

RUNNING HEAD: Moralization and legitimacy

How the Moralization of Issues
Grants Social Legitimacy to Act on One's Attitudes

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Abstract

Actions that do not have as their goal the advancement or protection of one's material interests are often seen as illegitimate (D.T. Miller, 1999). Four studies suggested that moral values can legitimate action in the absence of material interest. The more participants linked sociopolitical issues to moral values, the more comfortable they felt advocating on behalf of those issues and the less confused they were by others' advocacy (Studies 1 and 2). Crime victims were perceived as being more entitled to claim special privileges when the crime had violated their personal moral values (Studies 3 and 4). These effects were strongest when the legitimacy to act could not already be derived from one's material interests, suggesting that moral values and material interest can represent interchangeable justifications for behavior. No support was found for the possibility that attitude strength explained these effects. The power of moralization to disinhibit action is discussed.

KEYWORDS: moralization, entitlement, psychological standing, advocacy, attitudes, self-interest

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How the Moralization of Issues

Grants Social Legitimacy to Act on One's Attitudes

In attempts to gain support, activists often strive to link their causes to moral values (*moralization*). For example, rather than advancing arguments for or against legalized abortion based on pragmatic concerns like its fiscal consequences, an advocate is likely to emphasize the relevance of moral concepts like life or choice. Similarly, victims of crimes sometimes feel that their outrage stems less from the material harm they have incurred, and more from the fact that the crime violates basic principles of justice or fairness. What are the consequences of moralizing an issue for people's behavior?

We propose that moralization grants people the social legitimacy to act on attitudes or motives that would otherwise be illegitimate for them to act upon. We refer to this social legitimacy as *psychological standing*, which describes the subjective sense that it is appropriate for an individual to engage in a particular behavior (Miller, Effron, & Zak, 2009; Miller & Effron, 2010). When people have psychological standing, they feel and are perceived as being entitled to speak up, take action, or otherwise act on their attitudes. When people lack psychological standing, they feel, and others perceive, that it is "not their place" to act. Psychological standing is different than other correlates of moralization examined by prior research, such as the desire to take political action (Pagano & Huo, 2007) or the willingness to violate the traditional requirements of justice in pursuit of the moralized outcome (Mullen & Skitka, 2006; Skitka & Houston, 2001; Skitka & Mullen, 2002a, 2002b). Whereas this prior research suggests that moralization can motivate people to act, we propose that moralization can also liberate people to act.

In the following sections, we elaborate on the concept of psychological standing, describe factors that grant or deprive individuals of it, and derive our predictions about its relation to moralization.

How Does One Obtain Psychological Standing?

People derive psychological standing from socially legitimate justifications for action. A particularly powerful justification for taking action on a specific issue is having a *material stake* in that issue (Miller, 1999). A material stake, as we define it, arises when one's physical or economic wellbeing has been, or has the potential to be, directly affected by an issue. Consider the finding that when people lack a material stake in an issue's outcome, they are unlikely to take action (Green & Cowden, 1992; Miller, 1999; Regan & Fazio, 1977; Sears, Hensler, & Speer, 1979; Sivacek & Crano, 1982), and others do not expect them to act (Crano, 1995). One explanation for this finding is that individuals without a material stake lack the motivation to act (Green & Cowden, 1992). Another explanation is that those who lack a material stake simply feel that it is "not their place" to act – in other words, they lack psychological standing (Miller & Ratner, 1996, 1998; Miller, 1999; Ratner & Miller, 2001).

In a study supporting the latter explanation (Ratner & Miller, 2001, Study 3), participants learned about a (fictional) health issue that directly affected only their own gender, thus giving them a relatively great material stake, or only the other gender, thus giving them a relatively small material stake. Although participants in both conditions had equally strong attitudes about the issue, participants with the greater stake were more likely to express these attitudes by signing a petition and writing a statement. Importantly, when these behaviors ostensibly helped an advocacy group called "Princeton Men and Women Opposed to Proposition 174" (as opposed to "Princeton Opponents of Proposition 174"), most participants performed them regardless of

gender. Apparently, this gender-inclusive name granted participants the psychological standing to act on their attitudes by signaling that it was not only the more-affected gender's "place" to join the cause.

The amount of psychological standing that one can derive from a material stake will depend, in part, on whether or not others have a larger stake. For example, few would argue that men have no material stake in the issue of legalized abortion – after all, most men are potential fathers. Yet despite similarly strong attitudes among men and women about abortion-related issues in one study, men were less comfortable expressing their views about these issues than their female counterparts (Ratner & Miller, 2001, Study 2). Apparently, men felt they lacked psychological standing on this issue because their material stake was relatively small compared to women's. As another example, imagine two individuals who have both been victimized by a recent crime spree. The victim who sustained the greatest material loss would probably be seen as more entitled to claim reparations, publicly condemn the criminals, or offer an opinion to officials about how to respond to the crimes (Miller et al., 2009; Miller & Effron, 2010).

It is important to distinguish between material stakes as a source of psychological standing versus a conflict of interest. Having a material stake in an issue often appears to compromise one's objectivity. In such cases, any claims one makes are likely to be unpersuasive (Eagly, Wood, & Chaiken, 1978; Walster, Aronson, & Abrahams, 1966). Yet the issue of persuasiveness is orthogonal to the issue of psychological standing. People might perceive a woman to be more entitled than a man to express strong views about abortion by virtue of her greater material stake in the issue (Ratner & Miller, 2001), but *if* a male were to advocate on behalf of his attitude about abortion, he might seem less biased and therefore be more persuasive.

Our focus in the present research is on entitlement to speak or act rather than on persuasive power.

To summarize, material stakes do not merely *motivate* action, but also *legitimate* it. Yet material stakes are not the only socially legitimate justification for action, and thus may not be required for individuals to feel that they have the standing to act. We next consider the possibility that moralization can provide an alternative source of psychological standing.

Psychological Standing from Moralization

Anecdotally, there are a number of sociopolitical issues about which some individuals seem comfortable acting on their attitudes despite having substantially less material stake than others. Women may be disproportionately represented among abortion advocates, but many men are found as well. Heterosexuals may not be materially affected by same-sex marriage legislation, but many of them publicly express strong views about it. The Freedom Riders, many of whom were White, traveled to the Deep South in the 1960s to protest anti-Black discrimination at great personal risk. One characteristic that these diverse issues share is that they are highly relevant to many individuals' moral values. For these issues, it seems that the perception that one has a *moral stake* can substitute for a material stake in determining who has psychological standing.

Why would having a moral stake in an issue grant one standing? Violations of one's moral values may not represent material harm, but they do represent symbolic harm. For example, many individuals not personally affected by the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks felt symbolically harmed by the attacks' moral gravity; the French newspaper *Le Monde* captured this sentiment on September 13 by declaring, "*Nous sommes tous Américains*" ("We are all Americans" Colombani, 2001). Much like moral principles are seen as defining rules of

behavior that apply to everyone, everywhere (Haidt, Rosenberg, & Hom, 2003; Rozin, 1999; Skitka, Bauman, & Sargis, 2005; Turiel, 1983), moral violations may be seen as symbolically harming everyone, everywhere. Incurring, or having the potential to incur, symbolic harm may provide a socially legitimate justification for action. Moralizing an issue may thus signal that it is “everybody’s place” to act.

Signaling that everyone is entitled to act should have the strongest effect on the behavior of individuals who would otherwise be disentitled to act. For example, individuals who act on strong attitudes about an issue in which they have little material stake should experience discomfort – unless they have a moral stake to justify their behavior. By contrast, actors should experience little discomfort if they have a material stake in the issue, regardless of whether or not they also have a moral stake. Once one can derive sufficient standing from one kind of stake, having another kind of stake provides only a redundant justification for action.

Although moralized attitudes are strong, not all strong attitudes are moralized. Moralization correlates only modestly with several indices of attitude strength, and, when attitude strength is controlled, still significantly predicts such outcomes as voting behavior and the desire to avoid attitudinally dissimilar others (Skitka & Bauman, 2008; Skitka et al., 2005; Wright, Cullum, & Schwab, 2008). The evidence thus suggests that the extent to which one traces an attitude to one’s moral values is qualitatively distinct from how strongly one feels about an issue. We contend that the psychological standing that individuals can derive from moralized attitudes is independent of attitude strength.

Although issues can be moralized on the societal level (Rozin, 1999), the present research focuses on individual differences in moralization. We propose that individuals who

moralize an issue will perceive that issue as affecting everyone symbolically, and will thus grant psychological standing to both themselves and others who act to advance the moralized position. Similarly, moralizing an issue should signal to others that one has a moral stake in that issue, and thus prompt others to grant one standing, so long as they do not reject the legitimacy of the moralized position. Even individuals who do not personally moralize an issue can nonetheless recognize the symbolic harm incurred by someone who has. For example, an individual who does not moralize the eating of pork may nonetheless recognize the standing of a kosher-observant individual to campaign against companies who falsely label foods as pork-free.

Overview of Studies

We first examined whether the extent to which participants moralized sociopolitical issues would predict how they reacted to advocates for those issues (Study 1) and how comfortable they themselves felt advocating on behalf of their views about those issues (Study 2). Prior research has suggested that advocates with psychological standing elicit less surprise and confusion than those without standing, and that individuals with standing feel more comfortable expressing their views in public (Ratner & Miller, 2001). Our next two studies measured perceptions of standing more directly, examining whether framing a crime as a moral violation would increase how entitled to act on their outrage some victims were perceived to be relative to others (Study 3), and how entitled to act on their outrage participants themselves expected to feel if they were victimized by the crime (Study 4). All four studies also manipulated how much material stake participants, or the people they evaluated, had in the relevant issues. We expected that the effects of moralization would be most apparent when a relative lack of a material stake deprived one of psychological standing. Studies 1 and 2 operationalized material stake as membership in a group that was most directly affected by the

relevant issue (as in Ratner & Miller, 2001), while Studies 3 and 4 operationalized it as the degree of financial loss that a crime caused an individual relative to other victims. All studies also measured how strongly participants felt about the relevant issues in an attempt to rule out the possibility that standing arises from attitude strength rather than from moralization per se.

Study 1: Reactions to Advocates

Because people who lack the standing to act generally refrain from doing so, those who act despite a lack of standing should elicit confusion from observers. If moralization grants standing, then the more one moralizes an issue, the less one should be confused by the actions of someone who otherwise lacks standing. Participants in Study 1 considered an advocate for the issue of legalized abortion. The advocate was either female and therefore had a greater material stake in the issue, or male and therefore had a lesser material stake (Ratner & Miller, 2001). We predicted that participants' moralization would be associated with less confusion in response to the male advocate, whereas this association would be weaker for the female advocate, whose greater material stake should already grant her the standing to advocate.

We focused on advocates for a position on abortion that participants themselves supported (i.e., pro-choice) because we thought that participants' moralization would not grant psychological standing to ideological opponents. Believing that outlawing abortion would create moral harm does not imply that one believes that keeping abortion legal would also create moral harm. Thus, participants who moralize one side of the abortion debate should not necessarily perceive an advocate for the other side of the debate as having a legitimate moral stake in the issue. In fact, moralization is associated with heightened intolerance for others with opposing views (Skitka et al., 2005; Wright et al., 2008), suggesting that individuals with more moralized

attitudes might respond more negatively to opponents for contrary positions. We return to this issue in the General Discussion.

Method

Participants

Participants were 66 Stanford undergraduates enrolled in an introductory psychology class who indicated on a pretest that they did not oppose legalized abortion (41 females, 22 males, and 3 who did not indicate their gender; 44% White, 15% Asian, 8% Black, 12% multiracial, and 21% of other or unknown race; M age = 18.84 years, SD = .90). They received course credit for their participation.

Procedure

In a packet of unrelated surveys, participants indicated their attitudes about legalized abortion on a 7-point scale (-3 = *Strongly oppose*, 3 = *Strongly support*), and then stated whether “My position about legalized abortion reflects something about my core moral values and convictions” (-3 = *Strongly disagree*; 3 = *Strongly agree*; Skitka et al., 2005).

Approximately two weeks later, the same students completed a second packet of unrelated studies, in which they read about either a male (“Robert”) or female (“Roberta”) sophomore who had advocated strongly in favor of a pro-choice position on abortion by donating \$200 to an advocacy group, starting an Internet petition that urged lawmakers to enact pro-choice legislation, traveling across the country to attend a demonstration, and organizing a rally near campus.¹

We measured *confusion* by assessing the extent to which reading about the advocate made participants feel shocked, suspicious, amazed, confused, and skeptical, and how surprising

and strange they found the advocate's actions (1 = *Not at all*; 7 = *Very much*; cf. Ratner & Miller, 2001, Study 2). These items were averaged to form a single composite ($\alpha = .83$).²

Results

Participants' gender did not moderate the results.

Confusion

To test the hypothesis that participants' moralization would be associated with less confusion about a male relative to a female advocate, we regressed the confusion scale (transformed with a natural log function to reduce negative skew) against participants' moralization (standardized), the advocate's gender (coded as -1 for the female and 1 for the male), and their interaction. Overall, neither participants' moralization nor the advocate's gender significantly predicted confusion, $t(62) = 1.17$ and 0.11 , respectively, *ns*, but, as predicted, the interaction between moralization and advocate gender was significant, $t(62) = 2.21$, $p = .03$. Simple slopes analysis revealed the hypothesized pattern, shown in Figure 1. The more participants moralized abortion, the less confused they were by a male advocate, $b = -.18$, $t(62) = 2.21$, $p = .03$, whereas moralization was unrelated to confusion about a female advocate, $b = .06$, $t(62) = .81$, $p = .42$.

We decomposed the interaction the other way by testing simple slopes of advocate gender at ± 1 *SD* from the mean of the moralization measure. Participants with less moralized attitudes towards abortion tended to be more confused by the male advocate than by the female advocate (untransformed *Ms* derived from regression equation = 2.35 and 1.85; cf. Ratner & Miller, 2001), although this effect was not significant, $b = .11$, $t(62) = 1.49$, $p = .14$. By contrast, participants with more moralized attitudes tended to perceive the female advocate as more confusing than the male advocate (*Ms* = 1.58 and 2.10), perhaps because they did not know

whether her advocacy stemmed from her material interests or her moral values – however, this difference was not significant either, $t(62) = 1.66, p = .10$.

Attitude strength

Two results argued against the possibility that participants' attitude strength explains our results. First, attitude strength correlated only modestly with moralization, $r(66) = .36, p = .003$, suggesting, like prior research, that the two variables are related but independent constructs (Skitka et al., 2005). Second, neither attitude strength nor its interaction with the advocate's gender were significant predictors of confusion when added in a step-wise fashion to the regression model described earlier, $t(61) = 1.19, p = .24$, and $t(60) = .84, p = .40$, respectively.

Discussion

Given that it is unusual for people to act without standing, advocates for issues in which they lack standing should provoke confusion. In Study 1, the more participants moralized an issue in which women have a greater material stake than men (i.e., abortion), the less confused they were by a male advocate whom they read about two weeks later. By contrast, participants expressed little confusion about a female advocate, regardless of how much they moralized the issue. Presumably, the female's gender already gave her standing on this issue (Ratner & Miller, 2001). Study 1 thus provides preliminary evidence that moralization, along with material interest, can grant standing.

Acting without psychological standing is not only unusual; it is also seen as illegitimate. To the extent that individuals feel it is illegitimate to act, they should feel uncomfortable acting. Study 2 tested the claim that moralizing an issue in which one lacks a material interest would be associated with greater comfort taking action on behalf of that issue. Moreover, Study 2 sought

to address a limitation of Study 1 by examining an issue that affects men more directly than women rather than only examining one that affects women more directly than men.

Study 2: Comfort Advocating

Participants considered two issues, one of which tended to affect their own gender more directly (*greater material stake* issue), and one of which tended to affect the other gender more directly (*lesser material stake* issue). We measured participants' private attitudes about the issue, their moralization, and their comfort expressing their attitudes through action. We hypothesized that participants' moralization would be a stronger predictor of their comfort expressing their attitudes about the issue in which they had a lesser material stake compared to the issue in which they had a greater material stake.

Method

Participants

Community college students ($N = 150$; 76 females and 74 males; 45% White, 25% Asian, 17% Latino, 4% Black, 24% other; M age = 21.78, $SD = 6.46$, range = 16 to 52; 39% self-identified as lower, lower-middle, or working class, 41% as middle class, and 38% as upper-middle or upper class) participated in this study online, embedded in a series of unrelated surveys, in exchange for course credit.

Procedure

Using 7-point scales, participants indicated their attitude about legalized abortion ($-3 =$ *Strongly oppose*; $3 =$ *Strongly support*), the extent to which they moralized abortion (using the item from Study 1), and their comfort expressing *their own* attitudes about legalized abortion in each of five public ways: signing a petition, attending a demonstration, writing to a Congressional representative, attending a meeting of "concerned citizens," and wearing a t-shirt

to class (1 = *Not at all comfortable*; 4 = *Somewhat comfortable*; 7 = *Very comfortable*). Finally, participants provided demographics. Women were coded as having a greater material stake in this issue, and men were coded as having a lesser material stake.

Later in the academic term, the same participants were invited to complete a second series of unrelated surveys. The 101 participants who elected to do so imagined that Congress was considering mandating that all male U.S. citizens between the ages of 18 and 25 enter a draft lottery to serve in the military. After indicating their gender, participants responded to the same questions about the draft that they had previously answered regarding legalized abortion. Finally, they indicated whether or not they would be required to enter the U.S. draft lottery if it were instituted. Participants who responded “yes” to this question (almost entirely men) were coded as having a greater material stake in this issue, whereas those who responded “no” were coded as having a lesser material stake.³

Results

We report analyses for the 101 participants who provided responses about both abortion and the draft, although identical results were obtained when we conducted analyses that allowed us to retain the 49 participants who only provided responses about abortion.

On average, participants opposed the draft and supported legalized abortion ($M_s = -1.61$ and 1.12 , $SD_s = 1.45$ and 1.89 , respectively), and moralized each issue somewhat ($M_s = .48$ and $.91$, $SD_s = 1.69$ and 1.83 , respectively). The specific issue did not significantly moderate the results that follow.

We hypothesized that moralization would be a stronger predictor of participants' comfort expressing their attitudes about the issue in which they had a lesser material stake. We tested this hypothesis by submitting the average of the five comfort items ($\alpha = .88$) to a repeated-

measures ANOVA that tested effects of moralization (a continuous variable, standardized separately for each issue), material stake, and their interaction. Results revealed a main effect of moralization, $F(1, 98) = 15.34, p < .001$, indicating that across issues, greater moralization was associated with greater comfort advocating in favor of one's beliefs. Overall, participants tended to feel more comfortable speaking up about the issue in which they had a greater material stake, but this main effect was not significant, $F(1, 98) = 2.27, p = .14$. More importantly, the predicted interaction was significant, $F(1, 98) = 9.11, p = .003$ (see Figure 2).

We decomposed this interaction by computing simple slopes based on the regression model underlying the repeated-measures ANOVA (greater-stake issue coded 1; lesser-stake issue coded -1; moralization standardized; participant effects coded with dummy variables). As predicted, greater moralization was associated with greater comfort advocating for the issue in which participants had *less* of a material stake, $b = .83, t(98) = 5.42, p < .0001$. By contrast, moralization was not significantly associated with comfort advocating for the issue in which participants had *more* of a material stake, $b = .19, t(98) = 1.03, p = .31$.

We used the same method to examine the simple effects of material stake at $\pm 1 SD$ from the mean of the moralization measure. For *less* moralized issues, participants felt more comfortable advocating their views about the issue in which they had a greater versus a lesser material stake (M s derived from regression model = 4.16 and 3.24, respectively), $t(98) = 3.30, p = .001$ (cf. Ratner & Miller, 2001, Study 2). By contrast, for *more* moralized issues, participants felt relatively comfortable advocating for both issues (M s = 4.54 and 4.91), $t(98) = 1.32, p = .19$.

Attitude strength. As in Study 1, attitude strength (defined here as the absolute value of the attitude measure) correlated only modestly with comfort, $r(202) = .46, p < .001$, again suggesting that the two are related though independent constructs. Although attitude strength

was a significant predictor of comfort when added to the repeated-measures ANOVA described earlier, $F(1, 97) = 28.70, p < .0001$, the hypothesized interaction between moralization and material stakes remained significant, $F(1, 97) = 9.77, p = .002$. Adding the interaction between attitude strength and material stakes to the ANOVA model did not further improve its fit, $F(1, 96) = .17, p = .68$. Thus, the data did not support the possibility that attitude strength explained the effects of moralization.

Discussion

Study 2 supported the hypothesis that moralization would more strongly predict participants' comfort publicly expressing their attitudes about an issue in which they had less of a material stake. The moderate association between moralization and attitude strength was insufficient to explain this effect.

We interpret these data as supporting our claim that moralization grants psychological standing. When participants could not derive standing from their material stake in the issue, they seemed to require a moral stake to feel comfortable expressing their attitudes. It is possible, however, that comfort arose from a source other than standing. Additionally, Study 2, like Study 1, was correlational, so the usual caveats about causation apply. Studies 3 and 4 sought to address these limitations by including direct measures of psychological standing and employing an experimental paradigm. To reduce any concerns specific to the operationalization of material stake used in Studies 1 and 2, Studies 3 and 4 operationalized material stake as the amount of financial loss caused by a hypothetical crime. Finally, to broaden the scope of our findings, Study 3 examined whether participants would grant another person standing based on *his* moralization.

Study 3: Victim Entitlement to Privileges

Participants in Study 3 considered two victims of a crime, one of whom had incurred more material harm than the other. In one condition, the crime violated the moral values of the victim who had incurred less material harm. We expected that the victim with the greater material loss would be perceived as more entitled to the privilege of publicly expressing outrage about the crime, unless the harm incurred by less-victimized individual violated a moral value. Moreover, we predicted that any differences in the outrage attributed to the two victims would be insufficient to explain this effect.

Method

Participants

Thirty-eight students (22 females, 16 males; M age = 19.59, SD = 1.28) eating in dining halls completed the survey in exchange for candy.

Procedure

Participants read a vignette about two neighbors, Mr. Jones and Mr. Smith, whose houses were vandalized by graffiti. The damage was worse at Jones' house, causing Jones (the character with a *greater material stake*) to have to pay \$1,000 in repairs, whereas Smith (the character with a *lesser material stake*) only had to pay \$80. The vignette emphasized that the two neighbors were each "equally upset about his house being vandalized, and each wants to see the perpetrators punished."

In the *moral stakes* condition, Smith was "upset by the content of the graffiti," which "contained lewd drawings, dirty words, and vulgar statements" and "deeply offend[ed] his basic values and standards of decency." Jones, by contrast, was "upset about having to pay for the damage to his house." The control condition did not contain this information, and the graffiti contained "shapes, squiggles, and indecipherable words."

Comprehension and manipulation checks. Participants were asked who had to pay more to repair his house (Jones, Smith, or neither) and who was more upset about the vandalism (-3 = *Definitely Jones*, 0 = *Both equally upset*, 3 = *Definitely Smith*; intermediate points labeled *probably* and *maybe*). Perceptions of moral stakes were assessed by asking to what extent Jones and Smith each viewed the vandalism as a moral violation, and to what extent they reacted with feelings stemming from their “core moral values and convictions” (1 = *Not at all*, 7 = *Entirely*).

Standing. Each participant imagined two scenarios in which only one of the two victims would have an opportunity to express his outrage publicly. In the first scenario, a judge decides to allow one of the two victims to decide how many hours of community service the vandals should receive. In the second, Jones and Smith collaborate on writing a statement that only one of them will be permitted to read aloud in court at the vandals’ trial. After each scenario, participants responded to four items indicating which character had greater standing to be the one permitted to express his outrage: to whom it would be more appropriate and legitimate to give the privilege, and who was more entitled and had a stronger claim to the privilege (-3 = *Definitely Jones*, 0 = *Both equally*, 3 = *Definitely Smith*; intermediate points labeled *probably* and *maybe*). We averaged the four items assessing the two characters’ relative standing across both scenarios ($\alpha = .80$).

Results

Comprehension and manipulation checks

We excluded the two participants who did not correctly identify which character’s repairs cost more, and three participants who had previously participated in a related pilot study.

Attrition did not differ between conditions, $\chi^2(1) = .23, ns$.

We averaged the two items measuring moral stakes separately for the character with less material stake ($\alpha = .93$) and the one with greater material stake ($\alpha = .90$). As expected, participants perceived the two characters as having an equivalent moral stake in the control condition ($M = 4.32, SD = 1.78$ for the character with less material stake; $M = 4.20, SD = 1.66$ for the character with greater material stake), paired $t(16) = .34, ns$. Also as expected, participants in the *moral stake* condition perceived the character with less material stake as having a greater moral stake relative to the other character ($M_s = 6.56$ and $2.63, SD_s = .60$ and 1.44 , respectively), paired $t(15) = 9.10, p < .0001$. The moral stake manipulation thus had its intended effect.

Unexpectedly, participants thought that the character with less material stake would be more upset than the other character in the *moral stakes* condition ($M = .75, SD = 1.24$) but not in the control condition ($M = -.29, SD = .85$); comparing the two conditions, $t(31) = 2.84, p = .008$. We thus included this item as a covariate in the analyses that follow.

Standing

As predicted, the relative standing of the character with the greater material stake was lower in the *moral stakes* condition ($M = -.90, SD = .74$; adjusted for “covariate, $M = -1.05$) than in the control condition ($M = -.52, SD = .85$; adjusted for covariate, $M = -.36$), $F(1, 30) = 5.71, p = .02$, in an ANCOVA controlling for how upset the characters were perceived to be relative to each other. To better understand the nature of this effect, we computed a separate regression equation for each condition that predicted standing from the covariate (mean-centered). The intercept of each equation tests whether standing was significantly below the scale midpoint. Results revealed that in the control condition, the ratings were significantly below the midpoint, $t(15) = 4.47, p < .001$, indicating that participants perceived that the character with less material

stake had significantly less standing than the character with a greater material stake. By contrast, the mean in the *moral stakes* condition was not significantly different than the midpoint, $t(14) = 1.55, p = .14$, indicating that participants perceived the two characters' standing as more equivalent when the one with the lesser material stake had moralized the issue.

Discussion

Study 3 demonstrated a causal relationship between moralization and psychological standing. Participants thought that it would be more appropriate and legitimate to give the privilege of publicly expressing outrage to the crime victim who had suffered greater material harm, unless the victim who had suffered less material harm had also suffered moral harm. In that case, participants perceived it to be equally appropriate and legitimate to give the privilege to either person. In other words, a moral stake can grant standing by substituting for a material stake. Moralization seems to have granted the character with a lesser material stake a greater social entitlement to act on his attitudes, independent of how upset he was about the crime.

Study 4: Victim Entitlement to Privileges 2

Whereas Studies 1 and 3 examined perceptions of others' standing, Study 4, like Study 2, examined perceptions of one's own standing. Participants imagined being victimized by a crime, and indicated how much standing they would feel they had to act on their motivations to obtain a special privilege. We manipulated moral and material stakes, predicting that standing would depend on the interaction between these two variables.

Study 4 sought to address a limitation of Study 3, in which a single scale measured which of two characters had more standing. We believe that moralization increased the standing of the character who had incurred less material harm, but it is possible that it instead (or additionally) decreased the standing of the other character instead. Moreover, explicitly asking participants to

compare the standing of the two characters may have contributed to the results. In Study 4, we measured moralization in a way that avoids these issues.

Study 4 also sought to address the question of whose moralization grants standing. Our prior studies show that participants' own moralization predicted their reactions to advocates (Study 1) and their comfort advocating themselves (Study 2), and also that another person's moralization was sufficient for participants to grant him standing (Study 3). Perhaps the source of moralization is less important for psychological standing than the knowledge that an issue has been moralized. Because we did not vary the source of moralization systematically, however, other interpretations are possible. To investigate this question, Study 4 manipulated whether participants imagined that the crime violated only their own moral values, or only the moral values of others.

Method

Participants

Participants were 169 individuals (92% students; 72 females, 60 males, 37 unknown; M age = 21.45, $SD = 3.77$) who completed the study on the Web in exchange for a \$5 gift card to an online retailer, or in the lab as part of a longer survey session in exchange for \$20.

Procedure

Participants read the following vignette:

Imagine that you come home one day to find that someone has broken into your dorm room, stolen some of your things, and graffitied a message on your wall. The university will pay to clean up the graffiti, but you estimate that you'll have to pay \$300 to replace your stolen items.

You and the other students in your dorm are extremely upset about the stolen property and the vandalism.

Participants further imagined that another student's room had been robbed, but not vandalized.

Moral stake manipulation. In the control condition, participants read that the graffiti contained “lines and squiggles” and was “completely illegible,” and that neither they nor the other students were morally offended by its content. In the *self moralizes* condition, they imagined that the graffiti contained a message that “deeply offends your core moral convictions,” “runs contrary to your basic values and beliefs about right and wrong,” and that made them view the vandalism as a “moral violation.” Participants also imagined that the other students in their dorm, by contrast, “view the message as being ‘merely words’ and therefore they do not view the act of vandalism as a moral violation.” The *others moralize* condition was identical to the *self moralizes* condition, except participants imagined that the other students moralized the issue while they themselves did not.

Attention and comprehension check. Three items helped address concerns, raised by our prior experience with this particular subject pool, about failures to attend to the stimuli (see Nosek, Banaji, & Greenwald, 2002). After reading the vignette, participants were instructed to click a small box. We interpreted a participant’s failure to do so as evidence that he or she was not attending carefully to the stimuli (see Oppenheimer, Meyvis, & Davidenko, 2009). To check participants’ understanding of the vignette, two yes/no questions asked if the content of the graffiti offended participants’ own moral convictions, or other students’ moral convictions.

Outrage. Participants indicated on 7-point scales how much the incident described in the vignette would make them feel angry, upset, and outraged (1 = *Not at all*; 4 = *Somewhat*; 7 = *Very much*). These items were averaged to form a single composite ($\alpha = .81$).

Motivation to act. Participants indicated on a 7-point scale how much they would want to find out who the thief was (1 = *Not at all*, 3 = *Somewhat*, 7 = *Very much*).

Material stake manipulation. We manipulated whether participants had incurred more or less material harm than the other victim. In all conditions, participants were reminded that the value of the possessions stolen from them was \$300. In the *lesser material stake* condition, the other victim's stolen possessions were worth \$1,000, whereas in the *greater material stake* condition, the other victim's possessions were worth only \$90. This manipulation was performed within subjects, and the order in which the conditions appeared was counterbalanced.

Standing. Participants imagined that the university police had apprehended the thief and had decided to release the thief's identity to a single person. Participants indicated on three 7-point scales how entitled they would feel to be the one to learn the thief's identity, and how appropriate and legitimate they would feel it was (1 = *Not at all*, 3 = *Somewhat*, 7 = *Very much*).

Results

Attention and comprehension check

We excluded the 8 participants who did not check the box in the response to the attention check instruction, suggesting that they had not read the passages carefully (see Oppenheimer et al., 2009), the 20 participants who incorrectly recalled who, if anyone, was morally offended by the graffiti, and 3 observations from participants who appeared to have previously completed the study. Attrition did not differ as a function of the between-subjects manipulation, $\chi^2(2) = 1.45$, *ns*.

Outrage and motivation to act

Our measures of outrage and motivation to act both differed as a function of the moral stakes manipulation in an unexpected way, $F_s(2, 135) = 3.45$ and 3.76 , respectively, $p_s = .03$ in one-way ANOVAs. Specifically, post-hoc tests with Bonferroni corrections revealed that the *others moralize* condition elicited less outrage ($M = 5.42$, $SD = 1.17$) than the control condition

($M = 6.04$, $SD = 1.07$), $p < .05$, and somewhat less than the *self moralizes* condition ($M = 5.92$, $SD = 1.23$), although this latter difference was not significant, $p = .13$. Similarly, the *others moralize* condition elicited less motivation to learn the thief's identity ($M = 5.34$, $SD = 1.48$) than the *self moralizes* condition ($M = 6.01$, $SD = 1.35$), $p = .03$, and non-significantly less than the control condition ($M = 5.93$, $SD = 1.24$), $p = .14$. Perhaps participants assumed that others who moralized the crime would experience heightened outrage and motivation, which made participants' own outrage and motivation seem lower (a contrast effect). To control for these effects, we included these two measures as covariates in the analyses that follow.

Standing

We submitted a composite of the three items measuring standing ($\alpha = .93$) to a 3 (*moral stake condition*: self vs. other vs. none, between subjects) \times 2 (*material stake condition*: greater vs. lesser, within subjects) \times 2 (*order*: greater material stake condition presented first vs. second, between subjects) ANCOVA that controlled for outrage, motivation to know the thief's identity, and the interaction of each of these two covariates with the within-subjects variable. (The order \times material stake and the order \times material stake \times moral stake interactions were omitted from the ANCOVA to conserve degrees of freedom, as they were not significant. Higher-order interactions with the covariates were also omitted for the same reason). Theoretically uninteresting main effects of order, $F(1, 130) = 3.75$, $p = .05$ and moral stake, $F(2, 130) = 2.91$, $p = .06$, emerged, and were qualified by a marginally significant interaction between these two variables, $F(2, 130) = 2.88$, $p = .06$. The main effect of the material stake manipulation was also significant, $F(1, 133) = 200.83$, $p < .0001$, indicating that overall, participants felt that they had more standing when their financial loss was greater (versus less) than another person's loss (see Figure 3). Of greater theoretical interest, the predicted interaction between the moral stake and

the material stake manipulations was marginally significant, $F(2, 133) = 2.71, p < .07$. As can be seen in Figure 3, the two moral stakes manipulations seem to have had the greatest effect on standing, relative to the control condition, in the *lesser material stake* condition.

To examine the nature of this interaction, we conducted separate one-way ANCOVAs for each moral stakes condition, using the covariates from the omnibus analysis just reported. (In the following text, M_{adj} denotes means adjusted for the covariates). In the *lesser material stake* condition, a significant effect of the moral stakes manipulation emerged, $F(2, 132) = 3.61, p = .03$. A planned contrast comparing the control condition (coded as -2) to the average of the two moralization conditions (each coded as 1), revealed that participants thought they would have more standing when the issue was moralized (by self: $M_{adj} = 4.16, M = 4.25, SD = 1.50$; by others: $M_{adj} = 4.03, M = 3.88, SD = 1.22$) compared to when it was not moralized ($M_{adj} = 3.39, M = 3.43, SD = 1.73$), $F(1, 132) = 6.84, p = .01$. The orthogonal contrast (*self-moralizes* coded 1, *other-moralizes* coded -1; control coded 0) revealed that the source of the moralization did not have a significant effect on standing, $F(1, 132) = .18, p = .67$.

In the *greater material stake condition*, as predicted, the moralization manipulation did not significantly affect psychological standing, $F(2, 132) = 1.06, p = .35$.

Discussion

Study 4 conceptually replicated the results of Study 3, providing strong evidence that moralization grants psychological standing to those who cannot already derive standing from another source. When participants imagined that the \$300 loss that a crime had caused them was less than the material loss incurred by another victim, moralization increased how much standing participants felt they had to act on their motivation to claim a special privilege related to the crime. When they instead imagined that the \$300 was *more* than the other victim's material loss,

however, moralization had no such effect, presumably because participants could already derive standing from this material stake (Miller et al., 2009; Miller & Effron, 2010). Said differently, participants felt that they had less standing to claim the privilege when another person had been more victimized, but this difference was attenuated by moralization.

The results did not support the possibility that the moralization manipulations affected standing merely by making participants more motivated to learn the identity of the criminal. All our analyses controlled for how outraged participants felt about the vandalism and how much they wanted to learn the identity of the criminal. In fact, comparing the M_s to the $M_{adj}s$ reported above reveals that controlling for these variables actually *strengthened* our effect.

Interestingly, moralization increased standing regardless of whether participants imagined that only they themselves or only other people were the source of the moralization. Participants who did not themselves moralize the crime may nonetheless have assumed that others who did moralize it would perceive them as having incurred symbolic harm. Participants who did moralize the crime may have assumed that their personal experience of symbolic harm would seem legitimate even to non-moralizing others. Apparently, the source of moralization in this situation was less important than the mere fact that the issue had been moralized on legitimate-seeming grounds. The General Discussion considers the role of consensus over moralization at greater length.

General Discussion

The present studies suggest that linking issues to moral values grants individuals the psychological standing, or social legitimacy, to act on their attitudes and motivations. Individuals who lack a material stake in an issue often feel uncomfortable taking action, and elicit surprise and confusion from observers when they do, because they have little standing to

act (Ratner & Miller, 2001). Our results suggest that having a moral stake in an issue can provide standing in the absence of a material stake.

Participants in Study 1 perceived a male advocate for a “women’s issue” (i.e., abortion) as less confusing when they viewed the issue as relevant to their moral values. Perceptions of a female advocate, who could derive standing from her gender’s greater material stake in the issue, were unrelated to participants’ moralization. In Study 2, participants said they would feel more comfortable taking social actions, such as signing a petition or attending a rally, to express their attitudes about abortion and military conscription when they moralized these issues.

Importantly, the association between moralization and comfort was weaker when participants could derive psychological standing from another source (i.e., a material stake in the relevant issue). Studies 3 and 4 demonstrated a causal link between moralization and standing by asking participants to assess the social legitimacy that different crime victims had to act on their motivation to claim a desirable privilege (e.g., expressing their views about the crime in court). In Study 3, participants perceived the victim who had incurred the most material harm as more entitled to such privileges – unless the crime had violated the other victim’s moral values.

Participants in Study 4 said they would feel more entitled to act on their motivation to claim such a privilege when the crime violated their own or others’ moral values; this effect was only observed among participants who could not derive psychological standing from a material stake. Together, these findings provide consistent support for the idea that when individuals have little material stake in an issue, a moral stake can nonetheless give them the psychological standing to act on their attitudes and motivations.

Moral Stakes and Symbolic Harm

Having a moral stake in an issue grants psychological standing because it makes one vulnerable to symbolic harm. The potential to experience this harm (as in Studies 1 and 2) or the actual experience of this harm (as in Studies 3 and 4) provides a socially legitimate justification for acting on the attitudes or motivations that one has pertaining to that issue. It is the belief that moralizing an issue gives one a form of “skin in the game” that grants one the right to express a particular attitude or to claim a particular privilege even in the absence of material interest.

Moral violations symbolically harm everyone, but sometimes they symbolically harm some individuals more than other individuals. For example, a politician who speaks a racial slur might morally offend an entire community, but cause the most symbolic harm to the racial group he named. In such cases, psychological standing will likely be granted in proportion to the relative size of one’s perceived moral stake. All members of the community would have the standing to protest the politician, but members of the targeted racial group would have the standing to lead the protest.

Moral and material stakes may represent particularly prominent sources of standing in contemporary American society, but other sources exist as well (Miller & Effron, 2010; Miller et al., 2009). One need not demonstrate that one has experienced or is vulnerable to harm in order to have a socially legitimate justification for acting. For example, being a member of a particular ethnic, religious, or national group gives one greater standing to criticize that group (e.g., Hornsey, Trembath, & Gunthorpe, 2004).

Alternative Explanations

A potential alternative account of our findings is that they are due to stronger attitudes or greater motivation among individuals with psychological standing. For example, participants who moralized the issues in Studies 1 and 2 may have cared more about these issues. Similarly,

participants in Studies 3 and 4 may have imagined that victims whose moral values were violated by a crime would feel more outrage or a greater desire to claim the relevant privileges. We found no evidence that these possibilities explained our results. Controlling for participants' attitude strength did not eliminate the relationship between moralization and the dependent variables in Studies 1 and 2. Similarly, we observed the effects of moralization in Studies 3 and 4 even though we controlled for perceptions of the victim's outrage in the case of Study 3, and controlled for participants' own outrage and desire to claim the privilege in the case of Study 4. Moreover, these measures of attitude strength and motivation – unlike moralization – did not interact significantly with our manipulations of material stake. In sum, the results provide good support for the idea that moralization, independent of attitude strength, grants psychological standing.

A second alternative account involves the possibility that people who act with little material or moral stake appear to have ulterior motives. For example, a male college student who organizes a pro-choice rally despite not viewing abortion as a moral issue might be suspected of caring more about résumé-building than about pro-choice advocacy. This alternative, however, has difficulty accounting for all our findings. In Study 3, it seems difficult to argue that a crime victim who wants to read a statement in court has ulterior motives merely because he does not view the crime as a moral violation. Similarly, it seems unlikely that participants in Study 4 would be concerned, in the absence of moralization, that they would appear to have ulterior motives for wanting to learn the identity of the person who vandalized their room. We believe the more parsimonious explanation for our results is that having either a moral or a material stake grants people the standing to act on their attitudes.

On the Substitutability of Moral and Material Stakes

Having a moral stake in an issue's outcome will often be associated with different psychological consequences than having a material stake (e.g., Skitka et al., 2005; Skitka & Mullen, 2002b). As sources of psychological standing, however, moral and material stakes seem to be substitutable. The present research suggests that both kinds of stake provide socially legitimate justifications for action, and that such justifications are redundant: Once a material stake entitles one to act, a moral stake provides little additional entitlement. Moral and material stakes may not always be viewed as equally legitimating sources of standing. For example, on an organization's board of directors, the standing to express an opinion about a proposed business strategy probably depends more on one's financial stake in the organization than on one's moral values. Nonetheless, we note that advocates for many contemporary sociopolitical causes – such as those related to capital punishment, social welfare programs, environmentalism, and so forth – commonly marshal both moral and material arguments to support their positions. For issues like these that are easy to frame as relevant to both moral and material harm, we suspect that psychological standing depends less on the source of one's stake and more on whether or not one has any stake.

Disagreement and Consensus about Moralization

How does disagreement about an issue's moral relevance affect psychological standing? The answer may depend on whether or not such disagreement centers on the *legitimacy* of moralization. It is easy to recognize the legitimacy of moralizing certain attitudes even if one does not moralize them oneself. For example, many individuals might recognize the legitimacy of being morally offended by a vulgar graffiti message, even if the message did not violate their own moral values. When there is consensus about the legitimacy of moralizing a particular attitude, psychological standing may not require consensus about whether or not the attitude

really *is* morally relevant. Thus, participants in Study 3 thought that a crime victim had sufficient justification to claim special privileges when he had moralized the crime, even though a second victim did not moralize it. And participants in Study 4 thought that moralization provided such justification regardless of whether only they or only others had done the moralizing. The ability to make a legitimate argument that one has incurred or will incur moral harm seems sufficient to provide psychological standing.

By contrast, people should be unwilling to grant psychological standing to another person whose moralization not only fails to resonate with their own moral values, but also seems illegitimate. This will often be the case when one disagrees with the position being moralized. For example, proponents of same-sex marriage probably reject the legitimacy of opponents' moral arguments, and thus perceive such moralization as insufficient to justify anti-same-sex-marriage advocacy. Moreover, people may feel especially offended, threatened, or judged when their ideological opponents claim the moral high ground (Minson & Monin, in press). And the more people moralize a particular attitude themselves, the less tolerant they are of individuals with opposing views (Skitka et al., 2005; Wright et al., 2008). For all these reasons, moralization may lead ideological opponents to respond more negatively to each other rather than to grant each other standing. Indeed, additional results from Study 1 showed that when pro-choice participants read about a pro-life advocate, greater moralization was associated not with diminished confusion, but rather with greater hostility towards a male advocate.

Conclusion

The present studies provide a novel perspective on the power of moralization. Whereas prior research has suggested that moralization is associated with *greater motivation* to take certain actions (e.g., Mullen & Skitka, 2006; Pagano & Huo, 2007), the present studies suggest

that moralization also has the potential to *reduce inhibition* against acting. Confusion and skepticism from others (Study 1), lack of personal comfort (Study 2), and lack of perceived and felt entitlement (Studies 3 and 4) may all work to inhibit people from taking action or expressing attitudes. Moralization may therefore be an effective strategy to mobilize people to rally for social change, victim compensation, and other causes – not only because moralization sparks outrage, but also because it grants people the psychological standing to voice this outrage.

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Notes

¹ Each participant also read about an advocate who performed these behaviors to support a pro-life position (order counterbalanced; no interactions with order emerged). We describe these findings in the General Discussion.

² Several items also measured hostility towards the advocate, but did not respond to the manipulations.

³ Eighteen men who were ineligible for the draft (e.g., due to age or citizenship) were coded as having less material stake in this issue, and 3 women who erroneously believed themselves to be eligible were coded as having a greater material stake. Comparable results were obtained when these participants were instead excluded from analysis.

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Figures

Figure 1. Study 1: Confusion in response to advocate, as a function of participant moralization and advocate's material stake). Untransformed values are shown for ease of interpretation.

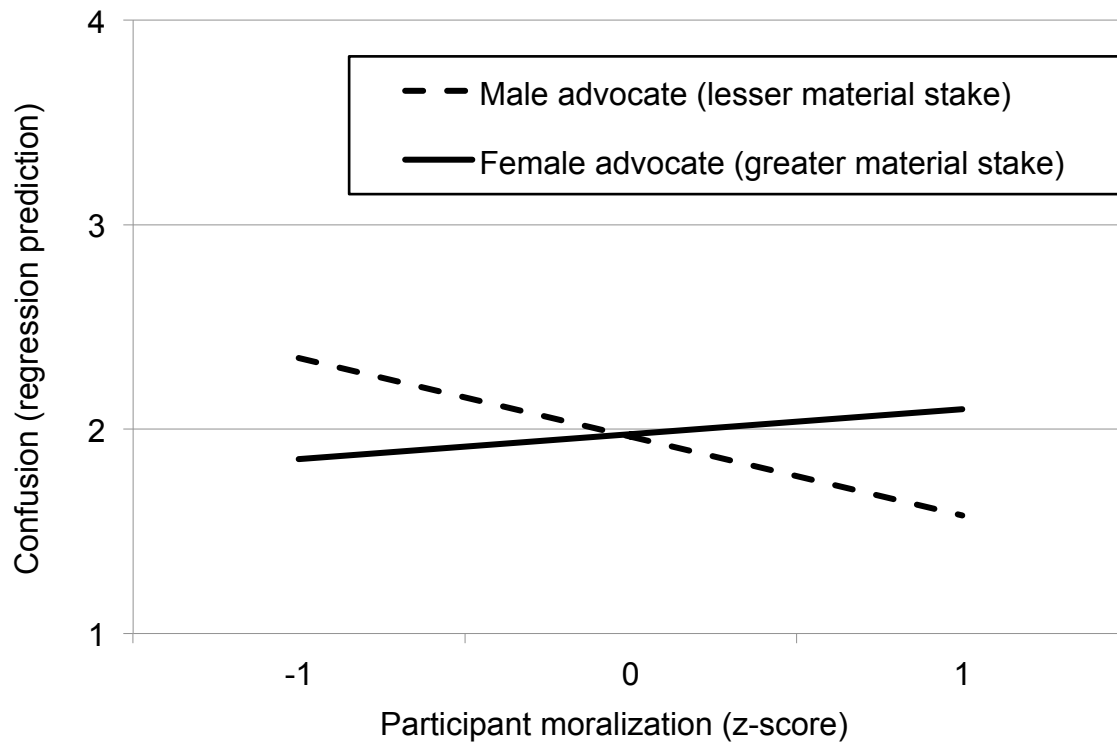


Figure 2. Study 2: Comfort advocating, by participant moralization and issue type (regression prediction)

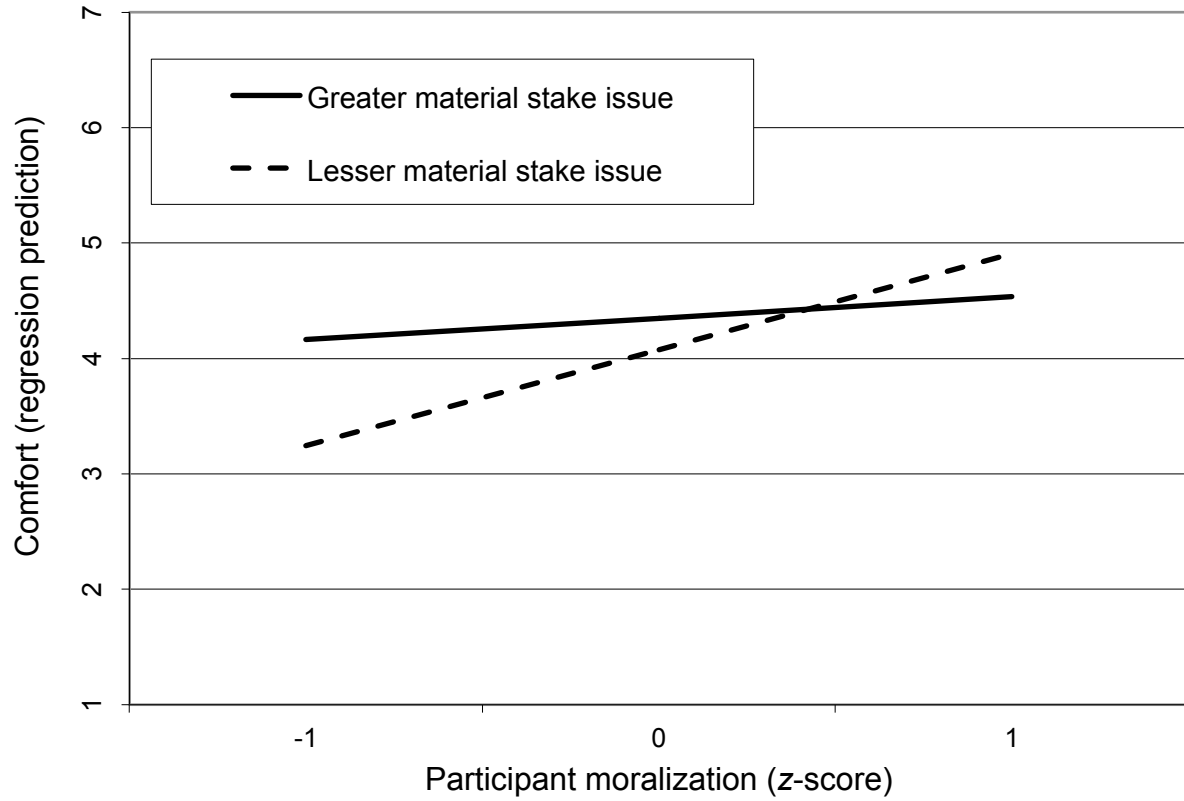


Figure 3. Study 3: Average felt standing (adjusted for covariates), by material and moral stake manipulations.

