

**The Moderating Role of Attachment Anxiety on the Effect of Social Exclusion on
Attitude Moralization**

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Abstract

In an online experimental study, we investigated whether being socially excluded leads to stronger attitude moralization of issues relevant to a group than being socially included, and if that effect is moderated by attachment anxiety. We did not expect a relationship between attitude moralization and attachment anxiety. We sampled 43 first-year psychology students that were randomly assigned to either social inclusion or exclusion condition, and measured attitude moralization of the issue of gender equality. We did not find support for our main and interaction hypotheses. We found a novel relationship between attitude moralization and attachment anxiety, which suggests that the higher the attachment anxiety, the higher the moralization of gender equality in general. However, the study was underpowered and future research should investigate these hypotheses with a larger and more diverse sample.

Theoretical implications are discussed.

Keywords: Moralization, Moral Conviction, Social Exclusion, Attachment Anxiety

The Moderating Role of Attachment Anxiety on the Effect of Social Exclusion on Attitude Moralization

Have you ever felt socially excluded by a group? Maybe you have or will at some point in your life. And did you ever think about how a moral position of yours became one? Interestingly, these two topics may be related. Social exclusion is hurtful and distressing, and can even activate neural regions associated with physical pain (Eisenberger et al., 2003). It is easy to imagine that being socially excluded may also evoke reactions. Socially excluded people with high need to belong might be more inclined to align their morals with morals they associate with the group to foster being included by the group again (Pfundmair & Wetherell, 2018). Is that the case for certain individuals more than for others? What about individuals who are highly afraid of being abandoned, are people who have high attachment anxiety more likely to change their moral conviction when facing social exclusion? This is an important topic because attitude moralization has large capability to modify a person's behavior and societal norms (e.g., Skitka & Bauman, 2008; Van Zomeren et al., 2018; Van Zomeren et al., 2012). Therefore, we ask these under-researched questions: Does social exclusion induce attitude moralization? As well as: Does attachment anxiety moderate the effect of social exclusion on attitude moralization? In this novel experimental study we investigate whether being socially excluded leads to stronger attitude moralization of issues relevant to a group than being socially included, and if that effect is moderated by attachment anxiety.

Moral Conviction and Attitude Moralization

The term *moral conviction* or attitude grounded in moral conviction refers to the view that an attitude reflects one's inner beliefs about right or wrong of fundamental matters (Skitka et al., 2005). Moral convictions are meta-perceptions that individuals develop about some of their attitudes that may differ in strength (Skitka et al., 2021). In other words, moral convictions are a special type of strong attitudes that are psychologically different from

conventions and strong preferences due to their degree rather than their kind. The extent to which people think of an issue as a moral one is variable within cultures, individuals and over time (Skitka et al., 2021). Individuals perceive their moral convictions as more objectively true than other strong non-moral attitudes and universally applicable in different situations (Skitka, 2010; Morgan & Skitka 2020). Although there is not always an ideal boundary, moral convictions are different from social conventions or personal preferences and even small children are able to differentiate between conventional, preferential, and moral reflections of right and wrong (Smetana & Braeges 1990).

The term *attitude moralization* refers to the process where attitudes gain moral relevance or become more strongly moralized (Rozin et al., 1997; Rozin & Singh, 1999;). For instance that is the case when it becomes a stronger *moral conviction* (Brandt et al, 2015; Wisneski & Skitka, 2017). Attitude moralization is a meaningful aspect of individuals and society (Rozin, 1999). Research reveals that emotions can be integral predictors of changes in moral conviction (e.g. Brandt et al, 2015; Clifford, 2019; Feinberg et al. 2019; Wisneski & Skitka, 2017). Yet, we do not know much about what is motivating individuals to form moral convictions (Skitka et al., 2018; see also Brandt et al., 2015; Feinberg et al., 2019; Rozin & Singh, 1999; Wisneski & Skitka, 2017).

This leads to an important and underinvestigated question: In what way can groups influence attitude moralization? Recent research has found and suggested that an intergroup context can act as a channel to promote the psychological process of attitude moralization (Leal et al., 2021b). For example, participating in collective movement can trigger attitude moralization over time (Leal et al., 2021a). We echo this work to understand how group processes can form the individual process of attitude moralization. In particular, we focus on whether and when social exclusion from a group can lead to moralization.

Social Exclusion and Attitude Moralization

Social exclusion is the process of being rejected from engaging in social relationships, groups or society (Williams, 2007). Ostracism and social rejection are similar processes that are sometimes conceptually used interchangeably. Researchers found that social exclusion may change an individual's behavior in a way of conforming with group members or mimicking them unconsciously (DeWall, 2010; Lakin & Chartrand, 2005; Williams et al., 2000). When people are socially excluded different basic psychological needs are being threatened, such as need to belong, control, self-esteem, and a meaningful existence (Williams et al., 2000; Zadro et al., 2004). To cope with this hurtful experience of social exclusion individuals work hard on creating social connections again (Maner et al., 2007). One possible way of establishing a notion of a social tie is through shared beliefs with others (Hardin & Higgins, 1996; Higgins & Pittman, 2008; Jost et al., 2008). When people comply with common beliefs they are able to establish a "shared reality" (Echterhoff et al., 2009; Hardin & Higgins, 1996). This in turn helps them to meet psychological needs again which were endangered by social exclusion, such as need to belong (Jost et al., 2008). Moral beliefs can be a kind of belief that might restore the fulfillment of those basic needs (Pfundmair & Wetherell, 2018). Not only do people have a personal moral identity but they also identify with social groups through moral beliefs they have in common, as suggested by social identity theory (Tajfel et al., 1971). Due to the feeling of universality and objectivity that occurs with a moral belief (Skitka, 2010), moral beliefs might be distinctly effective in reaching a sense of cohesion and homogeneity with the group, which is what socially excluded people are desiring (Pfundmair & Wetherell, 2018). Therefore, individuals who have been socially excluded may be particularly prone to adhere to the groups' morals because they long for cohesion and belonging (Pfundmair & Wetherell, 2018), hence they moralize. By moralizing issues relevant to a group, they align themselves with the morals of the group, and this could

be a strategy to show they are motivated to be part of the group. We therefore hypothesize that social group exclusion will motivate attitude moralization of issues relevant to the group.

The Moderating Role of Attachment Anxiety

We propose that there are some individual differences that can make the effect of social exclusion on moralization stronger. Particularly, we suggest that attachment anxiety could moderate the relationship between social exclusion and attitude moralization.

Attachment anxiety refers to the amount of anxiety a person experiences about being abandoned or rejected by a relationship partner and worries regarding their partner's accessibility in need (Brennan et al., 1998). Their origin can be found in attachment theory proposed by Bowlby (1973, 1980, 1982). Attachment theory tried to explain how a secure relationship supports an individual in handling negative emotions or life events while an individual's insecure attachment hinders their rehabilitation from negative emotions and life events (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002). Previous research found that people high in attachment anxiety are particularly sensitive to being rejected in an interpersonal relationship (Downey & Feldman, 1996).

A study on applying attachment theory in a group context found that also a group can be an origin of comfort or support (Hogg, 1992). Another study found that also a relation with a group can satisfy some criteria for an attachment (Rom & Mikulincer, 2003). It can be suggested that attachment theory may also be helpful for investigating individual differences in a group context (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2013). They also suggest that people who are socially excluded from a group react in the same way as when rejected from a close relationship, according to their attachment. To further investigate the influence of attachment on social exclusion Shaver and Mikulincer (2013) conducted a study in extension to a previous study about loss of meaning of life as a reaction to social exclusion (Stillman et al., 2009). They found that participants with high attachment anxiety felt a lower sense of

meaning of life after being socially excluded by a group as opposed to participants with low attachment anxiety (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2013). Since people with high attachment anxiety show notably high sensitivity and reaction to social exclusion, they may be more susceptible to engage in strategies to regain group affiliation such as by moralizing issues relevant to the group. Thus, the second hypothesis is: for people who score highly on attachment anxiety (relative to those who score low), the effect of social exclusion on moralization will be stronger. We do not predict that attachment anxiety is associated with moralization.

Overview and Hypotheses

In the present experiment, we examine the relationship between social exclusion from groups and moralization, and attachment anxiety as a moderator. We will test the main hypothesis in which we predict that being socially excluded leads to stronger attitude moralization of issues relevant to the group than being socially included. We will also test the second, interaction hypothesis that attachment anxiety moderates the effect of social exclusion on attitude moralization such that for people who score high on attachment anxiety (relative to people who score low on it), being socially excluded would trigger greater moralization than being socially included. Finally, we do not expect a relationship between attachment anxiety and attitude moralization.

Method

Participants

We aimed to recruit over 200 students to have 80% power to detect a Cohen's d effect size 0.40 (Leal et al., 2021b), but were unable to achieve the desired sample size because of the lack of response from the participant pool. A sample of 49 first-year students of the international Psychology program of the University of Groningen participated in the online experiment, in exchange for course credits. Six participants were excluded from the statistical analyses because they failed attention checks. The final sample consisted of 43 participants

(31 female, 12 males) ranging in age between 18 to 26 ($M= 19.98$, $SD= 1.73$). The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Behavioural and Social Sciences of the University of Groningen (EC-BSS).

Design

The research design is composed of a with a 2 (social inclusion vs. social exclusion) \times 2 (attachment anxiety: low vs. high) between-subjects factorial design. The independent variable is social exclusion and the proposed moderator variable is attachment anxiety. The dependent variable is moralization. Participants were randomly assigned to either social exclusion or social inclusion condition.

Procedure

To participate in this online experiment participants filled out the informed consent form. In the first part of the study, they were asked to answer questions about different societal issues. Participants filled out a questionnaire about attitude, moral conviction, and attitude strength on three societal issues: gender equality, animal testing in medical research, and workplace diversity at time 1. The target issue of moralization was gender equality, and the other two issues were just included as filler issues.

In the second part of the study, participants were introduced to a fictitious student association at the University of Groningen called 'SpeakUp Groningen' that is allegedly concerned with issues that international students face such as social justice, cultural diversity, and fighting against gender and racial discrimination, as well as organizing social activities such as pub quizzes. After learning about the student association, participants were asked to answer two true-false attention checks: "SpeakUp Groningen is motivated to promote social justice and cultural diversity by advocating for minority students' rights, and fighting against gender and racial discrimination.", and: "SpeakUp Groningen supports international students' social life by organizing social events and activities." Next, they rated some filler items

regarding their thoughts and feelings about ‘SpeakUp Groningen’, for instance: “I think SpeakUp Groningen is important for students.” or “I feel committed to the values of SpeakUp Groningen.”.

Subsequently, we introduced the context of the manipulation. Participants were told that the researchers were interested in understanding how well students would fit in this student association. They were told that on the basis of their answers to the following questions they would match or not match the group and therefore would be able to get in touch with the group or not. The items represented the social values of the student association. Participants were asked to assess the importance of several items on a 7-point Likert-type scale from 1 (Not at all) to 7 (Extremely) such as: “Supporting minority rights.”, “Helping to organize group activities.” or “Supporting gender equality and women's empowerment.” Actually, they were randomly assigned to either social exclusion (experimental group) or social inclusion (control group). In the social inclusion condition participants read: “We are happy to inform you that you fit into SpeakUp Groningen. Based on your answers, *you seem to have the profile that fits with the profile of SpeakUp Groningen*. This association cares about equality and social justice and values students who stand up for these issues. Perhaps there may even be another opportunity to join another association in the future.”. In the social exclusion condition participants read: “We are sorry to inform you that you do not fit into SpeakUp Groningen. Based on your answers, *you do not seem to have the profile that fits with the profile of SpeakUp Groningen*. This association cares about equality and social justice and values students who stand up for these issues. Perhaps there may still be another opportunity to join this association in the future.”. Next participants completed a manipulation check questionnaire, as well as some filler items to improve the believability of the cover story.

In the third part of the study, participants again answered questions about their attitude, moral conviction, and attitude strength about the societal issues of gender equality

(target issue of moralization), animal testing in medical research, and workplace diversity at time 2. Then, participants answered one attention check item: “Please indicate the name of the association described in the study”, and some filler items. We then measured attachment anxiety, socio-demographic information (gender and age), and other measures that are not relevant for the hypotheses of this paper. In the end, participants were thanked and debriefed. We presented them with some actual student associations (e.g. VIP) and ways to receive psychological support (e.g. the student service center) in case of need after participation in the study.

Measures

Manipulation Check

To check whether our manipulation worked, participants filled out 17 items out of four subscales of need-threat and mood that have been used to measure perceptions of social exclusion (adapted from Williams, 2009). We measured belonging with three items: “I feel disconnected.”, “I feel rejected.”, “I feel like an outsider.”, ($\alpha = .90$). We used a 3-item measure for lack of self-esteem: “I feel good about myself.”, “My self-esteem is high.” and “I feel liked.”, ($\alpha = .83$). We used a 3-item measure for unmeaningful existence: “I feel invisible.”, “I feel meaningless.” and “I feel non-existent.”, ($\alpha = .90$). We used an 8-item measure for negative mood: “I feel good.”, “I feel bad.”, “I feel friendly.” “I feel unfriendly.”, “I feel angry.”, “I feel pleasant.”, “I feel happy.”, and “I feel sad.”, ($\alpha = .86$). Participants completed these items on a 5-point Likert-type scale from 1 (Not at all) to 5 (Extremely). The self-esteem items and some of the mood items were reverse coded. We created a composite for general feelings of social exclusion by averaging all items ($\alpha = .94$). The higher the scores, the higher the perceptions of social exclusion, feelings of need to belong, lack of self-esteem, experience of negative mood, and feelings of unmeaningful existence.

Moralization

To assess moralization, we measured moral conviction about gender equality at time 1 and 2. First, participants were asked to what extent they support or oppose gender equality, which indicates their general attitude towards the topic, on a 7-point Likert-type scale from 1 (strongly oppose) to 7 (strongly support). Next, they completed a 3-item measure of moral conviction (adapted from Skitka et al., 2005; Skitka et al., 2009). The three items were: “How much is your opinion on gender equality a reflection of your core moral beliefs and convictions?”, “How much is your opinion on gender equality connected to your beliefs about fundamental right or wrong?” and “How much is your opinion on gender equality based on moral principle?” ($\alpha_{\text{time 1}} = .90$, $\alpha_{\text{time 2}} = .85$). We also measured attitude strength in two dimensions (importance and extremity), using Wisneski and Skitka’s approach (2017). Participants were asked: “How much is your opinion on gender equality important to who they are as a person?” (importance) and “How strongly do you feel about gender equality?” (extremity) ($r_{\text{time 1}} = .79$, $r_{\text{time 2}} = .72$). We used a 7-point Likert-type scale for the moral conviction and attitude strength questions that ranged from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much).

Attachment Anxiety

To measure attachment anxiety, we used three items from the Adult Attachment Questionnaire (Simpson et al., 1996). Participants indicated their opinion on the following items: “I rarely worry about being abandoned by others” (reverse coded), “I usually want more closeness and intimacy than others do.” and “The thought of being left by others rarely enters my mind.” (reverse coded) by using a 7-point Likert-type scale (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree) ($\alpha = .67$). Given that the reliability of the scale was moderately low and the second item significantly decreased its reliability, we excluded it and created a composite score that only included the first and third items ($r = .58$, $p < .001$).

Results

Manipulation Checks

We conducted five regression analyses to test a 2 (social inclusion vs. social exclusion) x 2 (high vs. low attachment anxiety) on the three needs-threat (belonging, self-esteem, meaningful existence), mood (adapted from Williams, 2009), and general feeling of exclusion. We found a significant main effect of social exclusion on belonging, $t(39) = 2.472$, $p = .018$, $d = 0.771$, lack of self-esteem, $t(39) = 3.746$, $p = .001$, $d = 1.089$, negative mood, $t(39) = 3.071$, $p = .004$, $d = 0.862$, and general exclusion, $t(39) = 3.089$, $p = .004$, $d = 0.875$. However, there was no significant effect of condition on unmeaningful existence, $t(39) = 0.803$, $p = .427$, $d = 0.301$ ($M_{\text{social inclusion}} = 1.65$, $SD = 0.96$; $M_{\text{social exclusion}} = 1.95$, $SD = 1.04$). Participants in the social exclusion condition reported higher levels of need to belong ($M = 2.71$, $SD = 1.16$), lack of self-esteem ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 0.73$), negative mood ($M = 2.64$, $SD = 0.74$), and overall feelings of exclusion ($M = 2.66$, $SD = 0.75$) than those in the social inclusion condition ($M_{\text{belong}} = 1.82$, $SD = 1.17$; $M_{\text{self-esteem}} = 2.61$, $SD = 0.72$; $M_{\text{mood}} = 2.06$, $SD = 0.58$; $M_{\text{exclusion}} = 2.04$, $SD = 0.67$). The moderator attachment anxiety (centered) was associated with each one of these five dimensions (need to belong, $t(39) = 2.417$, $p = .020$; lack of self-esteem, $t(39) = 2.952$, $p = .005$; unmeaningful existence, $t(39) = 2.400$, $p = .021$; negative mood, $t(39) = 3.439$, $p = .001$; and overall feelings of exclusion, $t(39) = 3.521$, $p = .001$). Finally, there were no significant interactions, $ps > .05$. Therefore, we conclude that our manipulation of social exclusion was successful.

Data Analyses

Before testing our hypotheses, we first tested whether there were effects of condition on moral convictions about gender equality at time 1. As expected, a t test did not detect significant effects of condition on moral conviction about gender equality at time 1, $t(41) = -0.216$, $p = .830$. Next, we tested whether attitudes about gender equality became moralized (i.e., attitude moralization) and stronger (i.e., strengthening of attitude) from time 1 to time 2, independent of condition. A paired-sample t test revealed no significant evidence for attitude

moralization of gender equality, $t(42) = 0.072, p = .943$ ($M_{\text{time 1}} = 6.12, SD = 1.02$; $M_{\text{time 2}} = 6.12, SD = 0.91$) from time 1 to time 2, regardless of condition. Furthermore, another paired-sample t test suggested that attitudes did not become significantly stronger for gender equality, $t(42) = -0.722, p = .474$, from time 1 ($M = 5.30, SD = 1.55$) to time 2 ($M = 5.38, SD = 1.62$), independent of condition.

Before conducting our main data analysis, we first centered the variables attachment anxiety (moderator), attitude strength at time 1 and time 2, and ran an interaction between condition and centered moderator attachment anxiety. To test our hypotheses, we ran one linear regression to assess whether condition, attachment anxiety (centered), and the interaction between condition and attachment anxiety predicted attitude moralization controlling for attitude strength at time 1 and time 2 (both centered). We controlled for attitude strength to remove any effect of attitude strengthening from the moralization of attitudes (e.g., Wisneski & Skitka, 2017).

A regression analysis revealed no significant effect of condition on attitude moralization of gender equality when controlling for attitude strength, $\beta = -0.042, t(37) = -0.274, p = .786, \eta_p^2 = .057, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-0.495, 0.377]$. Since we did not find evidence for strengthening of attitudes, we also ran another model without controlling for attitude strength, and we found the same findings, $\beta = -0.46, t(39) = -0.312, p = .757, \eta_p^2 = .057, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-0.481, 0.353]$. Not line with our hypothesis, participants in the social exclusion condition did not moralize the issue of gender equality more ($M = -0.06, SD = 0.63$) than those in the social inclusion condition ($M = .05, SD = 0.79$). Unexpectedly, there was a significant association between attachment anxiety and moralization of gender equality when controlling for attitude strength, $\beta = -0.444, t(37) = -2.270, p = .029, \eta_p^2 = .057, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-0.366, -0.021]$, and also

without controlling for attitude strength in the model, $\beta = -0.439$, $t(39) = -2.365$, $p = .023$, $\eta_p^2 = .057$, 95% CI = [-0.355, -0.28]. Finally, we found no significant interaction between condition and attachment anxiety, when including attitude strength in the model $\beta = .072$, $t(37) = .367$, $p = .716$, $\eta_p^2 = .057$, 95% CI = [-0.233, 0.336], and also without including attitude strength in the model, $\beta = .065$, $t(39) = .351$, $p = .728$, $\eta_p^2 = .057$, 95% CI = [-0.221, 0.314]. Thus, we did not find support for the moderation hypothesis.

Discussion

The goals of this experiment were to investigate the following research questions: Does social exclusion induce attitude moralization? As well as, does attachment anxiety moderate the effect of social exclusion on attitude moralization? To this end, we conducted an experimental study in which we manipulated social exclusion in the context of a fictitious student association, and the issue of moralization was gender equality. We tested the main hypothesis in which we predicted that being socially excluded would lead to stronger attitude moralization of issues relevant to the group than being socially included. We also tested a second, interaction hypothesis predicting that attachment anxiety moderates the effect of social exclusion on attitude moralization, such that for people who score high on attachment anxiety (relative to people who score low on it), being socially excluded would trigger greater moralization than being socially included. Finally, we did not expect a relationship between attachment anxiety and attitude moralization.

We did not find any support for the main and interaction hypotheses. Participants in the social exclusion condition did not moralize gender equality more than participants in the social inclusion condition, and attachment anxiety did not play a moderating role. However, attachment anxiety was positively associated with attitude moralization. Despite these

findings, we must note that, the study was underpowered ($N = 43$), so the findings need to be interpreted with caution. Lastly, it is worth mentioning that attachment anxiety was associated with need to belong, lack of self-esteem, unmeaningful existence, negative mood, and overall feelings of exclusion. This implies that people who have high attachment anxiety were also more likely to have a stronger experience of exclusion subjectively. The association between unmeaningful existence and attachment anxiety supports the finding mentioned in the introduction of this paper, that people socially excluded by a group, and high in attachment anxiety experienced a lower sense of meaning of life than people with low attachment anxiety (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2013).

Theoretical Implications

This research can offer some theoretical contributions to our understanding of moralization and social exclusion. Even though we did not find support for the hypotheses, this line of work paves the way for new and promising future research, as it is the first study that examined how social exclusion can lead to moralization of issues relevant to the group. We do not know much about how moralization is influenced by group processes. Researchers investigated whether socially excluded people high in need to belong moralize issues they associate with the group they had been excluded from (Pfundmair & Wetherell, 2018). Our research goes beyond that, by examining moralization on issues relevant to the group. This adds some theoretical value to the moralization literature since we do not know much about what drives individuals to form moral convictions (Skitka et al., 2018; see also Brandt et al., 2015; Feinberg et al., 2019; Rozin & Singh, 1999; Wisneski & Skitka, 2017).

Second, this research can add to the literature on the consequences of social exclusion. For example, as introduced earlier, social exclusion is threatening psychological needs like need to belong, self-esteem, control, and a meaningful existence, and thus changes

one's desire for them (e.g. Williams et al., 2000; Zadro et al., 2004). However, no other research has investigated personal moral convictions motivated by social exclusion, yet.

Contrary to our hypothesis, there was a significant, positive relationship between attachment anxiety and attitude moralization. This suggests that the more individuals score on attachment anxiety the more likely they are to moralize gender equality in general.

Researchers that conducted a meta-analysis concluded that individuals with anxiety experience threat-related bias, which means that they are more attentive towards a threat than non-anxious individuals (Bar-Heim et al., 2007). While other researchers found that when people experience immoral violating groups that display a threat to their personal values, they are more likely to moralize (Leal et al., 2021b). Therefore, individuals with attachment anxiety might be more prone to have stronger moral convictions than individuals without attachment anxiety. Especially given that 31 of our 43 participants were female, and the target issue of moralization being gender equality which may arguably be of personal value to females. The finding of a significant relationship between attachment anxiety and attitude moralization could be an object of further research.

Limitations and Future Research

This study also has some limitations. One potential limitation of the study concerns the small sample size ($N = 43$) because of lack of response of the participant pool, resulting in an underpowered study. In this sense, we cannot make any strong inferences from our findings and we should interpret them with caution. Therefore future research should recruit a larger sample size to test these hypotheses again.

Another limitation concerns the fact that participants already held a strong moral conviction about gender equality at time 1 which left very little room for moralization to occur. We selected gender equality because previous research found moderate levels of moral

conviction (Leal et al., 2021). Speculatively, the small number of participants we sampled were biased in regards to their strong moral convictions towards gender equality at time 1.

A further possible limitation regards the circumstance that we only used one target issue of moralization which was gender equality. Issues such as gender equality or sexism are higher in moral relevance for liberals (Skitka et al., 2015). Another potential limitation of the study is the type of sample we used, which were all first-year psychology students, and therefore have a similar educational background and small range in age. Thus, future research should replicate this study with a more diverse sample in terms of age and educational background, and use more target issues of moralization relevant to people with different political backgrounds. This would support the generalizability of future findings.

Conclusion

This is the first experimental study that examined the effect of social exclusion on attitude moralization of an issue relevant to the group and the moderating effect of attachment anxiety. Although the study was underpowered, and we did not find support for our main hypothesis, these research ideas spark promising research towards the understanding of how the process of attitude moralization works in group settings. A novel finding was a positive relationship between attachment anxiety and attitude moralization of gender equality in general. Future research with a larger and more diverse sample should seek to replicate this study and build on this theoretical understanding.

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