

Savage, Brainwashed, or Just Like Me: Moral Disagreement Increases External Attribution for Beliefs

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Abstract

Morality seemingly creates a great cultural divide (Haidt, 2012) — people are pro-choice or pro-life, for traditional marriage or for equality, and for or against the death penalty. Our understanding of these moral disagreements has important and sometimes even grave implications for how we treat others. The present study builds a novel model of belief attribution of moral disagreements. We propose that people attribute moral beliefs to one of three sources: savage tendencies, external factors or internal beliefs. In two experiments, one open-ended and one more quantitative, we explored how people attribute moral beliefs. The findings from our study suggested that participants do tend to attribute their beliefs and the beliefs of those who agree with them to more internal reasons than the beliefs of those who disagree with them for issues such as same-sex marriage and abortion. Additionally, character of the individual had only some effects on belief attribution. These findings inform how we understand moral debates, and future research can apply these results to investigate the role of strength of beliefs, differences across cultures, and even how research in morality is conducted.

Savage, Brainwashed, or Just Like Me: Moral Disagreement Increases External Attribution for Beliefs

“Savages we call them, because their manners differ from ours, which we think the perfection of civility; they think the same of theirs.”

—Benjamin Franklin, *Remarks Concerning the Savages of North America*

When Europe began its colonization of the Americas and Africa, they were faced with populations with different cultural and moral norms. In response to these cultural differences, they deemed the native population nothing short of “savages,” and the native people were perceived as lacking the capacity for moral reasoning and in turn slaughtered or enslaved. Eventually, the cultural narrative of the “white man’s burden” (Kipling, 1899) took hold, and Europe began colonizing and importing Christianity into native culture, schooling the target groups in European customs. In this second stage, the native peoples were seen as having some capacity for morality, but their morality was seen as inferior, stemming from irrational, external cultural myths and in need of reparation. Finally, once the native populations started adhering to Eurocentric norms, some European leaders recognized that the native others were following an internal moral standard and deserved human rights.

This shift in perception from savage, to salvageable, to members of a universal humanity seemingly parallels how we often understand others who hold differing moral opinions. We often immediately think that they are “savage,” or idiotic, lacking moral reasoning. Even once we remember that others are not actually idiots, we often look to external explanations for their beliefs, thinking that they were just raised to believe in irrational positions. In rare cases, we might believe that even though others disagree with us, they have deep internal reasons for these beliefs. More likely, this acknowledgment of a strong internal moral compass governing moral

beliefs and behaviors occurs only when others agree with our beliefs. In this paper, we explore this three-step model of moral attribution. When faced with a moral opinion, people believe that others are either 1. savage; 2. following external rules; or 3. following an internal moral compass. More specifically, we predict that when others disagree with us, we will view them as savages lacking in morality (step 1). If we know that they are otherwise upstanding citizens, we will believe that they are simply brainwashed (step 2). Only those who agree with us are capable, morally-conscious individuals, following an internal moral compass (step 3).

Early accounts of moral development mirror this three-step process, namely Kohlberg's three stages of moral development. Following Piaget's moral development theories (Kohlberg 1975), Kohlberg conceived of three overarching stages to categorize how moral reasoning develops throughout the human lifespan (Kohlberg, 1971). The first of Kohlberg's stages is the Pre-conventional stage, characteristic of children nine or younger, in which moral reasoning is not fully developed and is influenced by outside authority. It is this stage that may be often projected onto target others in cases where the target individual is labelled "savage." Second is the Conventional stage, characteristic of most adults and adolescents, in which the moral standards in the Pre-conventional stage are internalized, but reasoning is still restricted to following the internalized version of societal norms. This stage, when projected onto target others, would instigate a "white man's burden" approach, wherein the target other may be perceived as needing adjustment in moral convictions. The Post-Conventional stage is limited to a very small percentage of adults, wherein these adults follow an internal sense of justice based on individual rights rather than societal norms (Kohlberg, 1971). If projected onto others, this stage would result in perception of an internal moral compass despite differences of moral opinion. Empirical work has since challenged the validity of Kohlberg's theory on the basis of

its hypotheticality, its sample-bias, his research design, and more (Gilligan, 1977; Snarey, 1985; Gibbs, 1977), but its similarity to the progression of slavery based on moral reasoning suggests that it could still be a useful heuristic in considering how people understand moral disagreements.

Recent research in moral psychology has looked at how people react to those who have opposing moral views. Although disagreements are not limited to an opposition of morals, research has shown that disagreements specifically in morality are special in that they produce the greatest amount of distancing behavior. For example, people tend to view their moral convictions as universally absolute, objective, and independent of authority (Skitka, 2010). Moral violations are not as simple as perhaps a disagreement in preference or even culture because they are stronger and elicit greater emotion and motivation (Skitka, Bowman, & Sargis 2005). Therefore, although a disagreement about preferred ice cream flavor or what movie to see would not usually instigate anger or the perception that the opposing belief is fundamentally wrong, opposition in moral beliefs has the tendency to do just that. The difference between the strength of reactions and consequences for moral disagreements and other disagreements (Skitka, 2010), especially in the perception of moral objectivity and universality, is what might make it so easy for someone in a moral disagreement to create distance and simply assume that those who disagree are morally incapable or inferior.

One reason why people may view those who disagree with them as morally inferior could be linked to mind attribution, or how much “mind” (i.e. ability to think and act) they ascribe to a person in a certain situation (Loughnan, Haslam, Murnane, Vaes, Reynolds & Suitner, 2010). Theory of mind is the branch of psychology that attempts to understand and explain how people attribute mind to others and predict behavior based on this. Theory theory, which is a sub-theory

of theory of mind, essentially predicts that mind attribution is derived from an external source (Carruthers & Smith, 1996). Simulation theory, however, predicts that mind attribution is derived from an internal source, where the person uses their own mind to predict the mind of someone else (Carruthers & Smith, 1996). Because people might view the minds of those who agree with them as closer to their own, they may give more internal mind attributions for those who agree with their moral convictions and more external attributions for those who disagree. There is research suggesting that it is more difficult for a person to put themselves in the mind of someone who is distant (Waytz, Gray, Epley, & Wegner, 2010; Trope, Liberman & Wakslak, 2007). For example, one reason socially distant others, such as outgroup members, reduce a person's empathy and willingness to help (Levine & Thompson, 2004) may be because reducing similarities or closeness reduces the ability to perceive experience, or to put yourself in the shoes of another (Baron & Miller, 2000). This is true not only for groups of national identity (Levine & Thompson, 2004) and cultural identity (Baron & Miller, 2000); one study in particular found that participants in a dictator game were more generous for those whose name they knew than for those who remained anonymous (Charness & Gneezy, 2008). Therefore, how much capability of thought, and of moral reasoning, a person assigns to another may depend on how close to their own mind they perceive the other person's mind to be.

There may also be evolutionary implications as to why we perceive distant others as having less capability for moral reasoning. Previous research suggests that we're more willing to come to the aid of those with greater similarities and social closeness (Hoffman, 1978). Because we may perceive and create distance between ourselves and those with whom we disagree, empathy for those with similar beliefs—and lack of empathy for those with dissimilar beliefs—may be one way in which preference for similar groups produces behavior that propagates the

need of the many through something like selective altruism (Leak & Christopher, 1982). Because we share the most with our ingroup, or those with whom we agree, we are naturally more capable of understanding their perspective, feeling their problems, and generating empathy for them (Levine & Thompson, 2004). Taking the perspective of a person becomes more difficult given a lack of shared moral convictions; without similarities to fall back on, understanding the dilemmas of the other and feeling their pain is problematic and may dissolve any concern or motivation to help, thus restricting helping behavior to the group with the most shared moral convictions.

Another explanation for why we might perceive distant others as less capable of moral reasoning may be a result of naïve realism (Ward & Ross, 1997). That is, we may sometimes perceive the world only in relation to what we directly see and feel and then construe this to be the absolute truth of the world. In this way, a person might consider their moral conviction, as it is in their direct internal experience, to be the only true moral conviction, and anyone who may disagree with them is perceived either as having a false belief or as being influenced by something external. Naïve realism might predict that we assume everyone thinks as we do, and when they do not we assume they are either not thinking or having some external influence preventing them from thinking.

What we propose is that people perceive their own morality as stemming from internal factors, essentially an internal moral compass, while often perceiving any beliefs that are in opposition with their own moral compass as stemming from external factors exclusive of an internal capability for moral reasoning. As isolated beings, we may sometimes lack the perspective to see outside of our own minds. Like fish that can't see the water they swim in, we might not be able to see the minds of others when they disagree with our morals.

Study 1

The first study examined the explanations that people naturally provide for other people's moral beliefs. Inspired by the history of colonialism, we manipulated moral disagreement so that each participant provided explanations for why they believed someone would agree or disagree with their views on a certain moral conviction. We also manipulated whether the other person was seen as a particularly noteworthy contributor to society. Our inclusion of this "good" condition was to ascertain if participants would continue to ascribe less mind to those who disagree with their conviction despite a description that might close distance between any perceived dissimilarities. We predicted that people would naturally provide internal attributions to themselves and people who agree with their moral opinions, but provide either an external or savage internal reason for those who disagree with their moral opinions.

Method

Participants. A total of 192 participants completed the survey via Amazon's Mechanical Turk (Mturk) in exchange for \$0.20. Twenty-six participants failed the informational manipulation check, leaving 164 participants ($M_{age} = 33.83$, 55% female, 59% liberal, all from the United States).

Procedure. This study used a 2 (agreement: disagree vs agree) x 2 (character: neutral vs good guy) x 2 (person: other vs. self) between and within subjects design, and looked at how people explain moral opinions regarding four morally controversial topics: abortion, same-sex marriage, euthanasia, and the death penalty. We selected to explore these four issues because they are among the top most controversial issues in the United States (Saad, 2010). Participants first indicated their moral opinion about each of the four issues on a binary scale, selecting whether each is or is not immoral. Participants were then randomly assigned into either the

agreement or disagreement condition and one character condition, reading about either a neutral man who opposed or agreed with their indicated belief (e.g. “John believes that same-sex marriage is morally permissible. He feels strongly about this position.”), or a “good” man (e.g. “John is a hardworking professional who goes out of his way to regularly help his colleagues. Among other things, John believes that same-sex marriage is morally permissible. He feels strongly about this position.”). After reading about an individual, participants responded to an open-ended question asking them why they believe the described person holds his view. After ascribing reasons for beliefs regarding all four issues, participants were then asked to reflect on their own moral opinion, and describe the reason they hold their own views. Finally, these open-ended responses were looped back to participants, who were asked to rate whether the person holds the view due to internal or external factors, with lower numbers indicating more internal¹ factors. Participants then completed questions about demographics and an attention check.

Results

Open-ended response. We first sought to code the open-ended responses according to whether the participants attributed beliefs to internal-savage reasons (e.g. they are idiots, they are uneducated), external reasons (e.g. that is what they were taught by parents or religion), or internal reasons (e.g. he believes that it is right). Canonical examples of each of these categories repeatedly emerged from the data (see Table 1). However, a preliminary attempt to code the open-ended responses for inferential statistics quickly revealed some important limitations for

¹ To provide greater context for this decision, participants first read: “There are many reasons why people form moral judgments. Some moral judgments might emerge from a person's internal moral compass, a person's deep understanding about what is right or wrong. Other moral judgments could result from external factors. People might hold a particular view because that is what they have been taught, or led to believe by peers, parents, politics, religion or society. In the following task, please rate whether a moral belief stemmed from an internal or external factor.”

coding the responses. Although some responses clearly fit into one of the three categories, it was often unclear where a reason fit. For example, one participant wrote that “John may hold traditional conservative values. He may believe that male-female relationships are the ‘correct’ way.” Another wrote, “He [has] read the Bible.” Further examples of these ambiguous responses are provided in Table 2. The explanation that John believes in the Bible is an appeal to external rules, but a belief is an internal state. An atheist researcher might be tempted to label this as following the external rule of the Bible, but a theist might claim that the Bible is part of one’s internal compass, and that the person is a good, reasonable being. Out of hesitance to overly impose our own notions of internal, external, and “savagely” internal, we therefore turn to the self-ratings of internality and externality, and use the open-ended responses as an illustrative tool to form a representative understanding of participants’ beliefs.

Ratings.

Same-sex marriage. A 2x2 between-subject ANOVA revealed a marginally significant overall effect, $F(3,161) = 2.46, p = .07, \eta_p^2 = .04$. There was a significant main effect of agreement $F(1,161) = 6.15, p = .01, \eta_p^2 = .04$, such that the participants who read about someone agreeing with them rated the reasons as more internal ($M = 2.27, SD = .93$) than the reasons of the person disagreeing with them ($M = 2.64, p = .97$) (see Figure 1). There was neither a main effect of goodness, $F(1,161) = .63, p = .43$, nor a significant interaction between goodness and agreement, $F(1, 161) = .68, p = .41$. Since character did not have a significant effect, it was dropped from the analysis regarding differences between self vs other. A 2 (agreement) x 2 (self vs. other) between and within subject ANOVA resulted in a significant main effect of agreement $F(1, 163) = 4.06, p = .05, \eta_p^2 = .02$, a significant main effect of self vs other, $F(1, 163) = 23.06, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .12$, and no significant interaction, $F(1,163) = 1.29, p = .26$. Relative to a person’s

own moral views ($M = 2.00$, $SD = 1.08$), both the agreeing ($M = 2.27$, $SD = .93$), $p = .01$, and disagreeing ($M = 2.64$, $SD = .97$), $p < .001$, were seen as more external.

Abortion. A 2x2 between subject ANOVA revealed a significant overall effect, $F(3,161) = 2.71$, $p = .075$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$. There was a significant main effect of agreement $F(1,161) = 4.71$, $p = .03$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$, such that the participants who read about someone agreeing with them rated the reasons as more internal ($M = 2.17$, $SD = .95$) than the reasons of the person disagreeing with them ($M = 2.49$, $p = .100$) (Figure 1). There was not a main effect of goodness, $F(1,161) = .78$, $p = .40$, but there was a marginally significant interaction between goodness and agreement, $F(1, 161) = 2.72$, $p = .10$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$, such that goodness did not change ratings in the agreement conditions ($p = .60$), but did correspond with a shift in attribution in the disagree condition ($p = .07$), with the good disagreeing person attributed more internal reasons ($M = 2.30$, $SD = .94$), than the neutral disagreeing person ($M = 2.69$, $SD = 1.05$). A 2 (agreement) x 2 (self vs. other) between and within subject ANOVA resulted in a significant main effect of agreement $F(1, 163) = 3.86$, $p = .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$, a significant main effect of self vs other, $F(1, 163) = 13.35$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$, and no significant interaction, $F(1,163) = .68$, $p = .41$. Relative to a person's own moral views ($M = 1.98$, $SD = 1.01$), both the agreeing ($M = 2.17$, $SD = .95$), $p = .05$, and disagreeing ($M = 2.49$, $SD = 1.01$), $p < .001$, were seen as more external.

Death Penalty. A 2x2 between-subject ANOVA did not reveal an overall effect, $F(3, 161) = .83$, $p = .47$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$. There was not a significant main effect of either agreement, $F(1, 161) = 2.36$, $p = .12$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$ or goodness, $F(1, 161) = .12$, $p = .72$, $\eta_p^2 = .001$, and there was not an interaction between goodness and agreement, $F(1, 161) = .004$, $p = .94$, $\eta_p^2 = .00$. Similarly, a 2 (agreement) x 2 (self vs. other) between and within subject ANOVA resulted in no significant main effect of agreement $F(1, 163) = .15$, $p = .70$, but a significant main effect of self vs other,

$F(1, 163) = 4.26, p = .04, \eta_p^2 = .03$, and a marginally significant interaction, $F(1,163) = 3.14, p = .08$. The disagreeing view ($M = 2.37, SD = .85$) was seen as more external relative to a person's own views ($M = 2.08, SD = 1.10$), $p < .001$, although the agreeing opinion did not significantly differ ($M = 2.17, SD = .87$), $p = .84$.

Euthanasia. A 2x2 between-subjects ANOVA revealed a significant overall effect, $F(3, 161) = 3.39, p = .01, \eta_p^2 = .05$. There was not a main effect of agreement, $F(1, 161) = 2.20, p = .14, \eta_p^2 = .01$, but there was a main effect of goodness, $F(1, 161) = 4.92, p = .02, \eta_p^2 = .03$, such that participants who read about a "good" person rated the reasons as more internal ($M = 2.08, SD = .85$) than when they read about a neutral person ($M = 2.35, SD = .83$). There was a marginally significant interaction between goodness and agreement, $F(1, 161) = 3.34, p = .06, \eta_p^2 = .02$, such that goodness did not change ratings in the disagreement conditions ($p = .77$) but did correspond with a shift in attributions in the agreement conditions ($p = .006$), with the good agreeing person attributed more internal reasons ($M = 1.85, SD = .83$) than the neutral agreeing person ($M = 2.38, SD = .86$). A 2 (agreement) x 2 (self vs. other) between and within subject ANOVA resulted in no significant main effect of agreement $F(1, 163) = .16, p = .70$, but a significant main effect of self vs other, $F(1,163) = 10.45, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .06$, and a marginally significant interaction, $F(1, 163) = 3.02, p = .08, \eta_p^2 = .02$. The disagreeing view ($M = 2.31, SD = .82$) was seen as more external relative to a person's own views ($M = 1.92, SD = 1.00$), $p < .001$, although the agreeing opinion did not significantly differ ($M = 2.10, SD = .85$), $p = .32$.

Overview. The findings in study one support our predictions in issues such as abortion and same-sex marriage. Participants tend to assign greater internal attributions to the beliefs of those who agree with them than the beliefs of those who disagree with them.

Study 2

The following study sought to further explore how people attribute moral disagreement. It was predicted that people would ascribe internal attributions to their own beliefs, but perceive the beliefs of those who disagree with them morally as being derived from an external source.

Method

Participants. A total of 203 participants were recruited via Amazon's Mechanical Turk (Mturk) to participate in our second study in exchange for \$.40. Twenty-three participants were excluded for failing that informational manipulation check, leaving 180 participants ($M_{\text{age}} = 31$, 64% male, 58% liberal),

Procedure. Just as in study one, this study used a 2 (agreement: disagree vs agree) x 2 (character: neutral vs good guy) x 2 (person: other vs. self) between and within subject design, with participants reading about a person who held a similar or opposing view, who was either described in neutral terms or as a good person, before rating their own views. The second study had two key changes from Study 1: The second study focused on only two politically contentious issues, same-sex marriage and abortion, and used specific questions gauging attribution of beliefs instead of open-ended responses. After each vignette, instead of an open-ended question participants rated the extent to which they agreed with statements about the attribution of the described person's conviction on a scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Statements included a range of external-savage attributions such as, "John is uneducated on the issue," (abortion, $\alpha = .81$, same-sex marriage $\alpha = .83$) external attribution statements, "John has been influenced by his upbringing," (abortion $\alpha = .69$, same-sex marriage $\alpha = .76$) and internal moral questions, "John is following his own internal moral compass" (abortion $\alpha = .60$, same-sex marriage $\alpha = .66$). These statements appeared in random order, and after rating these statements, participants rated whether John holds his view because of internal or external factors from (1)

Definitely Internal to (4) Definitely External (for a full list of statements, see Table 3). As in study 1, participants also completed questions about demographics and attention checks subsequent to the moral situations.

Results

Abortion.

Savage. A 2 (agreement) x 2 (character) between subject ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of agreement, $F(1,176) = 79.76, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .31$, no main effect of character, $F(1,176) = 1.18, p = .28$, and no significant interaction between character and agreement, $F(1,176) = 1.57, p = .21$. Since character did not have a significant effect, it was dropped from the analysis regarding differences between self vs other. In addition to a main effect of agreement, $F(1,178) = 25.33, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .13$, a 2 (agreement) x 2 (self vs. other) between and within subject ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of self vs other, $F(1,178) = 200.42, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .53$, and a significant interaction $F(1,178) = 82.57, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .32$. Planned contrasts showed that others' disagreements ($M = 2.86, SD = .70$) were viewed as more savage than agreeing opinions ($M = 1.89, SD = .74$) which were both viewed as more savage than one's own beliefs ($M = 1.53, SD = .67$), $p < .001$.

External. A 2 (agreement) x 2 (character) between subject ANOVA resulted in a significant main effect of agreement, $F(1,176) = 42.18, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .19$, was a main effect of character, $F(1,176) = 9.60, p = .002, \eta_p^2 = .05$, such that the good character was ascribed more external reasons ($M = 3.52, SD = .76$), relative to the neutral character ($M = 3.18, SD = .91$). and no significant interaction between character and agreement, $F(1,176) = .33, p = .57$. A 2 (agreement) x 2 (self vs. other) between and within subject ANOVA once again revealed a main effect of agreement, $F(1,178) = 8.27, p = .005, \eta_p^2 = .04$, a significant main effect of self vs

other, $F(1,178) = 225.06, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .56$, and a significant interaction $F(1,178) = 33.63, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .32$. Others disagreements ($M = 3.70, SD = .83$) were viewed as more external than the agreeing opinion ($M = 2.97, SD = .71$), $p < .001$ which were both seen as more external than one's own beliefs ($M = 2.13, SD = .87$), $p < .001$.

Internal. A 2 (agreement) x 2 (character) between subject ANOVA resulted in a significant main effect of agreement, $F(1,176) = 25.63, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .13$. There was not a main effect of character, $F(1,176) = .84, p = .36$, nor a significant interaction between character and agreement, $F(1,176) = .54, p = .46$. A 2 (agreement) x 2 (self vs. other) between and within subject ANOVA revealed a main effect of agreement, $F(1,178) = 8.63, p = .004, \eta_p^2 = .05$, a significant main effect of self vs other, $F(1,178) = 35.58, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .17$, and a significant interaction $F(1,178) = 14.25, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .07$. Disagreements ($M = 3.38, SD = .71$) were viewed as significantly less internal than agreeing opinions ($M = 3.89, SD = .61$), $p < .001$. Disagreeing opinions were more external than one's own beliefs ($M = 4.02, SD = .81$), $p < .001$, though agreeing opinions did not differ significantly from the person's own belief, $p = .13$.

Internal-External. Turning to the global rating of whether people believed a reason stems from internal or external factors, a 2 (agreement) x 2 (character) between-subjects ANOVA resulted in a significant main effect of agreement, $F(1,176) = 11.65, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .06$, no main effect of character, $F(1,176) = .29, p = .59$, and no significant interaction between agreement and character, $F(1,176) = 2.16, p = .14$. A 2 (agreement) x 2 (self vs. other) between- and within-subject ANOVA revealed a marginal main effect of agreement, $F(1,178) = 3.50, p = .06, \eta_p^2 = .02$, self vs other, $F(1,178) = 75.65, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .30$, and a significant interaction between agreement and self vs. other, $F(1,178) = 5.43, p = .02, \eta_p^2 = .03$. Planned contrasts revealed that participants ascribed more external reasons to opposing views of others ($M = 2.54$,

$SD = .69$) than agreeing views ($M = 2.22$, $SD = .62$), $p = .001$, which were both more external than one's own views ($M = 1.81$, $SD = .86$), $p < .001$ (see Figure 2).

Same Sex Marriage.

Savage. A 2 (agreement) x 2 (character) between subject ANOVA resulted in a significant main effect of agreement, $F(1,176) = 110.67$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .39$. There was not a main effect of character, $F(1,176) = .56$, $p = .45$, nor a significant interaction between character and agreement, $F(1,176) = .25$, $p = .62$. A 2 (agreement) x 2 (self vs. other) between and within subject ANOVA revealed a main effect of agreement, $F(1,178) = 55.84$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .24$, a significant main effect of self vs other, $F(1,178) = 268.12$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .60$, and a significant interaction $F(1,178) = 96.41$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .35$. Planned contrasts showed that others disagreements were viewed as more savage than one's own beliefs ($M = 1.46$, $SD = .53$), $p < .001$. The agreeing opinion ($M = 1.86$, $SD = .73$), was rated as less savage than the disagreeing opinion, ($M = 3.06$, $SD = .79$) $p < .001$, although it was also rated significantly different than the person's own belief ($M = 1.46$, $SD = .58$), $p < .001$.

External. A 2 (agreement) x 2 (character) between subject ANOVA resulted in a significant main effect of agreement, $F(1,176) = 91.11$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .34$. There was not a main effect of character, $F(1,176) = .21$, $p = .65$, nor a significant interaction between character and agreement, $F(1,176) = .24$, $p = .63$. A 2 (agreement) x 2 (self vs. other) between and within subject ANOVA revealed a main effect of agreement, $F(1,178) = 29.50$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .14$, a significant main effect of self vs other, $F(1,178) = 275.49$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .61$, and a significant interaction $F(1,178) = 51.04$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .22$. Planned contrasts showed that others disagreements ($M = 3.97$, $SD = .74$) were viewed as more external than agreeing opinion ($M =$

2.93, $SD = .71$), $p < .001$ which were both more severe than one's own beliefs ($M = 2.15$, $SD = .85$), $p < .001$.

Internal. A 2 (agreement) x 2 (character) between subject ANOVA resulted in a significant main effect of agreement, $F(1,176) = 66.58$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .27$, no main effect of character, $F(1,176) = .007$, $p = .97$, nor a significant interaction between character and agreement, $F(1,176) = .27$, $p = .61$. A 2 (agreement) x 2 (self vs. other) between and within subject ANOVA revealed a main effect of agreement, $F(1,178) = 25.61$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .13$, a significant main effect of self vs other, $F(1,178) = 68.98$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .28$, and a significant interaction $F(1,178) = 33.20$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .16$. Planned contrasts showed that others disagreements ($M = 3.17$, $SD = .72$) were viewed as less internal than the agreeing opinion ($M = 3.98$, $SD = .60$), which was less internal than one's own beliefs ($M = 4.15$, $SD = .77$), $p < .001$.

Internal_External. A 2 (agreement) x 2 (character) between subject ANOVA resulted in a significant main effect of agreement, $F(1,176) = 44.39$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .20$, no main effect of character, $F(1,176) = 1.13$, $p = .29$, nor a significant interaction between character and agreement, $F(1,176) = 1.53$, $p = .22$. A 2 (agreement) x 2 (self vs. other) between and within subject ANOVA revealed a main effect of agreement, $F(1,178) = 14.76$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$, a significant main effect of self vs other, $F(1,178) = 37.80$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .30$, and a significant interaction $F(1,178) = 19.70$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .10$. Planned contrasts showed that others' disagreements ($M = 2.80$, $SD = .75$) were viewed as less internal than the agreeing opinion ($M = 2.10$, $SD = .68$), which was less internal than one's own beliefs ($M = 1.81$, $SD = .91$), $p < .004$ (see Figure 3).

Overview. The findings in study two support our predictions. Participants attributed their own beliefs to the most internal reasons and the beliefs of those who agreed with their moral convictions on abortion and same-sex marriage to more internal reasons than the beliefs of those who disagreed with their convictions.

General Discussion

Overall, what our study found was that agreement does have an effect on attribution of beliefs, such that participants attributed the beliefs of those who agreed with them to more internal reasons and the beliefs of those that disagreed with them to more external reasons. For potential causes we will shortly attempt to elaborate on, this was true more for issues such as same-sex marriage and abortion than the issues of the death penalty and euthanasia. The character of the person opposing or supporting participants' convictions did have some effect in that sometimes this shifted attributions either to more internal for the agreeing person or more external for the disagreeing person. Ultimately, this pattern reflects the patterns we predicted; for those who oppose our moral convictions, we view them less as thinking, reasoning beings and more as immoral savages or rule-following idiots without the capacity for internal morality.

The implications for our findings provide insight into how moral debates occur and are perpetuated. Because we cannot see the other side as having internal morality, we dismiss their convictions as inferior and resort to insults. However, it may be possible to bridge this distance and create understanding if similar character qualities are emphasized during a debate. This holds implications for how we see others and their morality across cultures, across social barriers, and other distances that accentuate dissimilarities between groups.

One area our findings seem to have the most relevance is in political debates, such as the ongoing debate between Republican and Democratic parties in the US. This is a debate that has

provoked vigorous hostility across many forums, from alternating insults in a comments page on the internet to a political candidate's televised slurring of another. In 2014, Katherine Martin created a lexicon of the insults most often used to belittle each party, including which insults were used most frequently. The offensive term most often used to refer to Democrats was "hack," and the term most used for Republicans was "extremist" (Martin 2014). What this shows is that neither side in the debate is prone to treating the opposing side fairly. Undoubtedly, slinging insults is at best unproductive to the debate and at worst prolongs the argument and sharpens the divide of hostility between parties. If there was a way to maintain healthier debates that advance rather than detract from the significance of the issues they concern, then it may be that research on emphasizing similarities will help foster better debates and diffuse hostility.

The divide between internal and external attribution of beliefs can also apply in the context of cultural differences. This is most often seen in the case of religious differences, such as Christians being pejoratively referred to as "Bible-thumpers" or atheists as "Satanists." An external attribution fosters these insults by increasing the perception that those who disagree with a person's moral convictions are morally inferior. Not all cultural differences are religious, however. Asian cultures, for instance, are sometimes pejoratively referred to as "dog-eaters" or "dog-munchers" due to the morally controversial consumption of dog meat in some countries. In this case, an internal attribution would promote cultural understanding that would diminish racial slurs and other affronts based on an external, morally inferior perspective.

Future research could apply itself to understanding attributions in terms of cultural differences through a study on food differences. The applications of such a study would concern the differences in rituals or cultural practices associated with food across cultures and the internal

or external attributions that would be assigned to these practices based on whether they support or oppose someone's particular beliefs and practices. For example, it is a common practice in the Hindu culture to refrain from consuming beef or beef products, whereas it is a common practice in the US to consume beef and beef products. A study designed to test the attributions associated with food practices could make use of these differences to determine whether the same pattern that occurs with moral disagreement would emerge.

One limitation of the present studies is that we did not include a measure to determine how strongly participants held their moral convictions to determine if the effect of attribution was strengthened by strong beliefs. Future research may wish to include the strength of moral convictions (Skitka, Bauman & Sargis, 2005) as a moderator of attribution. Furthermore, our manipulations of agreement and character did not have strong effects within the contexts of the death penalty and euthanasia. This may be because people do not view these issues in as black and white a manner as they do issues such as same-sex marriage and abortion, or even because people simply do not have as much concern for these issues as they do for the others. Perhaps because these issues are so controversial, people inherently understand that there is another side to the debate with a legitimate intellectual perspective. The effects of agreement might be strengthened within the issues of death penalty and euthanasia by stronger moral convictions from participants, or by removing the controversial nature of issues such as death penalty and euthanasia. If, for example, participants were asked to attribute beliefs about issues such as incest to external or internal beliefs, they might be more likely to see these beliefs as external because they would not as readily recognize that there is an existing opposing side to their own beliefs. Therefore, future studies may wish to control for the strength of participant's

convictions and the extent to which they understand the issue at hand as a black-and-white concern.

Although our manipulation of character did not have much effect on attribution, there is evidence in the literature of moral psychology that people do assign greater agency to a person depending on the character traits and values of that person (Sripada and Konrath, 2011). This lack of effect could be something specific to our design that may yet have an effect in future research. Because our neutral character was not given any cultural identification, however, it is possible that given this lack of traits and values people chose to perceive this neutral character as naturally good, and therefore naturally similar, because they chose to rely on a heuristic concerned with people they see every day. Future research could investigate whether character manipulation has a stronger effect for a food study across cultures, for example, where the neutral character would still be identified as culturally distinct.

Despite these limitations, our findings have implications for how researchers themselves conduct cross-cultural research. Early moral research focused only on harm and care as moral concerns (Kohlberg, 1966), and anthropological research in the 90s suggested there existed moral concerns without clear victims, such as using a flag to clean a toilet or necrophilia (Haidt, Koller & Dias, 1993). From this evidence, researchers concluded that people moralize things based on cultural norms about morality and purity. It is possible, based on our findings about internal and external attribution, that researchers may have jumped to external attributions too quickly, failing to see the internal moral compass that might drive moral norms. Likewise, research on the differences of moral judgements in politics suggests that the debate between parties such as liberals and conservatives stem from different moral foundations (Graham, Haidt & Nosek, 2009). Although it may be true that researchers and participants alike may perceive

those who oppose their moral convictions as relying on separate rules, it may be just as likely that we are misrepresenting the extent to which we are all unable to see outside of our own internal perspective.

Our findings display a difference in how attribution is typically ascribed. Most often, attribution bias determines that we are quicker to ascribe external reasons to our own behavior and internal reasons to others' behavior (e.g. perceiving a waiter as a rude person when they exhibit rude behavior, but understanding that you had a bad day when you do the same). What this difference in attribution suggests is that internal and external attributions are situational; we are quick to ascribe our moral convictions, something we perceive as good, to an internal attribution and our bad behaviors to an external attribution. In this way, attribution allows us to take credit for our good behaviors but not our bad. Just like the researchers that ascribed external rule-following attribution to moral concerns, however, we may be too quickly dismissing the external factors that drive our own behaviors and convictions. Either we must accept that others have internal reasons driving their beliefs, or we must understand that even our own behaviors are driven by external forces. Nisbet and Wilson (1977), for example, determined that we fail to recognize the sources for our own beliefs, and that we do not know ourselves as thoroughly as we might like to think. Thus, in failing to recognize the internal attributions of others, we may also be failing to recognize the external attributions for ourselves, unable to see beyond ourselves and our own hearts and minds.

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Table 1.

	Same-sex Marriage	Abortion	Death Penalty	Euthanasia
Internal “Savage” Attribution	“John has no morals.”	“He does not recognize that [the fetus] is a human life.”	“If [he would consider my point of view] then [he] would change [his mind].”	“He is immoral.”
	“He is ignorant.”	“Lack of research.”	“He may be vengeful.”	“He does not recognize that all life is to be respected.”
External “Rule Following” Attribution	“He was raised to believe this by idiots.”	“He [is from] a patriarchal society.”	“He is misinformed.”	“Because that is how he was raised.”
	“Because he is a Christian.”	“He was raised to believe it is immoral.”	“He was brought up in a way that has fixed his view.”	“He might have religious beliefs that tell him it’s wrong to kill anyone.”
Internal Compass Attribution	“He believes in traditional marriage.”	“He believes in personal choice.”	“He finds value in every life.”	“He believes someone has a right to end their life.”
	“He believes in equality.”	“George believes in the value of life.”	“He believes in an eye for an eye.”	“He believes nobody should have the power to take away a life.”

Examples of attribution for each category of attribution, as taken from the open-ended responses in Study 1.

Table 2.

Same-Sex Marriage	Abortion	Death Penalty	Euthanasia
“He is a good person.”	“He is liberal.”	“Because he is allowed to have choices.”	“He is devoted to the human race.”
“He’s gay.”	“He is a nice guy.”	“He has had a bad experience with criminals.”	“His wife was euthanized.”
“He is young and has an open mind.”	“He had a friend who had an abortion.”	“In the Bible he is correct.”	“He wants to teach good values to his child.”

Examples of ambiguous responses for each subject, as taken from the open-ended responses in Study 1.

Table 3.

Study Two Statements
“John is uneducated on the issue”
“John has not thought critically about the issue”
“John is stupid.”
“John has been influenced by family/friends.”
“John has thought about the issue and has simply drawn a different conclusion than I have.”
“John is weird.”
“John is simply following political/religious rules.”
“John is following his own internal moral compass.”

Statements as they appeared for rating in study two.

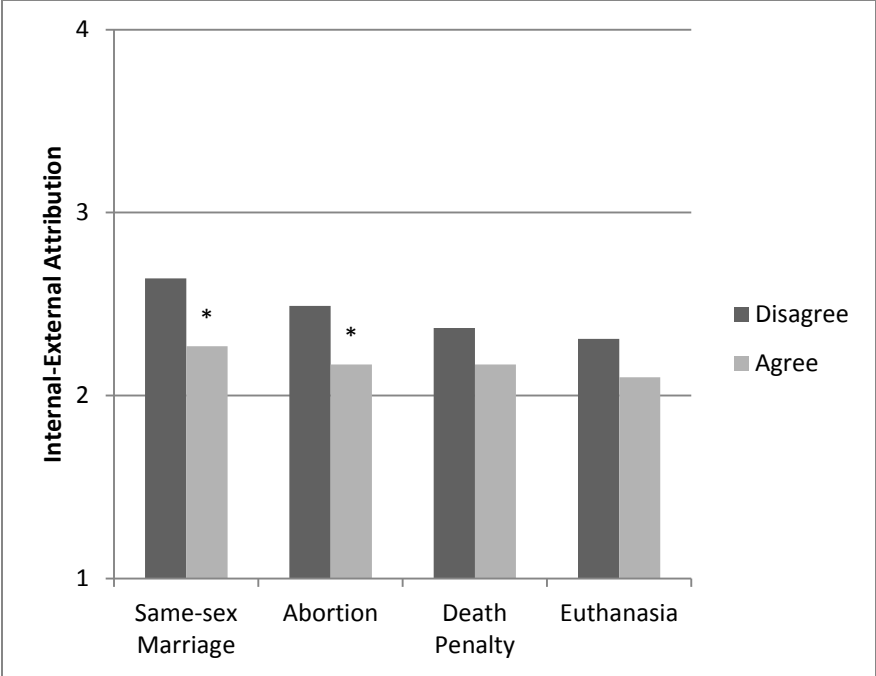


Figure 1. Differences in Internal and External Attribution by subject.

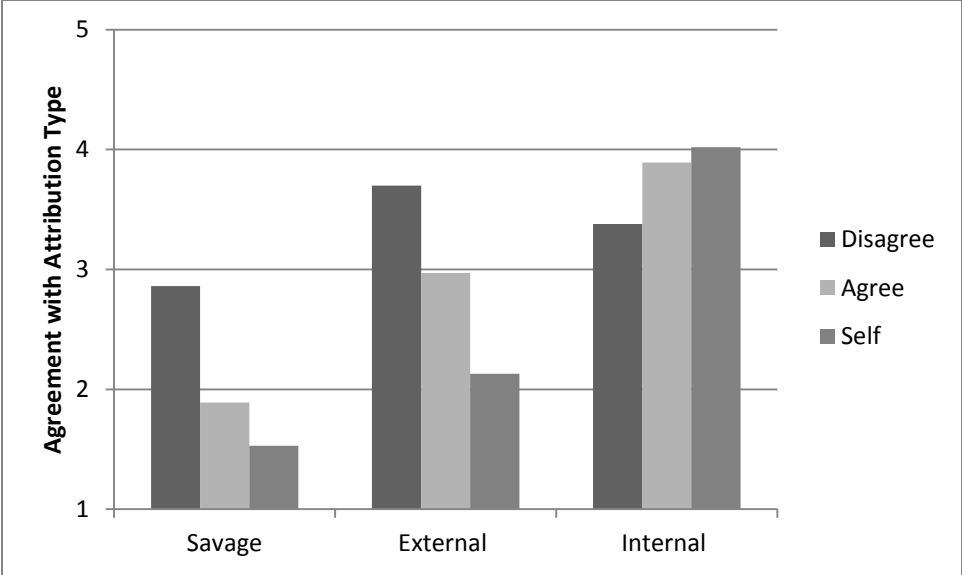


Figure 2. Differences in agreement with attribution type for abortion.

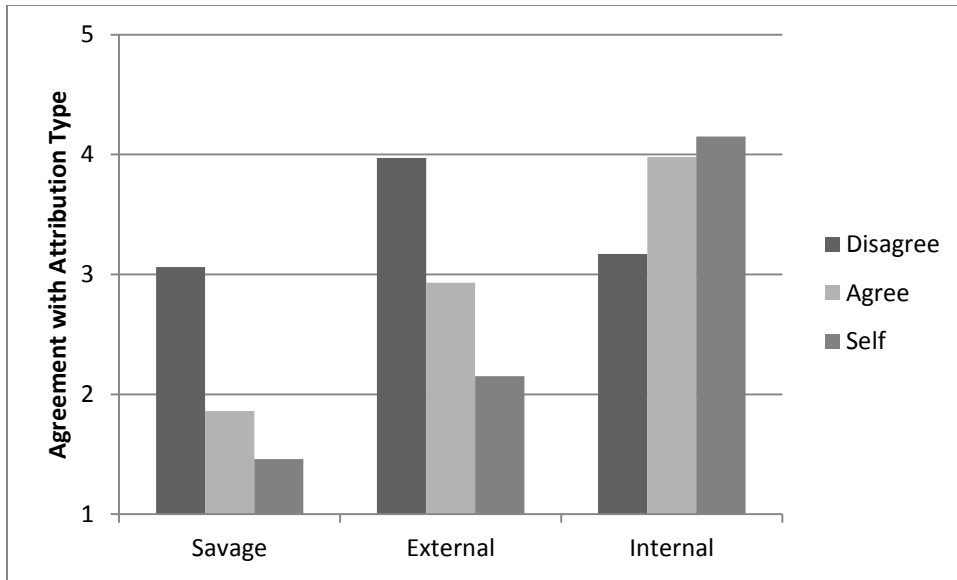


Figure 3. Differences in agreement with attribution type for same-sex marriage.