We're Good People: Moral Conviction as Social Identity

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Study 1
Are moral convictions tied to identity?

Sample Characteristics and Variables

Data
288 participants
70% women; Mean age = 20 years

Predictors
- Moral conviction (4 items per attitude)
- Attitude importance (3 items per attitude)

Outcomes
- Self-reported identity centrality (IDC; 3 items per attitude)
- Reaction time in modified Me/Not Me task (RT)

Reaction Time Task

Basic Structure
- A modified Me/Not Me task (Markus, 1977)
- 5 blocks of trials
- 54 trials per block
- Each trial consisted of a single slide; examples below.

Stimuli
- 10 Political issues (e.g., legal abortion, government spending, gun control)
- 13 Values (e.g., fairness, loyalty, success)
- 21 Traits (e.g., intelligent, impulsive) were also included to help contextualize the task as self-descriptive (rather than one of merely reporting attitudes)
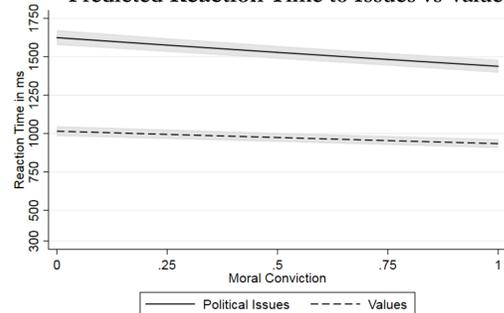- Each issue appeared twice; once with "support," once with "oppose"
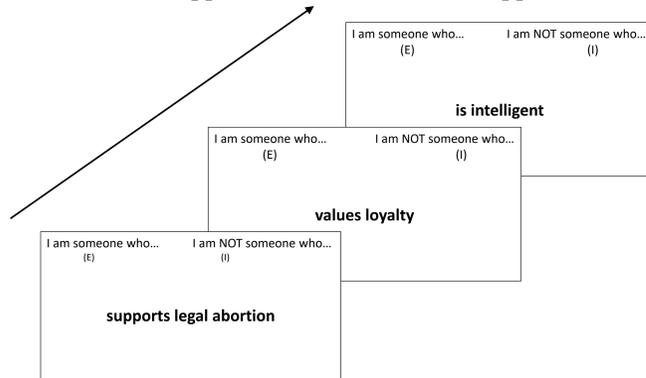
Results: Moral convictions are tied to identity
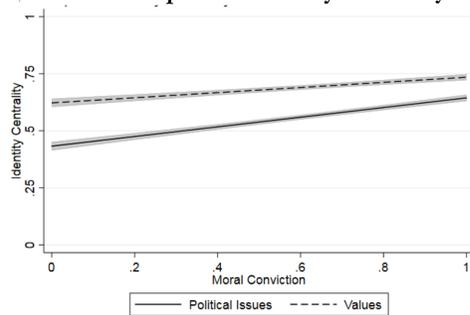
Note. Self-reported identity centrality and Me/Not Me reaction time for values and for issues across the full range of moral conviction. Predicted values come from the fixed portion of two multi-level linear mixed models. The reaction time model was fit with log-transformed reaction time as the outcome, and predicted values from this model were converted to milliseconds.
Dark areas indicate 95% CIs.

Study 2, Part 1
Are moral convictions social identities?

Sample Characteristics and Variables

Data
407 participants
73% women; Mean age = 20 years

Predictors
- Moral conviction (4 items per attitude)
- Attitude importance (3 items per attitude)

Outcomes
- Self-reported identity centrality (IDC; 3 items per attitude)
- Reaction time in modified Me/Not Me task (RT)
- "Who said what?" (WSW) social categorization score

"Who said what?" Task

Basic Structure
- *Presentation phase*: Participants see 8 faces 3 times, each time paired with a unique statement
- *1-minute distractor task*
- *Surprise recall phase*: Participants attribute all 24 statements to faces, one after the other. Participants' choices in the recall phase are unconstrained. They could ascribe all 24 statements to a single face if they wanted.

Stimuli
- 8 target individuals (see right)
- 24 statements (8 moral, 8 non-moral, 8 filler)
- "Moral" statements pertained to a morally mandated issue for that participant (moral conviction score > 0.5)
- "Non-moral" statements pertained to an issue that the participant did not moralize (moral conviction score < 0.5)
- Statements could pertain to the death penalty, gun control, or free market economics
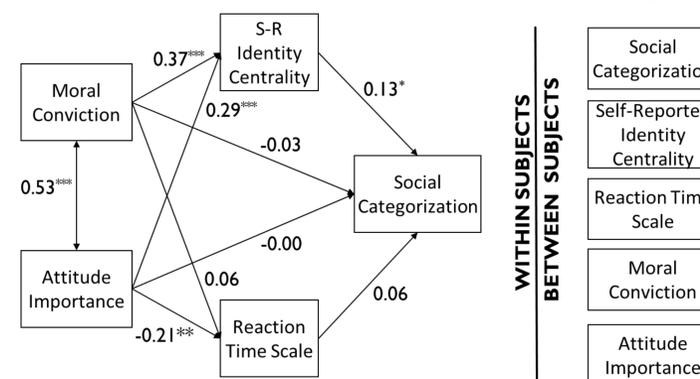
Presentation

Recall
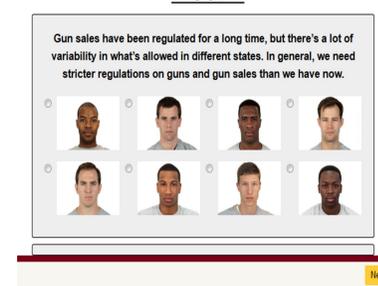
Results: Moral convictions are identities with a social component

Indirect Effects of Moral Conviction on Social Categorization

Path estimates are standardized. *p < 0.05. ** p < 0.01. ***p < 0.001
CFI = 0.945; RMSEA = 0.050; $\chi^2(40)$= 54.38**

WSW Social Categorization Scores

Moral convictions: r = 0.61; Non-moral attitudes: r = 0.55;
Race: r = 0.55; all ps < 0.001

Study 2, Part 2
Does identifying with moral convictions explain intolerance of moral disagreement?

Additional Outcome Variables

Social Intolerance (aka preferred social distance; 11 items)
"How willing or unwilling would you be to have someone who did not share your views on [this issue]…"
- As a roommate
- As my work leader
- As the teacher of my children
Average α across issues = 0.95

Political Intolerance (9 items)
"People who do not share your views on [this issue]…"
- should be allowed to teach in public schools.
- should be allowed to enforce policy decisions and laws.
- should have their phones tapped by our government
Average α across issues = 0.86

Results: Identity centrality partly mediates the link between moral conviction and intolerance

Indirect effects of moral conviction on intolerance

Social Intolerance	Political Intolerance
Total Effect: 0.188*	**Total Effect: 0.140**
Total Indirect Effect: 0.068	**Total Indirect Effect: 0.033**

Note. Entries are standardized estimates for the effects of moral conviction on social and political intolerance, derived from the multi-level structural equation model depicted below.

Indirect Effects of Moral Conviction on Intolerance
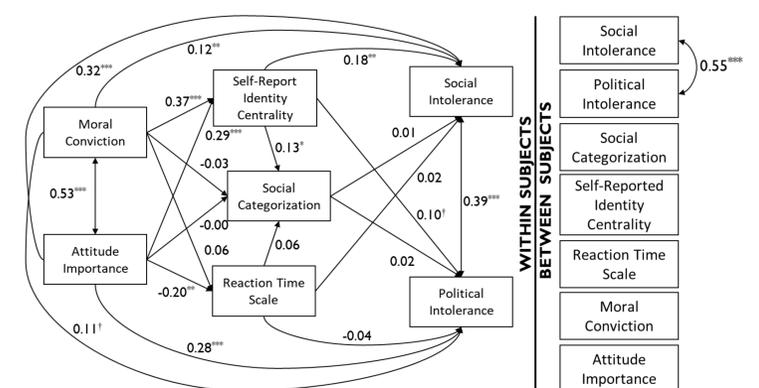
Path estimates are standardized. *p < 0.05. ** p < 0.01. ***p < 0.001
CFI = 0.969; RMSEA = 0.036; $\chi^2(61)$= 84.43, p = 0.025.

Conclusions

- Moral convictions are part of how people see themselves.
- Moral convictions are part of how people see others.
- Moralized identities account for part—but not all—of the link between moral conviction and intolerance