**Belief Change Under Conditions of Moral Conviction**

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

Many issues exist where people disagree, some are simple matters of preference (Coke vs. Pepsi) and others are matters of convention that society has agreed upon (driving on the right/left in the U.S./UK). However, some beliefs are rooted in the perception that a given stance is fundamentally right or wrong, based on a moral principle connected to core beliefs and convictions. We define this as ‘Moral Conviction’. For example, a pro-choice supporter whose belief is tied to the perception that women have a fundamental right to bodily self-determination. One fundamental characteristic of beliefs held with ‘Moral Conviction’ is that historically, these beliefs are more difficult to change as compared to beliefs grounded in preference or social convention (Skitka et al., 2021). Considering that many stances on some of the most important issues today (e.g., Israel-Palestine conflict, Abortion, climate change, etc.) are grounded in moral conviction, understanding how to affect belief change is critical.

Given the difficulty of changing attitudes for morally convicted beliefs, one promising avenue of research is work on attitude ‘demoralization’, meaning a reduction in the strength of moral conviction that one holds towards a belief. Conceptually, if morally convicted beliefs are hard to change, characterizing a belief in a non-moral framework should lead to greater potential for attitude change. However, there is mixed evidence that this is effective, some research has shown that moral conviction can be successfully reduced by framing arguments using pragmatic or economic counter-arguments (Kodapanakkal et al., 2022, Kutlaca, 2013), while other research has shown that morally convicted individuals are resistant to nonmoral counter-arguments, and instead, more open to moralized counter-arguments (Luttrell et al., 2019). Conceptually, we are interested in replicating these studies and determining whether moral or nonmoral appeals are more effective at changing belief, and furthermore, if this is mediated by a reduction in perceived moral convictions.

Another plausible approach for attitude change in conditions of moral conviction would be to leverage 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). This makes sense, considering that these beliefs are due to moral conviction, rather than social convention. Furthermore, this indicates that if de-moralization is successful, social pressure likewise could be successful in attitude change.

We plan on conducting a series of experiments. First, we seek to determine if we can successfully use moral or nonmoral arguments to affect attitude change, and additionally, if these arguments lead to increased or decreased moral conviction. Next, we seek to determine if we can successfully experimentally manipulate perceptions of social consensus, in order to set us up for our last study. Finally, we wish to know if experimentally decreased moral conviction results in increased susceptibility to the effects of the social consensus manipulation we developed in the previous study. Ideally, we could determine whether we can directly affect attitude change using moral/nonmoral arguments, and if that is not successful, we would want to know if we could successfully de-moralize individuals, and thus change their attitudes using social pressures.

DO A GRAPH THAT SHOWS PREDICTED THEORETICAL OUTCOMES

USE A DEFINITION THAT IS ABOUT OBJECTIVE/UNIVERSALITY

ADD QUESTIONS THAT DIRECTLY ASK ABOUT OBJECTIVITY AND UNIVERSALITY

WHAT MAKES ME WANT TO PURSUE IT IF THERE IS MIXED EVIDENCE?

WHY DIDN”T IT WORK…WHAT COULD WE DO DIFFERENTLY TO MAKE IT WORTH CONTINUE TO LOOKING AT?

THE INTERVENTION WASN”T SUCCESSFUL, BECAUSE IT DIDN”T ACTUALLY REDUCE MORALIZTION CORRECTLY?   
  
 PERHAPS THERE ARE SOME CONCEPTS THAT CAN BE CHANGED, BUT SOME CONCEPTS THAT CAN”T? LETS EXPLORE THIS FURTHER.

1st PARAGRAPH IS ‘UNNECESSARY PARTLY’ trim it down and get to the research question ASAP, define moral conviction and move on?

REWRITE THE SECOND TO LAST PARAGRAPH TO MAKE CLEAR HOW IT WOULD BE GREAT FOR SOC.CONSENSUS TO WORK IF WE COULD SUCCESFULLY DEMORALIZE.

“IN PRELIMINARY WORK, WE WERE ABLE TO MANIPULATE SOCIAL CONSENSUS” – make sure to talk about what we already did in the context of what we are planning to do!

TAKE THE LAST PARAGRAPH AND ‘SPREAD IT OUT’ AMONGST THE EARLIER PARAGRAPHS WHEN I BRING THEM UP – DESCRIBE THE EXPERIMENTS IN MORE DETAIL, AND TALK ABOUT WHAT I HAVE DONE ALREADY.

CAN I DEMORALIZE? SERIOUSLY MAKE A PILOT STUDY TO MODIFY MORAL CONVICTION AND SEE WHAT WORKS?  
  
CAN I THEN USE SOC-CONSENSUS TO CHANGE BELIEFS?

MAKE SURE THAT THE TWO OPENING QUESTIONS ARE SPECIFIC AS POSSIBLE AFTER REVISIONS TO MAKE SURE WE”RE REFERENCING EXACTLY WHAT WE”RE DOING.

IF I CAN”T SUCCSESFULLY DEMORALIZE SOMETHING … WHAT IS SOMETHING ELSE I CAN STUDY AND LOOK AT SO I CAN MOVE FORWARD? (INDEPENDENT OF DEMORALIZATION)

Brief Conceptual Overview and Improvement Area

WHAT MAKES ME WANT TO PURSUE IT IF THERE IS MIXED EVIDENCE?

WHY DIDN”T IT WORK…WHAT COULD WE DO DIFFERENTLY TO MAKE IT WORTH CONTINUE TO LOOKING AT?

* Brannon 2019: counterattitudinal object information can influence attitudes about related objects.
  + Lateral Attitude Change: Change in a focal object can lead to changes in related objects (attitude towards ice cream, affects attitude towards cake)
  + Does counterattitudinal information about a focal object change attitudes in related concepts?, as a function of how much the focal object is held with moral conviction
    - “changes in attitudes toward one social group can generalize to other social groups that are perceived as similar in some regard”
    - Generalization, when it’s related and the main obj changes, and Displacement, when change happens but no focal attitude changes.
  + Moral Conviction: known to ‘buffer’ against attitude change. Those that hold high moral conviction towards an attitude are less likely to change their mind (than those w/ low moral conviction).
    - High levels of moral conviction prevent the formation of new evaluative associations?
      * For people w/ low moral conviction, attitude change towards the focal object SHOULD generalize, and for those with high moral conviction, the focal and related objects should be resistant to change
    - Moral conviction could also buffer attitude only for the focal object, but NOT related objects!
      * Individuals received an article that expressed view counter to their reported attitude (opposition 4,5,6 got benefits article, supporters 1,2,3, got an opposition article)
  + Moral conviction was NOT significantly correlated with attitude change towards any of the four objects!
    - Relationship b/w attitude change for the focal object and proximal object was STRONGER when moral conviction was high, e.g., moral conviction does NOT buffer changes in attitudes towards any object, and attitude change for the focal object generalized to the proximal object regardless of moral conviction.
  + WHY? Was moral conviction on the object UNRELATED to changes in attitude on the object? E.g. High moral conviction did NOT make changing minds more difficult?
    - Moral conviction was not manipulated, merely measured, and the two topics chosen were ones where there was fair opinion already existing on both of them?
    - Perhaps the measure was poor? The measure only uses the single item screener, and didn’t actually ask the more advanced 3 item one, or directly address universality/objectivity needs.
      * It is POSSIBLE that the effect of moral conviction on LAC is due to differential effects for SOME determinants of attitude change (e.g., social influence) but not others (e.g., persuasive arguments)
      * This is EXACTLY the type of point we are wanting to make, as we are examining both social influence AND persuasive arguments.
      * The researchers themselves agree that the single item measure of moral conviction could be flawed due to poor psychometric properties.
  + Past research shows that moral conviction can MODERATE change in attitudes, the current research suggests that the impact of moral conviction does not extent to change towards RELATED objects (not my assumption in the first place?)
    - This is VERY SURPRISING, given STRONG CLAIMS about buffering effects in existing theory.
    - Suggests boundary conditions for the buffering effects of moral conviction on attitude change.
    - E.g., due to the ‘particular type’ of counterattitudinal information,
      * Current research used strong arguments in the form of an article to induce attitude change (see Luttrell, 2016).
      * Past research on moral conviction largely focused on attitude change in response to social influence (Skitka, 2009; Skitka, 2005; Aramovich, 2012)
        + What was the PREVIOUS method of ‘demoralizing’, or trying to buffer against attitude change? How is 'our’ method different or superior?
        + E.g., variations on argument ‘strength’, Luttrell used ‘moderately strong’ arguments, Whereas the researchers here explicitly used VERY strong arguments.
    - “Yet, in contrast to the idea that moral conviction produces unwavering attitudes, participants in the current research changed their attitudes in response to counterattitudinal arguments, regardless of their level of moral conviction. This discrepancy suggests that moral conviction may only serve as a buffer against attitude change in cases of persuasion via social influence, while strong counterattitudinal arguments remain quite effective in changing attitudes held with high moral conviction.

THE INTERVENTION WASN”T SUCCESSFUL, BECAUSE IT DIDN”T ACTUALLY REDUCE MORALIZTION CORRECTLY?