Utopian Hopes or Dystopian Fears? Exploring the Motivational Underpinnings of Moralized Political Engagement

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Abstract
People are more likely to become politically engaged (e.g., vote, engage in activism) when issues are associated with strong moral convictions. The goal of this research was to understand the underlying motivations that lead to this well-replicated effect. Specifically, to what extent is moralized political engagement motivated by proscriptive concerns (e.g., perceived harms, anticipated regret), prescriptive concerns (e.g., perceived benefits, anticipated pride), or some combination of these processes? And are the motivational pathways between moral conviction and political engagement the same or different for liberals and conservatives? Two studies (combined N = 2,069) found that regardless of political orientation, the association between moral conviction and political engagement was mediated by the perceived benefits of preferred but not the perceived harms of non-preferred policy outcomes, and by both anticipated pride and regret, findings that replicated in two contexts: legalizing same-sex marriage and allowing concealed weapons on college campuses.

Scholars often assume that some issues or dilemmas necessarily evoke moral reactions or sentiments, whether these issues are presented as moral dilemmas (e.g., trolley problems; Foot, 1967) or as controversial issues of the day (e.g., the legal status of abortion; Hillygus & Shields, 2005). Contrary to the view that some social phenomena are by definition moral, there is considerable individual variation in the degree that people report that their positions on specific issues—including polarized topics such as abortion and gay marriage—reflect their core moral convictions (e.g., Skitka, Bauman, & Sargis, 2005). Moreover, this variation matters. The degree to which people vest a specific issue with moral conviction is associated with (a) greater preferred social and physical distance from those who do not share one's morally convicted views; (b) lower levels of goodwill and cooperativeness in attitudinally heterogeneous groups; (c) greater inability to generate procedural solutions to resolve disagreements about the target issue; (d) greater distrust of otherwise legitimate authorities, such as the U.S. Supreme Court, to rule correctly on an issue; (e) rejection of non-preferred decisions and policy outcomes, regardless of whether they are associated with exemplary fair or legitimate procedures and authorities; (f) greater immunity from majority and normative influence; (g) resistance to compromise; and (h) acceptance of vigilantism and violence to achieve morally preferred ends (see Skitka, 2014, for a review).

People's moral convictions also play an especially important role in motivating political engagement, including cause-related activism, voting, and voting intentions—results that emerge even when controlling for variables such as strength of partisanship or attitude strength (e.g., Skitka & Bauman, 2008; van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2012). Although it is increasingly clear that the degree to which a person's position on a given issue is perceived as a moral conviction predicts greater political engagement and activism, what is less understood is why and how. The goal of the research described in this article was to test competing hypotheses about the motivational underpinnings of morally motivated political engagement by testing whether it comes from people's perceived harms or anticipated regret (and therefore avoidance motives), perceived benefits or anticipated

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Table 1. Summary of Hypotheses.

	Moral	Political
Asymmetry	The *moral asymmetry hypothesis* predicts that moral motivations are more likely be avoidance oriented, focused on dystopian fears and anticipated regret (i.e., proscriptive) than approach oriented, focus on utopian hopes, or anticipated pride (i.e., prescriptive).	The *political asymmetry hypothesis* predicts that conservatives' moral motivations are more likely than liberals' to be proscriptively oriented, whereas liberals' moral motivations are more likely than conservatives' to be prescriptively oriented.
Symmetry	The *moral symmetry hypothesis* predicts that moral motivations are equally likely to be proscriptively or prescriptively motivated.	The *political symmetry hypothesis* predicts that liberals' and conservatives' moral motivations are equally likely to be prescriptively or proscriptively oriented.

Note. The cognitive version of these hypotheses operationalizes proscriptions and prescriptions as people's beliefs about the relative harms or benefits of non-preferred and preferred outcomes to the SSM debate. The affective version of these hypotheses operationalizes proscriptions and prescriptions in terms of the anticipated regret or pride people would feel if they (respectively) failed to engage in activism, or engaged in activism around the issue of SSM. SSM = same-sex marriage.

pride (and therefore approach motives), or some combination of both.

Moral Motivations: Symmetrical or Asymmetrical?

Theorists often describe morality in terms of rules, suppression of immorality, and avoidance, and not in terms of people's desire to approach ideals or moral goods. Haidt (2008), for example, defines morality as "interlocking sets of values, practices, institutions, and evolved psychological mechanisms that work together to suppress or regulate selfishness . . ." (p. 70). Evolutionary theorists argue that avoidance is the primary moral orientation in part because morality evolved from generalized disgust reactions. Pathogen disgust, for example, is thought to have generalized to prohibitions on cannibalism, and sexual disgust could have led to prohibitions on incest (Lieberman & Hatfield, 2006). Similarly, some have argued that moral motivation is based more on people's feelings related to "oughts" (i.e., related to duty, obligations, and responsibilities) than their feelings related to "shoulds" (i.e., their ideals, hopes, and aspirations). For this reason, people's moral motivations are argued to be related more strongly to prevention rather than promotion concerns (Zaal, Laar, Ståhl, Ellemers, & Derks, 2011). Finally, other theorists argue that morality boils down to a cognitive template that has an agent and victim, and that the essence or prototype of morality is therefore one based on interpersonal harm, presumably something people should be especially motivated to avoid (e.g., Gray, Young, & Waytz, 2012). Taken together, these theories suggest that moral convictions predict political engagement because moral convictions are associated more strongly with reactionary and avoidant motivations than with proactive and approach motivations. Moral conviction's relationship with political engagement should therefore be explained better by avoidance than approach concerns (the *moral motive asymmetry hypothesis*; see Table 1).

In contrast, moral motives theory (Janoff-Bulman & Carnes, 2013) builds on dual process theories of motivation and self-regulation to argue that people's moral motivations can be *either* approach or avoidance oriented. Proscriptive morality (rooted in avoidance motivations) is focused on what people should not do and on protecting against harms. Prescriptive morality (rooted in approach motivations), in contrast, focuses on what people should do, and on providing for people's well-being and the social good. From this perspective, moral concerns could be associated with both proscriptive and prescriptive motives that in turn lead to increased political engagement (the *moral motive symmetry hypothesis*; see Table 1).

Empirical investigation of the relative weight people attach to proscriptive and prescriptive moral motivations, however, yields mixed evidence in support of the moral motive symmetry hypothesis. On the one hand, people give proscriptions and prescriptions equal moral "weight." That is, they believe that people should be motivated to engage in moral actions just as much as they should be motivated to avoid engaging in immoral actions (consistent with the moral symmetry hypothesis). Other research indicates that stronger moral convictions are associated with both stronger perceived harms of electing a non-preferred candidate and the benefits of electing a preferred candidate; in other words, approach and avoidance reactions (Brandt, Wisneski, & Skitka, 2015). On the other hand, people regard prescriptions as more discretionary and a matter of personal preference than proscriptions, and proscriptions are perceived to be comparatively more mandatory and blameworthy (when violated) than prescriptions—results more consistent with the moral asymmetry hypothesis (Janoff-Bulman, Sheikh, & Hepp, 2009).

In summary, although moral motives theory predicts that moral motivation can be proscriptively or prescriptively oriented, evidence for this hypothesis is mixed, and research that has directly compared the moral symmetry and asymmetry hypotheses is relatively scarce. One goal of this study was therefore to test the moral symmetry and asymmetry hypotheses in the domain of politics and political engagement.

Political Engagement and Motivation: Ideologically Symmetrical or Asymmetrical?

We also have competing hypotheses about the degree to which liberals' and conservatives' thoughts, feelings, and motivations are fundamentally asymmetrical (i.e., different) or symmetrical (i.e., similar). Consistent with the idea that the psychological foundation of liberals' and conservatives' motivations is more likely to be asymmetrical than symmetrical is research that indicates that liberals and conservatives differ in their sensitivity to positive and negative affects, losses and gains, and to positive and negative outcomes (see Hibbing, Smith, & Alfort, 2014 for a review). Conservatives, for example, learn how to avoid negative outcomes more quickly than how to approach positive outcomes (Shook & Fazio, 2009). Similarly, people on the political right are persuaded more by negatively framed messages that emphasize losses or costs than they are by messages that emphasize benefits, whereas those on the political left are persuaded more by positively framed messages that emphasize gains and benefits than messages that emphasize losses and costs (Lavine et al., 1999). Conservatives are also higher in threat sensitivity (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003) and biased toward negative stimuli in general (Hibbing et al., 2014), reactions that are both linked to inhibition-based avoidance motivation.

Based on the above findings, moral motives theory (Janoff-Bulman & Carnes, 2013) predicts not only that moral motives come in proscriptive and prescriptive "flavors" but also that liberals and conservatives tend to prefer one flavor to the other. Conservatives' moral motivations are predicted to be more proscriptively than prescriptively oriented, whereas liberals' moral motivations are predicted to be the converse. From this perspective, conservatives' morally motivated political engagement is more likely to be based on a desire to avoid the perceived costs of their non-preferred electoral or policy outcome, whereas liberals' morally motivated political engagement is more likely to be based on a desire to approach the perceived benefits of their preferred electoral or policy outcome (the *political asymmetry hypothesis*; see Table 1).

Although there are reasons to believe that liberals' and conservatives' moral convictions may lead to political engagement through different motivational processes, there are also reasons to believe that the motivational processes underlying ideological differences may be more similar than they are different (the *political symmetry hypothesis*; see Table 1). For example, threat sensitivity (which one could argue reflects avoidance motives) may play a more significant role in ideological formation for conservatives than for liberals (e.g., Duckitt & Fisher, 2003). That said, threat sensitivity might not differentially motivate liberals' and conservatives' political behavior. In other words, although there may be asymmetry in the antecedents of ideological differences, there may nonetheless be symmetry in the motivational processes that drive

ideological thoughts, feelings, and behavior. Consistent with this idea, liberals and conservatives are, respectively, intolerant of conservative and liberal groups (e.g., pro-life or pro-choice activists) because of the perceived threat these groups pose to their respective cherished values (Wetherell, Brandt, & Reyna, 2013). One could therefore argue that liberals' and conservatives' reactions in this context were similarly motivated by concerns that would seem to be more avoidance than approach oriented.

This and other research suggests that instead of reacting to or interpreting the world in fundamentally different ways, liberals' and conservatives' basic motivations may be more similar than they are different. Ideological symmetry in prescriptive and proscriptive motivations may be especially likely, given that approach and avoidance states are so fundamental and basic to human (and animal) physical and psychological adaptation (Elliot, 2006). Although liberals and conservatives may have different visions of what a dystopian or utopian future might look like, their dystopian fears and utopian aspirations may nonetheless similarly motivate moralized political engagement: Both groups may be similarly motivated to avoid anticipated regret and/or a perceived dystopian future, or to approach anticipated pride and a perceived utopian future.

Cognitive and Affective Components of Prescriptive and Proscriptive Moral Motivations

Another goal of the current research was to explore prescriptive and proscriptive moral orientations at two levels of analysis: beliefs about collective harms and benefits on one hand, and people's anticipated emotional reactions to the idea of engaging in activism on the other. The idea that people's cognitions and beliefs explain attitude–behavior correspondence is consistent with expectancy-value models of attitudes (e.g., Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) that emphasize the cognitive basis of attitudes when predicting behavior. Affect, however, can play a role in attitudes and attitude–behavior correspondence (Eagly & Chaiken, 1998), and anticipated emotions—in addition to or instead of people's cognition and beliefs—may play a role in understanding why and how moral convictions predict political engagement. We elaborate on both these possible ways of thinking about prescriptive and proscriptive motives next.

Beliefs as Proscriptive and Prescriptive Motivation

If people's moral motivations are proscriptively oriented, they should be especially motivated by the harms they associate with a non-preferred outcome. In contrast, if people's moral motivations are prescriptively motivated, they should be especially motivated by the benefits they associate with a preferred outcome. The moral symmetry and asymmetry

hypotheses differ in how much weight they predict people attach to concerns about harms versus benefits. The moral symmetry hypothesis predicts that people are likely to be motivated by both perceived harms and benefits when they have a strong moral investment in a specific cause. In other words, moral conviction should be associated both with perceptions of greater harm of a non-preferred policy outcome and with greater benefit of preferred policy outcome, and both these considerations should positively predict cause-related political engagement and activism. The moral asymmetry hypothesis, in contrast, predicts that people will be motivated more by the perceived harms of a non-preferred policy outcome than they will be by the perceived benefits of a preferred policy outcome. According to this view, moral conviction will be associated with stronger perceived harms of a non-preferred policy outcome than perceived benefits of a preferred policy outcome. Moreover, perceived harms will more strongly mediate the relationship between moral conviction and political engagement than perceived benefits.

The political symmetry and asymmetry hypotheses make different predictions about whether political orientation will moderate these mediational predictions. The political asymmetry hypothesis predicts that political orientation will moderate the degree to which harms versus benefits mediate the association between moral conviction and political engagement. More specifically, this hypothesis predicts that liberals' moral convictions should predict political engagement more strongly through the perceived benefits of their preferred policy outcome than the perceived harms of their non-preferred outcome, whereas conservatives' moral convictions will predict political engagement through the perceived harms of their non-preferred policy outcome more than the perceived benefits of their preferred policy outcome. The political symmetry hypothesis, in contrast, predicts that the moral motivations of liberals and conservatives will be more similar than different, regardless of whether the path is ultimately through perceived harms, benefits, or some combination of both processes.

Anticipated Emotions as Proscriptive and Prescriptive Motivation

Anticipated emotions associated with becoming politically engaged could provide prescriptive or proscriptive motivation as much or more than people's beliefs and cognition (e.g., Manstead & Parker, 1995). Anticipated regret, for example, is an aversive reaction based on people's feelings about how much they will regret inaction (Gilovich & Medvec, 1995). Furthermore, these feelings predict behavioral intentions (e.g., Abraham & Sheeran, 2003; Parker, Stradling, & Manstead, 1996). Stronger moral convictions about an issue may also be associated with feelings of anticipated regret at the idea of failing to take a stand in support of one's beliefs. Perceived moral obligation to protect the

environment, for example, predicts anticipated regret about failing to engage in conservation efforts, and these feelings in turn predict behavioral intentions to do so (Kaiser, 2006). These results suggest possible inter-connections between moral considerations, anticipated regret, and behavior.

Although anticipated pride is less extensively studied than other self-conscious emotions (Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007), there are indications that anticipated pride increases self-control (Katzir, Eyal, Meiran, & Kessler, 2010), adherence to goals (Williams & DeSteno, 2008), and mediates the effects of attitudes and social norms on behavior (Onwezen, Antonides, & Bartels, 2013). In addition to testing the moral and political symmetry hypotheses with harms and benefits as potential mediators, we tested anticipated regret and pride as possible mediators of the links between moral conviction and political engagement.

Little or no research to our knowledge has explored the relative roles of issue-relevant cognitions (e.g., harms vs. benefits) and self-relevant emotion (e.g., anticipated regret vs. pride) might play in these processes. Although there are good theoretical reasons to believe that both cognition and affect may be involved in these processes, there is little theoretical basis for predicting whether one or both processes are more or less likely to explain the association between moral convictions and activist intentions. This aspect of our study was therefore largely exploratory.

Study 1 tested our hypotheses in the context of the same-sex marriage (SSM) debate. The data for Study 1 were collected in January and February of 2012, when SSM was legalized in a handful of states (Connecticut, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont, and New York). Many states were either actively debating or had passed constitutional amendments defining marriage in terms of one man and one woman, whereas other states were either considering legalizing the SSM or had active court challenges of bans against it. In short, the issue of SSM was particularly salient—both pro and con—at the time data were collected. Study 2 was a close replication of Study 1 in the context of the conceal/carry debate about guns on college campuses.

Study 1

Method

Participants. Participants (*N* = 1,402) were recruited from an online panel maintained by U-SAMP. U-SAMP (recently rebranded as Instantly, Inc.) is a for-profit marketing and survey company with more than a million volunteer panelists in the United States who participate in exchange for direct payment or for donations to charities. We used quota sampling to ensure that our sample contained roughly similar numbers of males and females, supporters and opponents of legalizing SSM, and participants from states where SSM was legal versus illegal at the time of data collection. Thirty-six participants who did not take a position on legalizing SSM were

excluded from the analytic sample leaving a final analytical sample of $N = 1,366$.[1]

Measures

Position on SSM. Participants' support or opposition to legalizing SSM was assessed by asking, "Do you support or oppose legalizing same-sex marriage?" with the response options of *support, oppose*, and *uncertain*. Participants who indicated that they were uncertain about their position were branched to the follow-up question: "If you had to choose, would you say that you tend to lean more toward supporting or opposing same-sex marriage?" with the response options of *lean more toward support, lean more toward oppose*, or *uncertain/don't know.*

We combined participants' self-reported stance on SSM with the current legal status (permitted vs. prohibited) of SSM in participants' state to create a single variable representing whether the status of the issue in their state was consistent or inconsistent with participants' position. That is, opponents who lived in states where SSM was illegal as well as supporters who lived in states where it was legal were both coded into a single "support the status quo" group. Opponents in states where SSM was legal and supporters in states where SSM was illegal were combined into an "oppose the status quo" group.

Moral conviction. Strength of moral conviction about SSM was measured by asking participants the degree to which their attitude about SSM was "a reflection of their core moral beliefs and convictions," "connected to fundamental beliefs about right and wrong," "a moral stance," and "based on moral principle" (Skitka, 2014). Responses were provided on 5-point scales with point labels *not at all, slightly, moderately, much*, and *very much*, α = .93.

Political orientation. To assess political orientation, participants were first asked whether they generally think of themselves as a *liberal, conservative, moderate*, or *something else*. Participants who indicated that they are liberal or conservative subsequently branched to an item that asked how strongly they identified as a liberal or conservative, with the response options of *slightly strong, moderately strong*, and *very strong.* Participants who responded as political moderates or "something else" branched to an item that asked whether they leaned toward being more of a liberal, conservative, or neither. Leaners were recoded as either *slightly liberal* or *slightly conservative*, and responses to these combined items were used to create a 7-point measure of political orientation, with higher scores reflecting stronger conservatism.

Anticipated harms and benefits. We adapted Eagly, Mladinic, and Otto's (1994) method for assessing the cognitive component of participants' attitude about SSM. Participants were asked to list up to two effects or consequences they thought prohibiting/permitting SSM would or does have for society (the would or does wording varied as a function of the legal status of SSM in participants' state). Participants provided ratings of each consequence on two scales: "How good or bad would the consequence you listed above be?" with the response options of *very bad, moderately bad, slightly bad, uncertain, slightly good, moderately good*, and *very good*, and "How much harm or benefit to society would be associated with the consequence you listed above?" with the response options of *extreme harm, moderate harm, slight harm, uncertain, slight benefit, moderate benefit*, and *extreme benefit*. These items were then recoded into the harm/benefit and bad/good participants associated with their non-preferred and preferred outcomes based on their stance on SSM. A principal-axis factor analysis with a promax rotation using these four items yielded a two-factor solution, with the harm/benefit and bad/good ratings of the consequences associated with preferred versus non-preferred legal statuses of SSM loading highly on different factors, with eigenvalues of 2.05 and 1.76, respectively. Therefore, averages of these items were calculated separately to capture the perceived harms of a non-preferred outcome (α = .93), and the perceived benefits of a preferred outcome (reverse coded, α = .97) with respect to the legal status of SSM.

In addition to the factor analysis, we text-analyzed the consequences participants generated using RIOT Scan software (Boyd, 2014) and the Harvard IV-4 dictionary (Stone, Dunphy, Smith, & Ogilvie, 1966) to assess whether the consequences of participants' non-preferred outcome used a greater proportion of negative and less positive language than the language they used to describe the consequences of their preferred outcome. Participants used a higher percentage of negative language when describing the consequences of their non-preferred outcome of the SSM debate ($M = 10.93\%$, $SD = 16.99$) than their preferred outcome ($M = 6.96\%$, $SD = 13.21$), $t(1254) = 7.20$, $p < .001$, $\omega^2 = .04$. Participants also used a higher percentage of positive language when describing the consequences of their preferred outcome of the SSM debate ($M = 13.30\%$, $SD = 16.23$) than their non-preferred outcome ($M = 9.20\%$, $SD = 11.11$), $t(1254) = 7.80$, $p < .001$, $\omega^2 = .05$.

Anticipated regret and pride. Anticipated regret of not engaging in SSM activism was measured by asking participants how much they would experience each of the following emotions if they did not engage in activism to support their position on SSM: regret, self-blame, guilt, anger, shame, disgust, dissatisfaction with self, disappointment, and pain (Connolly & Reb, 2003; α = .96). Anticipated pride for engaging in activism on SSM consisted of rating of the emotions: happiness, pride, gratification, honor, moral, strong, important, and powerful (which together represented the Anticipated Pride scale, α = .96). Responses to these items were provided on 5-point scales with the response options of *not at all, slightly, moderately, much*, and *very much.* A principal-axis factor analysis with a promax rotation yielded

the expected two-factor solution, with regret and pride items loading on separate factors, with eigenvalues of 10.14 and 2.95, respectively.

Activist intentions. Activist intentions were measured by asking participants their willingness to engage in a number of activist behaviors in support of their position on legalizing SSM (Skitka & Wisneski, 2011). These behaviors were to sign a petition, contact a state representative, work at a phone bank, volunteer to go door-to-door to collect signatures, vote in the next election, hold group meetings at their home, and to donate a small or large sum to the cause. Responses were provided on 4-point scales with the point labels of *not at all willing, slightly willing, moderately willing*, and *very willing*, α = .89.

Demographics. Participants were asked several demographic questions, including state of residence, age, gender, and education.

Results

As a first test of our hypotheses, we tested whether moral conviction predicted activism as well as each of the proposed mediators. For each model, demographic controls (age, gender, and education) were included in a first block,[2] the direct effects of political orientation, participants' position on the legal status quo in their state (support/oppose), and moral conviction (mean centered) were entered in a second block, and the two- and three-way interaction terms of moral conviction, SSM status, and political orientation were entered in the third and fourth blocks. These models indicated that all interaction terms were either not significant or too small in effect size to be meaningful (i.e., they explained less than 1% of the variance in a given criterion). Non-significant and trivial interaction terms were removed, and the model was refit (Aiken & West, 1991).[3]

Consistent with the findings of past research and the political symmetry hypothesis, stronger (vs. weaker) moral conviction predicted greater activism intentions, $B = .28$, $SE = .02$, $t(1359) = 17.64$, $p = .000$, 95% CI = [.25, .31], and was not moderated by political orientation, $B = .01$, $SE = .01$, $t(1356) = 1.19$, $p = .234$, 95% CI = [−.01, .03]. Greater activism intentions were also associated with being politically liberal, $B = −.07$, $SE = .01$, $t(1359) = −5.84$, $p = .000$, 95% CI = [−.09, −.04], and living in a state where the status of SSM was inconsistent with one's beliefs, $B = .11$, $SE = .04$, $t(1359) = 2.87$, $p = .004$, 95% CI = [.04, .19].

Moving to the models predicting each of the mediators, the moral symmetry hypothesis predicted that stronger moral convictions about SSM would be associated with greater anticipated regret and/or perceived harm of non-preferred policy outcomes, as well as greater anticipated pride and/or perceived benefits of preferred policy outcomes. In contrast, the moral asymmetry hypothesis predicted that stronger

moral convictions about SSM would be associated more strongly with the anticipated regret and/or perceived harm of non-preferred policy outcomes than it would be with anticipated pride and/or the perceived benefits of preferred policy outcomes. The political symmetry hypothesis predicted that the relationship between moral conviction and the proposed mediators would be the same for those on the political left and right, whereas the political asymmetry hypothesis predicted that political orientation would moderate these relationships. As predicted by the moral and political symmetry hypotheses, stronger moral conviction about the issue of SSM predicted higher levels of perceived harm associated with participants' non-preferred outcome, higher perceived benefits of their preferred outcome, anticipated pride associated with becoming involved in the issue, and anticipated regret at not doing so. Moreover, none of these relationships were moderated by political orientation (see Tables 2 and 3).

Next, we tested the association of the proposed mediators with activism intentions using a similar approach. Anticipated regret, pride, and perceived benefits of preferred policy outcomes (but not perceived harms of a non-preferred policy outcome) all positively predicted activism intentions (see Table 4). The first three results are consistent with the moral symmetry and inconsistent with the moral asymmetry hypothesis. That perceived harm did not predict activist intentions and perceived benefits did is the reverse of what would be predicted by the moral asymmetry hypothesis. Consistent with the political symmetry and inconsistent with the political asymmetry hypothesis, the interactions between the mediators and political orientation were either non-significant or trivial.

Finally, we found no evidence of a bias toward status quo maintenance in a given state. In fact, we found evidence to the contrary. Whether participants' position on SSM was consistent or inconsistent with the legal status quo in their given state was unrelated to anticipated regret and pride, perceived harms of participants' non-preferred legal status of SSM, or perceived benefits of participants' preferred legal status of SSM (see Tables 2 and 3).[4] As mentioned earlier, activist intentions were higher when participants' position on SSM was inconsistent (rather than consistent) with the current legal status of SSM in their state).

In summary, the results of the regression analyses yielded results more consistent with the moral and political symmetry than asymmetry hypotheses. Stronger moral conviction was positively related to the harms and benefits associated with different outcomes of the SSM debate, as well as anticipated pride and regret at engaging and failing to engage in activism, respectively. Anticipated regret, pride, and the perceived benefits of participants' preferred, but not the harms of non-preferred policy outcomes, in turn predicted activist intentions. Because none of these relationships were moderated by political orientation, these results were also more consistent with the political symmetry than asymmetry hypothesis.

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Table 2. Regression Model (Unstandardized Regression Coefficients) Predicting Anticipated Harms and Benefits of Same-Sex Marriage (Study 1).

Block	Harms							Benefits						
	B	SE	t	p	LCI	UCI	R^2_{change}	B	SE	t	p	LCI	UCI	R^2_{change}
1														
Age	.01	.003	1.56	.12	−.001	.01		.01	.003	1.60	.11	−.01	.01	
Education	.07	.03	2.56	.01	.02	.13		.11	.03	3.31	.001	.05	.18	
Gender	.37	.09	4.32	<.001	.20	.53	.02**	.30	.10	2.91	.001	.10	.50	.02**
2														
Political orientation	.01	.02	0.25	.80	−.04	.05		−.19	.03	−6.31	<.001	−.24	−.13	
Status quo	.10	.08	1.14	.26	−.07	.26		.14	.10	1.40	.16	−.06	.34	
Moral conviction	.26	.03	7.69	<.001	.20	.33	.04**	.21	.04	5.02	<.001	.13	.29	.04**
R^2							.06**							.06**

Note. Gender: −.5 = male, .5 = female; status: −.5 = support current status quo, .5 = oppose status quo, and higher political orientation scores = conservative. Non-significant interactions are not reported. SSM = same-sex marriage; LCI = lower confidence interval; UCI = upper confidence interval.
*p < .05. **p < .01.

Table 3. Regression Model (Unstandardized Regression Coefficients) Predicting Anticipated Regret and Pride of Engaging in SSM-Relevant Activism (Study 1).

Block	Regret							Pride						
	B	SE	t	p	LCI	UCI	R^2_{change}	B	SE	t	p	LCI	UCI	R^2_{change}
1														
Age	−.003	.002	−1.31	.19	−.007	.001		−.01	.002	−2.91	.004	−.01	−.002	
Education	.04	.02	1.67	.10	−.007	.08		.01	.02	0.21	.83	−.04	.05	
Gender	.05	.07	0.76	.45	−.08	.18	.004	.22	.07	3.19	.001	.08	.35	.02**
2														
Political orientation	−.07	.02	−4.18	<.001	−.11	−.04		−.12	.02	−6.84	<.001	−.16	−.09	
Status quo	.03	.06	0.48	.63	−.09	.15		.09	.06	1.49	.14	−.03	.21	
Moral conviction	.43	.03	17.70	<.001	.39	.48	.19**	.46	.03	18.57	<.001	.41	.51	.21**
R^2							.19**							.22**

Note. Gender: −.5 = male, .5 = female; status: −.5 = support current status quo, .5 = oppose status quo, and higher political orientation scores = conservative. Non-significant interactions are not reported. SSM = same-sex marriage; LCI = lower confidence interval; UCI = upper confidence interval.
*p < .05. **p < .01.

Tests of mediation. To provide a stronger test of our hypotheses, we used bootstrap analysis to test the relationship of moral conviction with activism intentions simultaneously through the mediational paths of anticipated pride, regret, harms, and benefits with 5,000 bootstrap samples (Preacher & Hayes, 2008; see Figure 1). Because political orientation did not moderate the relationship between moral conviction and any of the proposed mediators, or the relationship between any of the proposed mediators and activism, political orientation was already ruled out as a possible moderator of any of the hypothesized mediational relationships.

The moral symmetry hypothesis predicted that morally convicted participants would be more motivated to avoid anticipated regret and harm of their non-preferred policy outcome and approach anticipated pride and the benefit of their preferred policy outcome, and these would in turn predict willingness to engage in activism. In contrast, the moral asymmetry hypothesis predicted that morally convicted participants would be more motivated to avoid anticipated regret and the harm of their non-preferred policy outcome than they would be by approaching anticipated pride and the perceived benefits of their preferred policy outcome. Results were completely inconsistent with the moral asymmetry hypothesis and largely consistent with the moral symmetry hypothesis. As can be seen in Figure 1, the perceived benefits of a preferred policy outcome (but not perceived harms of a non-preferred policy outcome, indirect effect = .002, SE = .004, 95% CI = [−.004, .01]) of the SSM debate mediated the association between moral conviction and activist intentions, indirect effect = .01, SE = .003, 95% CI = [.006, .02]. Stronger moral convictions about SSM were associated with greater perceived benefits of participants' preferred legal status of SSM, which were in turn associated with stronger intentions

Table 4. Regression Model (Unstandardized Regression Coefficients) Predicting Intentions to Engage in SSM-Relevant Activism.

Block	B	SE	t	p	LCI	UCI	R^2_{change}
1							
Age	−.002	.001	−1.28	.20	−.005	.001	
Education	.05	.02	3.36	.001	.02	.08	
Gender	.003	.04	0.08	.94	−.08	.09	.01**
2							
Political orientation	−.02	.01	−2.15	.03	−.04	−.002	
Status quo	.08	.03	2.48	.01	.02	.15	
Moral conviction	.10	.02	6.39	<.001	.07	.13	
Harm	.01	.01	0.87	.39	−.01	.03	
Benefit	.05	.01	5.89	<.001	.04	.07	
Regret	.20	.02	12.20	<.001	.17	.24	
Pride	.17	.02	10.01	<.001	.13	.20	.41**
R^2							.42**

Note. Gender: −.5 = male, .5= female; status: −.5 = support current status quo, .5 = oppose status quo, and higher political orientation scores = conservative. Non-significant interactions are not reported. SSM = same-sex marriage; LCI = lower confidence interval; UCI = upper confidence interval.
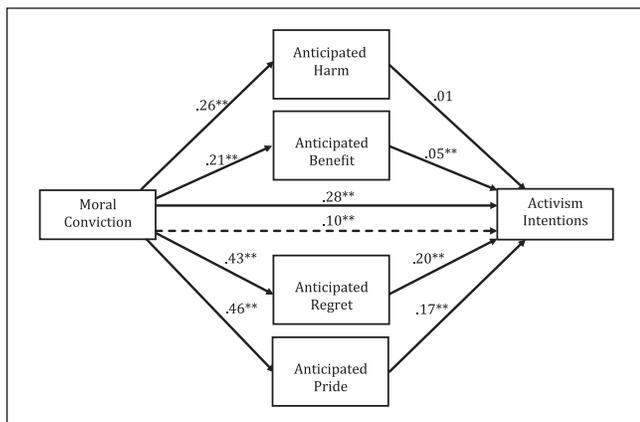*p < .05. **p < .01.

Figure 1. OLS regression and mediation results for relationships between moral conviction, anticipated emotions and consequences, and SSM activism intentions in Study 1.
Note. Bold lines indicate significant mediation paths; dashed lines indicate the c′ path. OLS = ordinary least squares; SSM = same-sex marriage.

to engage in activism. In other words, although we observed moral motive asymmetry when prescriptive and proscriptive motivations were operationalized as beliefs, it was the *opposite* direction of what the moral asymmetry hypothesis predicted: Perceived benefits significantly mediated the moral conviction–activism relationship whereas perceived harms did not.

As can be seen in Figure 1, both anticipated pride (indirect effect = .08, SE = .01, 95% CI = [.06, .10]) and regret (indirect effect = .09, SE = .01, 95% CI = [.07, .11]) also mediated the relationship between moral conviction and activist intentions. Higher levels of moral conviction were associated with stronger feelings of anticipated regret and pride, which in turn predicted greater intentions to engage in activism. Contrasts

revealed that the indirect effects through pride and regret were stronger than the indirect effect through benefits (see Table 5). The total indirect effect of all four mediators (harms, benefits, regret, and pride) was significant, indirect effect = .18, SE = .01, 95% CI = [.16, .20]. The direct effect of moral conviction on activism intentions remained significant when controlling for the four mediators, B = .10, SE = .02, t(1355) = 6.39, p < .001, 95% CI = [.07, .13].

Study 1 Discussion

The results of Study 1 revealed that moralized political engagement is motivated more by the collective benefits people associate with the good than the harms they associate with the bad, and by anticipated pride and regret at the idea of either acting or failing to act in the name of their morally convicted beliefs. Moreover, similar patterns of morally motivated political engagement were observed for people on the political right and left, and whether participants' position was consistent or inconsistent with the status quo. There might be something particular, however, about the issue of SSM that might have led to this pattern of results. Study 2 was therefore designed to replicate the results of Study 1 in a different policy context, and one that may have stronger associations with harm, specifically the issue of conceal/carry guns on college campuses.

Study 2

Study 2 was designed to be a close and registered replication (https://osf.io/v5tae/) of Study 1 that tested the generalizability of the results of Study 1 in a new policy domain, specifically whether guns should be allowed to be carried on college campuses.

Table 5. Tests of Contrasts Between Indirect Effects for Studies 1 and 2 Based on 5,000 Bootstrapped Samples.

	Study 1				Study 2			
	ID diff	*SE*	LCI	UCI	ID diff	*SE*	LCI	UCI
Pride vs. regret	−.011	.017	−.044	.022	.002	.021	−.038	.046
Pride vs. benefits	.066	.011	.046	.088	.062	.014	.036	.091
Pride vs. harms	.074	.011	.054	.097	.070	.014	.045	.100
Regret vs. benefits	.077	.011	.057	.098	.059	.012	.036	.085
Regret vs. harms	.086	.011	.065	.107	.068	.013	.044	.093
Benefits vs. harms	.009	.005	−.001	.019	.008	.006	−.003	.021

Note. ID diff gives the differences between the two indirect effects, and *SE* gives the standard error for the difference. LCI and UCI give the upper and lower bounds from the bias corrected and accelerated 95% confidence intervals from the bootstrapping procedure. Confidence intervals that contain 0 indicate that the indirect effects for the two paths do not differ.

Participants

Participants ($N = 726$) were recruited from Mechanical Turk. Twenty-three participants who did not take a position on the issue were excluded from the analytic sample leaving a final analytical sample of $N = 703$. This sample size met our target of $N = 700$,[5] determined by G*Power estimates of having 90% power to replicate the effects observed in Study 1. Approximately equal numbers of participants supported and opposed concealed guns on college campuses (supporters $n = 347$, opponents $n = 356$).

Measures

We used the same measures as used in Study 1[6] with two exceptions. First, references to SSM were replaced with references to allowing people to carry concealed guns on college campuses. Second, status quo was not included in Study 2 because most states allow individual universities to establish localized gun polices making the exact status in each state ambiguous.

Results

Consistent with Study 1 and past research, stronger moral conviction predicted greater activism intentions when the proposed mediators were not included in the model, $B = .21$, $SE = .02$, $t(690) = 11.36$, $p = .000$, 95% CI = [.18, .25]. The effects for participants' position on the issue and for political orientation were both non-significant, ts(690) < 1, $p > .46$. Furthermore, of the interaction terms, only the two-way issue position by political orientation was significant, $B = .14$, $SE = .03$, $t(689) = 4.85$, $p = .000$, 95% CI = [.04, .20]. This interaction, however, was not relevant to any of the hypotheses in the current article and was not considered further.

Next, we turned to the regression models predicting the proposed mediators. As predicted by the moral and political symmetry hypotheses and replicating Study 1, stronger moral conviction about the issue of guns on campus predicted higher levels of perceived harm associated with participants' non-preferred outcome, higher perceived benefits of their preferred outcome, anticipated pride associated with becoming involved in the issue, and anticipated regret at not doing so. Moreover, none of these relationships between moral conviction and other variables were moderated by political orientation or position on the issue (see Tables 6 and 7).

Anticipated regret, pride, and perceived benefits of preferred policy outcomes (but not perceived harms of a non-preferred policy outcome) all positively predicted activism intentions (see Table 8). The first three results are consistent with the moral symmetry and inconsistent with the moral asymmetry hypothesis. That perceived harm did not predict activist intentions and perceived benefits did is the reverse of what would be predicted by the moral asymmetry hypothesis. Consistent with the political symmetry and inconsistent with the political asymmetry hypothesis, none of the relationships between the proposed mediators and activism were moderated by political orientation.

Tests of mediation. Mediational analyses also replicated Study 1. As can be seen in Figure 2, the perceived benefits of a preferred gun policy outcome (but not perceived harms of a non-preferred gun policy outcome, indirect effect = .003, $SE = .004$, 95% CI = [−.004, .01]) mediated the association between moral conviction and activist intentions, indirect effect = .01, $SE = .004$, 95% CI = [.004, .02]. Stronger moral convictions about guns on campus were associated with greater perceived benefits of participants' preferred legal status guns on campus, and perceived benefits in turn predicted stronger intentions to engage in activism.

Both anticipated pride (indirect effect = .07, $SE = .01$, 95% CI = [.05, .10]) and regret (indirect effect = .07, $SE = .01$, 95% CI = [.05, .10]) also mediated the relationship between moral conviction and activist intentions. Higher levels of moral conviction were associated with stronger feelings of anticipated regret and pride, which in turn predicted greater intentions to engage in activism. Contrasts revealed that the indirect effects through pride and regret were stronger than the indirect effect

Table 6. Regression Model (Unstandardized Regression Coefficients) Predicting Anticipated Harms and Benefits of Guns on Campus (Study 2).

Block	Harms							Benefits						
	B	SE	t	p	LCI	UCI	R^2_{change}	B	SE	t	p	LCI	UCI	R^2_{change}
1														
Education	.08	.04	2.02	.04	.002	.16		.11	.05	2.00	.05	.002	.21	
Gender	.35	.11	3.35	.001	.15	.56	.02*	−.08	.14	−0.55	.58	−.35	−.19	.006
2														
Political orientation	.005	.03	0.16	.87	−.06	.07		.06	.04	1.54	.12	−.02	.15	
Side of issue	.04	.12	0.30	.76	−.19	.26		.06	.15	0.41	.68	−.24	.36	
Moral conviction	.24	.04	5.74	<.001	.16	.32	.05**	.30	.06	5.54	<.001	.020	.41	.05**
3														
Side of Issue × Political Orientation	.23	.07	3.47	.001	.10	.36	.02*	.41	.09	4.80	<.001	.24	.58	.03**
R^2							.08**							.09**

Note. Gender: −.5 = male, .5 = female; status: −.5 = support current status quo, .5 = oppose status quo, and higher political orientation scores = conservative. Non-significant interactions are not reported. LCI = lower confidence interval; UCI = upper confidence interval.
*p < .05. **p < .01.

Table 7. Regression Model (Unstandardized Regression Coefficients) Predicting Anticipated Pride and Regret of Engaging in Gun-Relevant Activism (Study 2).

Block	Regret							Pride						
	B	SE	t	p	LCI	UCI	R^2_{change}	B	SE	t	p	LCI	UCI	R^2_{change}
1														
Education	−.02	.03	−0.54	.59	−.08	.05		−.01	.03	−0.22	.83	−.08	.06	
Gender	−.02	.08	−0.20	.84	−.18	.14	.001	.13	.09	1.42	.16	−.05	.30	.003
2														
Political orientation	.03	.02	1.24	.22	−.02	.07		.07	.02	2.83	.005	.02	.11	
Side of issue	−.08	.08	−0.97	.33	−.24	.08		.05	.09	0.63	.53	−.11	.22	
Moral conviction	.37	.03	12.32	<.001	.31	.43	.19**	.50	.03	16.41	<.001	.44	.56	.29**
3														
Side of Issue × Political Orientation	.14	.05	2.89	.004	.04	.23	.01**							
R^2							.20**							.29**

Note. Gender: −.5 = male, .5 = female; status: −.5 = support current status quo, .5 = oppose status quo, and higher political orientation scores = conservative. Non-significant interactions are not reported. LCI = lower confidence interval; UCI = upper confidence interval.
*p < .05. **p < .01.

through benefits (see Table 5). The total indirect effect of all four mediators (harms, benefits, regret, and pride) was significant, indirect effect = .16, SE = .01, 95% CI = [.12, .19]. The direct effect of moral conviction on activism intentions remained significant when controlling for the four mediators, B = .05, SE = .02, t(686) = 2.83, p = .004, 95% CI = [.01, .09].

Study 2 Discussion

The results of Study 2 replicated those of Study 1 in a different political context, specifically with respect to people's thoughts and feelings about allowing concealed guns on college campuses. Morally motivated political engagement on the part of those on the political right and left was predicted

by the perceived benefits of preferred policy outcomes and not the perceived harms of non-preferred outcomes, and by anticipated pride and regret. Political orientation did not moderate these effects.

General Discussion

Two studies tested competing motivational explanations for how and why people become more politically engaged when they have a moral investment in a given issue, and whether the motivational processes involved are similar or different for liberals and conservatives. Our results revealed that moralized political engagement is motivated more by the collective benefits people associate with the good than the harms

Table 8. Regression Model (Unstandardized Regression Coefficients) Predicting Intentions to Engage in Gun-Relevant Activism (Study 2).

Block	B	SE	t	p	LCI	UCI	R^2_{change}
1							
Education	.04	.02	0.19	.85	−.03	.04	
Gender	.07	.05	1.32	.19	−.03	.16	.003
2							
Political orientation	−.03	.01	−2.24	.03	−.05	−.003	
Side of issue	.01	.04	0.11	.92	−.08	.09	
Moral conviction	.06	.02	2.83	.005	.02	.09	
Harm	.01	.01	0.74	.46	−.02	.04	
Benefit	.04	.01	3.14	.002	.01	.06	
Regret	.19	.03	7.78	<.001	.14	.24	
Pride	.14	.02	6.02	<.001	.10	.19	.37**
R^2							.37**

Note. Gender: −.5 = male, .5 = female; status: −.5 = support current status quo, .5 = oppose status quo, and higher political orientation scores = conservative. Non-significant interactions are not reported. LCI = lower confidence interval; UCI = upper confidence interval.
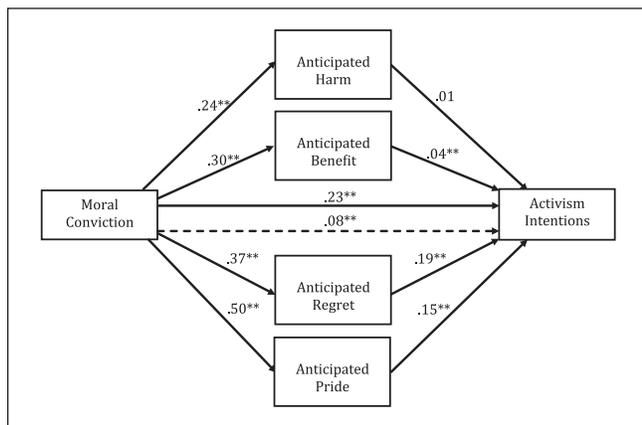*p < .05. **p < .01.

Figure 2. OLS regression and mediation results for relationships between moral conviction, anticipated emotions and consequences, and gun activism intentions in Study 2.
Note. Bold lines indicate significant mediation paths; dashed lines indicate the c′ path. OLS = ordinary least squares.

they associate with the bad, and by anticipated pride and regret at the idea of either acting or failing to act in the name of their morally convicted beliefs. To the extent that we observed evidence of moral motive asymmetry at the level of people's beliefs about the harms/benefits of SSM and guns on campus, it was in the opposite direction than predicted by previous theory and research, which has tended to emphasize the power of harm and dystopian concerns to the relative neglect of the possible motivational power of utopian aspirations.

The finding that people's moralized political engagement is driven more by a focus on benefits than harms is surprising, given other research that demonstrates that people are often much more loss averse than they are gain seeking (e.g., Kahneman & Tversky, 1984) and the general conclusion that

"bad is psychologically stronger than good" (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001). This previous research, however, typically focuses more on material losses and gains, which may be experienced differently than moral losses and gains.

Although beliefs about benefits certainly played a role in predicting people's moralized motivations to engage in activism, self-relevant emotions played a role as well, and a stronger role than their beliefs about benefits. Stronger moral convictions about SSM and guns on campus were associated with stronger anticipated regret at the idea of not becoming politically engaged in these issues, as well as stronger anticipated pride at the thought of becoming more engaged, and both reactions—anticipated regret and pride—predicted higher levels of activist intention. The pattern of results with self-focused anticipated emotions therefore played out in a pattern that was more consistent with the moral symmetry than asymmetry hypothesis.

Although this research provides some support for the moral motives theory prediction that moral concerns can be rooted as much or more in prescriptive as proscriptive motivations, our results did not support the moral motives theory prediction that these motives would be politically asymmetrical. To the extent that ideological differences in moral orientations exist, they would be most likely to reveal themselves in the context of politicized debate where people's political orientations and motivations are especially salient and accessible. That said, political orientation did not moderate the relationship between moral conviction and the degree to which people's moralized attitudes were associated with either perceived harms or benefits, or anticipated pride or regret. Although the idea that there may be political asymmetry in moral motivations cannot be completely ruled out, the results of these studies nonetheless shift the burden of proof to those who argue that liberals' and conservatives' moral

motivations are fundamentally different (see Greenwald, 1975, on the power of null hypothesis results to shift burdens of proof).

The goal of these studies was to test competing hypotheses about the motivational underpinnings of the links between moral conviction and political engagement. Given that most of the hypothesis tests in the current study were correlational, however, it is reasonable to wonder whether harms/benefits and affect are possible antecedents, rather than only possible consequences, of having a strong moral conviction about an issue. To explore this question, Brandt et al. (2015) recently used a longitudinal panel design to examine the relative role of beliefs about harms and benefits of electing Mitt Romney or Barack Obama in the 2012 Presidential election, as well as the degree to which people's emotional reactions to the candidates were related to fear, hostility, or enthusiasm. They found that affect was both an antecedent and a consequence, whereas beliefs about harms and benefits were only consequences of changes in moral conviction related to candidate preferences over the election cycle. Brandt et al.'s research yielded important new insights about the cognitive and emotional antecedents and consequences of morally convicted attitudes. The current research complements and extends this research by testing hypotheses in two different politicized contexts and by testing the degree to which proscriptive and prescriptive cognitions and emotions not only relate to attitude moralization but explain the connections between attitude moralization and political engagement as well.

Implications and Conclusion

As reviewed at the beginning of this article, most theories of morality are implicitly or explicitly focused on harm, avoidance, and inhibition, including defining morality in terms of (for example) constrained self-interest (e.g., Haidt, 2008) or a narrow focus on harm (Gray et al., 2012). Moral motives theory opened consideration to the possibility that people's moral motivations can be oriented toward both proscription and prescription, and therefore can be as much about people striving to create a world closer to their utopian aspirations as it is oriented toward preventing their dystopian nightmares. Consistent with the predictions of moral motives theory, the results of the present study very clearly establish that morality sometimes is about approach, pride, and utopian hopes, and is not inevitably or primarily about avoidance, regret, or dystopian fears.

Moral motives theory also posits that people's moral concerns are likely to vary as a function of whether they are focused more on the self, interpersonal relationships, or the broader social order (Janoff-Bulman & Carnes, 2013). Our results provide some preliminary support for this idea. Political engagement in the issues of SSM and guns on campus was predicted by people's moralized desire for a specific end state—that is, their vision of the best possible social world, something that is clearly about the broader social order and collective. That said, moralized political engagement was also predicted by people's self-conscious emotions and desires to be their best possible selves. When focused on the collective, moral conviction was associated with a focus on building the best possible world and not on avoiding the worst. When focused on the implications of political engagement for themselves, moral conviction was associated with desires to approach an ideal self (anticipated pride) in addition to avoiding letting oneself down (anticipated regret). Both these mind-sets—concerns about the collective good and concerns about the implications of one's behavior for the self—appear to operate simultaneously when people are thinking about whether to act on their moral convictions about a given issue by engaging in cause-relevant activism. Taken together, these results and others suggest that the motivational underpinnings of moralized investment in issues and subsequent behavior are complex and multi-determined—people are not only concerned about the greater good or about themselves as moral agents: Concerns about both combine to provide a powerful fuel for political engagement.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Notes

1. See supplemental materials for demographic information and the correlations between all variables for both Studies 1 and 2.
2. We included these demographic variables as controls to reduce the error variance inherent in a diverse national sample, a normative approach to large sample survey research. The pattern of results remains the same when these control variables are not included in the models. See supplemental materials for models excluding the control variables.
3. The decision to ignore results that explained less than 1% of the variance was made a priori. Few interactions were dropped for this reason, and analysis of those that were dropped revealed that the simple effects were very modestly different in strength but never different in direction or significance. See supplemental materials for complete models, including non-significant and trivial interaction terms.
4. An alternative way of testing the status quo maintenance hypothesis is to model the two-way interaction between same-sex

marriage (SSM) status in the participant's state and participant SSM support/opposition, as well as the three-way interaction of status quo, position, and moral conviction. These two-way and three-way interactions did not predict regret, pride, harm, or benefit, and did not explain a meaningful amount of variation in activism (<1%). Supporters were higher in pride and regret, and perceived less harm than opponents, but support/opposition to SSM did not qualify any of our reported findings.

5. Our registered replication indicated that we would aim for $N = 500$ (80% power). We decided later that 90% power would provide greater confidence in interpreting null results and would be more consistent with the recommendations of the replication recipe (Brandt et al., 2013).

6. We accidentally did not include age in our demographic measures in Study 2.

Supplemental Material

The online supplemental material is available at http://pspb.sagepub .com/supplemental.

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