

The effect of ostracism on attitude moralization: The moderating role of social anxiety

Eva Neuenstein

S3905217

Department of Psychology, University of Groningen

PSB3-BT.2021-2022.1: Bachelor Thesis

Group number 7

Supervisor: Ana Figueiredo Leal

Second evaluator: Dr. Kyriaki Fousiani

In collaboration with: Inga Hassebroek, Bibi Khan, Jolnar Makhous, Alex Nikolaidi, Clarissa

Rieger.

Month 01, 2022

A thesis is an aptitude test for students. The approval of the thesis is proof that the student has sufficient research and reporting skills to graduate, but does not guarantee the quality of the research and the results of the research as such, and the thesis is therefore not necessarily suitable to be used as an academic source to refer to. If you would like to know more about the research discussed in this thesis and any publications based on it, to which you could refer, please contact the supervisor mentioned.

Abstract

Does and when does social exclusion trigger attitude moralization? Attitude moralization (i.e., when attitudes transform into stronger moral convictions) is a relevant process that determines an individual's perception about right and wrong, moral and immoral. So far, we do not know much about what triggers a person to moralize and how group processes play a role when it comes to moralization. We predicted that socially excluded people might moralize attitudes relevant to a potential new group to regain their thwarted need to belong. We, therefore, propose that social exclusion might trigger attitude moralization. Furthermore, we investigate how individual differences (in particular social anxiety) moderate this relationship, stating that socially anxious people do not engage in attitude moralization as a consequence of being excluded. In an experimental online study, we did not find a significant effect of social exclusion on attitude moralization (of values related to the group). Neither did we find a significant effect of social anxiety on the relationship between social exclusion and attitude moralization. Despite the null findings, this study is the first that tests the idea that attitude moralization might be affected by social. Our study design builds the basis for future research to further investigate and understand moralization processes and their relationship to social exclusion.

Keywords: attitude moralization, ostracism, social anxiety, moral conviction

The effect of ostracism on attitude moralization: The moderating role of social anxiety

Most people can probably relate to the experience of once being excluded from a social group. We refer to ostracism as the experience of being excluded by others (Williams, 2007). Potential negative feelings that we can experience when being ostracized (interchangeably used with the term “social exclusion”¹) can affect people in multiple negative ways (Leary, 1990) as their need to belong is thwarted – a fundamental human desire to feel accepted by others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; MacDonald & Leary, 2005). A possible attempt in restoring this fundamental need is by reconnecting with other people (Maner et al., 2007). In order to align with the new group, people might adopt the group values to their own core moral beliefs and convictions (Maner et al., 2007). In other words, people may develop *moral convictions* (i.e., absolute beliefs about right and wrong (Skitka, 2002) to connect with the morals of the group -a process that is called *attitude moralization* (Leal et al., 2021; Wisneski & Skitka, 2017). However, there is no research on the process of moralizing attitudes relevant to the group as a consequence of exclusion. Hence, it is important to understand whether and when the relationship between ostracism and attitude moralization. This leads us to the question which will be investigated in this study: Does ostracism trigger attitude moralization?

In our paper, we will investigate if ostracism leads to stronger attitude moralization of issues that are important to the group compared to social inclusion. In particular, we hypothesize that social anxiety moderates the effect of ostracism on attitude moralization. Moreover, we state that the effect of ostracism on moralization would be weaker for people who score high on social anxiety than those who score low. In other words, social anxiety could buffer the effect of ostracism on moralization.

¹ “social exclusion” refers to the action of pushing an individual out of a group or a social situation while remaining accessible to other people (Williams et al., 2005).

Attitude Moralization

Moral convictions are people's fundamental beliefs about right or wrong (Skitka, 2002). In contrast to strong attitudes, which seem to be a matter of preferences or taste, moral convictions are experienced as facts about the world (Skitka et al., 2005) which determine if people regard an issue as moral or immoral. As Morgan and Skitka (2020) showed in their research, moral convictions distinguish from strong attitudes by being independent on time and situations. That is, they are perceived as universally applicable and grounded in objective general truths. Unlike attitudes grounded in convention, moral convictions cannot be easily swayed by figures of authority or peers with different opinions (Skitka & Baumann, 2008). Part of what differentiates moral convictions from attitudes or preferences are the extent of its connection to strong moral emotions such as disgust (Haidt, 2003; Skitka et al., 2005). An individual who holds moral convictions can furthermore be motivated to act upon their beliefs (Leal et al., 2020) by, for example, distancing themselves from people with different moral convictions (Skitka et al., 2005).

When neutral attitudes become more moralized and therefore turn into stronger moral convictions we refer to a process called *attitude moralization* (Rozin, 1999; Rozin, 1997). As Leal et al. (2021) showed, being part of the group seems to contribute to how people build moral convictions. The fundamental principle that undergoes this idea is that people hold shared beliefs in groups to maintain a positive self-image (Hornsey, 2008). To maintain their social identity, they are thus willing to adopt or even moralize values important to the group (Skitka et al. 2005). Furthermore, Leal et al. (2020) suggests that moralization might be further facilitated when a distinct outgroup violates moral beliefs that are hold by ingroup members. That is, people might protect and moralize their in-group values as a consequence of experiencing negative emotions when being confronted with a distinct group (Haidt, 2003; Clifford, 2019). Despite this information, it is still poorly understood how group processes

can influence attitude moralization (Skitka et al., 2018), thus, we aim to contribute with our research to the understanding of this relationship.

Ostracism and Attitude Moralization

Being ostracized describes the experience of being excluded from a group (Williams, 1997). This rejection can cause personal distress and strong negative emotions that are accompanied by a series of negative psychological effects (Leary, 1990). As Eisenberger et al. (2003) showed, this distress can activate the same brain regions responsible for the sensation of physical pain. These negative consequences seem to evoke from a person's thwarted need to belong (for example Pfundmair & Wetherell, 2018; Mallott et al., 2009; DeWall et al., 2011), one of the most fundamental needs of humans, expressed by aiming for affiliation and acceptance from others (Leary, 2010).

As a consequence of this thwarted need to belong, ostracized individuals might try to reconnect with other people to restore their need to belong (Pfundmair & Wetherell, 2018). This attempt can take different forms, ranging from just acting prosocially (Williams & Sommer, 1997) to conforming with a new group's values (Williams et al., 2000). Thus, individuals who have been ostracized will try to identify with the new group's values to reduce threatened needs, namely the need for belonging, self-esteem, control, and meaningful existence (Williams, 2000). The goal is to gain acceptance again and to re-establish their social group identity, more specifically, the moral identities that are presented in their groups (Hornsey, 2008; Hardin & Higgins, 1996). Thus, in our paper, we build our reasoning on the idea that a person is willing to modify their moral convictions by adopting a new group's morals to satisfy their need to belong.

As introduced in a paper by Pfundmair and Wetherell (2018), individuals who show a high need to belong are especially likely to adhere to moral beliefs when experiencing ostracism. A possible explanation for this moralization process is that ostracized individuals defend themselves from the negative feelings associated with their exclusion, and hence try to protect their identity and

need to belong by adopting the values of a group (Pfundmair & Wetherell, 2018). This idea aligns with a paper by Richman et al. (2015) stating that people are willing to adapt their self-concepts to those of other people to re-establish the feeling of connectedness and group identity, a process referred to as “self-concept-malleability”. However, previous research has not investigated how being ostracized can motivate an individual to change their moral beliefs (i.e., moral convictions) to be aligned with the moral beliefs of the group. In other words, ostracized individuals might cope with ostracism by moralizing issues relevant to the group to seek acceptance and reaffiliation. Therefore, our paper further extends the narrow body of research by exploring to what extent being socially excluded leads to stronger moralization of issues relevant to the group than being socially included.

The Moderating Role of Social Anxiety

As stated, people might moralize attitudes relevant to the group when being socially excluded. In our study, we focus on whether individual differences and especially social anxiety moderates the relationship between ostracism and attitude moralization. In particular, we state that socially anxious people do not engage in attitude moralization when being ostracized. By definition, social anxiety refers to the fear of being negatively evaluated by others (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) as well as the fear of being rejected (Erwin et al., 2003). It is accompanied by negative interpersonal functioning (Turner et al., 1986) and by the avoidance of social situations to prevent negative evaluation from others (Davila & Beck, 2002). In general, socially anxious people seem to hold a negative schema and perception about the world, which is highlighted by negative expectations of social contact (Maner et al., 2007). Socially anxious people, therefore, seem to focus on indicators of further rejection (Mallott et al., 2009) which may lead them to further withdrawal from social contact with others (Wells, 2013).

Accordingly, when a socially anxious individual experiences ostracism, it is possible that their negative schema contributes to their decision to *not* restore their need to belong as it

is a risk for further rejection (Mallott et al., 2009). In this sense, their focus on cues of rejection might prevent them from recognizing possibilities of reaffiliation in general. As a consequence, they might not aim for inclusion from a new group and thus might not adopt values from the new group to become part of them (thus, they do not engage in attitude moralization). In our research, we predict that social anxiety moderates the effect of ostracism on attitude moralization such that for people who score high on social anxiety (relative to people who score low on it), being socially excluded would *not* trigger greater moralization than being socially included. To investigate the moderating role of social anxiety is of high relevance, as socially anxious people also show a strong desire to restore their need to belong (Williams, 2007; DeWall & Bushman, 2011).

Hypotheses

Finally, we present two hypotheses in our paper. Firstly, we hypothesize that being socially excluded leads to stronger attitude moralization of issues important to the group than being socially included. Secondly, we predict that social anxiety moderates the effect of ostracism on attitude moralization. Particularly, for individuals who score high on social anxiety, ostracism would not lead to attitude moralization whereas, for those who are not socially anxious, we expect that ostracism leads to moralization. Ultimately, we do not expect a relationship between social anxiety and attitude moralization.

Methods

Participants and Design

This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Behavioural and Social Sciences of Groningen. We aimed to recruit over 200 students to have 80% power to detect a Cohen *d*'s effect size 0.40 (Leal et al., 2021). However, we did not achieve the desired sample size due to the lack of response from the participants' pool. First-year Psychology students from the international program of the University of Groningen took part in an online SONA study

in exchange for 0.7 credits. Six participants were excluded from the analysis because they failed the attention checks. The final sample consisted of 43 participants: 31 female participants and 12 male participants ($M_{age} = 19.98$, $SD_{age} = 1.73$). All participants were randomly assigned to either the experimental condition in which people were excluded from a fictitious group (social exclusion condition) or the control condition in which people were included in the fictitious group (social inclusion condition). We investigated social anxiety as the moderator and attitude moralization as the dependent variable.

Procedure

Before participants started with the first part of the study, they were asked to read and sign the informed consent. Participants were told that the goal of the study was to gain knowledge of students' opinions about current societal problems and student associations. Accordingly, we introduced three distinct societal issues, including gender equality, the original issue of interest for the study. The issues of diversity in the workplace and animal testing were added to cover the aim of the study. We then measured attitude, attitude strength, and moral convictions about the target issue of gender equality and about the other two issues at time 1.

In the second part, participants were introduced to the context of the manipulation of social exclusion. We informed them about a new fictitious student association, "SpeakUp Groningen" that focuses on different societal issues and on helping international students to build social connections. Additionally, it was told that this association aims to increase social justice and cultural diversity by, for example, demonstrating against gender and racial discrimination. To reassure that participants paid attention to the study we presented them two statements about the purpose of the association such as: "SpeakUp Groningen supports international students' social life by organizing social events and activities", and "SpeakUp Groningen is motivated to promote social justice and cultural diversity by advocating for

minority students' rights, and fighting against gender and racial discrimination." Participants had to indicate whether these statements were true or false. We then measured participants' desire of becoming part of the association. We asked participants to indicate on a 7-point scale how much they agree with questions such as "I feel I want to belong to SpeakUp Groningen" to see if they would want to be part of the group. In the next step, we told participants that we would measure how well they fit with the group by asking them to indicate the extent to how important some items were to them, for example: "Getting to know new people and students", "Offering help and support for vulnerable groups" and "Addressing gender inequalities at the University of Groningen", by using a 7-point Likert scale (1= *not at all* to 7= *extremely*). We told them that these questions would later determine whether they will be included or excluded from the association.

Afterward, we randomly assigned participants to either the included or excluded condition. Participants in the social inclusion condition received the following message: "Congratulations! We are happy to announce that you fit into SpeakUp Groningen. Based on your responses, you seem to be a good match for this new student group and its members. This means that you can become a part of SpeakUp Groningen from now on! At the moment, the student association focuses on addressing diversity, sustainability, and gender equality issues and wants to give opportunities to those who seem to represent and care about these values. We encourage you to get in touch with them and to voice your opinions. Perhaps there may still be another opportunity to join more student associations in the future." Participants in the social exclusion condition received this message: "We are sorry to announce that you do not fit into SpeakUp Groningen. Unfortunately, based on your responses, you do not seem to be a good match for this new student group and its members at this time. This means that you currently cannot become a part of SpeakUp Groningen. At the moment, the student association focuses on addressing diversity, sustainability, and gender

equality issues and wants to give opportunities to those who seem to represent and care about these values. We would not encourage you to get in touch with them and to voice your opinions. Perhaps there may still be another opportunity to join the student association in the future.” To assess to what extent participants felt ostracized we measured their experience of belonging, esteem, unmeaningful existence, mood, and exclusion as manipulation checks.

In the last part of the study, participants were asked to answer the same set of questions about societal issues again at time 2. To check if participants paid attention we asked them to pick the right name of the association of the following options “SpeakUp Students”, “SpeakUP Groningen” or “SpeakUp University”. Lastly, we assessed the moderator *social anxiety*. Additionally, we measured other variables which will not be reported here, since they are not relevant to the paper.

Finally, participants filled in sociodemographic data such as age and gender and were thanked, debriefed, and informed about possibilities to join student associations. Besides that, we offered numbers and e-mail addresses that can be contacted in case emotional support was needed after participating in the study.

Measures

Manipulation Checks

Firstly, we measured participants’ need for belonging, self-esteem, meaningful existence, and mood to assess feelings of experienced social exclusion (Hales & Williams, 2018; Williams, 2009). All items were indicated on a 5-point scale (1= *not at all* to 5= *extremely*). Belonging was indicated by the following items: “I feel disconnected”, “I feel rejected” and “I feel like an outsider” ($\alpha = .904$). Self-esteem included the items “I feel good about myself” (reversed coded), “My self-esteem is high”, and “I feel liked” (reversed coded) ($\alpha = .833$). Meaningful existence was measured by the items “I feel invisible”, “I feel meaningless” and “I feel non-existent” ($\alpha = .900$) and mood was measured by the items “I

feel: good, bad, friendly, unfriendly, angry, pleasant, happy, sad” ($\alpha = .855$). The items “I feel: good, friendly, pleasant and happy” were reversed coded. All need-threat items together indicated $\alpha = .937$, showing high reliability of the scales. Higher scores indicated higher feelings of social exclusion.

Moralization

We assessed attitude moralization by asking questions regarding gender equality at two different times. First, after the societal issues were presented, and second after participants were either included in or excluded from the group. We measured general attitude about gender equality by the following item: “To what extent do you *support* or *oppose* gender equality?” The answer was indicated on a 7-point scale (1= *strongly oppose* to 7= *strongly support*). We then measured moral convictions about gender equality by the following items: “How much is your opinion on gender equality: a reflection of your core moral beliefs and convictions?, connected to your beliefs about fundamental right and wrong?, based on moral principle?” ($\alpha_{\text{time1}} = .901$; $\alpha_{\text{time2}} = .855$) (adapted from Skitka et al., 2009; Wisneski & Skitka, 2017). To distinguish attitude strength from moralization we asked for two different aspects of attitude strength (importance and extremity) as control variables ($r_{\text{time1}} = .786$; $r_{\text{time2}} = .719$) (Wisneski & Skitka, 2017). Attitude strength was measured by the following items: “how much is your opinion on gender equality important to who you are as a person” (“importance aspect” of attitude strength) and “how strongly do you feel about gender equality” (“extremity aspect” of attitude strength) (e.g., Wisneski & Skitka, 2017). Answers were indicated on a 7-point scale (1= *not at all* to 7= *very much*). Participants also answered these questions for the other two issues: animal testing in medical research and workplace diversity. We computed *attitude moralization* by subtracting the average score of moral conviction at time 1 from the average score of moral conviction at time 2.

Social Anxiety

We investigated *social anxiety* as a moderator. To measure *social anxiety*, we used three items of the brief version of the fear of negative evaluation scale (Leary, 1983). We used this scale since it has been used to measure social anxiety (Rapee & Heimberg, 1997). Participants indicated to what extent they agree with the following items: “I worry about what other people will think of me even when I know it doesn’t matter”, “Other people’s opinions of me do not bother me” (reversed coded), and “I am afraid that others will not approve of me.” Participants' answers were given on a 5-point scale (1= *strongly disagree* to 5= *strongly agree*) ($\alpha = .888$).

Results

Manipulation Checks

To assess whether our manipulation check was successful, we tested several 2 (social inclusion vs. social exclusion) x 2 (high vs. low score of social anxiety) designs on the three needs-threat (i.e., belonging, self-esteem, meaningful existence), mood (Williams, 2009), and general feeling of exclusion. For that, we centered the variables belonging, self-esteem and meaningful existence and then ran five different regression analyses. We found a significant effect of social exclusion on lack of self-esteem, $\beta = 0.36$, $t(39) = 2.76$, $p = .009$, $f^2 = .13$, $CI_{95\%} = [0.15, 1.00]$. We found marginally significant effects of social exclusion on belonging, $\beta = 0.27$, $t(39) = 1.88$, $p = .068$, $f^2 = .07$, $CI_{95\%} = [-0.05, 1.38]$, negative mood, $\beta = 0.24$, $t(39) = 1.90$, $p = .065$, $f^2 = .06$, $CI_{95\%} = [-0.02, 0.71]$ and on the general perception of exclusion, $\beta = 0.26$, $t(39) = 1.98$, $p = .055$, $f^2 = .06$, $CI_{95\%} = [-0.01, 0.79]$. Furthermore, we did not find a significant effect of social exclusion on unmeaningful existence, $\beta = 0.03$, $t(39) = 0.18$, $p = .862$, $f^2 = .00$, $CI_{95\%} = [-0.56, 0.66]$ ($M_{inclusion} = 1.65$, $SD_{inclusion} = 0.96$; $M_{exclusion} = 1.95$, $SD_{exclusion} = 1.04$). Participants in the social exclusion condition showed higher levels of lack of self-esteem ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 0.73$), need to belong ($M = 2.71$, $SD = 1.16$), 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 ($M_{\text{self-esteem}} = 2.61$, $SD = 0.72$; $M_{\text{belong}} = 1.82$, $SD = 1.17$; $M_{\text{mood}} = 2.06$, $SD = 0.58$; $M_{\text{exclusion}} = 2.04$, $SD = 0.67$). Social anxiety (centered) was associated with lack of self-esteem $\beta = 0.44$, $t(39) = 2.60$, $p = .013$, $f^2 = .11$, $CI_{95\%} = [0.05, 0.40]$, belonging $\beta = 0.45$, $t(39) = 2.38$, $p = .022$, $f^2 = .12$, $CI_{95\%} = [0.05, 0.65]$, mood $\beta = 0.46$, $t(39) = 2.76$, $p = .009$, $f^2 = .13$, $CI_{95\%} = [0.06, 0.36]$, and general feeling of exclusion $\beta = 0.48$, $t(39) = 2.84$, $p = .007$, $f^2 = .14$, $CI_{95\%} = [0.07, 0.40]$. Finally, we found a non-significant association between social anxiety (centered) and unmeaningful existence $\beta = 0.30$, $t(39) = 1.53$, $p = .135$, $f^2 = .05$, $CI_{95\%} = [-0.06, 0.45]$.

Main analysis

Before testing our hypotheses, we first tested whether there were effects of condition on moral convictions about gender equality at time 1. A t test indicated no significant effects of condition on moral conviction about gender equality at time 1, $t(41) = -0.22$, $p = .830$.

After that, 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 showed no significant evidence for attitude moralization of gender equality, $t(42) = 0.07$, $p = .943$ ($M_{\text{time 1}} = 6.12$, $SD = 1.02$; $M_{\text{time 2}} = 6.12$, $SD = 0.91$) from time 1 to time 2, regardless of condition. Furthermore, another paired-sample t test indicated that attitudes did not become significantly stronger for gender equality from time 1 ($M = 5.30$, $SD = 1.55$) to time 2 ($M = 5.38$, $SD = 1.62$), $t(42) = -0.72$, $p = .474$, regardless of condition.

Before we ran our main model, we first centered the variables social anxiety, attitude strength at time 1 and time 2, and computed an interaction between condition and centered social anxiety. To test our hypotheses, we ran one linear regression to test whether social exclusion, social anxiety (centered), and the interaction between condition and social anxiety predicted attitude moralization. Hereby we controlled for attitude strength at time 1 and time

2 (both centered) to remove any effect of attitude strengthening from the moralization of attitudes (e.g., Wisneski & Skitka, 2017).

Our regression analysis did not indicate a significant effect of condition on attitude moralization of gender equality, $\beta = 0.00$, $t(41) = 0.02$, $p = .981$, $f^2 = .00$, $CI_{95\%} = [-0.48, 0.49]$. 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 ($M = 0.05$, $SD = 0.81$). As expected, there was no significant association between the moderator social anxiety and moralization of gender equality $\beta = -0.34$, $t(41) = -1.51$, $p = .141$, $f^2 = -.06$, $CI_{95\%} = [-0.37, 0.06]$. Finally, we did not find a significant interaction between condition and social anxiety, $\beta = 0.05$, $t(41) = 0.23$, $p = .823$, $f^2 = .00$, $CI_{95\%} = [-0.29, 0.37]$.

Discussion

The main goal of this study was to investigate whether ostracism leads to attitude moralization relevant to a group (in this case, changes in attitude moralization about values relevant to the group) and if social anxiety moderates the effect of ostracism on attitude moralization. To this end, we conducted an experimental study in the context of a student association investigating if university students would moralize attitudes of gender equality when being ostracized from this association. We hypothesized that ostracism would trigger attitude moralization of issues relevant to the group, meaning that ostracized people moralize attitudes important to the group more than people who have been included. We did not find support for this hypothesis. Moreover, we propose that social anxiety would buffer the relationship between ostracism and moralization. Particularly, we predicted that for people who score high on social anxiety, ostracism would not lead to greater attitude moralization, whereas for people who score low on social anxiety, ostracism would lead to greater attitude moralization. Our findings did not support this interaction hypothesis either, meaning that our results do not show that social anxiety potentially affects and buffers the relationship between

ostracism and attitude moralization. Moreover, social anxiety was not associated with attitude moralization. However, we must acknowledge that this study was underpowered ($N = 43$), thus we need to interpret these findings with caution.

Ultimately, we have to consider that social anxiety was associated with the lack of self-esteem, need to belong, negative mood, and overall perception of exclusion which are correlated with experiencing ostracism. This suggests that those who score high on social anxiety were more likely to experience ostracism stronger than those scoring low on social anxiety.

Theoretical Implications

This research shows three important implications for understanding attitude moralization within a group context.

Firstly, our study is the first that examines how ostracism can impact attitude moralization about issues relevant to the group. This is relevant to investigate since we do not know much about how features of groups can influence attitude moralization. Some research by Leal et al. (2021) suggests that groups serve as a breeding ground for moralization, highlighting the importance of further exploring the impact of group processes on moralization. As far as we know, only one paper investigated the impact of group processes on moralization processes when being ostracized (Pfundmair & Wetherell, 2018), showing that excluded people adhered more to the values of the group than those included. However, they did not examine how individuals change their moral convictions about societal issues *that are relevant to the group*. This investigation is of high relevance since individuals' moral convictions seem to be influenced by morals represented in groups they belong to or try to belong to (Ellemers & Van der Toorn, 2015). Our study provides the first attempts at understanding if an individual would moralize values important to the group when being excluded. Furthermore, previous research has focused on investigating moralization

processes within a group context indicating that collective action might trigger moralization (Leal et al., 2020). The current study goes a step further by exploring if attitude moralization is also triggered when an individual is excluded from a group. Although our findings did not show a significant effect of ostracism on attitude moralization, this study provides a promising new area of research on moralization. Future studies should conceptually replicate our study with a larger and more diverse sample to further enhance our knowledge about moralization processes.

Secondly, our findings contribute to the ostracism literature by investigating a possible connection to attitude moralization. Ostracism seems to influence individuals in multiple self-adapting ways. As Pfundmair and Wetherell (2018) suggest, ostracized individuals try to regain acceptance by the group and therefore adapt their attitudes to the values shown in the group. Moreover, Richman et al. (2015) showed that ostracism might increase self-concept malleability showing that an individual might change their self-concept to regain connection with others. Despite these findings, no research has investigated if moralization processes might be a potential consequence of ostracism. In other words, no study has examined if people would change their moral beliefs about right or wrong (Skitka, 2002) as a consequence of ostracism. Our study expands the knowledge about the consequences of ostracism by conducting the first approach in assessing how individuals adapt their moral convictions as a possible consequence of ostracism. By creating a research design that tests the impact of ostracism on attitude moralization, our study provides the framework to further understand potential consequences of ostracism.

Finally, this research extends the literature on social anxiety by investigating to what extent it affects the link between ostracism and attitude moralization. We have argued that individual differences (such as social anxiety) might influence the effect of ostracism on attitude moralization which is relevant to understand for two main reasons. Firstly, if social

anxiety had an impact, it would provide an understanding of how people engage differently in attitude moralization and further motivate research to focus on the impact of characteristic differences on attitude moralization. Secondly, socially anxious people seem to have a thwarted need to belong when being ostracized (Williams, 2007; DeWall & Bushmann, 2011) but might not engage in restoring this need due to negative expectations of social contacts (Maner et al., 2007) or the fear of a further rejection (Mallott et al., 2009). Thus, if socially anxious people would not tend to moralize when experiencing ostracism, research had to focus on helping them to find alternatives to restore their thwarted need. Overall, we did not find significant differences in attitude moralization for people who score low or high on social anxiety. Nevertheless, given that our study was underpowered, the results from our analysis should be treated with caution. We recommend further research to explore the effect of individual differences on moralization.

Limitations and Future Research

Finally, several potential limitations need to be considered. One limitation of our study is that it is underpowered due to a lack of response from the participant pool. Furthermore, we only used psychology students from the Netherlands in our sample. Thus, the age range is quite small, and we did not account for cultural diversity nor included other professions, such as students from other faculties or even different work fields. For this reason, our results cannot be generalized to a wider population. Future research should recruit a larger and more diverse sample (i.e. larger age range, more diverse nations, and a larger pool of professions) to establish higher generalizability.

Another limitation concerns the measurement of moral convictions. Since participants already scored quite high on moral convictions measured at time 1 ($M_{\text{time 1}} = 6.12$) (on a 7-point scale), there was little room for participants' moral convictions to increase at time 2. However, we chose gender equality as the relevant issue to measure participants' strength of

moral conviction, because research by Leal et al. (2021) showed that psychology students scored moderately on moral convictions about gender issues. Hence, research is required to measure more issues for moral conviction or to use multiple measures of attitude moralization to detect if the strength of moral convictions changes after time.

Lastly, a limitation of our study is that the manipulation for unmeaningful existence did not seem to work as intended, because we did not find a significant effect of ostracism on unmeaningful existence. Nevertheless, we decided to measure unmeaningful existence to detect people's experience of ostracism because Williams (2009) stated that meaningful existence is one of the thwarted needs when being ostracized. Furthermore, also Hales & Williams (2018) showed that the need for meaningful existence seems to be negatively affected by ostracism. Even though the manipulation of the other dimensions such as lack of self-esteem, belonging, negative mood, and general perception of exclusion worked as intended, future work should aim to investigate to what extent the thwarted need of meaningful existence can be regarded as a consequence of ostracism.

Conclusion

Moral convictions seem to influence our social behavior in multiple ways. Still, we know very little about what influences moralization processes. This paper sheds new light on the connection between ostracism and attitude moralization on the one hand and to what extent social anxiety might moderate this relationship on the other. It takes the first step towards enhancing our understanding of how ostracism influences moralization of values that are relevant to the group. Overall, our results did not support our hypotheses. Thus, we cannot confirm that ostracism triggers attitude moralization nor that social anxiety can buffer the effect of ostracism on attitude moralization. This implies that further research has to investigate the relationship between ostracism and moralization and how this connection

might be influenced by specific character traits. We recommend that future work utilize the design of our study and replicate it with a larger and more diverse sample.

References

- American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders: dsm-5* (5th ed.). American Psychiatric Association.
- Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117(3), 497–529.
- Clifford, S. (2019). How emotional frames moralize and polarize political attitudes: moralizing effects of persuasive frames. *Political Psychology*, 40(1), 75–91. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12507>
- Davila, J., & Beck, J. G. (2002). Is social anxiety associated with impairment in close relationships? a preliminary investigation. *Behavior Therapy*, 33(3), 427–446. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0005-7894\(02\)80037-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0005-7894(02)80037-5)
- DeWall, C. N., & Bushman, B. J. (2011). Social acceptance and rejection: the sweet and the bitter. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 20(4), 256–260.
- DeWall, C. N., Deckman, T., Pond, R. S., & Bonser, I. (2011). Belongingness as a core personality trait: how social exclusion influences social functioning and personality expression: belongingness as a core personality trait. *Journal of Personality*, 79(6), 1281–1314. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.2010.00695.x>
- Eisenberger, N. I., Lieberman, M. D., & Williams, K. D. (2003). Does rejection hurt? an fmri study of social exclusion. *Science*, 302(5643), 290–292.
- Ellemers, N., & Van der Toorn, J. (2015). Groups as moral anchors. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 6, 189–194. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2015.08.018>
- Erwin, B. A., Heimberg, R. G., Schneier, F. R., & Liebowitz, M. R. (2003). Anger experience and expression in social anxiety disorder: pretreatment profile and predictors of attrition and response to cognitive-behavioral treatment. *Behavior Therapy*, 34(3),

331–350. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0005-7894\(03\)80004-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0005-7894(03)80004-7)

Haidt, J. (2003). The moral emotions. In Davidson, R.J., Scherer, K.R., Goldsmith, H.H.

(Eds.), *Handbook of affective sciences* (pp. 852–870). Oxford: Oxford University

Press.

Hales, A. H., & Williams, K. D. (2018). Marginalized individuals and extremism: the role of

ostracism in openness to extreme groups. *Journal of Social Issues*, 74(1), 75–92.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12257>

Hardin, C. D., & Higgins, E. T. (1996). Shared reality: How social verification makes the

subjective objective. In R. M. Sorrentino & E. T. Higgins (Eds.), *Handbook of*

motivation and cognition, Vol. 3. The interpersonal context (pp. 28–84). The Guilford

Press.

Hogg, M. A. (2007). Uncertainty-identity theory, 39, 69–126.

[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601\(06\)39002-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601(06)39002-8)

Hornsey, M. J. (2008). Social identity theory and self-categorization theory: a historical

review: social identity theory and self-categorization theory. *Social and Personality*

Psychology Compass, 2(1), 204–222. [https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9004.2007.00066.x)

[9004.2007.00066.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9004.2007.00066.x)

Kerr, N. L., Rumble, A. C., Park, E. S., Ouwerkerk, J. W., Parks, C. D., Gallucci, M., & van

Lange, P. A. M. (2009). “how many bad apples does it take to spoil the whole

barrel?”: social exclusion and toleration for bad apples. *Journal of Experimental*

Social Psychology, 45(4), 603–613. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2009.02.017>

Leal, A. L., van Zomeren, M., Gonzáles, R., Gordijn, E., Tagar, M. R., Álvarez, B., Frigolett,

C. & Halperin, E. (2020). Collective action as a breeding ground for moralization.

Manuscript under review.

Leal, A. L., van Zomeren, M., Gordijn, E., Reifen Tagar, M., & Halperin, E. (2021). Attitude

moralization in intergroup contexts: Do immoral or moral outgroup violations trigger moralization? *Manuscript under review*.

Leary, M. R. (1983). A brief version of the fear of negative evaluation scale. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 9(3), 371–375.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167283093007>

Leary, M. R. (1990). Responses to social exclusion: Social anxiety, jealousy, loneliness, depression, and low self-esteem. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 9(2), 221-229.

Leary, M. R. (2010). Affiliation, acceptance, and belonging: The pursuit of interpersonal connection. In S. T. Fiske, D. T. Gilbert, & G. Lindzey (Eds.), *Handbook of social psychology*, Vol. 2, 5th ed. (pp. 864–897). John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

<https://doi-org.proxy-ub.rug.nl/10.1002/9780470561119.socpsy002024>

MacDonald, G., & Leary, M. R. (2005). Why does social exclusion hurt? The relationship between social and physical pain. *Psychological Bulletin*, 131, 202-223

Mallott, M. A., Maner, J. K., DeWall, N., & Schmidt, N. B. (2009). Compensatory deficits following rejection: the role of social anxiety in disrupting affiliative behavior.

Depression and Anxiety, 26(5), 438–446. <https://doi.org/10.1002/da.20555>

Maner, J. K., DeWall, C. N., Baumeister, R. F., & Schaller, M. (2007). Does social exclusion motivate interpersonal reconnection? resolving the "porcupine problem". *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 92(1), 42–55.

Morgan, G.S., Skitka, L.J. (2020). *Evidence for meta-ethical monism: Moral conviction predicts perceived objectivity and universality across issues*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology, New Orleans, LA.

Pfundmair, M., & Wetherell, G. (2018). Ostracism drives group moralization and extreme

- group behavior. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 159(5), 518–530.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00224545.2018.1512947>
- Rapee, R. M., & Heimberg, R. G. (1997). A cognitive-behavioral model of anxiety in social phobia. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 35(8), 741–56.
- Richman, S. B., Slotter, E. B., Gardner, W. L., & DeWall, C. N. (2015). Reaching out by changing what's within: social exclusion increases self-concept malleability. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 57, 64–77.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2014.11.008>
- Rozin, P., Markwith, M., & Stoess, C. (1997). Moralization and becoming a vegetarian: The transformation of preferences into values and recruitment of disgust. *Psychological Science*, 8, 67-73. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.1997.tb00685.x>
- Rozin, P., & Singh, L. (1999). The moralization of cigarette smoking in the united states. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 8(3), 321–337.
https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327663jcp0803_07
- Skitka, L. J. (2002). Do the means always justify the ends, or do the ends sometimes justify the means? a value protection model of justice reasoning. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 28(5), 588–597.
- Skitka, L. J., Bauman, C. W., & Sargis, E. G. (2005). Moral conviction: another contributor to attitude strength or something more? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 88(6), 895–917.
- Skitka, L. J., & Bauman, C. W. (2008). Moral conviction and political engagement. *Political Psychology*, 29(1), 29–54.
- Skitka, L. J., Wisneski, D. C., & Brandt, M. J. (2018). Attitude moralization: probably not intuitive or rooted in perceptions of harm. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 27(1), 9–13.

- Turner, S. M., Beidel, D. C., Dancu, C. V., & Keys, D. J. (1986). Psychopathology of social phobia and comparison to avoidant personality disorder. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 95*(4), 389–94.
- Wells, A. (2013). *Cognitive therapy of anxiety disorders: a practice manual and conceptual guide* (2nd ed.). Wiley-Blackwell.
- Williams, K.D. (1997) Social Ostracism. In: Kowalski R.M. (Ed.) *Aversive Interpersonal Behaviors* (pp.133-170). Plenum Press. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4757-9354-3_7
- Williams, K. D. (2007). Ostracism: the kiss of social death: ostracism: the kiss of social death. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass, 1*(1), 236–247.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9004.2007.00004>.
- Williams, K. D. (2009). Ostracism: Effects of being excluded and ignored. In M. P. Zanna (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 41, pp. 275-314). New York: Academic Press.
- Williams, K. D., Cheung, C. K. T., & Choi, W. (2000). Cyberostracism: effects of being ignored over the internet. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 79*(5), 748–762. <https://doi.org/10.1037//0022-3514.79.5.748>
- Williams, K. D., Forgas, J. P., & Hippel, W. von. (2005). *The social outcast: ostracism, social exclusion, rejection, and bullying* (Ser. Sydney symposium of social psychology series, v. 7). Psychology Press. Retrieved November 29, 2021
- Williams, K. D., & Sommer, K. L. (1997). Social ostracism by coworkers: does rejection lead to loafing or compensation? *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 23*(7), 693–706. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167297237003>
- Wisneski, D. C., & Skitka, L. J. (2017). Moralization through moral shock: Exploring emotional antecedents to moral conviction. *Personality and Social Psychological Bulletin, 43*(2), 139-150. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167216676479>

Appendix

Flyer for the student association "SpeakUp Groningen"

