

Project Summary

My (or Your?) moral judgments. Understanding the phenomenon of moral conformity

Our world is filled with intense moral debates over issues like abortion, the death penalty, and immigration. While we often see our moral beliefs as deeply personal and unchanging, this project challenges that view by investigating the surprising influence of group dynamics on moral decisions.

Decades ago, social psychologist Solomon Asch demonstrated how group pressure could sway even simple judgments, such as the length of lines. Remarkably, people often conformed to incorrect group opinions. But does this kind of group influence extend to moral judgments—our core beliefs about right and wrong?

Our earlier research (Paruzel-Czachura et al., 2024) showed that **moral conformity** exists: people often change their moral judgments under group pressure. Yet many questions remain:

- Which moral dilemmas are most vulnerable to group influence?
- How do factors like gender, age, or cultural background affect conformity?
- Can group pressure create lasting changes in moral beliefs?

To answer these questions, this project will conduct six studies:

1. **Severity of Moral Issues:** Are less severe dilemmas (e.g., lying) more influenced by groups than severe ones (e.g., murder)?
2. **Abstract vs. Real-Life Dilemmas:** Do people conform differently when faced with hypothetical scenarios compared to real-life situations?
3. **Gender Influence:** Does the gender of the influencing group matter? Are people more likely to conform to men?
4. **Age Influence:** Are individuals more influenced by older groups than younger ones?
5. **Individual Differences:** What personal traits (e.g., personality, religiosity, cognitive abilities) make someone more or less likely to conform?
6. **Cultural Universality:** Is moral conformity universal, or does it vary across cultures, such as in the Hadza tribe of Tanzania?

We will also examine participants' **physiological responses**—such as heart rate—to understand how group pressure affects them during moral decisions. We will also conduct **longitudinal studies** to see how strong group pressure may be.

Why Does This Research Matter? Understanding moral conformity is essential for:

1. **Navigating Social Influence:** Group dynamics shape decisions in schools, workplaces, and communities.
2. **Reducing Polarization:** Insights could help bridge divides on contentious moral issues by fostering dialogue.
3. **Promoting Ethical Independence:** Educators and leaders can create environments encouraging independent moral reasoning.
4. **Cross-Cultural Insights:** Exploring non-Western societies helps us understand whether moral conformity is universal or culturally specific.
5. **Practical Applications:** Findings could guide interventions to reduce harmful group behavior, such as hate crimes or unethical workplace decisions.