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## An intergroup perspective on attitude moralization

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# **Chapter 1**

General Introduction



*Attitude moralization* is an important social psychological phenomenon with many small- and large-scale implications for individuals, groups, and society. It refers to a process in which attitudes toward an *issue* (e.g., gender inequality or human-caused climate change) become more strongly moralized and connected to one's core values and beliefs (i.e., *moral conviction*; Brandt et al., 2015; Rozin, 1999; Rozin et al., 1997; Rozin & Singh, 1999; Skitka et al., 2005; Wisneski & Skitka, 2017). For instance, people may come to believe that gender inequality or human-caused climate change “is morally wrong and unacceptable” and strongly oppose these issues because it is “a matter of a fundamental moral principle”. The consequences of such a phenomenon can be of great relevance for individual and societal change (Rozin, 1999; Skitka et al., 2021). For example, it can not only change people (e.g., turning ordinary citizens into activists or even radicals) and their behaviors (e.g., stop eating meat, buy green products), but also form and develop groups or movements (e.g., bringing people with similar convictions together for a movement, such as Me Too, and Fridays for Future) and create division (e.g., staying away from those who hold dissimilar views), and ultimately structurally change society (e.g., implementing gender quotas in organizations, implementing plastic bans and fines). Attitude moralization may therefore be a prime engine for individual change toward (acting for) social change.

Despite these critical implications of attitude moralization, we know surprisingly little about its psychology (Skitka et al., 2021), particularly in contexts of intergroup relations and conflict. The scant research on this topic has mainly approached attitude moralization as an intra-individual phenomenon, focusing on how cognitive appraisals and integral emotions may drive this moralization process (e.g., Brandt et al., 2015; Feinberg et al., 2019; Wisneski & Skitka, 2017; see also Skitka et al., 2018, 2021, for reviews and discussions). However, research has not yet explicitly considered or investigated the *social* underpinnings of attitude moralization, and there is at present no specific perspective that explains how groups — ingroups or outgroups — influence attitude moralization specifically.

This is somewhat surprising because there is good reason to study and approach attitude moralization as a psychological phenomenon embedded in social and particularly group contexts. After all, moralization is not likely to occur in a social vacuum but to be influenced by social, relational, group, political, and societal factors. For instance, gender equality and environmental issues such as eating meat and climate change have progressively gained stronger moral meaning for individuals (e.g., De Cristofaro et al., 2021; Feinberg et al., 2019; Feinberg & Willer, 2013), and such moralization cannot probably be dissociated from an

increasing global awareness of such issues (e.g., Me Too movement, the 2016 Paris Agreement on Climate Change, Fridays for Future movement), and from heated debates on social media between groups with different views on specific topics (e.g., Twitter; Mooijman et al., 2018). Thus, attitude moralization is likely to be influenced by how people interpret, integrate, and relate to information from their social and particularly group environments.

Against this backdrop, this thesis examines when, how, and why individuals' attitudes become more strongly moralized in contexts of intergroup relations and conflict. In this introduction chapter, we<sup>1</sup> first introduce what we currently know about attitude moralization and then outline such an intergroup perspective on moralization. Specifically, we explain how our perspective builds upon but also is different from extant work, and preview the three sets of empirical studies we conducted that reflect this perspective.

We propose that intergroup contexts and thus groups can function as a special and powerful conduit for the process of attitude moralization, particularly in contexts where people are faced with violations of their ingroup's values through the actions or expressions of outgroup members *that they feel demand a response from their ingroup*. Indeed, groups can embody values (e.g., equality) that individuals, given their social nature, seek to protect from perceived external attack. Accordingly, violations of ingroup values by (immoral) outgroup members are likely to motivate group members to engage in psychological value protection responses against outgroup attack, and as such, push attitudes further into the moral domain (Tetlock et al., 2000; Van Zomeren et al., 2018).

For instance, when the former U.S. President Trump made negative comments about women (Darweesh & Abdullah, 2016), such as "*Can you imagine that, the face of our next president? I mean, she's a woman, and I'm not supposed to say bad things, but really, folks, come on. Are we serious?*", women and liberals promptly reacted and gender issues gained stronger moral emphasis, culminating in, for example, thousands of people outside of the U.S. joining the 2017 Women's March against sexism in over 50 countries. Moreover, when the Trump administration in 2017 announced the U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Agreement on Climate Change that aimed to mitigate global climate change impact, liberals rapidly reacted with moral outrage, and climate change issues were strongly and internationally discussed in moral terms, resulting in protests and pro-Paris agreement petitions. These examples illustrate how perceived violating actions of outgroup members may potentially motivate group members to moralize issues and act on them. Hence, we specifically investigated *when* and *how* such

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<sup>1</sup> As this dissertation is a collaborative effort, I will refer to "we", and not "I", in the remainder of this introduction.

perceived violations of ingroup values committed by outgroup members may drive stronger *moralization* of one's attitudes on a specific topic (e.g., gender inequality, or human-caused climate change).

Indeed, the key message in this thesis is that an intergroup perspective provides new insights into the development of attitude moralization, namely because the presence of an (immoral) outgroup that violates and threatens ingroup values, triggers group members' motivation to protect their values, and as such, further connecting specific attitudes to fundamental beliefs about right and wrong. We will examine these ideas *experimentally* across a variety of intergroup contexts (Chapter 2) and *longitudinally* in the context of individuals' participation in the Chilean student movement (Chapter 3). Moreover, we also explore the moralizing potential of similar violations coming from *ingroups* rather than outgroups (Chapter 4), in order to examine whether the same value-protective responses occur, or whether they are different due to ingroup's source of threat. Chapter 5 discusses and synthesizes the findings reported in this thesis and evaluates the added value of our intergroup perspective on attitude moralization.

## The Psychology of Attitude Moralization

### *What is Attitude Moralization?*

Moralization is generally defined as the psychological process in which an action, entity, or attitude acquires stronger moral properties (Rozin, 1999; Rozin et al., 1997; Rozin & Singh, 1999)<sup>2</sup>. In this dissertation, we specifically focus on moralization of one's attitudes, that is, *attitude moralization*. We refer to attitude moralization as the psychological process in which a relatively non-moralized or somehow moralized attitude becomes *more strongly* moralized or transforms into a stronger (attitude grounded in) *moral conviction*<sup>3</sup> (Brandt et al., 2015;

<sup>2</sup> Moralization of *actions* and *entities* are theoretically and empirically distinct from moralization of attitudes (see Rhee et al. 2019, for a review). Moralization of actions generally involves evaluations of a given behavior in some construed situations, that often portray a moral violation, by indicating their level of wrongness (e.g., Clifford et al., 2015; Haidt, 2001). Differently, moralization of an entity means that entire categories of groups (e.g., outgroups, family) or elements of living systems (e.g., trees, animals) are subjectively perceived and labeled as targets of moral concern (e.g., Crimston et al., 2016; Schein & Gray, 2018; Sommer et al., 2019). Both conceptualizations of moralization rely on underlying assumptions about notions of morality, right and wrong, good or evil. That is, moralization of an action or entity is assumed to reflect moral concerns but does not indicate the degree to which it is indeed embedded in a moral concern, which is exactly what attitude moralization aims to capture and measure (Rhee et al., 2019; Skitka et al., 2021).

<sup>3</sup> Some have labeled this process as *moral amplification* (Rhee et al., 2019) — that is, attitudes that are already recognized as moral become more morally amplified, which is different from attitudes that have not yet entered the moral domain and acquired moral meaning (i.e., *moral recognition*; see Rhee et al., 2019; Skitka et al., 2021). In this thesis, attitude moralization essentially reflects a moral amplification process, and not a moral recognition one.

Wisneski & Skitka, 2017). Particularly, this process concerns individual changes in subjective perceptions of the degree to which an attitude object (i.e., societal *issue*, such as gender inequality) is attached to absolute beliefs about right and wrong, and *values*<sup>4</sup> (Skitka et al., 2005; Wisneski & Skitka, 2017).

**Moral Conviction.** Attitudes held with such moral conviction represent a special class of strong attitudes and are characteristically different from mere strong attitudes (Skitka et al., 2005). Broadly speaking, an attitude refers to a positive or negative evaluation of an attitude object (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993), such as an issue, and strong attitudes are typically characterized as extreme (“I feel strongly about my opinion on gender inequality”), important, central (“My opinion on gender inequality... “is important to who I am” and “central to who I am as a person”), and certain (“I am certain about my opinion on gender inequality”), but may not necessarily be imbued with moral meaning. On the other hand, attitudes grounded in moral conviction (or simply moral convictions) involve an evaluation of an attitude object in terms of morality (i.e., notions of right or wrong). In other words, moral convictions reflect individuals’ fundamental beliefs about right and wrong (Skitka et al., 2005), for instance, “my opinion on gender inequality is based on my core moral beliefs and convictions”, and are a concrete expression of a core moral value or principle (e.g., a moral conviction about gender inequality may reflect a broader value of universalism or justice). Thus, moral convictions are always strong attitudes, but not all strong attitudes are moral convictions (Skitka et al., 2005).

Indeed, moral convictions accommodate a number of psychological characteristics that confer them a distinct moral status. According to the domain theory of attitudes (Nucci, 2001; Nucci & Turiel 1978; see Skitka, 2010, 2014, Skitka et al., 2021), attitudes held with moral conviction are experienced as a matter of moral imperative, and are substantially different from attitudes that merely represent personal preferences (i.e., attitudes that reflect matters of taste, subjective criteria, and are not socially regulated) and normative conventions (i.e., attitudes that reflect societal or group norms, rules, laws, and are socially and culturally regulated)<sup>5</sup>. Particularly, such moral convictions are psychologically experienced as an absolute and universal truth that applies to any situation, context, and culture (“I believe that gender inequality is wrong in the Netherlands as in any other country”); unbendable facts about the

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<sup>4</sup> We refer to *value* as a general and desirable goal that functions as a compass to guide people’s lives; differs in importance and priority, but remains relatively stable over time (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2022; Schwartz, 1992, 1994).

<sup>5</sup> Even though such conceptualization may imply that attitudes grounded in moral conviction are structurally different from attitudes grounded in normative conventions that evoke group, authority, and peer influences and forces, this does not preclude that norms and groups do not contribute to the development of moral conviction in individuals.

world; independent of authorities, norms, and societal rules (“I believe that gender inequality is wrong regardless of what the others/society think”); resistant to social influence and change; emotionally moving; and fundamentally self-motivating and justifying for actions on behalf of those convictions (e.g., joining a protest against gender inequality; see Skitka, 2010, 2014, and Skitka et al., 2021, for reviews). Thus, moral convictions transcend the boundaries of strong attitudes and have unique cognitive, emotional, and behavioral expressions of their own, that can ultimately have implications for individuals, groups, and society, as we discuss in the next section.

### ***Why Does the Study of Attitude Moralization Matter?***

Understanding when, how, and why attitudes become more strongly moralized is critical because such psychological process may change individuals and how they perceive, feel, behave, and relate to others, groups, and society. Indeed, attitude moralization may profoundly spark people to be agents of social change at the service of one’s moral conviction. For instance, people are more willing to undertake collective action on behalf of their moral convictions and values (De Cristofaro et al., 2021; Pauls et al., 2022; Sabucedo et al., 2018; Van Zomeren et al., 2011, 2012; Zaal et al., 2011; see Agostini & Van Zomeren, 2021, for a meta-analysis), engage in activist helping behavior to support refugees (Kende et al., 2017), and vote for political candidates that support one’s convictions (Morgan et al., 2010; Skitka & Bauman, 2008). Of course, this also means that they will be motivated to act against other groups who violate their convictions (Pauls et al., 2022), which can lead to counterprotests and even vigilantism (Skitka & Houston, 2001).

Thus, moralization of attitudes can meaningfully impact social-psychological processes within and between groups. This means that, on the one hand, moral convictions can serve an important social function in sustaining and protecting social groups (and their values and morals). Particularly, they prompt people to enter or stay connected in social groups, and further create a sense of “us” (e.g., people who hold similar convictions come together to be part of a movement or fight for a cause, or are more prone to identify with the movement or cause; Van Zomeren et al., 2018; voting for one’s own political party; Morgan et al., 2010; Skitka & Bauman, 2008; and engagement in politicized helping behavior; Kende et al., 2017). In fact, some have suggested that moral convictions can bring similarly-minded people together, as much as specific norms of a group can become moralized and regarded as markers of the content of group identity (Van Zomeren et al., 2018; see also Agostini & Van Zomeren, 2021).

On the other hand, moralization of attitudes may also accentuate perceptions of division



and distance between “us” versus “them”, and further create a sense of (*inter*)group distancing (e.g., fighting for a group cause against “them”; Van Zomeren et al., 2018). In line with this idea, research has shown that moral convictions predict, for example, social distance toward those who hold dissimilar moral convictions (Skitka et al., 2005; Wright et al., 2008; Zaal et al., 2017), intolerance toward those whose moral convictions are different from theirs (Skitka et al., 2005; Wright et al., 2008; see also Brandt et al., 2016), lower levels of cooperation toward those who hold divergent moral convictions (Wright et al., 2008), aversion toward political leaders with contrasting beliefs (Simonsen & Bonikowski, 2022), ideological divide in policy preferences towards an outgroup (Reifen et al., 2014), support for hostile forms of collective action against an outgroup (Pauls et al., 2022; Zaal et al., 2011), and prejudice and hostility toward the outgroup (Garrett & Bankert, 2020). Therefore, moral convictions do not only hold the power to bind people and groups together around similar convictions, but also increase the gaps between groups whose convictions are different from one’s group. Put differently, moral convictions can importantly be a binding and dividing force for society, that can even stimulate or perpetuate intergroup conflict and/or be a barrier to social harmony or conflict resolution in society.

In sum, attitude moralization may indeed motivate people to act and change the social world, which can not only transform individuals (e.g., turning them into social activists or even radicals and extremists; see Agostini & Van Zomeren, 2021; Skitka, 2010, 2014), but also relationships within and between groups (e.g., creating movements, and enhancing polarization between groups; Garrett & Bankert, 2020; Mooijman et al., 2018; Van Zomeren et al., 2018), and finally society at large (Rozin, 1999). Therefore, the consequences of such a psychological process should not be underestimated, which begs the question of how people further develop such strong moral convictions.

### ***What Do We Know About the Triggers of Attitude Moralization?***

Even though much research has demonstrated the social psychological implications of moralization and moral conviction (Skitka, 2010, 2014; Skitka et al., 2021), surprisingly, we still know little about how to trigger the psychological process of attitude moralization (Skitka et al., 2018, 2021). Yet, research suggests that specific *emotions* play a key role in the attitude moralization process (Rozin & Singh, 1999; see Skitka et al., 2018) — in fact, a growing body of research has demonstrated that emotions triggered by an attitude-related object may motivate moralization of these object-related attitudes. For instance, Wisneski and Skitka (2017) demonstrated experimentally that abortion-related images that depicted disgust led to increased

levels of moral conviction about abortion, and this was explained by self-reported experiences of disgust. Additionally, Feinberg and colleagues (2019) showed how morally evocative stimuli about eating meat (e.g., in video format) induced greater moral emotions (e.g., disgust, outrage), and attitude moralization of objection to meat-eating over time. Clifford (2019) also showed that exposure to persuasive and emotionally charged frames (i.e., inducing anger and disgust) moralized specific attitudes about food politics (e.g., natural food; see also Kodapanakkal et al., 2022). Finally, in the social and political context of the 2012 U.S. presidential election, Brandt and colleagues (2015) found that enthusiasm for a preferred political candidate and hostility toward a non-preferred political candidate predicted changes in moral conviction about these candidates. Together, these findings suggest that attitude moralization is likely to be driven by an emotional response to an evocative stimulus.

However, moralization research has primarily approached the process of moralization as an intra-individual phenomenon by examining their emotional and cognitive underpinnings, such as specific emotions (Brandt et al., 2015; Clifford; 2019; Feinberg et al., 2019; Rozin & Singh, 1999; Wisneski & Skitka, 2017), but also harm appraisals (e.g., Wisneski et al., 2020; Wisneski & Skitka, 2017), valenced thoughts (e.g., Luttrell et al., 2019), and harms and benefits (e.g., Brandt et al., 2015). Research has not yet considered how this moralization process may occur and unfold in social and group contexts, and how being in particular intergroup contexts (e.g., ingroups being faced with violations of ingroup values by outgroup members) may shape this process. In our approach, we situate the intra-individual process of moralization in intergroup contexts.

### **An Intergroup Perspective on Attitude Moralization**

We argue that attitude moralization is a process that does not occur in isolation from social context, but is embedded in social interactions, relationships, and relations within and between groups. Thus, we propose that the process of attitude moralization may be motivated by processes grounded in groups (or group concerns) in relation to outgroups. Particularly, groups may serve as potent conduits for moralization because individuals' psychological group membership is often grounded in values that they seek to protect when threatened (Van Zomeren et al., 2018). This means that groups and intergroup contexts may function as breeding grounds for moralization as they include outgroups whose actions can trigger group members to revisit and defend their moral values when threatened. For instance, when the former U.S. President Trump made negative comments about women, and announced the U.S. withdrawal from the Paris agreement on climate change, triggering moral discussions around the topics of

sexism/gender inequality and climate change, and leading to protests, as described earlier. These examples capture how group members may experience outgroup actions as violations of their values, motivating them to articulate them in moral terms and take action on their behalf.

Such intergroup account of moralization resonates with the large body of morality research showing how groups can psychologically influence and shape morality, that is, notions of “right or wrong” (e.g., moral judgments, moral self-views, moral reasoning, moral behavior; Ellemers, 2017; Ellemers & Van der Toorn, 2015; see also Ellemers et al., 2019). Indeed, groups help people define who they are, what they value, where they belong, and how they should behave (Ellemers, 2012, 2017; Tajfel, 1974; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, 1985, 1991). Moreover, groups can provide shared conceptions of morality and thus serve as moral anchors that help regulate individual and social cognitions, emotions, and behaviors (Ellemers, 2017; Ellemers & Van den Bos, 2012; Ellemers & Van der Toorn, 2015). Not surprisingly, groups functionally define moral guidelines and dictate what is “right or wrong” by establishing and enforcing norms, values, behaviors, and practices that ought to be followed by their members (Ellemers et al., 2013; Ellemers & Van den Bos, 2012). Group members accordingly feel motivated to act in accordance with groups’ morals to guarantee their inclusion as well as respect by their group counterparts (Leach et al., 2007, 2015; Pagliaro et al., 2011). Importantly, by being aligned with the values and morals that the groups stand for, group members may also feel a sense of positive social and moral identity (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Ellemers et al., 2004). After all, they place high importance on perceptions of morality for themselves and the group (Goodwin, 2015; Leach et al., 2007). Therefore, groups and their morals are likely to have a meaningful impact on people’s individual sense of right and wrong regarding some issues. Put differently, people may develop individual moral convictions (i.e., moralize) through the lens of morals that define groups (Ellemers, 2017; Ellemers & Van der Toorn, 2015; see also Spears, 2021).

We thus investigate how groups and intergroup contexts may induce changes in people’s moral convictions (i.e., attitude moralization). Specifically, we focus on structural contexts and situations that include conflicts between groups (e.g., when outgroup members violate ingroup values) as triggers for moralization. This means that the process of attitude moralization can be studied as being part of an intergroup phenomenon that occurs among members of groups with clear values, and are in relation to other groups with different values. Moralization is indeed very likely to occur in contexts where ingroups and outgroups serve as moral anchors and agents — that is, when group membership encapsulates who “we” are and

what “we” stand for in terms of “our” moral values, and is also in contrast with who “they” are and what “they” stand for (Van Zomeren et al., 2018). Therefore, we argue that moralization has a strong potential to emerge in intergroup contexts that encompass intergroup behaviors that challenge individual and group morals, particularly when outgroup members violate core values of the ingroup.

### ***Attitude Moralization as an Intergroup Value Protection Response***

A violation of ingroup values may be a key ingredient to induce a process of attitude moralization, especially in intergroup contexts. Based on this idea, we propose that moralization may be part of a broader value protection response to violations of core values by outgroup members. As such, we outline an intergroup value violation perspective on moralization by integrating key insights from the literature on value protection, intergroup relations, and moralization. Our approach moves beyond the value protection approach (Skitka, 2002; Tetlock et al., 2000) because it zooms in on outgroups as potentially triggering attitude moralization, and extends the social identity approach because it zooms in on attitude moralization processes (e.g., Ellemers, 2017; Ellemers & Van den Bos, 2012). Thus, we offer a new perspective on moralization, in which we investigate when and how the intergroup context can facilitate the intra-individual process of attitude moralization.

Value protection models (Skitka, 2002; Skitka & Mullen, 2002a; Tetlock, 2002; Tetlock et al., 2000) broadly advocate that a violation of one’s values can be the active ingredient in motivating action to protect one’s values. In other words, when people are confronted with value violations, their sense of social and moral order is put in jeopardy, and they feel internally compelled to react and act to protect and (re)affirm these values (Skitka, 2002; Tetlock et al., 2000). Such a reactive and protective response may be materialized through different expressions of moral outrage: harsher character attributions about the violator, moral emotions (e.g., anger, disgust, and contempt), and willingness to punish or condemn the violator (D’Amore et al., 2022; Tetlock et al., 2000); and also moral cleansing responses of value affirmation that are aimed to restore the social and moral order within the community (e.g., engaging in helping behavior to symbolically repair the damage of the violation; Pauls et al., 2022; Skitka et al., 2004; Tetlock et al., 2000).

These value-protective responses are likely to be enhanced when such value violations are committed by *outgroup members*. Value protection models have not considered the extent to which the group membership of such violators may be a critical determinant of how such violations are experienced. However, there is some initial evidence suggesting that people are

motivated to engage in actions to restore moral balance in response to outgroup wrongdoings. For instance, Skitka and colleagues (2004) studied Americans' responses to the 2001 World Trade Center terrorist attacks, and found that Americans engaged in different forms of moral outrage (e.g., anger, punishing those responsible) and value-affirming behaviors (e.g., helping) in response to such attacks. More recently, Pauls and colleagues (2022) found that American non-Trump voters were willing to engage in value reaffirmation responses (i.e., willingness to engage in collective action, ingroup identification, moral conviction) in response to a strong value violation committed by the Trump administration. By situating such violations and protective responses in an intergroup context, we believe we get a more realistic and contextualized understanding of broader social phenomena that are highly driven by perceptions of outgroup injustice/violations and group identities (e.g., participation in collective action or protests to hopefully repair a situation of group (dis)advantage; Van Zomeren et al., 2018).

Indeed, group memberships and identities can be foundational anchors for driving value-protective responses. According to a social identity approach (Tajfel, 1974, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, 1985, 1987, 1991), people often experience some social situations not just simply as individuals but as members of social groups (e.g., a Democrat is likely to act as a member of a Democratic party in situations where the values tied to their Democrat identity are made salient, such as joining a climate change or anti-gun protest). There are many ways of activating people's group identities in different contexts that can range from being part of a social and political movement (making the political identity salient) to being the only woman in a large business meeting (making the gender identity salient in comparison with a predominant outgroup). One of the most effective strategies to trigger people's sense of identification with a group is by being confronted with violations of core ingroup values that are relevant to the group and its morals by outgroup members (e.g., Mazzone et al., 2015; Van Zomeren et al., 2018). This is because outgroup members violating ingroup members' values may potentially represent or be experienced as an attack on the ingroup and its members' values and identities.

We therefore propose that moralization can be one protective psychological response to deal with particularly relevant violations of ingroup values by outgroup members. Specifically, we suggest that moralization may occur to protect the moral perimeter of the ingroup against *outgroup attack*. Categorizing someone as an outgroup typically means that "they" are different from "us" and hold distinct values from "ours" (Bar-Tal, 1990; Ellemers, 2017; e.g., Skitka et

al., 2004). In this sense, when “they” commit a violation of “our” values that are relevant to the group, we may feel the need to respond and do something about it (e.g., punish the violator) especially when such violations may be indicative of a threat or attack on the group (Van Zomeren et al., 2018). Indeed, group members tend to experience discomfort, threat, and become morally sensitive when faced with such violations by outgroup members (e.g., Gordijn et al., 2001; Mendes et al., 2007; Molenberghs et al., 2016; Van Zomeren et al., 2018). As such, the perceived violation of ingroup values by outgroup agents may motivate expressions of emotions and action to protect ingroup values (Van Zomeren et al., 2018), such as anger and collective action against an institution to defend one’s values that are relevant to the ingroup and its morals. We argue that such violations of ingroup values may also force people to revisit and (re)affirm their own conceptions about right and wrong (i.e., moral convictions) — that is, induce a process of moralization.

This raises questions of when, how, and why violations committed by outgroup members may elicit an attitude moralization process. Importantly, not *all* violations of ingroup values by outgroup members will induce changes in people’s moral convictions. For example, when the former U.S. president Trump made comments about immigrants from Haiti, El Salvador, and African countries, such as: “*Why are we having all these people from sh\*thole countries come here?*”, (non-immigrant) Democrats and people around the world condemned such affirmations but it did not necessarily translate into moral debates or protests around the issue of immigration. We reason that violations by outgroup members that are imbued with strong feelings or perceptions of threat, damage, and harm to the ingroup may hold stronger potential to motivate a moralization process (Molenberghs et al., 2016; Pauls et al., 2022; Schein & Gray, 2018). This is because violations of ingroup core values by outgroup members that convey and signal a dangerous, harmful, and threatening message to the ingroup are the ones that are more likely to demand a protective response from the ingroup. Such a protective response may involve moralization of the issue relevant to the violation because this is a way of affirming and validating one’s and group’s morals against outgroup attack. Thus, individuals may respond to outgroups’ violations that are perceived as a threat to what the ingroup stands for by exhibiting different psychological responses (i.e., experiencing negative moral emotions such as outrage and anger, punishing the violator, undertaking collective action, and moralizing issues) to protect the group’s moral perimeter against outgroup attack.

### ***Hypothesizing Specific Triggers for Attitude Moralization***

We argue that moralization is likely to unfold as a function of how ingroup members perceive and respond to the actions or expressions of outgroup members that violate ingroup values. Particularly, we suggest that ingroup value violations by outgroup members are likely to trigger a process of attitude moralization (1) when the outgroup is perceived as immoral (Chapter 2) and (2) when ingroup members actively respond to such violations by an immoral outgroup (i.e., by engaging in collective action; Chapter 3). We explain the rationale for these ideas in turn.

**Immoral Character of the Outgroup.** We propose that perceptions of the *immoral character* of the outgroup<sup>6</sup> violator may be key to interpreting the violation as such a threatening outgroup attack that would lead to attitude moralization and other responses (i.e., negative moral emotions, such as outrage and anger, punishment, collective action) aimed at psychologically protecting the ingroup against the outgroup. This is because violations by outgroups perceived as *immoral* can be experienced as an intentional and malevolent attack on the ingroup and a threat to ingroup values (Brambilla et al., 2011, 2012; Leach et al., 2015; Nadler & McDonnell, 2012; Schein & Gray, 2018). Indeed, outgroup morality is relevant to ingroups, and group members are sensitive to information about the moral character of the outgroup to ensure group interests and manage the relationship with the outgroup (Ellemers, 2017; Leach et al., 2015). Importantly, not all outgroups are perceived as a danger or threat to the ingroup, such as *moral* outgroups (e.g., De Freitas & Cikara, 2018). Therefore, even though value violations committed by outgroup members perceived as moral may be unexpected and destabilize the relationship with the outgroup, they may be interpreted as isolated cases or irrelevant to the ingroup. Consequently, group members may psychologically disengage from such outgroup actions to protect the intergroup relationship and harmony for social living (e.g., Rai & Fiske, 2011), inhibiting a moralization process. Thus, being exposed to violations by outgroup members *perceived as immoral* may hold a stronger potential to induce a moralization process (Chapter 2).

**Collective Action.** Based on the idea that violations by outgroup members perceived as immoral may trigger an attitude moralization process, we further propose that participating in collective action against a perceived immoral outgroup may motivate attitude moralization (Chapter 3). This entails that intergroup conflict contexts of collective action may actually be

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<sup>6</sup> That is, whether the outgroup is already perceived to lack moral principles, values, or characteristics that are valued by the ingroup.

facilitative of a moralization process. Collective action often involves actions that individuals take as group members to improve the position and situation of their ingroup (Wright et al., 1990), and typically involves a power struggle between two opposing groups (Simon & Klandermans, 2001). Such a heated intergroup context contains two crucial ingredients that may help trigger attitude moralization: the contextual availability of a strong social movement (or *ingroup*) fighting against an adversary (or *outgroup*) perceived as immoral (Wright, 2009). Thus, moralization is more likely to occur and develop further when group members are actively undertaking collective action in response to a violation by an assumed immoral outgroup (e.g., the government) that is responsible for the ingroup disadvantage. Indeed, group members may take such actions as a form of expressing and protecting who “we” are (i.e., identity) and the moral values that “we” stand for against outgroup’s unjust actions (Van Zomeren et al., 2018), which may help further push attitudes into the moral domain.

We propose that participation in collective action may foster moralization because it enables individuals to *identify* with the movement (by increasing the overlap between personal and political identity — i.e., politicize; Turner-Zwinkels et al., 2015; see also Turner-Zwinkels et al., 2017) and thus with the core moral values and convictions the movement stands for. Moreover, we test whether two other identity-related mechanisms, that is, group-based anger toward the outgroup and ingroup efficacy beliefs, may also lead to moralization (Van Zomeren et al., 2004, 2018). Particularly, participation in collective action may *enrage* individuals further (by increasing a range of emotions toward the outgroup, such as anger and contempt; Becker et al., 2011), and *empower* otherwise passive victims of the social structure into agentic architects of social change (by enhancing efficacy beliefs and changing one’s identity; Cocking & Drury, 2004; Drury et al., 2005; Drury & Reicher, 2000, 2005). This means that participating in collective action may help validate a coherent sense of who “we” are as moral, collective, emotional and empowered agents of social change against an evil opponent, which may subsequently spark group members to further moralize issues they stand for as an expression of such a representative politicized identity. This is important because it can actually help understand the role of moralization in explaining why people stay engaged in social movements, and how they can be sustained over time.

To summarize, we suggest that ingroup value violations by outgroup members are likely to induce a process of attitude moralization when the outgroup is perceived as immoral and when group members actively respond to such violations (i.e., by undertaking collective action). This implies that intergroup contexts that portray a conflict (i.e., being exposed to a



violation by an immoral outgroup, or undertaking collective action against such an outgroup) have the potential to motivate group members to moralize issues they stand for as a way of psychologically protecting and reaffirming their values against outgroup attack.

### ***What If Such Violations Are Committed by Ingroup Members?***

It is important to understand whether our intergroup perspective is specific to ingroup value violations committed by outgroup members or can be extended to any violators, such as ingroup violators (Chapter 4). Therefore, we explored whether attitude moralization can also be triggered in response to ingroup value violations committed by *ingroup* members — that is, when the value violation comes from *within* the group. Similar to Chapter 2, we propose that perceptions of the *moral character* of the ingroup<sup>7</sup> violator may help group members interpret whether the violation of ingroup values demands a protective response (Brambilla & Leach, 2014; Brambilla et al., 2011, 2012; Leach et al., 2015; Nadler & McDonnell, 2012; Wojciszke et al., 1998). We thus tested whether such a value-protective mechanism fosters attitude moralization when the threat comes shockingly from within — that is, when the violation of ingroup values is perpetrated by a *moral* (vs less moral) ingroup member (i.e., a wolf in sheep’s clothing). Different from Chapter 2, we do not focus on perceptions of the *immoral character* of the ingroup violator because immoral ingroup members are likely to be perceived as not prototypical and representative of the ingroup, or even as derogated ingroup members, which may not elicit the expected protective response.

Indeed, highly moral group members may be perceived as typical members who have integrated and endorsed core values and morals of the group, and act in accordance with group norms (e.g., Abrams et al., 2014; Otten & Gordijn, 2014). Further, they may be responsible for sustaining such core morals and values within the group (Levine & Moreland, 1994). Thus, when *moral* group members commit a violation against what the group stands for, group members may experience and construe such violation as an unexpected threat to the stability of the positive and moral ingroup image and identity (Brambilla et al., 2013; Branscombe et al., 1999; Ellemers, 2017; Horsney & Jetten, 2003; Okimoto & Wenzel, 2010; Sankaran et al., 2017; Van der Toorn et al., 2015). After all, such behavior is not in line with their moral character and with what the group represents. Consequently, they may feel urged to do something about it, such as moralizing relevant issues (Wisneski & Skitka, 2017) as a

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<sup>7</sup> That is, whether the ingroup member is perceived to represent group’s interests, moral principles, values, and/or characteristics that are valued by the ingroup (e.g., honesty, trustworthiness; Ellemers, 2017; Goodwin, 2015; Leach et al., 2007, 2015).

psychological strategy to protect ingroup values and restore moral balance and order (Tetlock et al., 2000). In sum, group members might also moralize group-relevant issues as a way of protecting core values and the moral image of the group against ingroup value violations by the most moral group members.

***Moral Emotions Driving Attitude Moralization as a Value Protection Response***

Based on theories and findings on moralization, intergroup emotions, and value protection (e.g., Skitka et al., 2018; Smith & Mackie, 2015; Tetlock et al., 2000), we argue that the experience of negative moral emotions (e.g., anger, disgust, outrage, and contempt) is not only a key indicator of a value protection response but also a mechanism that may lead to attitude moralization. We suggest that the experience of moral emotions in response to ingroup value violations (by immoral outgroups, in Chapters 2 and 3, and moral ingroups, in Chapter 4) may help signal the need for group members to protect their core values. As such, these emotions may trigger an attitude moralization process, as an emotionally driven value-protective response.

Value protection models suggest that negative moral emotions (i.e., anger, contempt, and outrage) constitute an affective indicator of a value protection response. Specifically, when people are confronted with relevant violations of core group values, a range of negative moral emotions are likely to arise as a way of dealing with the violation to sustain and defend one's worldviews and values (Skitka, 2002; Skitka et al., 2004; Tetlock et al., 2000; see also D'Amore et al., 2022). Indeed, such emotions are often elicited in response to events that affect the ingroup (Gordijn et al., 2001; Mackie et al., 2000; Smith & Mackie, 2015) as well as to unjust and deviating actions by outgroups (e.g., Halperin & Gross, 2011), which determines how group members respond (Branscombe & Doosje, 2004; Goldenberg et al., 2016; Halperin, 2014; Halperin et al., 2011; Reifen et al., 2011). As such, the experience of such emotions may serve as a cue to indicate that such stimulus/event needs a moral response, such as moralization of attitudes (Giner-Sorolla, 2012; Haidt, 2003) — which fits with moralization research showing that an evocative stimulus that elicits strong moral emotions (or an emotional trigger event) is a key precursor of attitude moralization (Brandt et al., 2015; Clifford, 2019; D'Amore et al., 2022; Feinberg et al., 2019; Wisneski & Skitka, 2017; see also Rozin & Singh, 1999; Skitka et al., 2018).

## Overview of the Chapters

In three empirical chapters, we investigated when, how, and why ingroup value violations by outgroup (and ingroup) members may trigger attitude moralization within and across different intergroup contexts. Across chapters using different topics and samples, we approached attitude moralization longitudinally in more controlled experimental intergroup settings for a short span of time (Chapters 2 and 4), and in a real-life intergroup context for an extended period of time (Chapter 3). In Chapter 2, we tested specifically how the (perceived) immoral character of the outgroup violator triggered attitude moralization in different intergroup contexts. In Chapter 3, we turned to the heated intergroup context of collective action, as such contexts include a strong social movement (or *ingroup*) fighting against an adversary (or *outgroup*) perceived as immoral. Thus, we tested how participating in collective action (against an assumed immoral outgroup) may induce changes in moral conviction over time. Finally, in Chapter 4, we tested whether perceptions of morality of an *ingroup* violator would have the same power to induce attitude moralization as a response to ingroup value violation.

### Chapter 2

In Chapter 2, we investigated whether and how a perceived ingroup value violation by an *immoral* outgroup may trigger attitude moralization in intergroup contexts. This chapter directly tests when groups and intergroup context can function as a conduit for moralization by highlighting outgroups as potentially triggering attitude moralization. We predicted that an ingroup value violation committed by an *immoral* outgroup (rather than a moral outgroup) would trigger greater attitude moralization through enhanced feelings of other-condemning emotions (i.e., anger, disgust, contempt, and outrage; Haidt, 2003). We also measured desire for punishment as an often-used indicator of a value protection process (e.g., Skitka et al., 2004; Tetlock et al., 2000), which is strongly related to other-condemning moral emotions such as anger and disgust (e.g., Tetlock et al., 2000). If moralization is indeed an integral part of a value protection response against outgroup attack in intergroup contexts, we should also expect that group members would be more willing to punish the immoral outgroup than the moral outgroup.

In four experiments using different intergroup contexts, violations, samples, and issues of moralization, we tested whether and how a violation of ingroup values committed by a member of an immoral outgroup (relative to a moral outgroup) would trigger attitude moralization. Studies 1a and 1b tested our hypotheses in the context of Equal Pay Day (about gender inequality) using a Psychology student sample (Study 1a) and a broader university

student sample (Study 1b), with the topic of moralization being sexism. Study 2 tested our hypotheses in a more clearly polarized intergroup context of the 2017 U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Accord on Climate Change, using an MTurk sample, and with the topic of moralization being climate change. Study 3 employed the context of Columbus Day in the U.S., using a Prolific sample, and with the issue of moralization being cultural appropriation.

Across studies and an internal meta-analysis ( $k = 4$ ,  $N = 701$ ), we found that ingroup value violations committed by *immoral*, rather than moral outgroup members facilitated greater attitude moralization (and desire for punishment; Studies 1a-b, 2, and 3); and these effects were mediated by increased other-condemning emotions (Studies 2 and 3). In line with a value protection explanation, we additionally found support for the idea that a violation by an immoral outgroup was experienced and construed as more threatening to ingroup values, inducing feelings of other-condemning emotions, that in turn would trigger attitude moralization (Study 3). Together, these findings thus support the idea that groups and the intergroup context can function as a special conduit for attitude moralization, which emphasizes the need for an intergroup perspective to understand how individuals' attitudes become increasingly moralized.

### **Chapter 3**

In Chapter 3, we investigated whether and how participating in collective action may longitudinally facilitate attitude moralization in the contentious context of the Chilean student movement. Since 2006, social movements have been impactful driving forces for social change in Chile (e.g., starting with the “Penguin Revolution” of students in 2006<sup>8</sup>, followed by the university student’s movement). Over the last decade, particularly, the student movement for better education has gained a large number of supporters and is still active. On many occasions, thousands of Chilean students have marched on the streets against the government, often on the basis of claims about the (perceived) immoral or unjust actions of the government (Bellei et al., 2014; Donoso & Bülow, 2016; Somma, 2012; Somma et al., 2020), to demand a transformation of the country’s education system. Against this backdrop, we focused on whether and how an intergroup context of collective action may trigger changes in moral conviction by following a sample of Chilean students over a period of two years (from 2017 to 2019) in the political student movement in Chile. We suggest that collective action contexts provide two crucial ingredients that may facilitate moralization: The contextual availability of a strong social movement (or ingroup) fighting against an immoral opponent (or outgroup). Whereas in

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<sup>8</sup> The Penguin Revolution was a mass social movement led by Chilean high school students (wearing black and white uniforms, hence, “Penguins”) protesting against the education system.

Chapter 2 ingroup members were exposed to violations by immoral outgroups, in Chapter 3, ingroup members were *actively involved* in responding to a violation by an immoral outgroup (i.e., the government) responsible for the ingroup disadvantage. We hypothesized that participation in collective action *moralizes* individuals' attitudes because it *politicizes* their identity and, informed by previous work on collective action, because it *enrages* them vis-a-vis the outgroup, and/or also *empowers* them to achieve social change<sup>9</sup>. Thus, participating in collective action to defend one's values against an immoral outgroup may induce a moralization process as a value protection response against outgroup attack.

We tested these hypotheses in a 2-year, 5-wave longitudinal study ( $N = 1214$ ) in the contentious context of the Chilean student movement. We specifically used random intercept cross-lagged panel models (RI-CLPM; Hamaker et al., 2015) to estimate whether and how collective action participation relates to moralization at a *within-person* level, that is, through changes within individuals over time (but also at between-person level, i.e., considering differences between individuals). This analytic approach is important because attitude moralization (i.e., individual changes in moral conviction) is theorized and assumed to be a malleable intraindividual phenomenon that reflects changes in attitudes within an individual (Brandt & Morgan, 2022; Morgan & Wisneski, 2017; Wisneski et al., 2020), and collective action participation has not been considered as an intraindividual phenomenon (i.e., how people individually change in their collective action participation) but often captured as a cross-sectional snapshot that reflects changes between individuals (i.e., how people differ from each other in collective action participation).

We approached the relationship between participation and moralization as a *dynamic* process, in which antecedents and consequences of within-person participation are considered in the same model. This is important because collective action participation is likely to both predict and *be predicted* by moral conviction, politicized identification, group-based anger toward the outgroup, and ingroup efficacy beliefs. We consistently found that participation in collective action predicted changes in moral conviction over time — an effect consistently explained by politicized identification and group-based anger toward the outgroup. Moreover, we found that moral conviction longitudinally predicted participation in collective action over time — an effect consistently explained by politicized identification. These findings confirm

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<sup>9</sup> We included group-based efficacy as it is closely related to identification and anger as precursors of collective action participation (Agostini & Van Zomeren, 2021; Van Zomeren et al., 2004, 2018).

that intergroup contexts such as those involving collective action against an immoral outgroup may be powerfully conducive to attitude moralization.

#### **Chapter 4**

Finally, in Chapter 4, we explored the potential of ingroup value violations by ingroup members to induce attitude moralization — particularly, whether and how the moral character of the *ingroup* violator would have the same potential for attitude moralization. Basing on the idea that ingroup members may moralize attitudes in order to protect ingroup values from outside attack (Chapters 2 and 3; see also D'Amore et al., 2022; Pauls et al., 2022), this chapter examines whether a similar value-protective mechanism fosters attitude moralization when the threat comes shockingly from within — that is, when the violation of ingroup values is perpetrated by a *moral* ingroup member. Different from previous chapters, we do not focus on the perceived *immorality* of the ingroup violator because such an immoral ingroup member may not be perceived as representative of the ingroup and even be perceived as an excluded or derogated member. Specifically, we argue that violations by highly moral members are typically perceived as unexpected and emotionally shocking, and disruptive of group's moral order (Ellemers, 2017; Wisneski & Skitka, 2017), motivating group members to engage in strategies to protect group moral image and values by moralizing issues relevant to the group.

We hypothesized that an ingroup value violation committed by an ingroup member perceived as *moral* ingroup (vs non-moral ingroup) would induce greater attitude moralization through enhanced feelings of *emotional shock*. As we suggest that moralization serves to protect ingroup values and moral image, we explored whether a violation by a moral ingroup member predicted two broad psychological protective responses, namely, expressions of *moral outrage* (i.e., experience of other-condemning emotions, such as anger, desire for punishment; Chapter 2; Skitka et al., 2004; Tetlock et al., 2000), and *moral cleansing* (i.e., motivation to restore moral self-worth; Tetlock et al., 2000), and perceptions of ingroup threat (Chapter 2).

In two experiments using different intragroup contexts, violations, samples, and issues of moralization, we tested whether and how a violation of ingroup values committed by a moral ingroup member (relative to a non-moral one) would trigger emotional shock and attitude moralization. In Study 1 ( $N = 232$ ), we used a natural intragroup context (i.e., participants selected and wrote about a group they identify with in their daily lives) and a sample of students in the Netherlands, with the topic of moralization being immigration. In Study 2 ( $N = 297$ ), we tested the hypothesis in the context of mass shootings and gun control in the U.S. using a

political intragroup context and an MTurk sample of Democrats, with the topic of moralization being gun control.

Overall, we found that group members experienced greater emotional shock when exposed to an ingroup value violation by a moral ingroup member (i.e., the wolf in sheep's clothing). However, we did not find support for the main hypothesis, as an ingroup value violation by moral group members did not seem to trigger attitude moralization. We also found no evidence for other value-protective mechanisms (i.e., moral outrage, moral cleansing, and perceptions of ingroup threat). Thus, an ingroup value violation by a moral ingroup was not a sufficient emotional trigger to activate a moralization process and protective responses.

This line of research helps understand some boundary conditions under which groups may function as conduits for moralization, such as the presence of an intergroup context. We discuss empirical and theoretical explanations for the observed lack of attitude moralization and offer suggestions for future research toward understanding the potential of violations of ingroup morality for attitude moralization. For instance, it is possible that ingroup members may disengage from the morals and values of the group when such ingroup value violations are committed by those “we” would least expect (i.e., the wolf in sheep's clothing). Still, this chapter's findings resonate with the idea that moralization seems to especially unfold as a value protection response against *outgroup* attack (Chapters 2 and 3).

## Summary

In this thesis, we study attitude moralization as an important phenomenon with multiple implications for individuals, groups, and society. Indeed, moralization is not likely to occur in a social vacuum but to be influenced by social, relational, group, political, and societal factors. We specifically propose that groups can function as conduits for moralization, as they embody ingroup values that people seek to protect from outgroup attack. Thus, moralization can be a value protection response against external attack by (threatening) outgroups that violate ingroup values. Particularly, we suggest that ingroup value violations by outgroup members are likely to trigger a process of attitude moralization (1) when the outgroup is perceived as immoral and (2) when ingroup members actively respond to such violations by an immoral outgroup (i.e., by engaging in collective action). This line of research paves the way toward a broader understanding of moralization by integrating the potential role of the intergroup context in driving moralization. This implies that if we want to better understand why we moralize issues such as gender inequality and climate change, we need to consider that, at least sometimes, it is “them” who trigger the moralization of specific attitudes in “our” minds.





