Moralization and Intolerance of Ideological Outgroups

Mark J. Brandt

Tilburg University

Geoffrey Wetherell

DePaul University

Jarret T. Crawford

The College of New Jersey

Address correspondence to m.j.brandt@tilburguniversity.edu

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Abstract

Moral conflicts are pervasive and potentially corrosive to democratic politics; however little is known about where moral convictions come from. We review evidence for the role of emotions, beliefs, the self, and even genetics in predicting moralization. The extent that moral convictions are emotionally-relevant and genetically based attitudes that are tightly intertwined with the self may help to explain their potency in predicting political behaviors and perceptions. In support of this idea we review recent work suggesting that both political liberals and conservatives are both intolerant towards ideological outgroups and that this intolerance is often based on perceived moral and value differences. Neither liberals nor conservatives are uniquely (im)moral, but rather both seek to defend the meaning provided by their political beliefs that are connected to their fundamental moral beliefs. Possible solutions to reduce moral conflict and promote cooperation are discussed.

Moralization and Intolerance of Ideological Outgroups

Conflicts arise for many reasons. Some conflicts are over scarce resources, such as natural resources like fresh water or social resources like power. Other conflicts are over values, such as religious, moral, and political beliefs. Conflicts over resources, in some ways, make sense. There are resources that people and societies need and one frequent necessity for acquiring those resources is to engage in conflict with people and societies that have resources you do not. Conflicts over values are different. Many attitudes do not inherently cause conflict. I (MJB) prefer the band Jawbreaker. They are a particularly good representation of the punk/emo amalgamation that occurred during the late '80's and early '90's, but if you do not share the same view we can still have a reasonable interaction and perhaps even be friends. However, both personal experience and history teaches us that other kinds of attitudes, particularly those that are experienced as morally relevant, are more likely to lead to conflict. Most scholars would predict that differences in preferences for early '90's punk bands are less likely to ruin a relationship than differences in moral values or a moral issue (e.g., whether or not abortion is permissible). In this paper, we first examine recent social psychological research on the moralization process by which people go from having a preference for an issue to a moral conviction. That is, we examine the question "Where do moral convictions come from?" Then, we review research on conflicts over moral values and other ideological worldviews.

Moral Conviction

Attitudes held with a sense of moral conviction are different from attitudes that are non-moral preferences or conventions. Moral conviction is a person's subjective meta-cognitive belief that a particular attitude or value is connected to his or her fundamental sense of right or wrong (Skitka & Morgan, 2014). These attitudes are often perceived as objective and universal,

and motivate behavior (Morgan, Skitka, & Lytle, 2014; Skitka, Bauman, & Sargis, 2005). One of the major findings of the moral conviction research program is that the extent a particular attitude is held with a sense of moral conviction differs from person to person. Some people consider abortion to be a moral issue, whereas others consider it a non-moral preference (e.g., Ryan, 2014; Skitka, Bauman, & Sargis, 2005). Similarly, some people consider their attitudes towards presidential candidates, same-sex marriage, gun control, Jawbreaker, and taxes as moral convictions, whereas other people consider these very same issues as unrelated to their moral values (e.g., Ryan, 2014; Skitka, Bauman, & Sargis, 2005). Individuals can even construe rather boring issues, like whether students should study, in moral terms (Van Bavel et al., 2012). One clear – but potentially controversial – conclusion of this research is that there is no clear-cut set of moral or non-moral issues, but rather different individuals construe different issues along a continuum from morally relevant to morally irrelevant.

The moral conviction research program has made it quite clear that moral convictions differ from their non-morally convicted counterparts. For example, moral convictions are easily accessible (Wisneski, Lytle, & Skitka, 2009) and people perceive moral convictions as independent of majority influence (Aramovich, Lytle, & Skitka, 2012), and independent of authority (Skitka, Bauman, & Lytle, 2009). For example, when the United States' Supreme Court – a branch of the United States' government that is typically perceived as highly legitimate – ruled in favor of physician assisted suicide (PAS), only people who were both opposed to and morally convicted about PAS perceived less legitimacy of the court after, compared to before, the court's ruling (Skitka, Bauman, & Lytle, 2009). This result suggests that people who view their opposition to PAS with a sense of moral conviction follow their convictions and ignore the suggestions of a typically legitimate authority, perhaps finding it easier to change their opinion

of the court rather than their deeply held moral conviction. The effects reported in these studies often use large samples of adults, and the effects hold when controlling for a host of plausible demographic and attitudinal variables (including, critically, attitude strength) suggesting that the effects of moral conviction are both far reaching and robust.

Where Do Moral Convictions Come From?

A recent extension of the moral conviction research program tries to understand why some people consider an issue to be a moral issue, but other people do not view the very same issue with a sense of moral conviction. What makes an issue a non-moral issue for some people, but a strong moral conviction for others? Why do some people see an issue as slightly moral, whereas others see the same issue as *the* prototype of a moral issue? That is, what causes moralization? In this section we review evidence for three possibilities, but there may be many more.

Emotions and Beliefs

The most well-known examinations of moralization were conducted by Paul Rozin and colleagues to understand the moralization of vegetarianism and smoking (Rozin, Markwith, & Stoess, 1997; Rozin & Singh, 1999). The primary reason these papers are cited in the contemporary literature is because they find that feelings of disgust are robust correlates of moralization (cf. Petrescu & Parksinson, 2014). This has inspired the relatively few additional studies that test moralization. For example, work by Wheatley and Haidt (2005) finds that manipulations of disgust lead people to see a morally neutral behavior (e.g., a student-council representative selected topics for the upcoming meetings that would stimulate discussion) as morally wrong (for a review of the slim empirical literature relevant to this moralization claim see Avramova & Inbar, 2013). The idea that emotions lead to moralization is consistent with the

gist of Haidt's (2001) influential social intuitionist model of moral judgment, which predicts that judgments of right or wrong are based on people's intuitive, gut-level, and emotional reactions to the issue. It is also consistent with cross-sectional studies finding a correlation between issue-based anger and other negative emotions and moral conviction (Mullen & Skitka, 2006; Skitka & Wisneski, 2011).

There is also reason to believe that less emotional and more cognitive considerations, like people's beliefs about the harms and benefits of a particular issue, may also play a role. A less well-known finding from Rozin and colleagues' work is that people's perception that eating meat or smoking is harmful was also associated with moralization (Rozin et al., 1997; Rozin & Singh, 1999). Other recent work has found that even moral judgments of scenarios that have removed all obvious instances of harm are thought to contain some degree of harm by participants (Gray, Schein, & Ward, 2014), and that anthropomorphizing a social cause (and thus highlighting the potential for harm) increases donations to that cause (Ahn, Kim, & Aggarwal, 2014). This suggests that moralization may occur via the strong emotions people attach to particular issues and/or via beliefs that an issue, attitude, or behavior has particularly harmful or beneficial outcomes.

Making firm conclusions about these interesting ideas is hampered because prior work on moralization has primarily used cross-sectional surveys which cannot capture changes in moralization (e.g., Rozin et al., 1997). Some work has used experimental manipulations of emotions (Wheatley & Haidt, 2005); however, these studies are rare, often small, and test moralization of unimportant issues (because they are more likely to be seen as morally irrelevant) and with limited types of emotions (i.e., disgust). It is more common for studies to manipulate emotions (or some other concept, like cleanliness; Horberg, Oveis, Keltner, &

Cohen, 2009; Zhong, Strejcek, & Sivanathan, 2010) and examine their effects on the moral wrongness of particular actions that are (likely) already moralized (e.g. a man having [safe] sex with a dead chicken).

To build on previous work addressing moralization, a longitudinal design is preferable. With this design it is possible to observe how emotions or beliefs about harms and benefits at one time point predict moral conviction at a later time point while controlling for moral conviction at the previous time point. In this case, the path estimates for the emotions and beliefs about harms and benefits represent the ability of these variables to predict changes in moral conviction (i.e. moralization) over time. A recent study of the 2012 U.S. Presidential Election tested the routes of both the emotion and beliefs about harms and benefits to the moralization of people's preferences for President (Barack Obama or Mitt Romney) in a longitudinal design (Brandt, Wisneski, & Skitka, 2014). In this case, the path estimates for the emotions and harms and benefits represent the ability of these variables to predict changes in moral conviction (i.e. moralization) over time. Participants completed two waves prior to the election (including one in the week prior to the election) and two waves in the months after the election (the last wave in mid-December of 2012).

In the longitudinal study, measures of emotions often relevant for morality and politics were used (Rozin, Lowery, Imada, & Haidt, 1999; Valentino, Brader, Groenendyk, Gregorowicz, & Hutchings, 2011). Hostility (consisting of items regarding anger, disgust, hostility etc.) towards participants' non-preferred candidate and enthusiasm (consisting of items regarding happy, joyful, excited, etc.) for participants' preferred candidate were included, so that the possible moralizing effects of both positive and negative emotions could be examined.[1]

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[1] Validated subscales of the affective reactions of the PANAS inventory were used as measures in this study (Watson & Clark, 1994). Fear was also included and did not find any consistent results.

Participants also reported the possible consequences of their preferred and non-preferred candidate winning the election and then rated the degree of harms and benefits of these consequences to capture their beliefs about harms and benefits (cf. Eagly, Mladinic, & Otto, 1994). Both the emotions and beliefs measures were used to predict standard measures of moral conviction (Skitka & Morgan, 2014). This study uncovered several interesting findings:

1. The associations between emotions and moral conviction, as well as harms and benefits and moral conviction, were significantly different (and stronger) between the two waves prior to the election compared to the two waves following the election.

2. In the two waves prior to the election, we found that enthusiasm predicted more moral conviction of people's preferred candidate at the next time point (i.e. Time 1 enthusiasm predicting Time 2 moral conviction) and hostility predicted more moral conviction of people's non-preferred candidate at the next time point. That is, emotions particularly relevant to the target of moral conviction (i.e. the candidates) predicted greater moralization.

3. In the two waves prior to the election, moral conviction predicted increased hostility, joviality, and perceived harms and benefits at the next time point. That is, the relationship between emotions and moral conviction are bi-directional, whereas moral conviction appears to be a cause but not a consequence of perceived harms and benefits.

4. These results were *not* moderated by participants' political ideologies or by which candidate they supported.

Combined, these four findings help move research on moralization forward, and highlight possible questions for future studies. For example, the emotion-related findings replicate the

spirit of Rozin's original research and Haidt's social intuitionist model, but also go further and suggest that irrelevant emotions may not be sufficient to increase moralization. That is, only the emotions that were most relevant to the target of moral conviction were associated with greater moral conviction over time (e.g., enthusiasm for the preferred candidate *did not* predict moral conviction of the non-preferred candidate). The results for harms and benefits also suggest some support for Haidt's (2001) social intuitionist model because beliefs about harms and benefits were an outcome (and not a cause) of moral conviction.

The precise mechanism linking moral convictions and beliefs about harms and benefits, however, could be further teased apart. Are these beliefs about harms and benefits post-hoc rationalizations of the moral convictions participants' felt, or do they arise because morally convicted participants are more likely to attend to positive and negative information about the issue? Another interesting question revolves around the non-significant differences between liberals and conservatives. Although liberals and conservatives may differ in the *content* of the issues they believe to be morally relevant (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009; Hofmann, Wisneski, Brandt, & Skitka, 2014), the *processes* underlying moral conviction appear to be very similar. Perhaps liberals and conservatives are more psychological similar, in terms of process, than typically assumed (for a review of additional evidence on this point see Skitka & Washburn, in press). Finally, and most preliminarily, the finding that the moralization process appears to be the most robust prior to the election suggests that moralization is not a continuous process, but rather may be centered on salient events. Practically speaking, this means that it will not always be possible to observe moralization, but that it needs to have a spark.

Investigations of moralization have typically focused on emotions and cognitions because these are the same type of constructs adopted by the original moral psychologists (e.g., David

Hume, Adam Smith). However, it is not clear that these emotions and cognitions are enough to create moralization on their own. People are very emotional about sports teams and they have perceptions of harms and benefits for a number of relatively mundane activities. Yet, these things are not necessarily felt with the vigor of a moral conviction. To help fill this gap, we have also examined other routes to moralization, such as via connections with the self-concept and genetics.

Self-concept

Core conceptions of the self are guiding principles in people's lives, and impact important outcomes such as psychological wellbeing (Diener, Oishi & Lucas, 2003; Higgins, 1987) and relationship satisfaction (Vinokur, Price & Caplan, 1997). Psychologists have often suggested a link between the self-concept and morality. For example, psychologists note that human life is driven by the search for things of value (Flanagan, 1991) and that identity is an orientation based on things that a person sees as admirable, worthwhile, or of value (Taylor, 1989). One end goal of moral development is to infuse one's sense of self with one's morals (Blasi, 1995), and to experience personal and moral goals as one and the same, leading the self to be defined by moral values (Colby & Damon, 1992). In short, people integrate conceptions of the self and morality (see also Frimer & Walker, 2009; Hart, 2005; Lapsley & Narvaez, 2004; Noam & Wren, 1993).

The idea that morality is integrated with the self suggests that moralization may be especially likely to occur for attitudes that are connected with the self. In early work on moral conviction, Skitka (2002) wrote that moral convictions are "self-expressive stands on a specific issue" that "result from heavily internalized norms…and personal commitment to terminal values" (p. 589); however, these ideas were never directly tested. Other early work on

moralization speculated that people moralize attitudes (e.g. about smoking) as they become aware that they have consequences relevant to the self (e.g. potential harm; Rozin, 1999). However, these examinations lack empirical tests of the extent to which the self-relevance of attitudes relate to moral conviction, and the possible causal directions underlying these relationships. For example, it could be the case that as people experience an attitude as self-relevant, they will feel more morally convicted about it. It could also be the case that people become morally convicted about an attitude, they become more likely to see it as relevant to the self-concept.

To provide empirical tests of the idea that moral convictions are experienced as self-relevant, and that the self-relevance of attitudes drive moral conviction, researchers (Wetherell, Brandt, & Reyna, 2014) examined the extent to which facets of attitude strength relevant to the self — importance and centrality — are related to the extent to which people are morally convicted about attitudes. Some past evidence found that, for a respondent-nominated set of attitudes, the importance and centrality of an attitude was correlated with moral convictions about the attitude (Skitka, Bauman, & Sargis, 2005). However, these effects did not always replicate. This most recent investigation analyzed over 40 different attitudes using a multilevel approach. In this approach, participants rate many different attitudes on moral conviction, importance, and centrality as well as several additional facets of attitude strength, such as certainty, extremity, and religious conviction. This analytic strategy is an important addition, as previous research (Skitka et al., 2005) examined a smaller number of purely between-subjects correlations between attitude strength and moral conviction, limiting the certainty that correlations are not driven by specific attitudes under study. Within participants, importance and centrality were the strongest predictors of moral conviction across attitudes compared to attitude

extremity, certainty, and even religious conviction. Across studies, the effect sizes of importance and centrality were approximately two to three times stronger of a predictor than the next strongest predictor. These initial studies suggest that within people attitudes experienced as core to the self are more likely to be imbued with a sense of moral conviction.

Although compelling, these results are cross-sectional, and thus do not provide evidence of a causal path between the self-concept and moral beliefs. To provide a test of the possible routes from the self-concept to moral conviction, additional longitudinal analyses of the relationship between moral conviction, and importance and centrality over time were conducted (Wetherell, Brandt, & Reyna, 2014). The time points in each study were one to two months apart. We measured participants' moral conviction about nuclear power, government bailouts, gun control, abortion rights, and immigration. Across two studies, importance predicted moral conviction over time, but moral conviction did not predict importance over time. Interestingly, when examining centrality, the reverse path was present: moral conviction predicted centrality over time, but centrality did not predict moral conviction over time.

Overall, these studies provide evidence that the self-concept is related to moral convictions within individuals. They also build upon previous theory (Colby & Damon, 1992; Rozin, 1999) suggesting that self-relevant beliefs become intertwined with moral beliefs over time. These results suggest a potential reciprocal relationship between the self-concept and morality. When people see an attitude as important, they may focus on it over time and imbue it with greater centrality and moral relevance, and as attitudes become more morally relevant, they may become increasingly central to the self. These results both mirror and build upon previous philosophical perspectives and psychological studies suggesting that people search for things of value in life, and incorporate them into the self-concept. To the extent that people experience

something as important, they may see it as of greater moral value, and incorporate it into the self-concept to a greater extent.

Genetics

A third possibility comes from work on genetics. Although the precise biological and genetic pathways are unknown, it is becoming widely accepted that social and political attitudes have a fair degree of heritability (Hatemi & McDermott, 2012). For example, one study (Hatemi, Medland, Klemmensen, Oskarsson, Littvay, Dawes et al., 2014) found that across several different countries and political systems approximately 40% of variance in political beliefs is due to shared genetics, whereas only 18% is due to shared environmental factors, and 42% is due to unshared and idiosyncratic environmental factors. This work has primarily been used to highlight the idea that political ideologies reflect ingrained predispositions and that they are not necessarily the sole result of socialization and social learning (e.g., Alford, Funk, & Hibbing, 2005).

The genetic underpinning of any given attitude, however, is not identical. That is, not every attitude has the same heritability estimate. In studies that have included a variety of different attitudes, attitudes vary in the extent to which they seem to have a heritable component. For example, in one of the first studies on the genetics of political attitudes (Eaves, Eysenck, & Martin, 1989), researchers found a high heritability estimate of 62% for the attitude "Sex crimes, such as rape and attacks on children, deserve more than mere imprisonment; such crimes ought to be flogged or worse", but a low heritability estimate of 1% for the attitude "It is wrong to punish a man if he helps another country because he prefers it to his own". One of the more clever uses of this variation in heritability across different types of attitudes is to test how this variability in heritability affects how people experience the attitude. This work was pioneered by

psychologist-turned-woodworker Abraham Tesser (Crelia & Tesser, 1996; Tesser, 1993, 2014; Tesser & Crelia, 1994; Tesser, Whitaker, Martin, & Ward, 1998) who found that more (compared to less) heritable attitudes were more extreme, more accessible, and harder to change (see also Alford, Funk, & Hibbing, 2005; Olson, Vernon, Harris, & Jang, 2001 for some conceptually similar findings). This suggests that the heritability of the attitude affects how people experience the attitude.

Building on the work of Tesser, we recently conducted preliminary tests as to whether genetics may also underlie moral conviction (Brandt & Wetherell, 2012). Some theorists have posited that morality has developed evolutionarily to promote group fitness (Haidt & Kesebir, 2010). Building on this, we suggested that because shared attitudes that are stable within a group across generations (i.e., heritable attitudes) may also help bind groups together they may become moralized and help maintain group fitness. This hypothesis is also possible without evoking the effective behaviors of our ancient ancestors. Heritable attitudes are strong attitudes and resistant to change. Perceiving them as moral convictions may help people avoid environmental sources promoting attitude change (cf. Tesser, 1993) – a potentially painful process (Tesser et al., 1998). To test these ideas we asked three samples to rate their moral conviction towards many different attitudes that were known to vary in heritability. We found, across samples, that people tended to express higher levels of moral conviction for attitudes with higher heritability estimates. These effects were smaller, but often remained significant, when controlling other indicators of attitude strength and extremity. Our results suggest that one viable avenue for future research is to examine the genetic underpinnings of moral convictions. Although we would never predict that moral convictions can be tied to one particular gene or set of genes, understanding the biological

route between heritability estimates and expressed moral conviction will helpful for understanding our moral sense.

Summary

Emotions, connections with the self-concept, and potential genetic underpinnings are three possible routes to moral conviction. These routes may be distinct pathways, but they may also represent three different ways that moral convictions can be embedded into a person's psychology. The more that a particular attitude is embedded, the more people imbue the attitude with a sense of moral conviction. Whether these routes are distinct, partial overlapping, or different manifestations of the same psychological process await ambitious researchers.

<div align="center">Moral Convictions and Dissimilar Others</div>

Understanding the root of moral convictions is not just a theoretical exercise. It is important because conflicts often arise with morally dissimilar others and these conflicts contribute to both the angst of the populace, but also humanitarian disasters. Historical examples abound: the American "Culture Wars", ISIS's expansion, the Cold War, war protestors…etc. As in real life, in the lab researchers have found that people feel high levels of self-involvement (Kouzakova, Ellemers, Harinck, & Scheepers, 2012), see less common ground with their opponents (Kouzakova, Ellemers, Harinck, & Scheepers, 2012), and experience a cardiovascular threat response (Kouzakova, Harinck, Ellemers, & Scheepers, 2014) in conflicts over moral issues compared to conflicts over resources. This may be the reason moral conflicts become so heated so quickly, why people are willing to discriminate and deny political rights to those they disagree with on moral issues (Skitka, Bauman, & Sargis, 2005), why moral conviction predicts greater perceived disagreement with ideological opponents (Crawford, Wire, & Chambers, 2014), and why some researchers claim that perceived value and moral conflicts are one of the

biggest and most consistent predictors of prejudice (Henry & Reyna, 2007). People even have a difficult time determining the procedures that might be used to resolve a moral disagreement (Skitka, Bauman, & Sargis, 2005) and tend to marry people with similar political and moral views over and above demographic and personality similarities (Alford, Hatemi, Hibbing, Martin, & Eaves, 2011).

Ideological-Conflict Perspective

One important question is why moral and value conflicts appear to be so potent. Our work points to one possible answer. Moral beliefs (and other belief systems) provide people with a sense of meaning (Greenberg et al., 1992; Kosloff et al., 2010; Proulx & Major, 2014). That is, it gives people a sense of how the world should and does work (Denzau & North, 1994; Proulx & Inzlicht, 2012). These expectations help people efficiently navigate their social, political, and moral world. Although meaning is the current popular term, other terms from the history of social, cognitive, and developmental psychology could also work (Abelson, 1979; Proulx & Inzlicht, 2012). For example, "Moral beliefs (and other belief systems) provide people with a [schema / mental representation / paradigm / working model]." There is ample evidence for this idea spanning decades: political scientists can measure political belief systems with the same tools cognitive scientists measure mental representations (Conover & Feldman, 1984; Hamill, Lodge, & Blake, 1985; Lodge & Hamill, 1986), computers can be programmed with a rudimentary political belief system just as they can be programmed with a rudimentary mental representations (Abelson & Carroll, 1965; Carbonell, 1978), political schemas facilitate schema-consistent memories similar to the effects with non-political schemas (Lodge & Hamill, 1986), and threats to meaning in one domain increase adherence to salient moral, political, or religious beliefs (e.g., Bassett, van Tongeren, Green, Sonntag, & Kilpatrick, in press; Castano, Leidner,

Bonacossa, Nikkah, Perrulli, Spencer, & Humphrey, 2011; Farias, Newheiser, Kahane, & de Toledo, 2013; Greenberg et al., 1992; Kosloff et al., 2010; Randles, Inzlicht, Proulx, Tullett, Heine, in press). Treating belief systems – including moral belief systems – as a complicated type of mental representation is not necessarily new (for one extensive model see Axelrod, 1973), but this characterization of belief systems allows us to make predictions about how people will respond to people with different belief systems.

People do not like it when their sense of meaning is violated. People have a schema for how the world should work and when the world does not conform to this expectation they experience anxiety and work to alleviate the anxiety of meaning violation (Jonas et al., 2014; Proulx et al., 2012; Randles et al., in press). The precise resolution to meaning violation (or schema violation or mental representation violation etc.) likely depends on the context, but we know that one way people affirm their sense of meaning is by being intolerant of people with different moral worldviews. For example, a variety of meaning-related threats increases the affirmation of an unrelated moral schema (i.e. the amount of bond set for a prostitute; Proulx & Hein, 2008; Proulx, Heine, & Vohs, 2010). Other work has shown that affirming people's sense of meaning reduces the amount of prejudice they express (Fein & Spencer, 1997).

In our work we have built on these ideas to propose the ideological-conflict hypothesis (Brandt et al., 2014). Most generally, and consistent with a variety of work on worldview conflicts (e.g., Tetlock, 1998; Tetlock, Kristel, Elson, Green, & Lerner, 2000) and attraction-similarity principles (Byrne, 1971; van Osch & Breugelmans, 2012), the hypothesis predicts that people will be intolerant of those who hold onto different worldviews. This hypothesis is most interesting when used to make predictions about when liberals and conservatives will be show intolerance. Past work has suggested that conservatives should be particularly intolerant because

they are more concerned about their ingroups (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009), are less open to experience (Sibley, Osborne, & Duckitt, 2012), or have higher needs for structure and closure (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003) which make them more adverse to people with opposing worldviews. The ideological conflict hypothesis, however, predicts that both liberals and conservatives will be intolerant of people with opposing worldviews. The idea is that because both liberal and conservative ideologies are belief systems that provide people with meaning, both liberals and conservatives should, in turn, express intolerance towards those who violate their sense of meaning.

The ideological-conflict hypothesis has been tested directly by several different labs. Across a range of target groups and student, community, and representative samples liberals tend to be intolerant of people they perceive to be conservative (e.g., Evangelical Christians, rich people) and conservatives tend to be intolerant of people they perceive to be liberal (e.g., gays and lesbians, atheists; Chambers, Schlenker, & Collison, 2013; Crawford, Modri, & Motyl, 2013; Crawford & Pilanski, 2014; Wetherell, Brandt, & Reyna, 2013). In one recent study (Waytz, Young, & Ginges, 2014), Democrats assumed that Republicans were motivated by outgroup hate while fellow Democrats were motivated by ingroup love. Similarly, Republicans assumed that Democrats were motivated by outgroup hate and fellow Republicans were motivated by ingroup love. Liberals and conservatives both even prefer ideologically similar authorities (Frimer, Gaucher, & Schaefer, 2014). The above findings all suggest that liberals and conservatives alike will express intolerance of people with differing worldviews.

Related experimental work has examined the extent to which the correlation between political beliefs and prejudice might be due to the perceived political ideology of the targets used in the studies. For example, manipulating the perceived ideology of African Americans to be

either liberal or conservative is enough to eliminate any association between conservative

political ideology and intolerant views of African Americans (Chambers, Schlenker, & Collison,

2013; Iyengar & Westwood, in press), a finding typical in political science and social psychology

(e.g., Cunningham, Nezlek, & Banaji, 2004; Federico & Sidanius, 2002). This suggests that

conservatism's association with racism may be driven (at least in part) by the presumed ideology

of African Americans. Similarly, manipulating the perceived ideology of gay men or atheists to

be conservative also eliminates the association between conservative political ideology and

intolerant views of these groups (Brandt & Spälti, 2014).

     We suggest that ideological conflict is caused by the underlying meaning that ideologies

provide. Consistent with these ideas, when people's sense of meaning is threatened, both liberals

and conservatives will compensate by affirming their political beliefs (Castano et al., 2011;

Greenberg et al., 1992; Kosloff et al., 2010; Proulx & Major, 2014; Randles et al., in press). In an

unpublished study (Brandt & Hagens, 2013), a community sample from the Netherlands

completed measures of political ideology and then wrote about one of two self-threats (a type of

meaning threat; Park & Maner, 2009) or a trip to the grocery store (a control condition). After

either of the self-threat conditions, participants on both the political left and the political right

expressed a larger ideological intergroup bias compared to participants in the control condition

(see Figure 1). Combined with previous work using meaning threats such as mortality salience,

reverse-colored playing cards, or the induced-compliance task (e.g., Kosloff et al., 2010; Proulx

& Major, 2014; Randles et al., in press), this study suggests that political ideologies on the left

and the right provide people with meaning.

     Another way to examine how the meaning ideologies provide is responsible for

ideological conflict is to test mediators of the association between political ideology and

intolerance. In our initial studies we found that a generalized sense of threat (Crawford & Pilanski, 2014) or perceived value violations (Wetherell, Brandt, & Reyna, 2013) were consistent mediators of the association. This suggests that perceptions that a groups is threatening or morally dissimilar are important drivers of the ideological-conflict effect. But in more recent work, Crawford (2014) examined the roles of several different types of threat in predicting prejudice against and political intolerance of ideological dissimilar groups. Across four samples, results showed that symbolic threat—that is, threat to people's important values and beliefs— was the most robust predictor of prejudice against ideologically dissimilar groups. Importantly, this effect was observed toward both left-wing and right-wing groups and imply similar psychological processes in intolerance across the political spectrum.

Interestingly, however, different types of threats underlay political intolerance, and further, the type of threat depended on the ideological orientation of the group itself. Specifically, consistent with evidence suggesting that people on the right are most concerned about the consequences of social disorder and upheaval (Stenner, 2005), safety threat predicted political intolerance of left-wing groups. However, political intolerance of right-wing groups was predicted by the perception that the group itself threatened the rights of other people (a form of "intolerance of intolerance" by liberal participants). Together, these results imply that pure dislike of ideologically dissimilar targets is tied to perceived violations of the types of values and beliefs that provide meaning to groups. However, attitudes that extend beyond mere dislike to outright suppression (i.e., political intolerance) may require more tangible types of threats (i.e., safety, rights violations).

Solutions to Ideological Conflict?

The idea that meaning threats underlie political conflict suggests several possibilities for alleviating the conflict. For example, in other domains research has demonstrated that self-affirmations (i.e. affirming participants' sense of meaning) reduce stereotyping and prejudice of outgroups (e.g., Fein & Spencer, 1997). In the political domain, similar effects have been found, such that people with both liberal and conservative views of the issues are more willing to compromise in negotiations over politically and morally charged issues (Cohen, Hserman, Bastardi, Hsu, McGoey, & Ross, 2007; see also Binning, Sherman, Cohen, & Heitland, 2010). Other work has highlighted that, prior to negotiations, expressing respect for the other side and affirming their status is useful for promoting more conciliatory behavior (Bendersky, 2014). Both of these intervention strategies take advantage of the tendency for people to incorporate important moral and political issues into their self-concept (Wetherell, Brandt & Reyna, 2014) to find a way to promote political cooperation.

Other work finds that by making a broader and more inclusive identity salient will reduce partisan polarization. Two recent studies by Luguri and Napier (2013) find that making a national identity salient reduces polarization, whereas making participants' partisan identities salient increases polarization. These effects were particularly strong when people were thinking abstractly, consistent with the idea that people rely more on their core attitudes and values when in an abstract mode of thought (Ledgerwood, Trope, & Liberman, 2010). This work is similar in principle to now-classic work showing that super ordinate goals and identities reduce intergroup conflict (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000; Sherif, 1958). By inducing partisans to focus on their (shared) national identity it was possible in for partisans to see past the meaning of their political affiliations to the meaning provided by a broader sense of identity. The success of the three interventions briefly highlighted here in promoting cooperation for both liberals and conservative

are in contrast to what might be expected by perspectives that highlight the different

psychological processes potentially underlying conservatism (e.g., Jost et al., 2003). If these

differential processes are the problem than the solutions should also likely be different; however,

this does not appear to be the case.

Conclusion

Over the course of this paper we have taken you from the underpinnings of moral

convictions to the conflict between political rivals. Through this journey we've highlighted

several underpinnings of moral convictions that may explain why moral convictions are

particularly difficult to change and the source of conflict. These studies are just the first step in

understanding the moralization process beyond sterile lab studies and cross-sectional surveys.

We encourage more intensive studies into the underpinnings and dynamics of moral convictions

because understanding the roots of these beliefs will helps us understand how people with moral

differences might be able to get along. This is currently a problem for different political and

moral backgrounds, with only a few studies suggesting possible solutions. Helping to solve and

ameliorate the negative effects of moral conflict is a practically and theoretically important

domain that will benefit from the insights of social psychologists.

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Figure 1

Self-threat increases ideological intergroup bias among the political-left and the political-right.
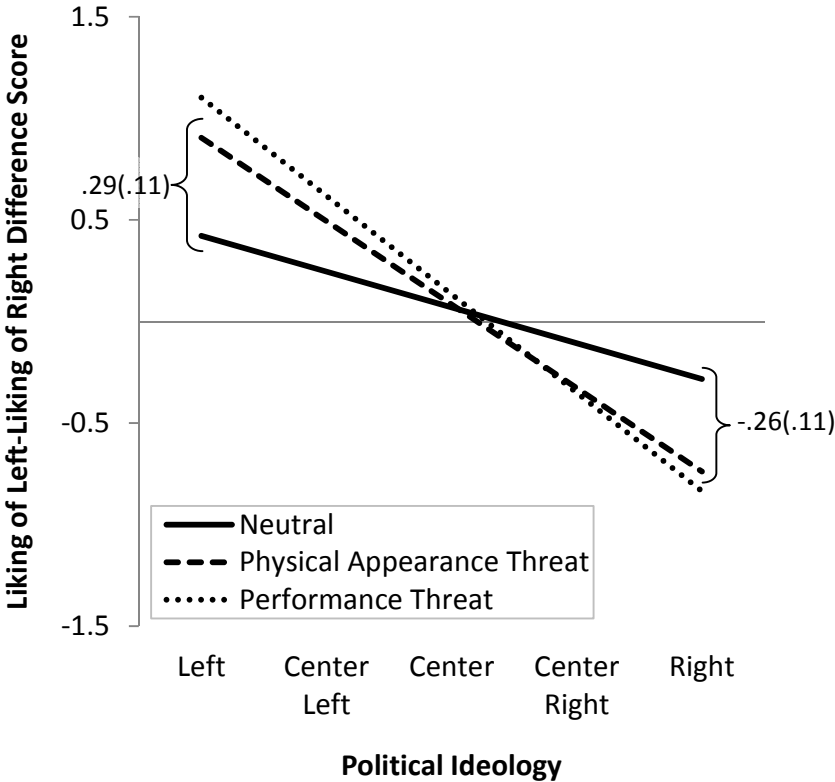
Note: Coefficients are unstandardized betas and standard errors in parentheses. Coefficients were both significantly different from zero, *p* = .02.The political ideology scale ranges from extreme-left to extreme-right; however no participants indicated they were extreme-left and only one participant indicated they were extreme-right and so the predicted values of these data-points are not displayed. The two threat conditions did not differ from one another. *N* = 182.