**Belief Change Under Conditions of Moral Conviction**

1. Can support for highly polarized positions, with strong moral conviction be ‘demoralized’?
   1. Via a pragmatic/economic argument?
   2. Via a personal benefit/hedonic argument?
2. Can we increase the effectiveness of social consensus on changing support for highly polarized positions by reducing perceived moral conviction?

Moral convictions are attitudes that are perceived as grounded in fundamental distinctions between right and wrong. Moral conviction, while often correlated with strength of belief, is fundamentally distinct from strong but non-moral attitudes/beliefs. This is because they are perceived as a universal and objective truth, which is relatively resistant to influence from equals or superiors. Thus, morally convicted beliefs are more difficult to change as compared to beliefs grounded in preference or social convention (Skitka et al., 2021). Our research question is fundamentally, how can we change attitudes that are backed by moral conviction.

Given that morally convicted beliefs are hard to change, one plausible solution would be to first ‘demoralize’ the belief, and then attempt change. However, there is mixed evidence that this is effective. Moral conviction has been successfully reduced by framing arguments using pragmatic or economic counterarguments (Kodapanakkal et al., 2022, Kutlaca, 2013), or by emphasizing the personal or hedonic benefit of a counter position (Bastian et al, 2015; Feinberg et al, 2019). In contrast, unsuccessful reduction of moral conviction has been attributed to choosing topics that are already highly politicized and polarized (e.g., COVID-19 vaccination), framings that are dependent on belief in authority influence, or flawed psychometric measurements of moral conviction itself (Aignesberger et al., 2023; Fenzi et al., 2022 ;Brannon et al., 2019). For our first study, we plan on testing several methods of moral conviction reduction (pragmatic/economic argument, and a personal/hedonic benefit argument), across an array of contemporary issues that falls along the spectrum of political belief and polarization (support for universal health care, capital punishment, and desire to exercise). Additionally, we plan on using an expanded item for measuring moral conviction that is an adaption of work by Skitka et al., (2021), which is novel insofar as it will measure perceptions of objectivity and universality in belief, which has been assumed but has not been directly assessed. Our goal is to directly reduce moral conviction on these stances, any change in behavior or belief would be a useful, but incidental benefit.

As our final goal is change in attitudes, after ‘demoralization’ we would like to leverage the effects of social influence. One of the strongest findings in psychology is that people conform towards the consensus group opinion (Asch, 1956; Deutsch M, 1955). However, one aspect of morally convicted beliefs that sets them apart from simple ‘strongly held’ beliefs, is that they appear to be independent of normative/majority influence (Skitka et al., 2005). In preliminary work, we were able to successfully manipulate social consensus by presenting false survey results that were assumed to be real, presenting either an artificially high or artificially low level of agreement with a position. We plan to directly test this interaction by attempting to reduce moral conviction and then seeing if that increases conformation towards the societal consensus.