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Moral Convictions in Religious Groups:
How Moral Convictions and Social Embeddedness
Relate to Ingroup and Outgroup Helping

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Abstract

Moral convictions (i.e., absolute beliefs about right and wrong) may be a powerful motivational force to explain helping behavior that transcends the boundaries of one's social group. In this research, we sought to answer when moral convictions relate to helping behavior among religious groups. We investigated the relationships between moral conviction, and ingroup- and outgroup-oriented helping intentions, and the moderating role of social embeddedness in religious groups in these relationships. We conducted a correlational study ($N = 293$) among Christians in the U.S. We found that (1) moral convictions were associated with ingroup- and outgroup-oriented helping, (2) social embeddedness in religious groups was only associated with ingroup helping and not with outgroup helping, and (3) the relationship between moral convictions and outgroup-oriented helping was stronger for people who were highly embedded in religious groups. Contrary to our expectations we did not find that the relationship between moral convictions and ingroup-oriented helping was stronger for people who were highly embedded in religious groups. Our findings support the ideas that moral convictions motivate helping behavior across group boundaries, and that social embeddedness in religious groups may enhance this relationship when outgroups are the target of help.

Keywords: Moral Conviction, Social Embeddedness, Religious Groups, Ingroup Helping, Outgroup Helping

**Moral Convictions in Religious Groups:
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There is some initial evidence that moral convictions (i.e., attitudes that are rooted in universal and fundamental beliefs about right and wrong; Skitka et al., 2005) may lead to helping behavior (Kende et al., 2017). Yet, it remains unclear when and how moral convictions are related to helping behavior in group contexts. In theory, helping behavior that is motivated by moral convictions would transcend one's social group, because these convictions are experienced as universal truths that are applicable to any context (Skitka et al., 2005; Morgan & Skitka, 2020). In the present research, we want to investigate how moral convictions may relate to helping behavior for people in religious groups. While it may seem contradictory at face value, research on helping behavior indicates that people in religious groups tend to favor helping their ingroup as compared to helping outgroups (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2011; Galen, 2012, Galen et al., 2015). That is, social embeddedness (i.e., being socially integrated and embedded in a social network/community through friends, family and group membership; Stroope, 2012; Klandermans et al., 2008) in religious groups may only predict ingroup-oriented helping behavior.

However, we propose that social embeddedness in religious groups may still act as a moderator in the relationship between moral convictions and helping behavior. More specifically, social embeddedness in religious groups may strengthen the motivating potential of moral convictions for in- and outgroup oriented helping behavior, because it provides people with a morally concerned community, which could compel them to act on their moral convictions (Graham & Haidt, 2010; Mooijman et al., 2018). This strengthened motivational potential of moral convictions may lead to both in- and outgroup-oriented helping because of the universal nature of moral conviction that transcends group boundaries (Skitka et al.,

2005). In order to gain understanding of these relationships between moral convictions and helping behavior in group contexts, we sought to answer the following research question: When do moral convictions relate to in- and outgroup-oriented helping among religious groups? We investigated whether moral conviction relate to in- and outgroup-oriented helping, and how social embeddedness in religious groups affects these relationships.

Moral Convictions

As stated above, moral convictions can be defined as attitudes that are rooted in universal and fundamental beliefs about right and wrong, and are expressions of one's core values (Skitka et al., 2005). That is, whether someone perceives that a specific attitude (e.g., about an issue, such as humanitarian aid) stems from their moral conviction depends on a meta-perception of the extent to which that attitude is based on evaluations of morality (Skitka et al., 2005; Ryan 2014). Following the domain theory of attitudes (Skitka et al., 2014), it is important to distinguish moral convictions from other strong but non-moral attitudes.

This theory divides attitudes in the domains of moral conviction, preference and convention. People's subjective experience of the domain of moral conviction is different from their subjective experience of preferences and conventions. First, attitudes in the domain of preference reflect people's personal taste. Preferences are perceived as subjective and are tolerant to others with different taste. Second, attitudes in the domain of convention are group dependent and reflect ingroup norms and beliefs. Conventions are often dictated by authority and help people to perceive what is right and wrong within their group (e.g., rules of conduct within a religion). Finally, attitudes in the domain of moral conviction are perceived and experienced as more fundamental, absolute facts about the world, objective and universally true (Skitka et al., 2005; Skitka et al., 2014).

Moral convictions have unique characteristics. Research indicates that moral convictions are comparatively authority independent (Skitka et al., 2009). That is, people perceive authority as less legitimate when their moral convictions are in conflict with authority decisions. And, research suggests that moral convictions are relatively immune to majority influence or peer pressure (Aramovich et al., 2012). Moreover, people tend to distance themselves from others who do not share their moral convictions (Skitka et al., 2005). Furthermore, morally convicted attitudes elicit self-relevant emotions such as pride and guilt (Skitka et al., 2017), and emotional reactions to others (Ryan, 2014). Another important aspect of morally convicted attitudes is the obligatory nature of such attitudes; people feel that they must act on their moral conviction (Kouchaki et al., 2018).

Because of the motivational nature of moral convictions to act, they have great potential to foster behavior towards social change on societal level. For example, people are more likely to vote or to engage in activism when issues are connected to their moral conviction (e.g., Skitka & Bauman, 2008; Morgan et al., 2010). Furthermore, moral convictions predict collective action on behalf of one's convictions through a relevant social identity (Van Zomeren et al., 2012). That is, when people perceive their moral convictions to be in line with their social group identity, these convictions may foster action that is geared towards improving the status of that group. Thus, moral convictions can lead to societal-level consequences when people act collectively for the benefit of their own or another social group.

Moral Convictions and Helping Behavior in Group Contexts

In the current research, we investigate when moral convictions relate to helping behavior in an intra- and intergroup context. As mentioned above, research on moral conviction has investigated how moral conviction may predict different forms of social activist behavior aimed at achieving social change, such as collective action (Van Zomeren et

al., 2012) and voting (Skitka & Bauman, 2008). Yet, previous research has not focused much on forms of prosociality. Kende and colleagues (2017) found that moral convictions were related to helping refugees in the field (humanitarian aid) in the context of the refugee crisis in Hungary, which provides the first evidence for how moral conviction may relate to helping behavior.

These findings are in line with the idea that moral convictions are experienced as universal truths that are applicable to any context (Skitka et al., 2005) and hold a motivating potential to engage in action that extends to outgroups (i.e., refugees; Kende et al., 2017) on behalf of such convictions. This implies that the motivating power of moral convictions for action should in theory not be restricted by group boundaries. Thus, we propose that moral conviction is related to helping behavior regardless of the group membership of the recipient (i.e., ingroup or outgroup).

Social Embeddedness in Religious Groups and Helping Behavior

Still, helping behavior may be affected by group-level processes. In this research, we do not only focus on moral conviction and in- and outgroup helping behavior but also on how these relationships may be affected by social embeddedness in religious groups. Social embeddedness is defined as being socially integrated and embedded in a social network/community through friends, family and group membership (Stroope, 2012; Klandermans et al., 2008). We focus specifically on social embeddedness in religious groups because participation in religious groups provides people with a broad moral frame of reference (Geyer & Baumeister, 2005). Illustrating this, Graham and Haidt (2010) argue that religion binds people into moral communities and that religion is intertwined with five moral foundations that include the virtues of care, fairness, ingroup loyalty, respect and purity. Thus, our focus on social embeddedness in religious groups allows us to study the

relationship between moral convictions and helping behavior in a social context that is—to a great extent—built around shared ideas about values and morality (Graham and Haidt, 2010).

Before we look at how the relationship between moral conviction and helping may be affected by social embeddedness, it is important to look at the direct relationship between social embeddedness in religious groups and ingroup helping behavior. Social embeddedness in relevant networks has a mobilizing potential. Klandermans and colleagues (2008) showed that immigrants who were more socially embedded in civil society organizations (e.g., cultural organization, political party, religious organization), were more likely to engage in collective action on behalf of their ingroup. In religious context, people who have more friends in their congregation and who are thus more socially embedded in their religious group, are more likely to donate money and volunteer in their congregation (i.e., ingroup) (Finke et al., 2006; Scheitle & Adamczyk, 2009). Thus, social embeddedness in religious groups may motivate people to take action, but this action is often ingroup-oriented.

Similarly, we suggest that the relationship between social embeddedness in religious groups and helping behavior is different for in- and outgroup oriented helping behavior. Research suggests that people in religious groups value benevolence (i.e., enhancing the welfare of close contacts) but not universalism (i.e., enhancing the welfare of others outside one's social group) because religion binds its group members in exclusivist, solidary groups, which reduces concern for the outgroup (Saroglou et al., 2004; Schwartz & Huismans, 1995). Indeed, people who are socially embedded in religious groups seem to display more ingroup-oriented helping behavior as compared to outgroup-oriented helping behavior (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2011; Galen, 2012, Galen et al., 2015). Moreover, one study even found that having friends with the same religious views had a negative effect on outgroup-oriented helping (Reitsma et al., 2006). Thus, social embeddedness in religious groups may only be directly related to ingroup-oriented helping and not to outgroup-oriented helping behavior.

The Moderating Role of Social Embeddedness

Yet, in this research we propose that social embeddedness in religious groups may moderate the relationship between moral conviction and helping behavior towards the ingroup and the outgroup. That is, social embeddedness may strengthen the relationship between moral conviction and both ingroup- and outgroup-oriented helping behavior in two ways, which we discuss below. This strengthened motivating potential of moral convictions may then translate into both ingroup-oriented helping and outgroup-oriented helping, because of the universal nature of moral conviction—which should not be restricted by group boundaries (Skitka et al., 2005).

First, social embeddedness in religious groups may affect what people perceive as morally relevant (e.g., selflessness and helping others), and could offer a tightly knit community in which moral behavior is mutually monitored (Graham & Haidt, 2010; and see Tetlock, 2002). Illustrating this, Mooijman and colleagues (2018) have shown that the belief that the majority of people shares one's moral views (i.e., perceived moral convergence), motivates people to act on their moral convictions. In their research, endorsement for violent protests was predicted by moral conviction, but only when perceived moral convergence was high. They argue that encounters with attitudinally similar others may reinforce moral conviction, which increases the likelihood that people act on their moral conviction in order to achieve desired moral ends. Thus, when one's moral conviction motivates them to help others from their own social group and their outgroup, this motivation may be strengthened by the perception that others in their religious group share their moral values.

Second, individuals who do not hold moral convictions that are in line with the group's values may be confronted with negative emotions (e.g., anger, outrage) and social distance by others in that group (Zaal et al., 2017). This illustrates how socially embedded people may project their moral convictions onto others around them. Then, people's sense of

obligation to act on their own moral conviction (Kouchaki et al., 2018) may be reinforced by the reaction of others in their group. Thus, in order to prevent a confrontation with other's negative emotions and social distancing, socially embedded people may be more inclined to act on their moral conviction when those are in line with the group's moral values.

Thus, we propose that social embeddedness in religious groups may strengthen the motivating potential of moral convictions for in- and outgroup-oriented helping behavior as explained by the social mechanisms of (1) participation in a morally concerned group (Graham & Haidt, 2010) and perceived moral convergence (Mooijman et al., 2018), and (2) projected moral obligation (Zaal et al., 2011).

The Present Research

We conducted a study to answer the following research question: When do moral convictions relate to ingroup- and outgroup-oriented helping among religious groups? We investigated whether moral conviction relate to in- and outgroup-oriented helping, and whether social embeddedness moderates these relationships. We recruited a sample of religious people (i.e., Christians) in the US. For the relationships between moral convictions and helping behavior, we hypothesized that moral conviction is associated with both ingroup helping (*hypothesis 1A*), and outgroup helping (*hypothesis 1B*). Secondly, for the relationships between social embeddedness and helping behavior, we hypothesized that social embeddedness in religious groups is associated with ingroup helping (*hypothesis 2A*), and that social embeddedness is not associated with outgroup helping (*hypothesis 2B*). Finally, we expected that social embeddedness in religious groups has a moderating role in the relationship between moral convictions and in- and outgroup oriented helping intentions. Thus, we hypothesized that the relationship between moral convictions and ingroup helping is stronger when people are socially embedded in religious groups (*hypothesis 3A*), and, that

the relationship between moral convictions and outgroup helping is also stronger when people are socially embedded in religious groups (*hypothesis 3B*).

Method

We used a correlational study design to test our hypotheses with ingroup-oriented helping intentions and outgroup-oriented helping intentions as dependent variables, moral conviction as independent variable, and social embeddedness in religious groups (i.e., religious embeddedness) as moderator variable. We set up the study in the context of two ongoing warfare conflicts and contexts in the Middle East (e.g., Syria) and Ukraine. We selected these two contexts because we assumed that participants were sufficiently aware of them.

Participants

We recruited 293 American individuals who participated in the study in exchange for a compensation of \$0,75. We conducted an online study via Academic Prolific and sampled people who reside in the U.S., and are affiliated with Christianity. Six participants were excluded because they did not indicate that they were Christian ($n = 5$), or answered every question with the maximum score ($n = 1$). The final sample consisted of 287 American Christians (141 male, 145 female, 1 other, $M_{age} = 43.96$, $SD = 15.21$). Of the participants who said to be affiliated with Christianity, 39% of the participants reported to ‘Christian’ as their religious affiliation, 24% reported Catholic, 6% Baptist, 9% Protestant, and 22% reported various other religious affiliations (e.g., “non-denominational Christian”, “Pentecostal”). Regarding political affiliation, 39% of the participants reported to be part of the Democratic party, 42% reported Republican party, and 19% reported other political affiliations (e.g., “independent”). The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Behavioral and Social Sciences at the University of Groningen.

Procedure

Participants were recruited via Academic Prolific, through which they received a link to a survey on Qualtrics. After giving informed consent, participants were asked to fill out the questionnaire. In the first part of this questionnaire, participants filled out measures of attitudes (e.g., moral conviction) towards two societal issues, namely, *humanitarian aid for war victims* and *social inequality*. The target issue was humanitarian aid for war victims, and social inequality was used as a filler issue to conceal the study's focus on humanitarian aid.

In the second part of the survey, participants were introduced to two warfare contexts abroad: American military operations in the Middle East (e.g., Syria), and the Russian military invasion of Ukraine. Participants indicated their helping intentions towards American (i.e., ingroup) and Ukrainian (i.e., outgroup) victims of war and their families. We assumed that American Citizens would be aware of the contexts of both American and Ukrainian war victims.

In the final part of the survey, participants filled out a questionnaire that consisted of measures of political ideology (“*How would you describe your political ideology?*” from 1 [extremely left-wing], to 7 [extremely right-wing]; “*What political party do you identify with the most?*” [democratic/republican/other]), religious embeddedness, religious affiliation, and some socio-demographics. Participants also completed other exploratory measures that are not relevant for the hypotheses of this study (see Appendix). At the end of the survey the participants were thanked, debriefed, and paid for their participation.

Measures

Moral Conviction

We used three items to measure moral conviction (Skitka et al., 2014). Participants indicated how much their opinion on humanitarian aid for war victims were “a reflection of their core moral beliefs and convictions”, “connected to their beliefs about fundamental right

and wrong”, and “based on moral principle” ($M = 5.97$, $SD = 1.20$, $\alpha = .95$). Participants responded to these items on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much).

Helping Intentions toward Ingroup and Outgroup

To measure helping intentions, we created three items that assessed different forms of helping toward American victims of war (i.e., ingroup) and Ukrainian victims of war (i.e., outgroup). Participants indicated their willingness to “help organize an event to raise funds to support *American/Ukrainian* soldiers and their families”, “volunteer to support the families of *American/Ukrainian* soldiers in the U.S.”, and to “to donate money to support the *American/Ukrainian* soldiers and their families”. Participants reported their willingness to help from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much) (ingroup helping intentions: $M = 4.75$, $SD = 1.77$, $\alpha = .88$; outgroup helping intentions: $M = 4.42$, $SD = 1.91$, $\alpha = .90$).

Social Embeddedness in Religious Groups

To measure social embeddedness in religious groups (i.e., religious embeddedness), we combined six items from two scales that originally measured social embeddedness and church activities in religious groups (Stroope, 2012). The items included two statements about church attendance: “I often attend church services (apart from weddings and funerals)” and “I often attend social gatherings organized through a church”); and four statements regarding the participant’s social network: “Most of my close friends are Christian”, “Most of my family members are Christian”, “Few people in my social network are Christians” (reverse coded), and “Having social contacts with a shared religion is important to me”. Responses were measured from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). All items were averaged to make a composite score for religious embeddedness. The item “Few people in my social network are Christians” was the only reversed scored item and resulted in lower reliability of the scale for religious embeddedness ($\alpha = .77$) and was therefore removed, resulting in a reliability of $\alpha = .79$ ($M = 4.09$, $SD = 1.45$).

Results

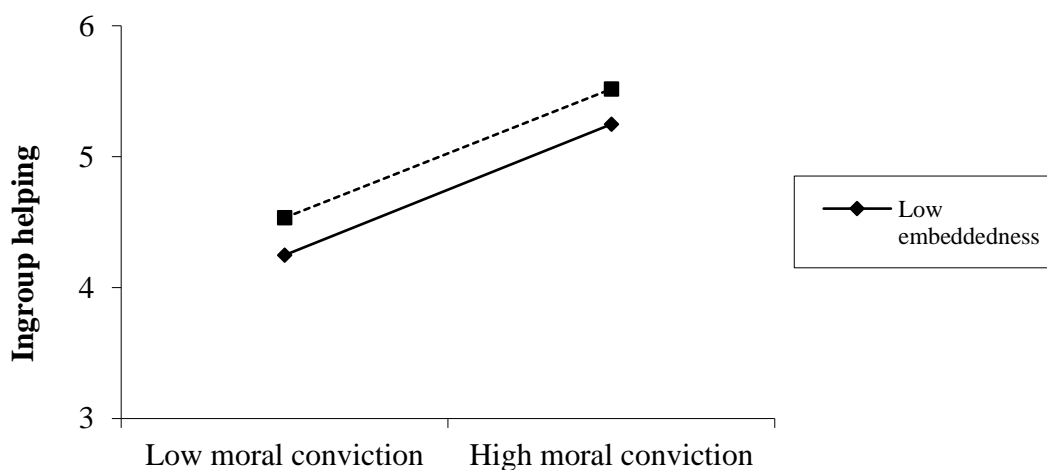
Hypotheses Testing: Ingroup Helping

Our hypotheses for the ingroup-oriented helping model were: moral conviction is associated with ingroup helping (1a), religious embeddedness is also associated with ingroup helping (2a), and, the relationship between moral convictions and ingroup helping is stronger for socially embedded individuals in religious groups (3a). Before running the model, we centered the variables moral conviction and religious embeddedness, and computed an interaction between them.

We ran a multiple linear regression analysis to test the hypotheses for this model. Overall, the regression model significantly predicted ingroup helping ($R^2 = 0.16$, $F(3, 283) = 17.48$, $p < .001$; see figure one). Moral conviction was positively and significantly associated with ingroup helping ($\beta = .42$, $SE = .08$, $t(283) = 4.93$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .08$), and religious embeddedness was significantly and positively associated with ingroup helping ($\beta = .28$, $SE = .07$, $t(283) = 4.08$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .06$). Therefore, hypothesis 1a and 2a were supported. However, the interaction effect was not statistically significant ($\beta = -.007$, $SE = .06$, $t(283) = -0.01$, $p = .90$, $R^2 = .00$). Thus, hypothesis 3a was not supported.

Figure 1

Ingroup helping intentions as a function of moral conviction and religious embeddedness



Hypotheses Testing: Outgroup Helping

For the outgroup-oriented model, our hypotheses were: moral conviction is associated with outgroup helping (1b), religious embeddedness is not associated with outgroup helping (2b), and, the relationship between moral convictions and outgroup helping is stronger for socially embedded individuals in religious groups (3b). We followed the same data analysis strategy used to test the ingroup helping model.

A multiple linear regression analysis showed that the overall model was significant in predicting outgroup helping ($R^2 = 0.27$, $F(3, 283) = 34.08$, $p < .001$; see figure 2). Moral conviction was positively and significantly associated with outgroup helping intentions ($\beta = .81$, $SE = .09$, $t(283) = 9.48$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .24$). Religious embeddedness was not significantly associated with outgroup helping intentions ($\beta = .11$, $SE = .07$, $t(283) = 1.64$, $p = .10$, $R^2 = .01$). Thus, hypotheses 1b and 2b were supported. Finally, the interaction between moral conviction and religious embeddedness ($\beta = .13$, $SE = .06$, $t(283) = 2.27$, $p = .02$, $R^2 = .02$) was significant. In order to decompose interaction effect, we conducted simple slopes analyses. For high religious embeddedness, the relationship between moral conviction and outgroup helping intentions was significant ($\beta = .99$, $SE = .13$, $t(283) = 7.55$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .17$), and stronger than for low religious embeddedness ($\beta = .62$, $SE = .10$, $t(283) = 6.17$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .12$).

Figure 2

Outgroup helping intentions as a function of moral conviction and religious embeddedness



Discussion

We investigated the relationship between moral convictions, social embeddedness in religious groups, and in- and outgroup-oriented helping to answer the question: When do moral conviction predict ingroup- and outgroup-oriented helping? We focused on a religious group (Christianity) and recruited a Christian sample to allow us to study the relationship between moral convictions and helping in a social context that is geared around shared moral frameworks and beliefs (cf., Graham & Haidt, 2010). We conducted a correlational study in which we measured people's moral conviction about humanitarian aid, social embeddedness in religious groups, and helping intentions towards the ingroup (i.e., American war victims) and the outgroup (i.e., Ukrainian war victims). First, supporting our hypotheses, we found that moral conviction was associated with helping intentions for both the ingroup (*hypotheses 1A*) and the outgroup (*hypothesis 1B*). Second, we found that social embeddedness in religious groups was associated with helping the ingroup (*hypothesis 2A*), but not with helping the outgroup (*hypothesis 2B*)—which was in line with our hypotheses. Third, we expected to find that social embeddedness in religious groups would moderate the relationships between moral convictions and helping intentions for both in- and outgroup. For ingroup-oriented helping (*hypothesis 3A*), we did not find support for this moderating role of

social embeddedness. However, we found that the relationship between moral convictions and outgroup-oriented helping intentions was stronger for people who were more socially embedded in religious groups (*hypothesis 3B*).

Theoretical Implications

Our findings have several implications for theory on moral convictions and helping behavior. First, the relationships we found between moral conviction and in- and outgroup helping intentions point to the motivating and universal potential of moral convictions (Skitka et al., 2005). Previous literature showed that moral convictions may motivate collective action (e.g., Van Zomeren et al., 2012) and volunteerism (Kende et al., 2017). Our findings imply that moral convictions carry a similar motivational force for helping behavior. Moreover, we found that this motivational force is not restricted by group boundaries as suggested by theory on moral convictions (Skitka et al., 2005). Thus, moral convictions may motivate people to help others, even when those in need are not part of the social ingroup of the helper.

This does not mean that social groups are not relevant for helping behavior. Previous literature on prosociality suggests that people whom are socially embedded in religious groups are motivated to make charitable donations to ingroup members, but not their outgroup (e.g., Galen et al., 2015). Furthermore, research suggests religion binds people in exclusivist groups that value benevolence (i.e., enhancing the welfare of close contacts) but not universalism (i.e., enhancing the welfare of others outside one's social group) (Saroglou et al., 2004; Schwartz & Huisman, 1995). Our findings replicate this in context of helping war victims, because social embeddedness was related to ingroup helping but not to outgroup helping intentions. This implies that social embeddedness in religious groups may be related to valuing benevolence but not universalism. Thus, social embeddedness in religious groups may be directly related to helping the ingroup, but not the outgroup. However, the finding

that social embeddedness in religious groups is directly related to ingroup helping and not outgroup helping does not imply that people who are socially embedded do not help the outgroup. Even when people are socially embedded in religious groups, their moral convictions may motivate them to help people in their outgroups.

We expected that social embeddedness would act as a moderator in the relationships between moral conviction and ingroup and outgroup helping. Previous literature points to the idea that social embeddedness in religious groups may strengthen these relationships because it provides a community in which (1) moral behavior is mutually monitored (Graham & Haidt, 2010; and see Tetlock, 2002) which may motivate people to act on shared moral values (Mooijman et al., 2018), and (2) people project the moral obligation that stems from their shared moral convictions on each other (Zaal et al., 2017). While moral convictions and social embeddedness were both related to helping behavior, our results did not indicate that the relationship between moral convictions and ingroup helping was stronger for people who are more socially embedded in religious groups.

However, our results still indicate that social embeddedness strengthens the relationship between moral conviction and outgroup helping. This is, to our current knowledge, a first step in empirical research into how social embeddedness may interact with moral conviction in context of helping behavior. These findings show that while moral convictions may be motivating in itself (Kende et al., 2017) and relatively immune to peer pressure (Aramovich et al., 2012), the intention to act on such moral conviction may still be affected by social embeddedness in morally relevant groups. That is, even if people's moral conviction may not be easily altered by peers, the motivation to act on these convictions may still be affected by peers in religious groups. Thus, social embeddedness in morally relevant groups may strengthen the potential of moral conviction to motivate helping people outside one's social group.

This moderating role of social embeddedness may be partly explained through moral convergence (i.e., the belief that the majority of people shares one's moral views; Mooijman et al., 2018). That is, the motivational potential of moral conviction is stronger when people perceive that others around them share the same moral conviction. Thus, people may be more inclined to act on their moral convictions and help people outside their social group when they believe that their fellow group members share these moral convictions.

Perceived moral convergence may also affect ingroup helping in contexts outside the scope of the current research. However, we did not find that the relationship between moral convictions and ingroup helping was stronger for socially embedded people. This may be explained through the context of this research. We operationalized ingroup helping as helping American war victims, which has been an ongoing issue for many years. The sense of moral obligation might be less salient for highly embedded people because people trust that others (e.g., the government, NGO's) are offering help to American soldiers. Then, being embedded in a religious group that values helping the ingroup may not motivate people to act on their moral conviction, but instead give people the reassurance that others are already working on solutions that are in line with their moral conviction.

The interplay between moral convictions, social embeddedness and in- and outgroup helping sheds light on the inherently social nature of moral convictions and the need to approach them as such. We assume that the religious nature of the sample in our study makes the effects of social embeddedness in groups with shared morality more visible. Still, we propose that the implications of this research may not be restricted to religious groups, but also extends to non-religious social groups with shared morality. Leach and colleagues (2015) argue that from a pragmatic perspective, every group, organization, society or family needs a certain degree of shared morality in order to function. That is, if morality were to be purely

individual, then people would be unable to infer what others consider to be moral, which would result in a lack of guidance for their own behavior in relation to others.

In that sense, every group is—to a certain degree—a morally concerned group with a degree of shared morality. When this shared group morality leads to the formation of an exclusivist group, this may lead to valuing benevolence and thus encourage ingroup helping (cf., Saroglou et al., 2004). At the same time, when shared morality aligns with relevant individual moral convictions (i.e., moral convergence; Mooijman et al., 2018), social embeddedness may strengthen the motivating potential of moral convictions to act on these moral convictions and help others outside one's social group.

Limitations and Future Directions

This research has some limitations. First, we measured self-reports of helping intentions and not actual helping behavior. Previous literature argues that such self-reports in religious samples may be susceptible to a self-enhancement bias because participants in religious samples may hold the stereotype that religious people are more helpful than nonreligious people (Galen, 2012). This may lead to an overestimation of self-reported helping intentions, meaning that the reported helping intentions may not directly translate into actual behavior. Still, we deem our findings meaningful since we found differences in the effects for ingroup and outgroup helping. Future research is needed in order to see if the effects we found still hold when helping behavior is measured instead of helping intentions.

Second, the sample was drawn from an American Christian population, which comes from a western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic (WEIRD) society (Henrich et al., 2010). Research outcomes from WEIRD societies are hard to compare and generalize to other regions in the world. Therefore, our findings and their implications are limited to WEIRD societies. Future research may replicate our findings in different cultures with different religions.

Another limitation of this study is that the context of the study is very specific. We focused on moral convictions and helping behavior in the context of war victims, which may limit the generalizability of the research findings. The context of war in our study also conveys another limitation. Our comparison between ingroup and outgroup-oriented helping may affect our outcomes because we compared two different war contexts (American interventions in the Middle East and the Russian invasion in Ukraine). In reality, these two war contexts and related helping behavior may be hard to compare. The war context in the Middle East consists of protracted conflicts in different countries, while the conflict in Ukraine is more localized and recent. This may affect how people relate to these different contexts and could thus affect people's helping intentions. However, we assume that the context of war was a good starting point for investigating moral convictions and helping behavior, because it may be a context of which most people are aware and which relates to people's moral convictions.

Future research could investigate whether our findings hold for different kinds of helping behavior than helping war victims. The effect of moral conviction on helping behavior may be partly determined by the context in which one would lend help, because the hedonic costs of acting on one's moral conviction may affect whether people engage in action or not (Tetlock, 2002). In order to test this, future research could measure the perceived (hedonic) cost of acting on one's moral convictions and see how this relates to helping behavior that is motivated by moral conviction.

Another direction for future research lies in the effect of perceived moral convergence (i.e., the belief that others in the social group share the same moral conviction; Mooijman et al., 2018) on the relationship between moral convictions, social embeddedness, and outgroup oriented helping behavior. Our findings indicate that the relationship between moral conviction and outgroup helping behavior is affected by social embeddedness in a morally

relevant group. While we did not measure perceived moral convergence, the moderator effect of social embeddedness may be partly explained by moral convergence. In an experimental research design, people's perception of moral convergence could be increased and decreased to a certain degree (e.g., with bogus statistics about moral convictions from a relevant social ingroup). Such research could study the relative contributions of moral conviction, perceived moral convergence, and social embeddedness in motivating helping behavior.

Conclusion

This research adds to the understanding of the under-researched yet important relationship between moral conviction and helping in group contexts. Our findings point to the motivating potential of moral convictions for helping behavior across group boundaries and stress the need for further social psychological approach to the relationship between moral convictions and helping behavior. In order to gain understanding of the relationship between moral conviction and helping behavior, we need to incorporate the specific group context (i.e., ingroup and outgroup helping) and the role of social embeddedness in morally relevant groups. Future research may continue to unveil how, why, and when moral convictions motivate helping behavior in group contexts.

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Appendix

Attitude

- *To what extent do you support or oppose humanitarian aid for war victims?*
 - 1- *Strongly oppose*
 - 2- *Moderately oppose*
 - 3- *Slightly oppose*
 - 4- *Uncertain*
 - 5- *Slightly support*
 - 6- *Moderately support*
 - 7- *Strongly support*

Moral Conviction

The following items were answered on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much):

- *How much is your opinion on humanitarian aid for war victims a reflection of your core moral beliefs and convictions?*
- *How much is your opinion on humanitarian aid for war victims connected to your beliefs about fundamental right and wrong?*
- *How much is your opinion on humanitarian aid for war victims based on moral principle?*

Religious Conviction

The following items were answered on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much):

- *How much is your opinion on humanitarian aid for war victims a reflection of your religious beliefs and convictions?*
- *How much is your opinion on humanitarian aid for war victims a religious stance?*

Attitude Strength

The following items were answered on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much):

- *How strongly do you feel about humanitarian aid for war victims?*
- *How important is humanitarian aid for war victims to you as a person?*

All items above (Attitude, Moral Conviction, Religious Conviction, Attitude Strength) were repeated for the filler issue of social inequality. In all items, ‘humanitarian aid’ was replaced with ‘social inequality’.

Ingroup Helping

The following items were answered on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much).

- *I would be willing to help organize an event to raise funds to support American soldiers and their families.*
- *I would be willing to volunteer to support the families of American soldiers in the U.S.*
- *I would be willing to donate money to support the American soldiers and their families.*
- *I would be willing to spread information regarding the situation of American war victims on social media.*
- *I would be willing to participate in a protest that demands more support for American war victims and their families.*
- *I would be willing to sign a petition for more resources for American war victims and their families.*

Outgroup helping

The following items were answered on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much).

- *I would be willing to help organize an event to raise funds to support Ukrainian soldiers and their families.*
- *I would be willing to volunteer to support the families of Ukrainian soldiers in the U.S.*
- *I would be willing to donate money to support the Ukrainian soldiers and their families.*

- *I would be willing to spread information regarding the situation of Ukrainian war victims on social media.*
- *I would be willing to participate in a protest that demands more support for Ukrainian war victims and their families.*
- *I would be willing to sign a petition for more resources for Ukrainian war victims and their families.*

Gender

- *Please indicate your gender:*
 - *Male*
 - *Female*
 - *Other*
 - *Prefer not to say*

Age

- *Please write your age, in years, below:*
 - *[Written text]*

Political Ideology

- *How would you describe your political ideology?*
 - *1 (extremely leftwing) to 7 (extremely right wing)*
- *What political party do you identify with the most?*
 - *Democratic*
 - *Republican*
 - *Other*
 - *[Written text]*

Political Identification

The following items were answered on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:

- *I identify with Liberals.*
- *I feel committed to Liberal ideology.*
- *I identify with Conservatives.*
- *I feel committed to Conservative ideology.*

Religious Affiliation

- *What is your religious affiliation?*
 - *[Written text]*

Christianity

- *Are you a Cristian?*
 - *Yes*
 - *No*
 - *Prefer not to say*

Religious Embeddedness

The following items were answered on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:

- *I often attend church services (apart from weddings and funerals).*
- *I often attend social gatherings organized through a church.*
- *Most of my close friends are Christian.*
- *Most of my family members are Christian.*
- *Few people in my social network are Christians. Having social contacts with a shared religion is important to me.*

Religious Strength

The following items were answered on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:

- *My religious faith is extremely important to me.*
- *My religious faith impacts many of my decisions.*
- *I look to faith for meaning and purpose in my life.*

Religious Identification

The following items were answered on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much).

- *I identify with Christians.*
- *I feel committed to the values of Christianity.*