Moral Conviction Study Design Draft

For our second study on belief change in polarized opinions, we plan to study the effects of moral conviction. Our goal is to determine if manipulation of moral conviction can increase or decrease the likelihood of belief change. We plan on testing several methods of moral conviction manipulation on support for four contemporary issues that fall along the spectrum of political belief and polarization. Our experimental design will be a 4 x 4 factorial design.

Our first independent variable will be exposure to one of our four contemporary issues, which are human caused climate change, universal health care, capital punishment, and desire to exercise. A priori, we believe that desire to exercise will have the least moral conviction, capital punishment will have a moderate amount of moral conviction, and that climate change will have the most moral conviction (Wright et al., 2008); We have no a priori predictions on how much moral conviction there will be for universal health care. This is a within subjects variable, as all participants will be exposed to each of the four topics.

Our second independent variable will be exposure to one of our four moral conviction manipulations. Our first manipulation, intended to increase moral conviction is reading an essay that is based on emphasizing concepts of ‘moral responsibilities’ and ‘broad ethical principles’ as well as explicitly framing things through the lens of harm and fairness (Ryan et al., 2019; Kodapanakkal, 2021; Clifford, 2017; Wisneski & Skitka, 2017). Our second manipulation, also intended to increase moral conviction, is reading an essay that explicitly links the current concept being examined to another, clearly accepted as moral belief (Aignesberger 2023; Feinberg et al., 2019). Our third manipulation, intended to decrease moral conviction, is reading an essay that emphasizes pragmatic elements such as cost or inefficiency (Kutlaca et al., 2013; Kodapanakkal 2021). Our fourth and final manipulation, also intended to decrease moral conviction, is reading an essay that emphasizes perceived personal economic and hedonic benefits from the activity (Feinberg et al., 2019; Bastian et al., 2015). This variable will be a between-subjects variable, as each participant will be randomly assigned one of the four different moral conviction manipulations. The effect of these manipulations will be assessed using a multi-item moral conviction aggregate item, validated for the purpose of assessing the impact of moral conviction on belief change (Kane, 2013).

Our dependent variable will be support for each of our four contemporary issues, assessed both pre and post manipulation. Additionally, we will measure multiple individual differences, including subjective numeracy, political orientation on a left-right spectrum, deontological and utilitarian orientation, resistance to belief change, and dogmatism.

Make sure to add an individual ‘openness to belief change for belief X’

* “how open are you to changing your beliefs on X”

Add labeling terminology for the four conditions (to easily separate them)

Bring 16 essays to lab meeting

Each participant gets all 4 essays for increasing 1 and 2, or decreasing 1 and 2, not a random assortment of each.

Shoot for similar word count

Make sure to measure moral conviction before and after – to see if our manipulation is successful.

Perhaps add a control condition? Alternatively, if pre measure can be it’s own control.

* Uninformative but on the same subject for control?
* Blank and unrelated essay?
* No reading at all?

When piloting – we don’t’ need individual differences

Do we need to measure pre-post moral conviction because it may have issues with demand characteristics? It’s less powerful… but that could be something to assess and worth looking at. If we do that, we want a neutral control to compare our conditions!

Post measures for the pilot only (to minimize demand characteristics!)

Put a list of the outcomes that we want to assess in the pilot study!

* Support for issue
* Moral conviction for issue
* Openness to belief change on issue
* Individual differences

Word count = this , readability = this, for all of the 16 essays.