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## An intergroup perspective on attitude moralization

Leal, Ana

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# **Chapter 5**

General Discussion



This PhD dissertation aimed to offer and empirically evaluate an intergroup perspective on the study of attitude moralization (i.e., how attitudes become more strongly moralized; Rozin, 1999; Rozin et al., 1997; Rozin & Singh, 1999; Wisneski & Skitka, 2017). Although some research has shown that moralization can have numerous consequences for individuals, groups, and society (see Chapter 1; Skitka et al., 2021), surprisingly little is known about what triggers the process of moralization (Skitka et al., 2018), especially in contexts of intergroup relations and conflict. The limited research on this topic primarily approached attitude moralization as an intra-individual phenomenon, with an emphasis on how cognitive appraisals and emotions underlie this moralization process (e.g., Brandt et al., 2015; Feinberg et al., 2019; Skitka et al., 2021; Wisneski & Skitka, 2017). Previous research did not consider and systematically investigate the *social* underpinnings of attitude moralization, as offered by the intergroup perspective we proposed and tested in this dissertation. This is crucial because moralization is not likely to occur in a social vacuum but rather to be influenced by social, relational, group, political, and societal factors — that is, it is likely to be influenced by how people interpret, integrate, and relate to information from their social environments.

Across three empirical chapters, this dissertation provided and empirically evaluated this perspective by demonstrating how attitude moralization can emerge in contexts of intergroup relations. Particularly, our intergroup perspective explains how groups — ingroups or outgroups — influence moralization, specifically by integrating insights from the moralization, intergroup relations, and value protection literatures. We proposed that intergroup contexts and 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 ingroup values by outgroup members that *they feel demand a response from their ingroup*.

More specifically, we proposed and found that the presence of an (immoral) outgroup that violates and threatens ingroup values triggers ingroup members' motivation to *protect* their values, and as such, connecting specific attitudes to fundamental beliefs about right and wrong (i.e., moralize). This means that moralization can serve a psychological *value protection* function against outgroup attack. We examined these novel ideas *experimentally* across a variety of studies with different intergroup contexts (Chapter 2) and *longitudinally* in the unique context of individuals' participation in the Chilean student movement (Chapter 3). Moreover, we explored the moralizing potential of similar violations coming from *ingroups* rather than outgroups (Chapter 4), in order to examine whether a similar psychologically protective function occurred, or whether they were different when the source of threat was coming from within the ingroup (i.e., the wolf in sheep's clothing).

Below we first summarize the key findings in these three chapters and how they relate to the intergroup perspective employed. Then, we discuss theoretical implications of this perspective and, more specifically, implications for the attitude moralization, intergroup relations, and value protection literature. Third, we discuss some practical and societal implications of attitude moralization. Fourth, we consider limitations and directions for future research, and finally offer some concluding remarks.

### **Summary of Key Findings Across Chapters**

The findings from this PhD thesis studies offer first evidence for the intergroup perspective we employed. First, we found that perceiving the immoral character of the outgroup mattered in moralizing specific attitudes in response to ingroup value violations by outgroup members (Chapter 2). Second, we found that participating in collective action against an (immoral) outgroup mattered in moralizing attitudes about the social movement (Chapter 3). Third and finally, in Chapter 4 we observed that no such moralization occurred when the violation came from within the ingroup, despite feelings of emotional shock. Together, these findings offer an intriguing picture of how the social psychology of groups and morality work in tandem to explain attitude moralization within intergroup contexts.

### ***Understanding Who “They” Are: The Immoral Character of the Outgroup Violator Seems to Matter***

In Chapter 2, we tested whether the immoral character of the outgroup violator led to enhanced attitude moralization. We focused on perceptions of immoral character because violations by outgroup members perceived as *immoral* could be interpreted as a deliberate 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). This chapter directly tested when groups and intergroup contexts can function as a conduit for moralization by highlighting outgroup violations as potential triggers for attitude moralization. In four experiments (and an internal meta-analysis) using different intergroup contexts (i.e., student organizations, and political intergroup contexts), violations (in the contexts of Equal Pay Day, the 2017 U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Accord on Climate Change, and Columbus Day in the U.S.), samples (i.e., Psychology students, university students, American Democrats), and issues of moralization (i.e., sexism, climate change, and cultural appropriation), we found that ingroup value violations committed by immoral (vs moral) outgroups indeed triggered somewhat greater attitude moralization (and desire for punishment); and these effects were explained by

increased other-condemning emotions (i.e., anger, outrage, disgust, and contempt). Particularly, ingroup members experienced and construed the violation by the immoral (vs moral) outgroup as more threatening, which induced feelings of other-condemning emotions that, in turn, triggered attitude moralization (and desire for punishment).

These Chapter 2 findings imply that group members can moralize relevant issues as a way of protecting ingroup values and its moral perimeter against immoral outgroup attack. Indeed, when group members are confronted with such violations by immoral outgroups, they are also confronted with what “we” are not and what “we” do not stand for, which may motivate them to revisit what “we” are and stand for. Such threatening outgroup violations can thus disrupt ingroup’s moral order and intergroup harmony, which may demand a psychological moral response by activating one’s morals and moralizing issues important to the group. Therefore, moralization (in addition to the experience of other-condemning emotions and desire for punishment) may be one potential psychological protective strategy to deal with ingroup value violations by immoral outgroups.

Importantly, these findings may suggest that ingroup members require contextualized information to determine whether and how they will respond to outgroup violations of ingroup values (Van Zomeren et al., 2023). It seems that ingroup members consider other relevant information about the outgroup, such as how immoral they tend to be, in order to understand and interpret the importance or danger of such violations to the ingroup and respond to them psychologically, for example by moralizing relevant attitudes and punishing the violators (D’Amore et al., 2022; Pauls et al., 2022). This suggests that the moralization process is not just driven by an affective response, but is part of a more cognitively complex value-protective process.

### ***Acting On “Their” Violations: Undertaking Collective Action Against an Immoral Outgroup Seems to Matter***

Based on the idea that violations by outgroup members perceived as immoral may trigger a process of attitude moralization (Chapter 2), in Chapter 3 we further proposed that participating in collective action against an immoral outgroup might foster attitude moralization. Indeed, we suggested that collective action contexts provide two crucial ingredients that may facilitate moralization: The contextual availability of a strong social movement (or ingroup) fighting against a perceived immoral opponent (or outgroup, e.g., government). We aimed to investigate whether and how participating in collective action longitudinally facilitated attitude moralization at a *within-person level*. On the basis of our

intergroup perspective and on key insights from the collective action literature, we hypothesized that participation in collective action *moralizes* individuals' attitudes because it *politicizes* their identity, *enrages* them vis-a-vis the outgroup, and/or *empowers* them to achieve social change.

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 a between-person level, i.e., considering differences between individuals). This analytic approach was important because (1) attitude moralization (i.e., individual changes in moral conviction) is theorized and assumed to be a malleable intra-individual phenomenon that reflects changes in attitudes within an individual (Brandt & Morgan, 2022; Morgan & Wisneski, 2017; Wisneski et al., 2020), and (2) collective action participation had not been considered as an intra-individual phenomenon (i.e., how people individually change in their collective action participation) but was 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 in collective action and moralization as a *dynamic* process. After all, 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 (Agostini & Van Zomeren, 2021; Van Zomeren, 2013). As expected, we consistently found that participation in collective action against an immoral outgroup predicted changes in moral conviction over time — a moralization effect consistently explained by politicized identification and group-based anger toward the outgroup. Furthermore, we found that moral conviction longitudinally predicted participation in collective action over time — an effect consistently explained by politicized identification. These findings offer novel evidence that tense intergroup contexts of collective action may be a powerful conduit for a within-individual process of attitude moralization. Particularly, undertaking collective action may not only enhance feelings of anger toward those who have violated one's values and are responsible for a situation of unfairness and disadvantage, but also politicize one's identity to be aligned with the values we stand for and thus strengthen one's moral conviction. Indeed, when taken together with the Chapter 2 findings, this means that participating in collective action to defend one's values against an immoral outgroup can induce a moralization process as a way of protecting one's values against outgroup attack.

### ***Shocked by “Our” Violations: Ingroup Value Violations by Moral Ingroup Members Do Not Seem to Matter for Moralization***

In Chapter 4, we explored whether attitude moralization could also be triggered in response to ingroup value violations committed by *ingroup* members — that is, when the value violation comes from *within* the group. This is important if we want to understand whether our value protection approach is limited to ingroup value violations committed by *outgroups* or could be extended to any violators, such as ingroup violators. Similar to Chapter 2, we proposed that perceptions of the *moral character* of the ingroup violator would help group members interpret whether the violation of ingroup values demanded a protective response. In this context, moral character perceptions may offer and convey relevant information (e.g., the moral status as a representative member of group’s values and morals) to assess the impact of such violations on group members and image (Brambilla & Leach, 2014; Brambilla et al., 2011, 2012; Leach et al., 2015; Nadler & McDonnell, 2012; Schwartz et al., 2022; Wojciszke et al., 1998). Different from Chapter 2, however, we did not focus on whether perceptions of *immorality* of the ingroup violator would hold the same potential for triggering moralization (and value-protective responses) because such immoral members would likely be psychologically perceived as not representative of the ingroup or as derogated and excluded ingroup members.

Instead, we tested whether such a value-protective mechanism fostered attitude moralization when the threat came shockingly from within — that is, when the violation of ingroup values was perpetrated by a *moral* (vs less moral) ingroup member (i.e., a wolf in sheep’s clothing). Indeed, the experience of negative emotions (or moral shocks) is a key component to inducing moralization (see Skitka et al., 2018), and we would expect that the strongest emotional potential to activate a moralization process would come from when ingroup members discover the “wolf in sheep’s clothing” within the group. Thus, we argued that violations by highly moral members would be perceived as unexpected and emotionally shocking, and disrupting of group’s moral order (Ellemers, 2017; Wisneski & Skitka, 2017), motivating groups members to engage in psychological strategies to protect group moral image and values by moralizing issues relevant to the group.

In two experiments using different intragroup contexts (i.e., in a natural intragroup context selected by participants, and a political intragroup context), violations (in the context of immigration, and mass shootings in the U.S.), samples (i.e., Psychology students, and American Democrats), and issues of moralization (i.e., immigration, and gun control), 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 consequently, attitude moralization. Moreover, we exploratively measured psychological expressions of such value protection explanation, that is, moral outrage (i.e., other-condemning emotions, and desire for punishment), moral cleansing (i.e., motivation to restore moral balance; Tetlock et al., 2000), and perceptions of ingroup threat (Chapter 2).

Overall, we found that group members exposed to an ingroup value violation by a *moral* ingroup member (i.e., the wolf in sheep's clothing) indeed experienced emotional shock. However, this did not trigger attitude moralization, or any other psychological protective responses (i.e., moral outrage, moral cleansing, and perceptions of ingroup threat). Thus, an ingroup value violation by a moral ingroup was not a sufficient trigger to activate a moralization process and protective responses. However, we must proceed with caution when interpreting these findings in light of the literature, as they do not necessarily imply that ingroup value violations committed by ingroup members may hold less potential to trigger moralization and value-protective responses than when committed by outgroup members. It is still possible that, for example, a violation by a moral ingroup may induce moralization under more specific conditions. Nevertheless, when taken together with the findings of the other chapters, we believe that these findings lend some support for the particular importance of the *intergroup* context as a special conduit for attitude moralization.

### **Theoretical Implications**

This dissertation aimed to provide a theoretical basis for an intergroup approach to the study of attitude moralization by integrating different insights from different social psychological literatures. Drawing on theories on attitude moralization (Skitka, 2010; Skitka et al., 2021), intergroup relations (Ellemers, 2017; Ellemers & Van den Bos, 2012; Ellemers & Van der Toorn, 2015; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and value protection (Skitka, 2002; Tetlock, 2002; Tetlock et al., 2000), we provide an integrative perspective on how social groups and intergroup contexts may help trigger an attitude moralization process.

Such an integrated perspective on moralization is theoretically relevant for two reasons. First, it accounts for the influence of group and intergroup dynamics (i.e., how people perceive and relate to others within and between groups), and specific social contexts (i.e., social environments that people are embedded in, e.g., collective action contexts) in the moralization process. In this dissertation, we indeed situated the intra-individual process of attitude moralization in contexts embedded in relationships within and between groups, and argued that

groups may function as conduits for attitude moralization — that is, people may develop stronger moral convictions through the lens of their group memberships, values, and how they relate to other groups. More specifically, the moralization process is 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 (Ellemers, 2017; Van Zomeren et al., 2018). By examining moralization against this backdrop, we generate a more ecologically valid understanding of the moralization phenomenon as embedded in the context of social and situational factors.

Second, this intergroup perspective proposes that attitude moralization may serve a specific *value-protective function* in such contexts. Indeed, when group members are confronted with violations of their core values and morals by threatening outgroup members, they may feel internally compelled to do something about it and act to protect such values (Pauls et al., 2022; Skitka, 2002; Skitka et al., 2004; Tetlock et al., 2000; Van Zomeren et al., 2018, 2023). After all, such violations may potentially be indicative of a dangerous threat or attack on the group (Van Zomeren et al., 2018, 2023). We proposed that moralization can be a protective psychological response to deal with ingroup value violations by outgroup members. Particularly, we demonstrated that ingroup value violations by outgroup members are likely to trigger a process of attitude moralization as a way of protecting the ingroup against outgroup attack (1) when the outgroup is perceived to have an immoral character (Chapter 2), and (2) when ingroup members feel morally obligated to respond to such violations by a perceived immoral outgroup or opponent (e.g., government) through collective action participation (Chapter 3). The proposed intergroup value protection function implies that group members may moralize relevant attitudes to psychologically protect, promote, and maintain group’s morals and values when threatened. Thus, moralization may be approached as a psychological strategy to protect and reaffirm the moral perimeter of the ingroup (against outgroup attack) as well as one’s moral worldviews. Below, we discuss the theoretical implications of this intergroup perspective for the literatures on moralization, intergroup relations, and value protection.

### ***Implications for Research on Attitude Moralization***

This dissertation contributes to our theoretical understanding of how the process of attitude moralization may function in at least three ways. First, this intergroup perspective on moralization goes beyond previous moralization approaches that primarily focused on the

emotional and cognitive underpinnings of the attitude moralization process, such as integral emotions (Brandt et al., 2015; Clifford, 2019; Feinberg et al., 2019; Rozin & Singh, 1999; Wisneski & Skitka, 2017), harm appraisals (e.g., Wisneski & Skitka, 2017), valenced thoughts (e.g., Luttrell et al., 2019), and harms and benefits (e.g., Brandt et al., 2015). As discussed earlier, we focused on the social and group underpinnings of moralization as a psychological phenomenon grounded in relationships within and between groups. Therefore, groups may serve as both breeding grounds and conduits for attitude moralization — that is, people may moralize issues through the lens of their group memberships, values, and relationships with other groups. This idea resonates with some morality theories proposing that the development of individual morals and values is likely to be anchored and derived from groups and their defining values (Ellemers, 2017; Ellemers & Van der Toorn, 2015).

Second, this research (specifically, Chapters 2 and 3) supports the growing body of evidence showing that emotions are key drivers of attitude moralization (see Skitka et al., 2018). Indeed, research has clearly shown that the experience of negative moral emotions (e.g., disgust, anger, outrage, contempt) seems to motivate people to moralize attitudes (Brandt et al., 2015; Clifford, 2019; D’Amore et al., 2022; Feinberg et al., 2019; Rozin & Singh, 1999; Wisneski & Skitka, 2017). In Chapter 2, we did not specifically focus on the unique predictive power of each emotion on moralization but rather a broader emotional experience that encompasses negative moral emotions in response to condemning violations (i.e., other-condemning emotions; Haidt, 2003). We indeed found that the experience of other-condemning moral emotions (i.e., anger, outrage, contempt, and disgust) underlined the process of moralization. In Chapter 3, we focused on group-based anger toward the outgroup because anger seems to be a pivotal emotional reaction to outgroup wrongdoings that also motivates action, such as participation in collective action (e.g., Van Zomeren et al., 2004; 2012). Indeed, we found that group-based anger toward the outgroup predicted moralization of attitudes over time. Future theory and research can examine in more detail how such emotions are experienced in the context of intergroup relations.

Third, this research echoes previous research suggesting that an (emotionally) evocative stimulus or trigger event that evokes moral concerns (e.g., pictures of aborted fetuses, videos of farm animals suffering, moral frames or messages) has the potential to induce a moralization process (e.g., Clifford, 2019; Kodapanakkal et al., 2022; Rhee et al., 2019; Wisneski & Skitka, 2017). In this dissertation, we explored the potential of ingroup value violations as trigger events for attitude moralization. In the context of intergroup relations, however, such an

evocative stimulus needs to be contextualized so that group members can evaluate whether such stimulus signals a need for a moral response, such as moralization of relevant attitudes. Indeed, not all ingroup value violations seem to have the potential to induce a moralization process (e.g., when committed by moral outgroup members, Chapter 2, or ingroup members, Chapter 4), and individuals may require additional information to interpret an event as sufficiently and morally triggering for moralization (e.g., the immoral character of the outgroup violator of ingroup values, Chapter 2). This is not entirely surprising because individuals may also engage in a variety of other psychological strategies when confronted with events that violate one's core morals and values, such as distancing themselves from the transgressions of others to elevate their moral self-views (e.g., Barkan et al., 2012). Therefore, there seems to be important boundary conditions to which ingroup value violations may serve as trigger events for attitude moralization that future research should seek to identify.

### ***Implications for Research on Groups and Intergroup Relations***

This dissertation also offers contributions to the intergroup relations literature in at least two ways. First, even though there is substantial research on how people develop a sense of morality, that is, moral reasoning (e.g., moral values, moral beliefs, moral conviction), moral behaviors (e.g., moral courage, moral hypocrisy, punishment), moral judgments (e.g., moral character, moral inferences), moral self-views (e.g., moral identity, moral affirmation), and moral emotions (e.g., moral anger, disgust, contempt, outrage; see Ellemers 2017; Ellemers, & Van der Toorn 2015; Ellemers et al., 2019), research has mainly focused on each phenomenon individually and not integrated them as different nuances or aspects of human morality that are related, especially in intergroup contexts (see Ellemers, 2017; Ellemers et al., 2019, for discussions). As such, there are few systematic and integrative approaches on how groups and intergroup contexts may influence the development of individual notions of right and wrong, such as moral conviction (Ellemers, 2017; Ellemers & Van den Bos, 2012; Ellemers & Van der Toorn, 2015). The call for such approaches is important because, after all, individuals' sense of morality ultimately serves to facilitate and maintain social order (Ellemers & Van der Toorn, 2015), social relations (Rai & Fiske, 2011), intergroup relations (Tomasello & Vaish, 2013), social communities (Tooby & Cosmides, 2010), and social life (Haidt & Kesebir, 2010). Our intergroup perspective on attitude moralization aims to bring together different layers of the psychology of human morality — particularly, we focus on how individuals as members of groups and embedded in intergroup contexts may develop personal moral convictions through

the lens of ingroup and outgroup-defining values, characteristics, and “their” transgressive behaviors (e.g., Ellemers, 2017).

Second, this research also extends our understanding of how moralization relates to participation in collective action and help sustain social movements. A recent meta-analysis showed that moral conviction is a strong predictor of collective action participation (Agostini & Van Zomeren, 2021). That is, when people are confronted with a situation of injustice or violation of one’s values and morals by an outgroup (such as government), they are likely to undertake in collective action on behalf of those values and morals to improve the situation of disadvantage (Agostini & Van Zomeren, 2021; Pauls et al., 2022; Van Zomeren et al., 2018). Chapter 3 intriguingly suggests that participating in collective action can reinforce people’s sense of “who we are” (i.e., group identity), feelings toward the outgroup (i.e., anger) and “what we stand for” (i.e., moral conviction). These findings have important implications for our understanding of how and why people stay in social movements and how such movements may get sustained over time. After all, once people take on a social identity (e.g., feminist), they may endorse in values and morals that are aligned with such identity (e.g., oppose gender inequality and sexism because it’s wrong) and may need to engage in actions to sustain and validate such identity (e.g., join a #MeToo protest).

Importantly, research suggests that acting on one’s convictions and being coherent with what one believes (e.g., through engagement in social activism) may ultimately be ingredients to give people a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives (e.g., Heintzelman et al., 2013; Igou et al., 2021; King et al., 2016). Moreover, research has shown that feelings of hate toward collective entities (e.g., institutions, groups) may also foster a sense of meaning in life (which derives from states of significant purpose and coherence; Elnakouri et al., 2022). Together, this may help understand why people remain psychologically engaged in social movements, and even explain why people stay members of, for example, radical and extreme groups — they have created a social identity with clear values and morals that give them a sense of belonging, meaning, and purpose within those groups and movements (e.g., Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Gómez et al., 2021; Lambert et al., 2013; Williams, 2007). This exactly why moral convictions can be a binding and dividing force for society — as they can help people stay connected within the group and create a sense of belonging and “us”, but also accentuate perceptions of division between “us” versus “them” (see Chapter 1).

### ***Implications for Research on Value Protection***

Finally, this dissertation goes beyond theory and research on value protection by extending the social psychology of value-protective responses to intergroup contexts (Skitka, 2022; Tetlock et al., 2000). Indeed, value protection models postulate that when people are confronted with violations of their core values, they feel internally compelled to act to psychologically protect such values by, for example, punishing the violator, expressing moral emotions (e.g., anger and outrage), repairing the damage of the violation, among others (Skitka, 2002; Skitka et al., 2004; Tetlock et al., 2000).

We offer at least two important additions to the value protection literature. First, such models have not considered whether the group membership of the violator could be a critical determinant of how such violations are experienced. Therefore, we propose that violations of *ingroup* values committed by *outgroups* could be catalysts for value protection responses and attitude moralization. We thus offer a more specific analysis of value protection responses in intergroup contexts. Second, we suggest that moralization can be one additional protective psychological response to deal with ingroup value violations by (immoral) outgroup members (see also Pauls et al., 2022). This means attitude moralization can be a psychological strategy to protect oneself and one's groups against (outgroup) attacks on their moral worldviews. Future research and theorizing should develop such an intergroup perspective on value protection by integrating these different psychological value-protective responses into one theoretical model (see Van Zomeren et al., 2023).

### **Practical Implications**

This dissertation also has at least two important practical implications that deserve attention. First, even though moralization may be a potential positive motivational force for social change as moral convictions predict voting, volunteering, normative collective action (see Skitka, 2010; Skitka et al., 2021), it may also have a “dark side” that should not be overlooked (Skitka & Mullen, 2002b). Indeed, moralization may in a way exacerbate conflicts between groups, which may lead to harmful consequences. As discussed in Chapter 1, moralization can be both a binding and a dividing force in society — that is moral convictions may have the power to bind people and groups who share similar convictions together, but also increase the gaps between groups whose convictions differ from one's group. In contexts of intergroup conflicts, it is possible that the more we accentuate perceptions of “us” versus “them”, the more we tend to perceive “them” as an enemy. After all, they represent what “we

do not stand for” which may potentially compromise constructive dialogue and conflict resolution among groups. Importantly, moral convictions may tunnel one’s perception of social reality in order to be aligned with such convictions no matter the cost. For instance, moral convictions are associated with a variety of hostile attitudes and behaviors endorsed in the name of such convictions, including prejudice and hostility toward outgroups, support for extremism, acceptance of lying and violence, increased intolerance and distancing from those with dissimilar opinions, among others (see Skitka, 2010; Skitka et al., 2021). Therefore, although moralization can potentially lead people to act for the greater good, it can also lead them to inflict more destructive than constructive outcomes on and for individuals, groups, and society.

Second, our findings may help understand why people do *not* moralize issues or take action in response to societal events that are seemingly morally and emotionally shocking and disturbing to the public. Indeed, people are often exposed to violations of their values in their daily lives, such as through the news on television and social media platforms (e.g., the Russian invasion of Ukraine; George Floyd death; Charlie Hebdo attack), which may evoke some emotional reaction but do not necessarily motivate people to act on that (e.g., through moralization, collective action). This dissertation suggests that those who experience such events as profoundly threatening to their own and group’s morals and values are the ones that are more likely to engage in such protective responses (e.g., undertaking collective action, volunteering; Kende et al., 2017). This implies that seemingly shocking societal events are only “triggering” when highly relevant to the values and morals of perceivers in the social context they are embedded within. This dissertation suggests that additional contextual information (i.e., immoral character of the outgroup) may help interpret such events as relevant and threatening, but there are of course other factors that can contribute to it that future research should seek to identify. However, we note the importance of careful ethical considerations in portraying information or events with the intention of eliciting such protective responses in target groups. In fact, such a strategy should be discouraged when it is considered irresponsible, given that moralization can also lead to destructive turmoil rather than constructive action (e.g., Mooijman et al., 2018). Instead, social media and news platforms should be aware of the psychology behind moralization and thus about how the content of news is communicated to prevent intergroup hostility and polarization.

## Limitations and Future Directions

Our research and approach to attitude moralization has limitations that are important to reflect on. In this dissertation, we aimed to provide an intergroup perspective on the study of attitude moralization and suggest that moralization can be part of an intergroup value protection response. However, we acknowledge that this work does not fully and thoroughly capture the extension of this phenomenon of how attitude moralization can be part of an intergroup value protection response, and only scratches the surface of it (e.g., Van Zomeren et al., 2023). This dissertation serves as a starting point for a systematic exploration of the conditions under which (or intergroup contexts within which) attitude moralization may emerge. We therefore outline in this section key limitations and directions for future research that will improve our understanding of how attitude moralization may develop in contexts of intergroup relations.

First, one potential limitation is that we cannot clearly disentangle whether moralization is indeed driven by group concerns or individual concerns. We did not study whether moralization and such value-protective responses may emerge even when group memberships (i.e., ingroups vs outgroup) are not necessarily socially delineated, which may also question whether the outgroup violation is in fact experienced at a personal or group level. We believe that it is a combination of both, as attitude moralization is still an intra-individual process (e.g., Brandt & Morgan, 2022; Morgan & Wisneski, 2017; Wisneski et al., 2020). Indeed, research supports the idea that the distinction between “what I stand for” and “what we stand for” becomes blurred when moralizing due to for example an overlap between personal and group identity (e.g., Turner-Zwinkels et al., 2015, 2017). Future research could more specifically test different individual and group-based motivations and explanations for triggering moralization and value-protective responses (e.g., to protect one’s morals and moral self-view against attack vs protect group moral perimeter against outgroup attack).

A second limitation is that we did not yet consider alternative explanations for how and why moralization can be part of a value protection response in contexts of intergroup relations. Our findings do not imply that moralization can be part of a psychological value-protective response *only* in contexts where ingroup members are confronted with ingroup value violations by immoral outgroups. In fact, recent research has shown that in a more situated polarized context of Zwarte Piet in the Netherlands, exposure to a conflict-prone group predicted greater attitude moralization about the issue of Zwarte Piet (and desire for punishment), and this was explained by negative moral emotions (i.e., anger, contempt, and disgust; D’Amore et al., 2022). These findings suggest that group members may feel motivated to moralize relevant



attitudes and engage in protective responses against outgroups that express hostility and may represent danger to the ingroup. Future research should identify other outgroup violator's characteristics (e.g., power or status, Leach et al., 2015; propensity for violence) and/or situational characteristics (e.g., perceptions of intractable intergroup conflict, see Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2013; perceptions of polarization, D'Amore et al., 2023; perceptions of interdependence, see Molho & Balliet, 2020) that can make group members feel the need to engage in value-protective responses.

Third, a limitation of this dissertation is that it provides little evidence for the precise anatomy of the psychological value protection process within intergroup contexts. Based on previous research (Brandt et al., 2015; Feinberg et al., 2019; Skitka et al., 2018, 2021; Tetlock et al., 2000; Wisneski & Skitka, 2017), we indeed consider that emotions are a pivotal mechanism to drive moralization as part of a value protection response against outgroup attack (Chapters 2 and 3). Moreover, we consider that threat appraisal, desire to punish the violator (Chapter 2), politicized identification, and participation in collection action (Chapter 3) could be indicators of attempts to protect the group, its values and morals. However, future research should specify how these psychological responses relate to one another and possibly interact to provide a better picture of how and when an intergroup value protection process unfolds (e.g., see Van Zomeren et al., 2023).

Furthermore, in this dissertation we focused on when, how, and why group members may moralize relevant attitudes upon exposure to violations of ingroup values in intergroup contexts. However, we believe that the idea that groups can function as conduits for moralization can be broadened to other group processes and intergroup dynamics. For example, group members may also engage in moralization in group contexts where they feel their social needs are threatened. In line with this idea, Leal (in prep) has found that people who were socially excluded from a group moralized group-related attitudes more strongly than those who were socially included, and this effect was stronger for socially excluded people who had a higher need to belong to the specific group (see also Pfundmair & Whetherell, 2019). These findings suggest that group members may be motivated to engage in attitude moralization to meet social and group needs and conform to values and morals that the group stands for. Future research should further investigate under what conditions moralization can be a psychological strategy to gain inclusion, and other contexts where groups can function as conduits for moralization.

Another interesting avenue for future research is to investigate how different cultural and intergroup contexts may shape the process of attitude moralization. For instance, it is possible that some cultural contexts, such as loose cultures (characterized by having few social norms, constraints of behavior, and high tolerance of deviant behavior, e.g., Brazil, Hungary, the Netherlands, Estonia, Ukraine; Gelfand et al., 2006, 2011), may include more ingredients to facilitate moralization of attitudes related to *personal* core values because people are typically more driven by internal motives (e.g., personal values, individual characteristics) in such cultures. On the other hand, in tight cultures (characterized by strong social norms, low tolerance of deviant behavior, and high historical threat, e.g., India, Malaysia, Pakistan, Singapore, Japan, South Korea; Gelfand et al., 2006, 2011), people are more driven by social norms and sanctions and may be less likely to moralize issues they find personally relevant but more likely to moralize attitudes related to *social norms* that are relevant to social and group functioning (e.g., Elster & Gelfand, 2021; Gelfand et al., 2011). Together, this means that moralization might be a process that gets activated to promote and/or protect individual morals in relation to their specific social and cultural environments.

There are also other contextual nuances that may be worth exploring in future research. For instance, contexts of intractable intergroup conflict, broadly characterized by ongoing and destructive conflict resistant to conflict resolution between groups, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Bar-Tal, 1998, 2007), may also contain unique ingredients that foster moralization. Indeed, groups often experience such conflict in moral terms (Coleman et al., 2007; Reifen et al., 2014), and therefore, these contexts can be facilitative of a moralization process. People who live in such intractable intergroup conflict contexts may often (1) be exposed to violence and (2) live in a state of imminent threat. Some research suggests that people in such environments may feel the need to reduce uncertainty by psychologically trying to create a coherent and comprehensible environment and worldview, as this is a way of giving meaning to traumatic experiences and events (Bar-Tal, 2013; Canetti et al., 2017; Davis et al., 1998). Therefore, such contexts may prompt people to get in touch with their values and morals on a more regular basis — thus facilitating moralization of personally relevant attitudes to protect who they are and what they stand for in relation to the opposing outgroup. Future research should investigate whether and the conditions under which people who live in *intractable* intergroup contexts or strongly experience such conflict may be more likely to hold strong moral conviction and moralize than those who live in contexts of mild intergroup conflict (or no conflict).

## **Conclusion**

Attitude moralization is an important phenomenon with multiple implications for individuals, groups, and society. Moralization is not likely to occur in a social vacuum but to be influenced by social, relational, group, political, and societal factors. In this dissertation, we aimed to provide an intergroup perspective on the study of attitude moralization and suggest that moralization can be part of an intergroup value protection response. We specifically propose that groups can function as conduits for moralization, as they embody values that people seek to protect. Thus, moralization can potentially be a value protection response against external attack by outgroup members that violate ingroup values. Particularly, we found 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 act on such violations by an immoral outgroup (i.e., by engaging in collective action). However, moralization was not triggered when such violation came — shockingly — from within the group. This line of research paves the road toward a broader understanding of moralization by integrating the potential role of the intergroup context in driving moralization. Future research should further develop this perspective and investigate the conditions under which groups can function as conduits for moralization.



