The Psychological Foundations of Moral Conviction

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In a letter to the editor of the *Mercury News*, one reader explained his views on the death penalty as follows: "I'll vote to abolish the death penalty….and not just because it is fiscally imprudent with unsustainable costs versus a life sentence without possibility of parole. More importantly, it's morally wrong. Making us and the state murderers -- through exercising the death penalty -- is a pure illogicality akin to saying 'two wrongs make a right'" (Mercury News, 2012). In short, this letter writer believes murder is simply wrong, regardless of whether it is an individual or state action, and for no other reason than because it is simply and purely wrong.

Attitudes rooted in moral conviction (or "moral mandates"), such as the letter writer's position on the death penalty, represent a unique class of strong attitudes. Strong attitudes are more extreme, important, central, certain, and /or accessible, and are also more stable, enduring, and predictive of behavior than attitudes weaker on these dimensions (see Krosnick & Petty, 1995 for a review). Attitudes held with the strength of moral conviction, even if they share many of the same characteristics of strong attitudes, are distinguished from otherwise strong but non-moral attitudes by a sense of imperative and unwillingness to compromise even in the face of competing desires or concerns. Someone might experience their attitude about chocolate, for example, in extreme, important, certain, and central terms, but still decide not to order chocolate cake at a restaurant because they are worried about their waistline. Vanity, or other motives such as health or cost, can trump even people's very strong preferences. Attitudes rooted in moral conviction, however, are much less likely to be compromised or vulnerable to trade off (cf. Tetlock et al., 2000).

To better understand how attitudes that are equally strong can nonetheless differ in their psychological antecedents and consequences, we need to understand the psychological and

behavioral implications of the content of attitudes as well as their structure (e.g., extremity, importance). Social domain theory (e.g., Nucci, 2001; Nucci & Turiel, 1978; Turiel, 1998; 2002), developed to explain moral development and reasoning, provides some useful hints about key ways that attitudes may differ in substance, even when they are otherwise equally strong. Using domain categories to describe how attitudes substantially differ represents a useful starting point for understanding the foundations of moral mandates (Skitka, et al., 2005; Skitka et al., 2008[1]; Wright et al., 2008). As can be seen in Figure 1, one domain of attitudes is personal preference. Personal preferences represent attitudes that people see as subject to individual discretion, and as exempt from social regulation or comment. For example, one person might support legalized abortion because she prefers to have access to a backstop method of birth control, and not because of any normative or moral attachment to the issue. She is likely to think others' preferences about abortion are neither right nor wrong; they may just be different from her own. Her position on this issue might still be evaluatively extreme, personally important, certain, central, etc., but it is not one she experiences as a core moral conviction. Her neighbor, however, might oppose legalized abortion because this practice is inconsistent with church doctrine or because the majority of people he is close to oppose it. To the extent that the neighbor's position is based on either authorities or peer influence, if church authorities or his peer group were to reverse their stance on abortion, the neighbor probably would as well. Attitudes that reflect these kind of normative beliefs typically describe what "people like me or us" believe, are relatively narrow in application, and are usually group or culture bound rather than universally applied. A third person, however, might see the issue of abortion more in moral terms. This person perceives abortion (or restricting access to abortion) as simply and self-

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[1] Skitka et al. (2008) initially labeled this theoretical perspective as an "integrated theory of moral conviction," or ITMC.

evidently wrong, monstrously wrong, if not evil. Even if relevant authorities and peers were to

reverse positions on the issue, this person would nonetheless maintain his or her moral belief that

abortion (or restricting access to it) is fundamentally wrong. In addition to having the theorized

characteristic of authority and peer independence, moral convictions are also likely to be

perceived as objectively true, universal, and to have particularly strong ties to emotion.

The goals of this chapter are to review recent developments in understanding the

psychology of moral conviction and to review research that tests the predictions of a domain

theory of attitudes. These developments include considerable research on operationalization and

measurement as well as testing a wide range of hypotheses about how moral convictions differ in

form and implication from otherwise strong but non-moral attitudes.

Measurement and Operationalization

To eliminate ambiguity associated with when people perceive a situation to have moral

implications, research on moral conviction has generally opted to use a bottom-up rather than

top-down empirical approach to study this construct. In other words, instead of defining the

characteristics of what counts as a moral mandate *a priori* (e.g., that it be seen as universal in

application or resistant to trade-offs), this program of research instead uses face-valid items[2] to

assess strength of moral conviction, and tests whether variation in strength of moral conviction

yields predicted effects (e.g., differences in perceived universal applicability). Avoiding

confounds with other indices of attitude strength is important if one wants to ensure that an

individual's response is motivated by morality, rather than by some other concern, such as

attitude importance, extremity, and so on. For this reason, moral conviction researchers see the

distinction between moral and non-moral attitudes as something that is subjectively perceived,

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[2] Face validity refers to the degree to which one can infer from test items what target variable being measured.

rather than as an objective property of attitudes, decisions, choices, or dilemmas.

Although people do not always seek to maximize principled consistency when making moral judgments (Ulhmann et al., 2009), they nonetheless appear to have a strong intuitive sense of when their moral beliefs apply to a given situation (Skitka et al., 2005). People can identify when situations engage their moral sentiments, even if or when they cannot always elegantly describe the processes or principles that lead to this sense (Haidt, 2001). The moral mandate program of research capitalizes on this ability. The assumption that people have some insight into the characteristics of their attitudes is one shared by previous theory and research on the closely related concept of attitude strength. Researchers assume that people can access from memory and successfully report the degree to which a given attitude is (for example) extreme, personally important, certain, or central (see Krosnick & Petty, 1995 for a review).

Hornsey and colleagues (Hornsey et al., 2003; 2007) provide one example of this approach. They operationalized moral conviction with three items, all prefaced with the stem, "To what extent do you feel your position…" and the completions of "is based on strong personal principles," "is a moral stance," and "is morally correct," that across four studies had an average Cronbach's α = .75. Others have used similar operationalizations of moral conviction, most typically using either a single face-valid item: "How much are your feelings about ____ connected to your core moral beliefs and convictions" (e.g., Brandt, & Wetherell, 2012; Skitka et al., 2005), or this item accompanied by a second item, "To what extent are your feelings about _____deeply connected to your fundamental beliefs about 'right' and 'wrong'?" (e.g., Skitka et al., 2009; Skitka & Wisneski, 2011; Swink, 2011). Morgan (2011) used a combination of the Hornsey et al. (2003, 2007) and Skitka et al. (2009) items to create a 5-item scale, and found α's that ranged from .93 to .99 across three samples. The reliability scores observed by

Morgan suggest that either all, or a subset, of these items work well, and will capture highly overlapping content.

Some have wondered, however, if moral conviction is better represented as a binary judgment: Something that is or is not the case, rather than something that varies in degree or strength. Measuring the categorization of an attitude as moral and the relative strength of conviction both contribute uniquely to the explanatory power of the variable (Wright et al., 2008; Wright, 2012). For this reason, as well as the parallelism of conceptualizing moral conviction similarly to measures of attitude strength, we advocate that moral convictions be measured continuously rather than nominally.

Other operationalizations of moral conviction are problematic because they confound moral conviction as a concept with the things that moral convictions should theoretically predict (e.g., Van Zomeron, Postmes, Spears, & Bettache, 2011; Zaal, Van Laar, Ellemers, & Derks, 2011), use items that have no explicit references to morality (e.g., "X threatens values that are important to me[3]," Siegrist, Connor, & Keller, 2012), conflate moral convictions with other dimensions of attitude strength (e.g., centrality, Garguilo, 2010; Skitka & Mullen, 2006), and/or measure other constructs as proxies for moral conviction, such as importance or centrality (e.g., Besley, 2012; Earle & Siegrist, 2008). These strategies introduce a host of possible confounds and do more to confuse than to clarify the unique contribution of moral conviction independent of other characteristics of attitudes. Attitude importance and centrality, for example, have very different associations with other relevant variables than those observed with unconfounded measures of moral conviction (e.g., including effects that are the reverse sign, e.g., Skitka et al., 2005). To

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[3] Not all values are perceived in moral terms. For example, fewer than 20% of participants perceived the Schwartz values associated with power, achievement, hedonism, and stimulation as moral, and fewer than 30% rated more than one of the self-direction items as moral (Schwartz, 2007).

avoid these problems, researchers should therefore use items that (a) explicitly assess moral content, and (b) do not introduce confounds that capture either the things moral conviction should theoretically predict (e.g., social distance from attitudinally dissimilar others or perceived universalism) or other dimensions of attitude strength (importance, certainty, or centrality).

Moral philosophers argue that moral convictions are experienced as *sui generis*, that is as unique, special, and in a class of their own (e.g., Boyd, 1988; McDowell, 1979; Moore, 1903; Sturgeon, 1985). This status of singularity is thought to be due to a number of distinguishing mental states or processes associated with the recognition of something as moral, including (a) universalism, (b) the status of moral beliefs as factual beliefs with compelling motives and justification for action, and (c) emotion (Skitka et al., 2005). These theoretically defining characteristics of attitudes (which taken together represent the domain theory of attitudes) are testable propositions in themselves, and have a number of testable implications (e.g., the authority independence and non-conformity hypotheses). I briefly review empirical research testing these core propositions and selected hypotheses that can be derived from them next.

Universalism and Objectivism

The domain theory of attitudes predicts that people experience moral mandates as objective truths about the world, much as they do scientific judgments or facts. In other words, good and bad are experienced as objective characteristics of phenomena and not just as verbal labels that people attach to feelings (Shweder, 2002). Because beliefs rooted in moral conviction are perceived as definitionally true, they should also be perceived as universally applicable. The author of the letter to the *Mercury News*, for example, is likely to believe that the death penalty should not only be prohibited in his home state of California, but in other states and countries as well.

Broad versions of the universalism and objectivism hypotheses have been tested and supported. For example, people see certain moral rules (e.g. Nichols & Folds-Bennett, 2003; Turiel, 1978) and values (e.g., Gibbs, Basinger, Grime, & Snarey, 2007) as universally or objectively true, and that certain moral transgressions should be universally prohibited (e.g., Brown, 1991). There is some evidence that people also see ethical rules and moral issues as more objectively true than, for example, various violations of normative conventions (Goodwin & Darley, 2008), but other research yields more mixed results about the degree to which people perceive things in the moral sphere as more objectively true than conventions or preferences (Wright, Grandjean, & McWhite, 2012). Until recently, little or no research has tested the universalism hypothesis.

To shed further light on the objectivism and universalism hypotheses, Morgan, Skitka, and Lytle (in preparation) tested whether thinking about a morally mandated attitude leads to a situational increase in people's endorsement of a universalistic moral philosophy (e.g., the degree to which people rate moral principles as individualistic or relativistic, versus as universal truisms). Participants' endorsements of a universalistic moral philosophy and attitudes about same-sex marriage were first measured at least 24 hours before the experimental session. Once in the lab, participants were primed to think about the issue of same sex marriage by watching a videotape of a woman in a semi-structured interview, who discussed her real (and strong) feelings in support of legalizing same-sex marriage. After viewing the video, participants completed the same universalistic philosophy measure they had at completed at least 24 hours before the experimental session. Strength of moral conviction about same-sex marriage was associated with increased post-experimental endorsement of a universalistic philosophy, a result that also replicated in a second study that primed thinking about attitudes using essays and a

different topic. In short, people see moral rules as more universally applicable when they have just thought about an attitude held with moral conviction.

A third study tested the universalism and objectivity hypotheses more directly by having participants rate the perceived objectivity (e.g., "Imagine that someone disagreed with your position on [abortion, requiring the HPV vaccine, same sex marriage): To what extent would you conclude the other person is surely mistaken?") and universality ("To what extent would you position on [abortion/the HPV vaccine, same sex marriage) be equally correct in another culture?") of these attitudes, in addition to providing ratings of the degree to which each reflected a moral conviction, and attitude extremity.. As predicted, strength of moral conviction was associated with higher perceived objectivity and universalism of attitudes, even when controlling for attitude extremity.

Finally, in a fourth study, participants were asked to generate sentences that articulated their own beliefs or positions with respect to "a piece of scientific knowledge," "something that is morally right or wrong," and "that you like or dislike." Participants then completed the same objectivity and universalism measures used in Study 3. Scientific and moral beliefs were rated as equally objectively true and universal, and as more objectively true and universal than likes/dislikes. In sum, moral convictions are perceived as indistinguishable from scientific facts in perceived universality and objectivism.

Motivation and Behavior

Attitudes rooted in moral conviction are predicted to also be inherently motivating, and therefore should have stronger ties to behavior than not rooted in moral conviction. A moral conviction that voluntarily terminating a pregnancy (or alternatively, interfering with a woman's right to choose whether to sustain a pregnancy) is fundamentally wrong, for example, has an

inherent motivational quality—it carries with it an "ought" or "ought not" that can motivate subsequent behavior. The presence or absence of another motivation (e.g., self-interest) has little impact on the action potential of moral conviction. Moral convictions are therefore theoretically sufficient in and of themselves as motives that can direct what people think, feel, or do (Skitka et al., 2005).

Implicit in this reasoning is the hypothesis that people should also feel more compelled to act on attitudes held with strong rather than weak moral conviction. In support of this hypothesis, stronger moral convictions about salient social issues and/or presidential candidates predict intentions to vote and actual voting behavior, results that have now replicated across three presidential election cycles in the U.S. (Morgan, Skitka, & Wisneski, 2010; Skitka & Bauman, 2008) and one Canadian election cycle (Conway, Cheung, Maxwell-Smith, & Seligman, under review). The motivational impact of moral conviction is equally strong for those on both the political right and left in the U.S. (although moderately stronger among liberals than conservatives in the Canadian sample), and has a robust effect even when controlling for alternative explanations, such as strength of partisanship and attitude strength.

In an ingenious study, Wright et al. (2008, Study 2) put people's self-interests into direct conflict with their moral convictions. Participants were pre-tested for their moral convictions on various issues. In the laboratory portion of the experiment, they showed up with one other participant, and were escorted to separate cubicles. Participants were shown the "other participants" essay about an issue (manipulated to be inconsistent with the real participants' attitudes). Participants were told to read the essay and provide a brief response. Participants were then told that they would participate in a completely unrelated study on economic behavior, which involved dividing a set of 10 raffle tickets for desirable prizes between themselves on the

"other participant." People almost always divide the prizes equally in this kind of economic game (e.g., Fehr & Fishbach, 2004). People with stronger moral convictions about the essay issue, however, kept most of the raffle tickets for themselves (on average, 8.5 out of 10 tickets) when dividing the tickets between themselves and the "participant" who had a divergent attitude from their own. Those who did not see the issue as a moral one, conversely, divided the tickets equally between themselves and the other "participant" (Wright et al., 2008). In summary, people are usually motivated by fairness in these kinds of economic games, but their moral convictions and distain for someone who did not share their moral views trumped the normative convention that resources in these cases should be divided roughly equally.

Emotion

The domain theory of attitudes also makes the prediction that moral convictions should have especially strong ties to emotion. For example, Person A might have a strong preference not to pay higher taxes, but does not have any moral attachment to the issue. If her taxes rise in an effort to control the deficit, she is likely to be disappointed rather than outraged. Imagine instead, Person B, who has a strong moral conviction that taxes be kept low. He is likely to respond to the same rise in tax rates with rage, disgust, and contempt. In short, the strength and content of emotional reactions associated with attitudes rooted in moral conviction are likely to be quite different than the emotional reactions associated with otherwise strong but non-moral attitudes. Emotional responses to given issues might also play a key role in how people detect that an attitude is a moral conviction, or in strengthening moral convictions.

Emotion as Consequence

Consistent with the prediction that moral mandates will have different, and perhaps stronger ties to emotion than non-moral mandates, people whose opposition to the Iraq War was high

rather than low in moral conviction also experienced more negative emotion (i.e., anger and anxiety) about the War in the weeks just before and after it began. In contrast, morally convicted supporters experienced more positive emotions (i.e., pleased and glad) about going to war compared to those low in moral conviction, results that emerged even when controlling for a variety of attitude strength measures. Similar positive and negative emotional reactions were also observed in supporters' and opponents' reactions to the thought of legalizing physician-assisted suicide (Skitka & Wisneski, 2011).

Emotion as Antecedent

Other research has tested whether people use emotions as information in deciding whether a given attitude is a moral conviction. Consistent with this idea, people make harsher moral judgments of other's behavior when exposed to incidental disgust such as foul odors or when in a dirty lab room, than they do when exposed to more pleasant odors or a clean lab room (Schnall, Haidt, Clore, & Jordan, 2008). People generalize disgust cues and apply them to their moral judgments, results that are interpreted as evidence that moral judgments are more intuitive than deliberative. It is important to point out, however, that moral judgments are not the same thing as moral convictions. Attitudes (unlike judgments) tend to be stable, internalized, and treated much like possessions (e.g., Prentice, 1987). In contrast, moral judgments are single-shot reactions to a given behavior, actor, or hypothetical, and share few psychological features with attitudes. Learning that incidental disgust leads to harsher moral judgments, therefore, may not mean that incidental disgust (or other incidental emotions) would also lead people to have stronger moral convictions.

Consistent with the important differences between judgments and attitudes, research in my lab has not found similar support for the idea that people use incidental affect as information

about whether their attitudes are moral convictions (Skitka, unpublished data). No differences in

moral conviction about issues of the day emerge as a function of whether data is collected in

clean versus dirty lab; in the context of pleasant (e.g., "Hawaiian breeze,") versus disgusting

smell (e.g., fart spray or a substance that smelled like a dead rat); or when participants have their

hands and forearms placed in an unpleasant concoction of glue and gummy worms, versus

feathers and beads. Other studies induced other emotions, for example, by having participants

write retrospective accounts about a time when they felt particularly angry, sad, happy, or

disgusted or tested hypotheses in the context of a misattribution of arousal paradigm. Although

manipulation checks revealed that each of these manipulations had the intended effect, none led

to changes in moral conviction.

One possible explanation for these null results is that integral (i.e. attitude-specific)

emotions tied to the attitude object itself may be trumping the potential informational influence

of incidental emotions. Once a morally convicted topic comes to mind, so too might all the

emotional associations with that object, which could overwhelm and replace incidental affect in

people's current working memory. Attitude-specific emotions might therefore play a more

important role than incidental emotions in how people identify whether a given attitude is one

held with moral conviction.

To test this idea, participants were exposed to one of four categories of pictures as part of

a bogus "recognition task." The images varied in relevance to the issue of abortion: pictures of

aborted fetuses (attitudinally relevant disgust/harm); animal rights abuses (attitudinally irrelevant

disgust/harm); pictures of non-bloody, disgusting images, such as toilets overflowing with feces

(attitudinally irrelevant disgust, no harm); or neutral photos (e.g., office furniture; no

disgust/harm). Pictures were presented at either subliminally (14 *msecs*) or supraliminally (250

msecs). Participants' moral conviction about abortion increased relative to control *only* after supraliminal exposure to the abortion pictures. Moreover, this effect was unique to moral conviction and was not observed with attitude importance. A second study replicated this effect, and tested whether it was mediated by disgust, anger, or perceived harm. Results indicated that the effect was fully mediated by differences in disgust (Wisneski & Skitka, 2013). Taken together, these results suggest that emotions play a key role in how people form or strengthen moral convictions, but these processes—although fast—nonetheless require some conscious processing.

In summary, it is clear that moral convictions have ties to integral emotion. The relationship between emotions and moral convictions, however, appears to be complex. Future research needs to manipulate other kinds of integral emotions, including positive emotions, to discover whether other emotional cues can also cause changes in moral conviction. Emotions not only serve as an antecedent to moral convictions, but also appear to be consequences of them as well. Although more research is needed to further tease apart the complex connections between moral convictions and emotions, one thing is clear: Emotions are clearly a key part of the story.

The Authority Independence Hypothesis

A core premise of the domain theory of attitudes is that people do not rely on conventions or authorities to define moral imperative; rather, people perceive what is morally right and wrong irrespective of authority or conventional dictates. Moral beliefs are not by definition antiestablishment or antiauthority, but are simply not dependent on conventions, rules, or authorities. When people take a moral perspective, they focus on their ideals and the way they believe things ought to or should be done rather than on a duty to comply with authorities or normative conventions. The authority independence hypothesis therefore predicts that when

people's moral convictions are at stake, they are more likely to believe that duties and rights follow from the greater moral purposes that underlie rules, procedures, and authority dictate than from the rules, procedures, or authorities themselves (see also Kohlberg, 1976; Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau, & Thoma, 1999).

One study tested the authority independence hypothesis by examining which was more important in predicting people's reactions to a controversial U.S. Supreme Court decision: people's standing perceptions of the Court's legitimacy, or people's moral convictions about the issue being decided (Skitka, Bauman, & Lytle, 2009). A nationally representative sample of adults rated the legitimacy of the Court, as well as their level of moral conviction about the issue of physician-assisted suicide several weeks before the Court heard arguments about whether states could legalize the practice, or whether it should be federally regulated. The same sample of people was contacted again after the Court upheld the right of states to legalize physician-assisted suicide. Knowing whether people's support or opposition to physician-assisted suicide was high versus low in moral conviction predicted whether they saw the Supreme Court's decision as fair or unfair, as well as their willingness to accept the decision as binding. Pre-ruling perceptions of the legitimacy of the Court, in contrast, had no effect on post-ruling perceptions of fairness or decision acceptance.

Other research has found behavioral support for the prediction that people reject authorities and the rule of law when outcomes violate their moral convictions. Mullen and Nadler (2008) exposed people to legal decisions that supported, opposed, or were unrelated to their moral convictions. The experimenters distributed a pen with a post-exposure questionnaire, and asked participants to return them at the end of the session. Consistent with the prediction that decisions, rules, and laws that violate people's moral convictions erode support for the authorities and

authority systems who decide these things, participants were more likely to steal the pen after exposure to a legal decision that was inconsistent rather than consistent their personal moral convictions.

Support for the authority independence hypothesis is particularly interesting and important, because fair procedures (e.g., procedures free from bias, that provide opportunities for constituency voice, or that treat involved parties with appropriate dignity and respect), generally lead people to accept non-preferred outcomes (a phenomena called the 'fair process effect,' e.g., Folger, Rosenfeld, Grove, & Corkran, 1979). That said, a now large number of studies have found that the fair process effect does not emerge when people have a moral stake in outcomes (see Skitka & Mullen, 2008; Skitka et al., 2008 for reviews, cf. Napier & Tyler, 2008).

People's moral mandates should affect not only their perceptions of decisions and willingness to comply with authorities, but should also affect their perceptions of authorities' legitimacy. People often do not know the "right" answer to various decisions authorities are asked to make (e.g., what is best for the group, whether a defendant is really guilty or innocent), and therefore, they frequently rely on cues like procedural fairness and an authority's legitimacy to guide their reactions (Lind, 2001). When people have moral certainty about what outcome authorities and institutions should deliver, however, they do not need to rely on standing perceptions of legitimacy as proxy information to judge whether the system works. In these cases, they can simply evaluate whether authorities get it "right." "Right" decisions indicate that authorities are appropriate and work as they should. "Wrong" answers signal that the system is somehow broken and is not working as it should. In short, one could hypothesize that people use their sense of morality as a benchmark to assess authorities' legitimacy. Consistent with this ideas, the results of the Supreme Court study referenced earlier also found that perceptions of the

Court's legitimacy changed from pre- to posting ruling as a function of whether the Court ruled consistently or inconsistently with perceivers' morally vested outcome preferences (Skitka et al., 2009).

The Non-conformity Hypothesis

Moral convictions might inoculate people from peer influence as well as authority influence. People typically conform to the majority when faced with the choice to accept or reject the majority position. This occurs because those who oppose the majority risk ridicule and disenfranchisement, whereas those who conform expect acceptance (Asch, 1956). In addition to acceptance, people may conform when they are unsure about the appropriate way to think or behave; they adopt the majority opinion because they believe the majority is likely to be correct (Chaiken & Stangor, 1987; Deutsch & Gerard, 1955). Therefore people conform both to gain acceptance from others as well as to be ''right.''

Feeling strong moral convictions about a given issue should weaken the typical motives for conformity–be more resistant to majority influence. To test this idea, Hornsey and colleagues presented student participants with feedback that their position on same-sex marriage was either the majority or minority view on campus. Surprisingly, stronger moral convictions about this issue were associated with greater willingness to engage in activism when students believed they were in the opinion minority, rather than majority – an example of counter conformity (Hornsey et al., 2003; 2007).

Another study had participants engage in what they believed was a computer mediated interaction with four additional (though, in fact, virtual) "peers." The study was scripted so that

each participant was exposed to a majority[4] of peers who supported torture (pre-testing indicated that none of our study participants did). Participants were shown the other participants' "opinions" one at a time before they were asked to provide their own position on the issue to the group. The key dependent measure was whether moral conviction would inoculate people from majority group influence. Results supported the hypothesis: Stronger moral convictions were associated with lower conformity rates, a result that was robust even when controlling for a number of indices of attitude strength (Aramovich et al., 2010). People do show strong conformity effects in an Asch paradigm, however, when making moral judgments about moral dilemmas, such as the trolley problem (Kundu & Cummins, in press), providing further evidence that moral judgments and moral attitudes are not the same things.

Conclusion

Theorists in recent years have proposed a number of ways that attitudes rooted in moral conviction differ from otherwise strong but non-moral attitudes. The research reviewed here supports the hypothesis that moral mandates represent a special class of strong attitudes that do not reduce to other dimensions of attitude strength. Moreover, moral mandates differ from strong but non-moral attitudes in ways that are predicted by a domain theory of attitudes. They are perceived as akin to facts about the world, positions that should be universally adopted, have particularly strong ties to emotion, are motivational, and predict a host of behaviors and reactions including authority independence, political legitimacy, anti-conformity, and civic engagement. With some exceptions, most research on the concept of moral conviction has focused on determining whether and how moral mandates differ from non-moral attitudes. The challenge for future research will be to begin to gain a greater understanding of how moral mandates are

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[4] Having another dissenter in the group did not change the results of moral conviction.

developed in the first place, and once established, whether people are capable of demoralizing an attitude. Given moral mandates have the potential for motivating great good (e.g., civic engagement, willingness to fight for justice), as well as motivating acts many would label as evil (e.g., terrorism, vigilantism; see Morgan & Skitka, 2009), learning more about the attitude moralization process represents an important area of inquiry going forward.

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Figure 1. A Domain Theory of Attitudes

Preferences

•Matters of taste
•Subjective
•Tolerant

Conventions

•Normative
•Often codified
•Group defined
•Culturally narrow

Moral Mandates

•Absolute/universal
•Objective
•Authority independent
•Motivating
•Self-justifying
•Motivating
•Strong emotions