radke, 2012; Loughnan, Haslam, & Bastian, 2010), has found that individuals often seek to withdraw their moral concern for certain entities (e.g., cows or sheep), when they have made the decision to eat beef or lamb (Buttlar & Walther, 2019). Such research suggests that individuals are motivated to maintain consistency between their moral attitudes and behavior (Harmon-Jones, Harmon-Jones, & Levy, 2015), however, as far as we are aware, there has not been any corresponding research to date investigating whether a similar process will apply in the context of moralization—that is, how increasing the moral significance of a given action may influence the level of moral significance applied to relevant attitudes and entities.

6 | CONCLUSION

Over two decades have passed since Rozin et al. (1997) first elucidated the concept of moralization. Since then, there have been many studies which have relied on the concept of moralization or have sought to directly study it, yet this brief review has revealed that surprisingly, little attention has been paid to the question of how moralization should be operationalized or how various approaches are theoretically linked. In response, we have delineated research examining the moralization of specific actions and compared this to the moralization of attitudes. We have also highlighted the potential for moralization to not only be applied to actions themselves, but also to actors or recipients of those actions. Both people and entities themselves can be considered as more or less morally relevant, therefore fitting the broad definition of moralization. Our review has also highlighted that although moralization has traditionally been conceptualized as a morally neutral target being newly incorporated within the moral domain, moralization has mostly been studied as incremental increases in the moral importance or wrongness of attitudes or actions that were already considered somewhat morally relevant. In an effort to address this lack of conceptual clarity, we have proposed a new definitional framework for moralization, which makes a distinction between moral recognition and moral amplification. By taking a broader and more inclusive approach to the concept of moralization, we have aimed to provide a platform from the various antecedents, consequences, and processes of moralization can be studied and understood.

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