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# 2

# The Cognitive Mechanisms of Intolerance

## Do our Meta-Ethical Commitments Matter?

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Now more than ever, peaceful coexistence requires open, compassionate dialogue between cultures that have very different sets of beliefs, values, and practices. Unfortunately, such dialogue can encounter intolerance that threatens not only to shut it down but also to generate strong negative reactions—even violence—towards divergent cultures (Haidt et al., 2003; Skitka et al., 2005; Skitka and Mullen, 2002; Wright et al., 2008).

Recent scholarship has identified potential sources for this intolerance. Particularly highlighted is the role that people's moral beliefs and values, especially those strongly held, play in generating negative interpersonal reactions. People report being significantly less supportive of moral diversity than other forms of diversity (Haidt et al., 2003; Wright et al., 2008), especially when encountered in contexts where intimate and/or frequent interaction is likely (e.g., dates, roommates, workplace). And

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even though people are more tolerant of moral diversity in cultures other than their own, this is true only when they believe it to result from different *factual*—not moral—beliefs (Wainryb, 1993; Wainryb et al., 1998; Wainryb et al., 2004).

Believing a disagreement to involve *moral* beliefs and values is a powerful predictor of intolerance in people of all ages, resulting in less tolerant attitudes towards divergent beliefs and values and less willingness to interact with, help, share resources with, or sit close to those who have them (Wright, 2012; Wright et al., 2008). Similarly, people's moral conviction predicts their intolerance for divergent beliefs and values, their unwillingness to seek resolution, and their suspicion for legal/political processes perceived as supporting those divergent beliefs and values (Mullen and Skitka, 2006a, 2006b; Skitka et al., 2005; Skitka and Mullen, 2002).

## Meta-Ethical Commitments

What is it about people's moral beliefs and values that drive this lack of tolerance? One plausible explanation comes to us from meta-ethics. Some philosophers hold that people are moral objectivists (Blackburn, 1984; Brink, 1989; Mackie, 1977; Smith, 1994), taking the position 1) that moral judgments are truth-apt, and 2) that their truth is mind-independent (and thus not determined by an individual's or group's beliefs, values, customs, etc.). Such a position creates the space for moral beliefs and values to be either (objectively) right or wrong. Given that morality is a normative domain, providing guidance on how things *ought* to be, this problematizes tolerance: to the extent that people are inclined to think the "right" moral beliefs and values are *their own*, they will view any that differ as wrong, misguided, even dangerous and immoral (e.g., Rachels and Rachels, 2009; Wong, 1984, 2006; cf. Snare, 1992). Thus, if people are (as many assume) moral objectivists, they are likely to display intolerance of divergent moral beliefs and values.

But *are* people moral objectivists? Though people's meta-ethical commitments have been a topic of much debate in philosophical circles (Blackburn, 1984; Brink, 1989; Harman, 1975; Mackie, 1977; Rachels and Rachels, 2009; Shafer-Landau, 2003; Smith, 1994; Wong, 1984, 2006), it has received less empirical attention. Indeed, it was not until recently that researchers have begun to systematically explore people's

meta-ethical commitments (Goodwin and Darley, 2008, 2010, 2012; Sarkissian et al., 2011; Krettenauer, 2004; Wright et al., 2012; Wright and Sarkissian, 2013; though see also Fishkin, 1984).

Of course, given the research highlighting the role morality plays in generating intolerance, it seems reasonable to assume that people are objectivists. And there is plenty of (indirect) evidence for this. People of all ages distinguish between moral and non-moral issues, viewing moral issues as more universally relevant, transcending cultural particulars, and applying more globally to human values/behavior (Nucci and Turiel, 2000; Killen and Nucci, 1995; Nucci, 1981; Smetana, 1981, 1983; Wainryb et al., 1998, 2004; Turiel, 1983, 1998).

Moreover, moral considerations are treated as more important than other considerations (Kohlberg, 1969, 1986; Piaget, 1932; Rest, 1979). Moral transgressions are viewed as wrong even in the absence of rules or the presence of social sanction (Smetana, 1981, 1983; Stoddart and Turiel, 1985; Turiel, 1983) and are seen as more serious, less response-dependent, and more severely punishable than social transgressions (Turiel, 1983, 1998; also Davidson et al., 1983; Goodwin and Darley, 2008; Nucci, 1981; Smetana, 1981, 1983; Smetana and Braeges, 1990), findings that hold cross-culturally (Nucci et al., 2000; Nucci et al., 1983; Song et al., 1987; Turiel et al., 1988).

In summary, there is a body of findings that support the hypothesis that people are moral objectivists, viewing divergent moral beliefs and values as violations of objective truths. Yet there is other research that brings this into question. Nichols (2004) found that while most of the people questioned about moral transgressions gave objectivist responses, some did not. Even more interestingly, Goodwin and Darley (2008, 2010, 2012) found that while people gave more objectivist responses for moral issues than other issues, they were nonetheless internally pluralistic in their meta-ethical stance, giving objectivist responses for some moral issues but not others.

One potential explanation for this pluralism is that people gave non-objective groundings for some "moral" issues (identified as such by the researchers) because they did not view them as *moral* issues. Nonetheless, Wright et al. (2012) found a similar pattern of pluralism when they allowed participants to self-identify moral issues. They also found strong evidence that this pluralism was *genuine*—i.e., not merely the result of conceptual confusion or different views about morality.

Given this surprising meta-ethical variability, what conclusions should we draw about the relationship between people's meta-ethical commitments and intolerance? Since previous research has failed to adequately disentangle *domain classification* (moral/non-moral) and *grounding* (objective/non-objective), we can only hypothesize that people's meta-ethical commitments will be strongly related to their tolerance for divergent beliefs and values, along with their willingness to interact with or help the people who endorse them; that, while people will express greater intolerance for divergent moral than non-moral beliefs and values generally, this intolerance will be greatest for objectively-grounded moral issues. Support for this hypothesis was found by Goodwin and Darley (2012)—asking participants to rate their discomfort for a roommate with divergent moral beliefs and values revealed a significant correlation ($r = .90$) between grounding and discomfort.

But this leaves an important question yet unanswered—why would people display meta-ethical *pluralism* (given that it seems an incoherent position)? Given the proposed relationship between grounding and tolerance, our hypothesis is that meta-ethical pluralism serves an important psycho-social function: namely, modulating the level of permissible choice and dialogue about moral issues, both within and between socio-cultural groups. Viewing a moral issue as objectively grounded removes it from the realm of legitimate personal/social negotiation (i.e., individual and/or social attempts to condone it will be deemed unacceptable, and censorship/prohibition will be supported). Viewing a moral issue as non-objectively grounded, on the other hand, allows people to acknowledge its *moral* significance (i.e., that it is not simply a personal matter), while at the same time maintaining room for choice, dialogue, and debate—thus, social censorship/prohibition will be viewed less favorably. The studies reported below are the first that we know of to test this hypothesis.

## Study 1

### PARTICIPANTS

Seventy-two undergraduate students who were enrolled in Introduction to Psychological Science courses participated in this study for research credit. The data from nine participants were eliminated due to incomplete surveys. Of the remaining 63 participants, 78% reported being

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female; 86% Caucasian, 2% African-American, 3% Asian-American, 6% Hispanic.

MATERIALS

Participants were given a survey with 45 issue-statements (e.g. "People should not cheat on their spouse," "People should wash their bodies regularly," see Table 2.1), 17 of which came from Goodwin and Darley (2008) and Wright et al. (2012) and the remainder from Wright et al. (2008). Statement presentation was randomized to control for order effects.

*Domain classification*. For each issue-statement, participants were asked to categorize the issue, choosing the best fit[1] from the following: "personal choice/preference," "social convention/norm," "moral," or "scientific fact." Participants were not given further instructions about these categories; not only does previous research (Wright, 2012; Wright et al., 2012) support the contention that people have a competent conceptual grasp of these categories, but it would have been difficult to provide definitions that would not have influenced participants' classification.

Self-classification was chosen over researcher classification (the method typically employed) because research on the relationship between moral beliefs and values and tolerance (e.g., Wright, 2010; Wright et al., 2008, 2012), has uncovered significant disagreement, between and within age-groups, about what issues belong in the *moral* domain. This does not appear to be due to conceptual confusion or different views about morality—qualitative analysis of people's explanations for their classifications suggests they share largely the same ideas about what morality is and what characteristic features it has (at least at its "core"; cf. Haidt, 2012). Rather, disagreement typically involved whether, for a given issue, moral features were present and/or should be prioritized over other features. Therefore, when assessing people's meta-ethical commitments, it seemed better to not assume the moral status of any issue *a priori*.

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[1] Some issues might fit into multiple categories. Therefore, we asked participants to choose whichever category was the *best fit*, capturing the features that were most salient and/or took priority.

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Table 2.1. Domain classification and objectivity grounding percentages, Study 1

| Issues | Personal | Social | Moral | Scientific fact | Relative | Mixed | Objective |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Men forcing women to have sex | 8% | 11% | 78% | 3% | 3% | 22% | 75% |
| Cheating on lifeguard exam | 11% | 14% | 65% | 10% | 8% | 19% | 73% |
| Robbing bank to pay for holiday | 7% | 27% | 63% | 3% | 5% | 23% | 73% |
| Incest | 2% | 18% | 57% | 24% | 8% | 29% | 63% |
| False testimony for a friend | 7% | 10% | 81% | 3% | 25% | 18% | 57% |
| Cheating on spouse | 10% | 10% | 78% | 3% | 19% | 29% | 52% |
| Discrimination | 16% | 16% | 66% | 2% | 19% | 34% | 47% |
| Eating pets | 27% | 29% | 44% | 0% | 26% | 44% | 30% |
| Assisted suicide | 35% | 3% | 62% | 0% | 68% | 26% | 6% |
| Death penalty | 21% | 8% | 70% | 2% | 63% | 27% | 10% |
| Medical research with animals | 29% | 8% | 59% | 5% | 61% | 24% | 15% |
| Protecting the environment | 16% | 27% | 40% | 16% | 43% | 23% | 34% |
| Honesty | 30% | 12% | 59% | 0% | 33% | 35% | 32% |
| First trimester abortion | 49% | 2% | 49% | 0% | 59% | 33% | 8% |
| Gay marriage | 40% | 14% | 43% | 3% | 49% | 38% | 13% |
| Not going to war | 39% | 19% | 42% | 0% | 66% | 27% | 6% |
| Being born out of wedlock | 43% | 19% | 38% | 0% | 70% | 18% | 11% |
| Kids going to school | 21% | 66% | 7% | 7% | 22% | 21% | 57% |
| Driving on wrong side of road | 18% | 60% | 2% | 21% | 32% | 15% | 53% |
| Driving through red light | 3% | 60% | 8% | 28% | 8% | 7% | 85% |
| Keeping bodies clean | 32% | 46% | 2% | 21% | 29% | 17% | 54% |
| Shooting gun into crowd | 8% | 42% | 31% | 19% | 6% | 16% | 77% |
| Burping/passing gas | 48% | 49% | 0% | 3% | 60% | 34% | 6% |

*(continued)*

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Table 2.1.  Continued

| Issues | Personal | Social | Moral | Scientific fact | Relative | Mixed | Objective |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Wearing pajamas to seminar | 51% | 46% | 2% | 2% | 55% | 26% | 19% |
| Tattoos/piercings | 94% | 5% | 0% | 2% | 73% | 19% | 8% |
| Vegetarianism | 89% | 2% | 3% | 6% | 67% | 19% | 14% |
| Masturbation | 84% | 6% | 6% | 3% | 68% | 29% | 3% |
| Donating money to the poor | 82% | 3% | 13% | 2% | 83% | 14% | 3% |
| Believing in god | 79% | 2% | 19% | 0% | 71% | 19% | 10% |
| Using recreational drugs | 71% | 10% | 11% | 8% | 58% | 29% | 13% |
| Playing violent video games | 71% | 5% | 21% | 3% | 71% | 19% | 10% |
| Owning guns | 71% | 16% | 13% | 0% | 69% | 24% | 6% |
| Watching pornography | 71% | 5% | 25% | 0% | 73% | 22% | 5% |
| Sexual promiscuity | 66% | 8% | 24% | 2% | 64% | 25% | 11% |
| Underage drinking | 60% | 22% | 18% | 0% | 67% | 17% | 16% |
| Talking during lecture | 53% | 40% | 7% | 0% | 51% | 32% | 17% |
| Parents punishing their children | 46% | 14% | 37% | 3% | 62% | 29% | 10% |
| Clouds made of water vapor | 0% | 0% | 0% | 100% | 0% | 5% | 95% |
| Jupiter largest planet | 0% | 0% | 2% | 98% | 0% | 3% | 97% |
| Earth as center of universe | 3% | 0% | 0% | 97% | 5% | 6% | 89% |
| Location of Boston | 5% | 2% | 0% | 93% | 2% | 5% | 93% |
| Primary colors red, blue, and yellow | 2% | 10% | 0% | 89% | 2% | 5% | 93% |
| 44th president inaugurated | 3% | 10% | 0% | 87% | 0% | 7% | 93% |
| Getting aerobic exercise | 8% | 6% | 0% | 86% | 5% | 10% | 86% |
| Humans having evolved | 10% | 5% | 10% | 76% | 13% | 25% | 62% |

*Meta-ethical grounding.* In line with previous research (Goodwin and Darley, 2008, 2010, 2012; Wright et al., 2012), objectivism vs. non-objectivism[2] was assessed in two related ways. The first was to ask participants whether the issue statement was "true," "false," or "just an opinion or attitude"—i.e. a question about the "truth-aptness" of the judgment expressed by the issue statement. This assessed whether participants favored a *cognitivist* position (i.e., moral judgments can be true or false, like beliefs) or a *non-cognitivist* position (i.e., moral judgments can be neither true nor false, like attitudes).

The second type of assessment was to ask participants to consider someone who had a different judgment than them about the issue statement and then have them select the best characterization of that disagreement, from "the other person would be mistaken," "it's possible that I would be mistaken, and the other person correct," or "it's possible that neither I nor the other person would be mistaken—we could both be correct." This assessed whether participants favored a *relativist* position (i.e., the truth of the moral judgment is relative to the individual making it and/or the culture to which the individual belongs) or an *objectivist* position (i.e., the truth is not so relativized).

Participants' overall grounding was calculated by adding these responses together. For the first question, true/false was scored as 1, opinion/attitude as 0; for the second question, either person being mistaken was scored as 1, neither mistaken (both correct) as 0. Together, they gave a possible range of 0–2 (0 = non-objective, 1 = mixed, 2 = objective).

Following previous research (Skitka et al., 2005; Wright et al., 2008), participants' tolerance for divergent beliefs and values was assessed by asking them to consider someone who believed differently than themselves about each issue. They were then asked how willing they would be (0 = not at all; 7 = very willing) to *interact* with (i.e., "date," "work with," and "live in the same town as" this person), and how willing they would be to *help* this person, if he/she were to approach them on campus, by "giving him/her change for a campus parking meter" and "dropping something off across campus for him/her."

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[2]  We labeled the opposite of objectivism "non-objectivism" (as opposed to "relativism," which we have used elsewhere—Wright et al., 2012) to acknowledge, and remain neutral between, the many different non-objectivist positions (e.g., subjectivism, relativism, non-cognitivism, etc.).

PROCEDURE

Participants signed up for the study through an online research system utilized by the psychology department. Upon arrival, informed consents were obtained and participants were given the survey to complete, which took about 40 minutes. Upon completion, they received a debriefing form.

RESULTS

Since participants classified the issues for themselves (and thus potentially differently from one another), we calculated the means of objectivity and tolerance for each domain separately for each participant (a technique employed in Wright, 2012; Wright et al., 2008, 2012). This gave every participant a mean for each variable within each of the four domains. Analyses were conducted on these means.

Of the 45 issues, only one was unanimously classified—as factual. Of the remaining 44 issues, 13 were dominantly (at least 35% of participants)[3] classified as moral, five were dominantly classified as social/conventional norms, 13 were dominantly classified as personal choice/preference, and 7 were dominantly classified as factual. The rest were split between multiple domains (see Table 2.1). Such diversity in domain classification demonstrates the potential methodological advantage of using individual differences (as opposed to assuming domain classification).

None of the issues were unanimously given a particular grounding. However, all those classified as social or factual were dominantly (44%+ participants)[3] objectively grounded, while those classified as personal issues were dominantly given non-objective groundings. The only domain with significant grounding variation was the moral domain: of the 13 issues classified as moral, seven were (dominantly) given objective groundings, one was mixed, four were non-objective, and one was split between all three (Table 2.1). Importantly, every participant gave variable groundings to their moral issues. Thus, as in previous studies

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[3] We calculated the percentage of classification (4 response options making 25% the baseline) required to be significantly above chance. With 63 participants, this percentage was 35%. For objectivity groundings, there were 3 response options (objective/mixed/relative), so the baseline was 33.3%. The same procedure was used for all classification and grounding comparisons.

(Goodwin and Darley, 2008, 2010; Wright et al., 2012), they displayed clear meta-ethical pluralism.

But did this meta-ethical pluralism function as we hypothesized? To answer this, we examined participants' tolerance for divergent beliefs and values as a function of domain classification (personal/social/moral/factual) and grounding (non-objective/objective).

First, we examined the function of people's meta-ethical commitments specifically: were people more tolerant of disagreement when it involved non-objectively-grounded moral issues than when it involved objectively-grounded issues? A within-participant ANOVA with *grounding* (non-objective/objective) and *interaction type* (date/work/live/change/delivery) revealed main effects on tolerance for both grounding, $F(1,52)^4 = 228.2$, p < .001, $\eta^2 = .81$, and interaction type, $F(4,208) = 22.9$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .31$, as well as a 2-way interaction between them, $F(4,208) = 8.7$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .14$. Participants were significantly less tolerant—that is, less willing to interact with/help someone who disagreed with them about objectively-grounded moral issues than non-objectively-grounded ones—and this difference was most extreme in those situations (i.e., dating/working with) that required intimate and/or frequent contact (Figure 2.1).

Next, we examined the effect of grounding across the other domains. For instance, while participants clearly viewed non-objectively-grounded moral disagreement as more tolerable than objectively-grounded moral disagreement, how would this tolerance compare to their tolerance for non-objectively-grounded disagreement in other domains? A within-participant ANOVA with *domain* (personal/social/moral)[5] and *interaction type* (date/work/live/change/delivery) revealed main effects on tolerance for both domain, $F(2,90) = 4.4$, p = .014, $\eta^2 = .10$, and interaction type, $F(4,180) = 55.7$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .34$, but no interaction. Participants were more willing to date, work with, and live in the same town as someone who disagreed with them about (non-objectively-grounded)

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[4] Degrees of freedom are reduced because there were participants that were dropped from the analysis because they failed to have all the points of comparison (e.g., they had given non-objective but not objective groundings for a particular domain or vice versa).

[5] There were not enough issues classified as "factual" that had been given a non-objective grounding to be included in the first analysis. There were also not enough classified as "personal" and given an objective grounding to be included in the second analyses.
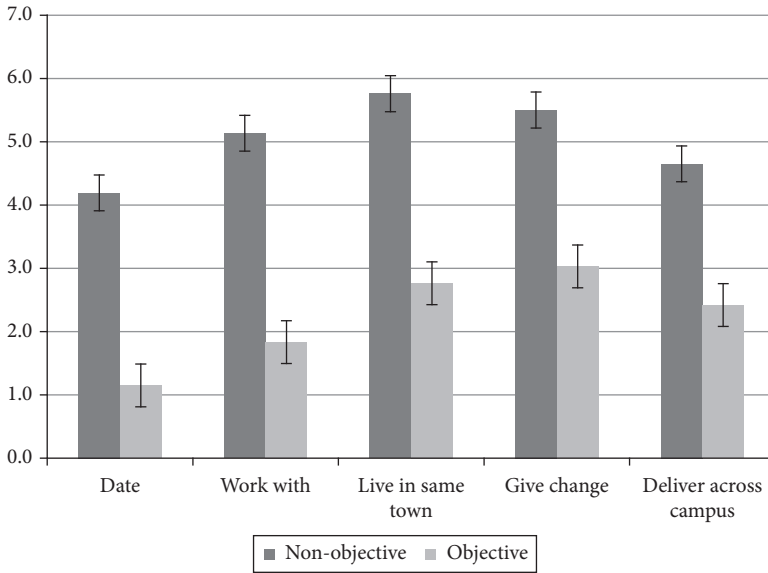
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**Figure 2.1**  Difference in tolerance for divergent beliefs and values between non-objectively- and objectively-grounded moral issues, Study 1.

personal issues than either social or moral issues—though, when it came to helping them, domain did not appear to matter (Figure 2.2).

What about those issues that participants had grounded objectively—were they less tolerant of objectively-grounded moral disagreement than other (e.g. factual) forms of objectively-grounded disagreement? A within-participant ANOVA with *domain* (social/moral/factual)[5] and *interaction type* (date/work/live/change/delivery) revealed main effects on tolerance for both domain, $F(2,98) = 69.5$, p < .001, $\eta^2 = .59$, and interaction type, $F(4,196) = 23.9$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .33$, as well as an interaction between the two, $F(8,392) = 2.0$, $p = .041$, $\eta^2 = .04$. For objectively-grounded moral issues, people's tolerance for disagreement plummeted far below their tolerance for other divergent beliefs and values, whether they involved objectively-grounded factual or social issues (Figure 2.3).

Together these findings suggest that meta-ethical pluralism does, in fact, perform the psycho-social function hypothesized: while recognizing that the moral status of an issue is by itself related to less tolerance for disagreement, grounding it non-objectively leaves an opening for some diversity. Once a moral issue has been objectively grounded, that opening
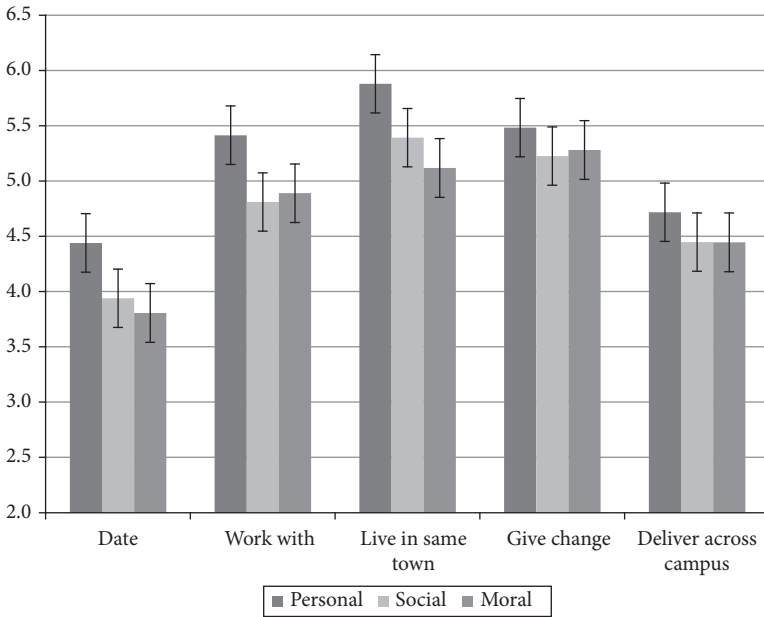
**Figure 2.2** Difference in tolerance for divergent beliefs and values for non-objectively-grounded personal, social, and moral issues, Study 1.
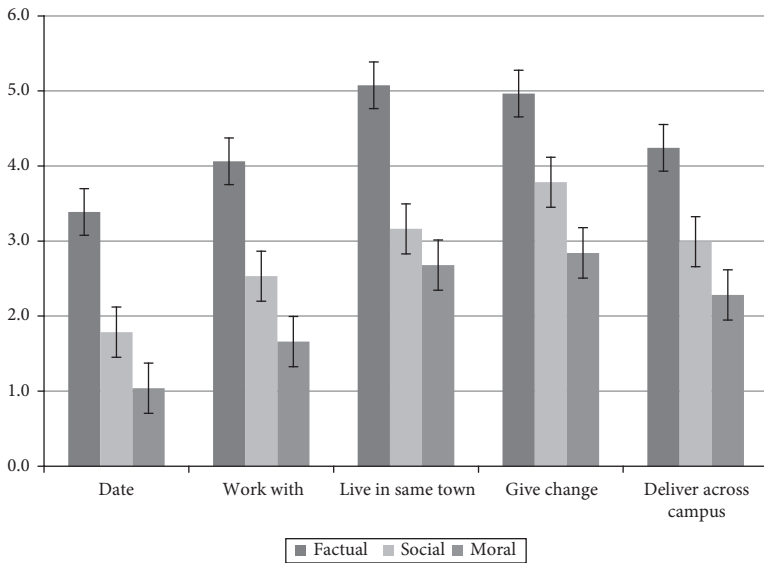


**Figure 2.3** Difference in tolerance for divergent beliefs and values for objectively-grounded factual, social, and moral issues, Study 1.

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disappears, leaving people not only less willing to interact with anyone having divergent beliefs and values, but less willing to help them as well.

*A priori coding.* Even though we have argued for the methodological value of allowing participants to self-classify issues, we nonetheless felt that it would be worth also examining the data with a pre-assigned domain classification (using, where possible, the categories assigned by Goodwin and Darley, 2008). Specifically, we wanted to verify 1) that participants' meta-ethical pluralism was still present and 2) that it had the same relationship to participants' tolerance.

We chose 18 moral and 8 social issues (see Table 2.2) and calculated the means for each type of interaction (as previously described). We

Table 2.2. Grounding for *a priori* domain classification, Study 1

| Domain | Issue | Non-objective | Mixed | Objective |
|--------|-------|--------------:|------:|----------:|
| Moral | Cheat on exam | 8% | 17% | 75% |
| | Shooting in crowd | 7% | 18% | 75% |
| | Robbing bank | 6% | 20% | 75% |
| | Rape | 4% | 23% | 73% |
| | Incest | 8% | 25% | 66% |
| | False testimony | 24% | 20% | 56% |
| | Cheating on spouse | 20% | 28% | 52% |
| | Discrimination | 18% | 35% | 46% |
| | Protect environment | 41% | 25% | 34% |
| | Honesty | 34% | 34% | 32% |
| | Eating pets | 27% | 45% | 28% |
| | Animal research | 61% | 25% | 14% |
| | Abortion | 55% | 31% | 14% |
| | Gay marriage | 48% | 38% | 14% |
| | Death penalty | 59% | 30% | 11% |
| | Assisted suicide | 65% | 25% | 10% |
| | Not going to war | 66% | 27% | 7% |
| | Donating money | 82% | 15% | 3% |
| Social | Driving through red light | 7% | 7% | 86% |
| | Driving on wrong side | 31% | 13% | 56% |
| | Going to school | 24% | 21% | 55% |
| | Wearing pajamas to seminar | 54% | 28% | 18% |
| | Talking during lecture | 54% | 30% | 17% |
| | Underage drinking | 63% | 21% | 15% |
| | Born out of wedlock | 66% | 21% | 13% |
| | Owning guns | 69% | 23% | 8% |

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conducted a within-participant ANOVA with *domain* (social/moral), *grounding* (non-objective/objective), and *interaction type* (date/work/live/change/delivery), which revealed main effects on tolerance for all three: domain, $F(1,64) = 52.6$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .45$, grounding, $F(1,64) = 277.3$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .81$, interaction type, $F(4,256) = 21.1$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .25$, along with a significant three-way interaction, $F(4,256) = 2.4$, $p = .05$, $\eta^2 = .04$. The results were very similar to those found above (Figure 2.4).

DISCUSSION

These findings suggest that both the *kind of issue* people take an issue to be (domain classification) and the *type of grounding* they give it (objective/non-objective) are important predictors of intolerance for divergent beliefs and values. What is more, it suggests that these are distinct mechanisms that interact with one another.

This is a point worthy of reflection. Though many researchers and theorists (including ourselves) have considered "social convention" to
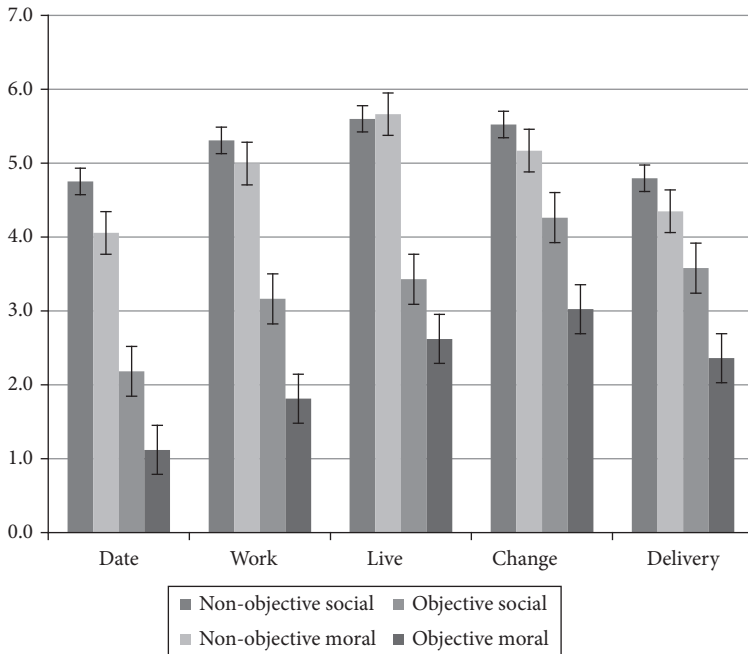


Figure 2.4  Difference in tolerance, *a priori* categorization, Study 1.

be synonymous with "non-objective" and "moral" with "objective," it is clear that participants themselves treat these as orthogonal: there were issues classified as social and yet grounded objectively and, most importantly, issues classified as moral and yet grounded non-objectively.

In short, all participants displayed clear pluralism. And this pluralism was, as hypothesized, related to their willingness to interact with or help divergent others. Participants' non-objectively-grounded moral issues were treated like non-objectively-grounded social issues—they were somewhat less acceptable than matters of personal choice/preference, but nonetheless more acceptable than objectively-grounded moral issues, where disagreement was met with strong intolerance (stronger, even, than for objectively-grounded social issues).

This means that, consistent with what advocates for moral relativism have long argued, there is something about an *objectively-grounded moral* issue (rather than an objectively-grounded social issue or a non-objectively-grounded moral issue) that brings out the most elevated levels of intolerance towards divergent beliefs and values.

## Study 2

While Study 1 examined the effects of domain classification and grounding on participants' willingness to interact with/help those with divergent beliefs across a variety of contexts, the data was limited in two ways: 1) it did not measure *attitudinal* tolerance, which previous research (Wright, 2010) suggests can differ from the more behaviorally-oriented measures of tolerance (at least in some age groups), and 2) the helping measures involved actions that were short-lived and minor, requiring little actual contact and lacking "ecological validity" with respect to the college-student experience. So, we introduced both a measure of attitudinal tolerance (comfort level with another's divergent belief) and two new helping measures (including someone in a study group for an exam; letting someone crash on your couch for a week).

Additionally, the dominantly non-objectively-grounded moral issues in Study 1 (e.g. assisted suicide, death penalty, gay marriage, etc.) are all issues whose moral status has been a topic of hot debate in the US social and political arena. On the other hand, the dominantly objectively-grounded issues (e.g., rape, infidelity, discrimination, etc.) are viewed as canonical moral issues—issues for which there is much less disagreement. This raises the possibility that participants mistook consensus for

objectivity, or used it as a sort of "proxy." Of course, the opposite could also be true—participants could have used non-objectivity as a way to acknowledge the existence of diverging opinions, made obvious through the highly publicized social/political debate of the issues.

Either way, this would suggest a conflation between grounding and consensus. Consistent with this hypothesis, Goodwin and Darley (2010, 2012) have found a strong correlation ($r = 0.84$–$0.85$) between perceived consensus and people's objectivity ratings across two studies—and a manipulation of perceived consensus influenced people's objectivity ratings (2012). To further investigate this, we introduced a measure of perceived social consensus.

PARTICIPANTS

Participants were 210 students enrolled in the Introduction to Psychological Science course (182 females; 88% Caucasian, 7% African-American, 3% Asian-American, 2% Hispanic) who participated for research credit.

MATERIALS AND PROCEDURE

*Materials.* Participants were given a survey that contained 30 of the 45 issues used in Study 1 (see Table 2.3), the presentation of which was randomized. Immediately following each issue-statement, participants were asked the same questions as Study 1. In addition, they were asked a *consensus* question: "How many people (in general) do you think share your view on this issue?"; an *attitudinal tolerance* question: "If a person disagreed with you on this issue, how comfortable would you be with that?"; and two new *behavioral tolerance* (helping) questions: "If a person approached you for help on campus, how willing would you be to help him/her out by: Including him/her in your study group for an exam? Letting him/her crash on your couch for a week?"

*Procedure.* Same as Study 1.

RESULTS

Of the 30 issues, none were unanimously classified into one domain. There were 10 issues dominantly (30%+ participants) classified as moral, two dominantly classified as social/conventional norms, eight dominantly classified as personal choice/preference, and four dominantly classified as factual. The rest were split between multiple domains (Table 2.3).

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Table 2.3.  Domain classification and objectivity grounding percentages, Study 2

| Issue | Personal | Conventional | Moral | Scientific fact | Relative | Mixed | %Objective |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Men forcing women to have sex | 5% | 7% | 84% | 4% | 6% | 13% | 81% |
| Cheating on a lifeguard exam | 13% | 12% | 64% | 12% | 11% | 19% | 70% |
| Incest | 11% | 23% | 50% | 16% | 17% | 18% | 66% |
| Cheating on spouse | 12% | 7% | 80% | 0% | 20% | 21% | 59% |
| False testimony for a friend | 11% | 18% | 55% | 16% | 23% | 19% | 58% |
| Robbing bank to pay for holiday | 15% | 17% | 66% | 1% | 14% | 30% | 55% |
| Discrimination | 16% | 17% | 66% | 0% | 20% | 27% | 54% |
| Honesty | 24% | 7% | 68% | 0% | 40% | 24% | 36% |
| Death penalty | 15% | 11% | 73% | 0% | 68% | 21% | 10% |
| Assisted suicide | 29% | 3% | 67% | 0% | 67% | 23% | 10% |
| First trimester abortion | 46% | 0% | 53% | 0% | 71% | 19% | 10% |
| Gay marriage | 43% | 23% | 33% | 0% | 62% | 25% | 13% |
| Shooting gun into crowd | 9% | 32% | 45% | 14% | 13% | 21% | 66% |
| Burping/passing gas | 43% | 53% | 4% | 2% | 68% | 23% | 9% |
| Driving on wrong side of road | 22% | 34% | 25% | 18% | 33% | 20% | 47% |
| Driving through red light | 23% | 46% | 6% | 24% | 27% | 17% | 56% |
| Wearing pajamas to seminar | 49% | 45% | 0% | 7% | 55% | 25% | 20% |
| Keeping bodies clean | 34% | 32% | 1% | 35% | 22% | 21% | 57% |
| Tattoos/piercings | 94% | 3% | 2% | 0% | 85% | 13% | 2% |
| Vegetarianism | 88% | 2% | 6% | 4% | 72% | 21% | 7% |
| Masturbation | 78% | 5% | 12% | 5% | 73% | 22% | 5% |

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|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Watching pornography | 74% | 5% | 20% | 1% | 75% | 17% | 8% |
| Donating money to the poor | 72% | 5% | 23% | 0% | 78% | 19% | 3% |
| Believing in god | 71% | 6% | 23% | 0% | 62% | 25% | 13% |
| Using recreational drugs | 66% | 13% | 17% | 4% | 60% | 28% | 13% |
| Playing violent video games | 59% | 20% | 18% | 4% | 69% | 23% | 8% |
| Protecting the environment | 23% | 28% | 19% | 31% | 32% | 32% | 36% |
| Getting aerobic exercise | 17% | 5% | 0% | 77% | 9% | 38% | 53% |
| Humans having evolved | 17% | 1% | 13% | 69% | 28% | 24% | 48% |
| 44th president inaugurated | 11% | 21% | 3% | 66% | 11% | 14% | 75% |

None of the issues were unanimously given a particular grounding. Of the 10 moral issues, seven were dominantly (39% + participants) objectively grounded and three were non-objectively grounded. The two social and factual issues were dominantly objectively grounded; the eight personal issues were dominantly non-objectively grounded. Four of the six split issues were non-objectively grounded and the other two objectively grounded.

The same analyses used in Study 1 were conducted, revealing virtually identical relationships between domain classification, grounding, and behaviorally-oriented tolerance (i.e., interacting/helping divergent others)—therefore, we focused here only on the new measures introduced.

We conducted the same analyses as before. First, we examined the function of participants' meta-ethical commitments by conducting a within-participant ANOVA with *grounding* (non-objective/objective) and *interaction type* (tolerance/study-group/couch), which revealed main effects on tolerance for both grounding, $F(1,178) = 357.8$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .67$, and interaction type, $F(2,356) = 208.2$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .54$, as well as a 2-way interaction between them, $F(2,356) = 32.9$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .16$. Participants were significantly less tolerant, both in attitudinal tolerance and willingness to help, of disagreement involving objectively-grounded moral issues than of disagreement involving non-objectively grounded ones—and this difference was most extreme in both their attitudinal tolerance and, once again, in the situation (i.e., sleeping on couch) that required frequent contact in an intimate setting (Figure 2.5).

Next, we examined the effect of grounding across the other domains: first for non-objectively-grounded issues and second for objectively-grounded issues. The first within-participant ANOVA with *domain* (personal/social/moral) and *interaction type* (tolerance/study-group/ couch) revealed main effects on tolerance for domain, $F(2,266) = 6.4$, $p = .002$, $\eta^2 = .05$, and interaction type, $F(2,266) = 145.2$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .52$, but no interaction. Though there was less distinction made between domains than in Study 1, participants were still slightly more tolerant of disagreement—as well as more willing to allow the disagreeing other into a study group and on to their couch—when that disagreement involved non-objectively-grounded issues that were personal. Paired-sample t-tests further revealed a difference between non-objectively-grounded social and moral issues, but only for attitudinal tolerance, $t(147) = 2.6$,
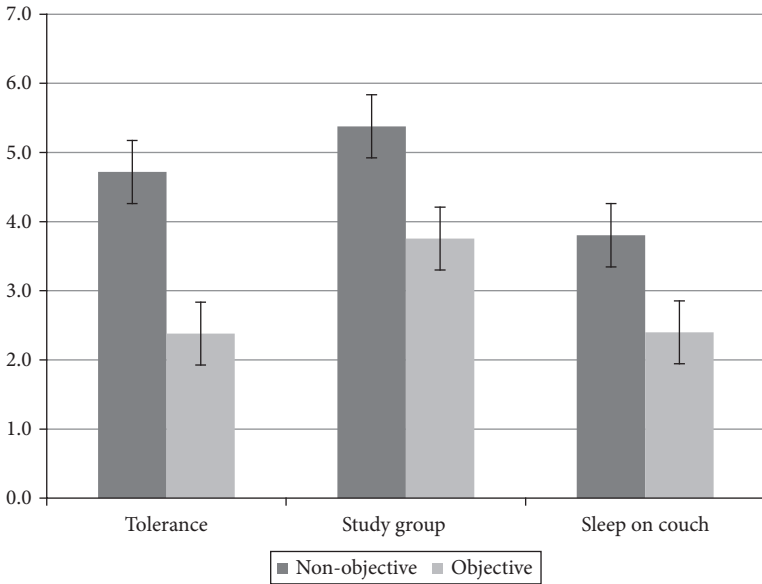
**Figure 2.5** Difference in tolerance for divergent beliefs and values between non-objectively- and objectively-grounded moral issues, Study 2.

$p = .011$—for the helping measures, there was no difference, $t$s(147) = 1.2–1.5, *ns*. This suggests that classifying an issue as moral involves increased attitudinal intolerance, even before the increased behavioral intolerance that comes with an objective grounding.

The second within-participant ANOVA with *domain* (social/moral/factual) and *interaction type* (tolerance/study group/couch) revealed main effects on tolerance for domain, $F(2,262) = 33.4$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .20$, and interaction type, $F(2,262) = 157.2$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .55$, but no interaction. Once again, for objectively-grounded moral issues, participants' tolerance for disagreement was far less than their tolerance for other (non-moral) objectively-grounded issues (Figure 2.6).

*Perceived consensus?* Did participants' reports of consensus differ between domains? A within-participant ANOVA with domain (personal/social/moral/factual) revealed a main effect on consensus for domain, $F(3,612) = 235.5$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .54$. Participants reported the highest level of consensus for factual issues ($M = 6.2$, $SE = .04$) and the lowest for personal issues ($M = 4.7$, $SE = .04$). Consensus for social

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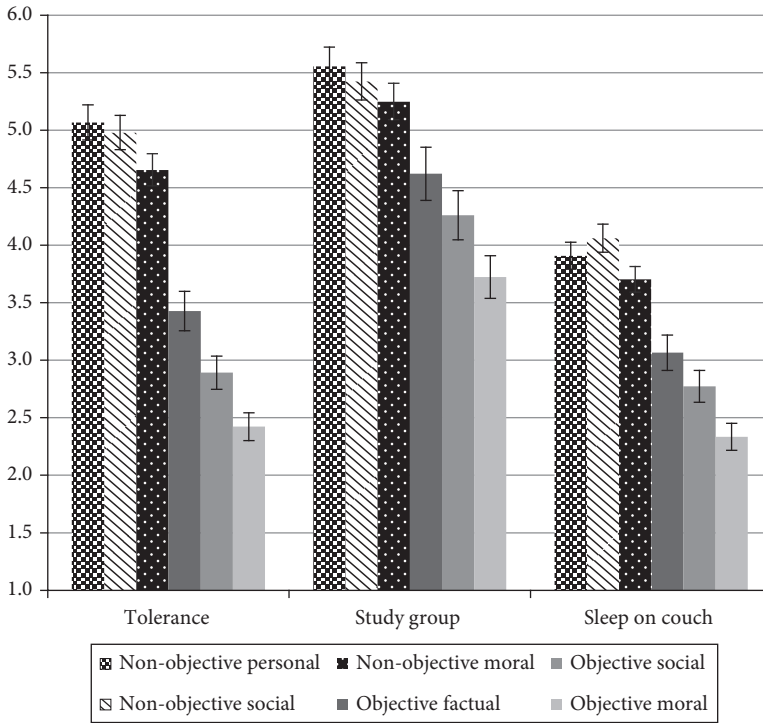
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Figure 2.6 Difference in tolerance for divergent beliefs and values for non-objectively-grounded personal, social, and moral issues and objectively-grounded factual, social, and moral issues, Study 2.

norms/conventions ($M = 5.6$, $SE = .06$) and moral issues ($M = 5.4$, $SE = .04$) fell between—and were significantly different from each other, $t(204) = 2.3$, $p = .024$. Consensus was also significantly correlated with grounding in all four domains, $rs(210) = .18–.36$, $ps < .007–.001$.

Does this mean that participants used consensus as a proxy for object-ivity? To investigate this, we utilized a standard mediation model (Baron and Kenny, 1986) for both willingness to interact with and willingness to help those who disagree. First, we separately regressed willingness to interact and willingness to help onto grounding, revealing that it was predictive of both (interact: $B = −.51$, $p = .001$; help: $B = −.39$, $p = .025$). Next, grounding was found to be predictive of perceived consensus ($B = .50$, $p < .001$). And finally, when entering grounding and consensus

together into each equation (one for willingness to interact and one for willingness to help), grounding ceased to be predictive (interact: $B = -.20$, *ns*; help: $B = -.18$, *ns*), while consensus remained so (interact: $B = -.45$, $p < .001$; help: $B = -.44$, $p = .001$). Sobel tests reveal that the mediational (indirect) effect of perceived consensus on the relationship between grounding and people's willingness to interact with/help those who disagree to be significant in both cases, $Zs = -3.3$ and $-2.9$, $ps < .001$. This supports the view that perceived consensus was a complete mediator of the relationship between grounding and tolerance—and *not* the other way around. In other words, rather than participants using perceived consensus as a proxy for objectivity, it is more likely that objectivity served as an indicator of how much consensus they could reasonably expect.

DISCUSSION

Study 2 confirmed and expanded upon the findings from Study 1, demonstrating a similar, if attenuated, role for meta-ethical pluralism in people's attitudinal tolerance compared to that found for more behav-iorally-oriented measures of tolerance, a role that was present even when those measures were expanded to include more ecologically valid measures.

With respect to the relationship between objectivity and perceived consensus, we found that once we controlled for consensus, grounding no longer directly predicted participants' attitudinal/behavioral intoler-ance. Indeed, our mediational analyses suggest that it is more likely that objectivity serves as an indicator of how much consensus can be reason-ably expected, which is in turn connected to how acceptable expressions of disagreement would be—and, correspondingly, how much intolerance towards that disagreement it would be acceptable to express.

## Study 3

Studies 1 and 2 demonstrated not only that people are meta-ethical pluralists, but also that this pluralism predicts participants' attitudinal/ behavioral tolerance for divergent beliefs and values. But our hypothesis about meta-ethical pluralism also involved people's attitudes about the social condoning vs. prohibiting of behaviors, which we had not yet tested directly. Study 3 was designed to do this. We hypothesized that individual and/or social attempts to engage in and/or condone behaviors

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involving objectively-grounded moral issues would be rejected, while censorship/prohibition would be supported. Behaviors involving non-objectively-grounded moral issues, on the other hand, would be treated as still open for debate and discussion, making censorship/prohibition less acceptable.

We also took this opportunity to include participants from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (M-Turk), which is more representative of the general US population.

## PARTICIPANTS

We had 311 participants, of which 148 were students enrolled in Intro-duction to Psychological Science (66% females; 94% Caucasian, 2% African-American) participating for research credit and 163 were parti-cipants from M-Turk (46% females; 80% Caucasian, 11% African-American, 4% Asian-American, 2% Hispanic). The college students were dominantly freshmen (18–21 years of age), while 16% of the M-Turk participants were aged 15–24, 50% aged 25–34, 12% aged 35–44, 11% aged 45–54, and the remainder +55. Data from 49 partici-pants (all M-Turk) were eliminated due to incomplete surveys, leaving 262 participants.

## MATERIALS AND PROCEDURE

*Materials.* Participants completed a survey containing 20 issue-statements, including new issues (see Table 2.4). Domain classification and grounding were measured using the same questions as before (exception: "scientific fact" was removed as a classification option). We also introduced new tolerance questions: specifically, we asked "how acceptable would it be for someone to engage in [the action mentioned]?" and "how comfortable would you feel if that person was a family member/friend" or "... a member of [your/a different] society?" We also asked questions about societal reactions more generally—e.g., how acceptable would it be "for people to socially shun someone who does this?", "for [our/a different] society to pass a law prohibiting it?", "for [our/a different] society to condone/support it?" Finally, there were questions about perceived con-sensus, this time encompassing both the participant's own and a different community.

*Procedure.* For the college students, this was the same. The other participants signed up for an HIT online through M-Turk, getting paid $0.25 for the completion of the survey.

RESULTS

Of the 20 issues, none were unanimously classified into one domain. There were seven issues dominantly (39% + participants) classified as moral, two as social/conventional norms, and six as personal choice/ preference. The rest were split between multiple domains (Table 2.4).

None of the issues were unanimously given a particular grounding. Of the seven moral issues, two were dominantly (56% + participants) object- ively grounded; four were non-objectively grounded. The two social issues were dominantly non-objectively grounded; five of the six per- sonal issues were dominantly non-objectively grounded, while one issue (choosing a major) was dominantly objectively grounded. Four of the six split issues were non-objectively grounded; the other two were objectively grounded.

For each domain, we collapsed the tolerance variables into two sum- mary variables, the first of which included the questions of attitudinal tolerance for, and social condoning of, divergent belief/values (labeled "support"; Chronbach's alpha $\alpha$: personal = .92, social = .96, moral = .94) and the second of which included the questions of social shunning/ prohibition (labeled "prohibit"; Chronbach's alpha $\alpha$: personal = .88, social = .89, moral = .79). We then examined the function of participants' meta-ethical commitments by conducting two paired-sample t-tests (one for each summary variable), revealing that participants were both more supportive of and less willing to prohibit divergent beliefs and values for those moral issues they had grounded non-objectively than for those they had grounded objectively: support, $t(135) = 10.4$, $p < .001$; prohibit, $t(136) = -11.8$, $p < .001$ (Figure 2.7).

Next, we examined the effect of non-objective grounding across the domains by conducting two within-participant ANOVAs with *domain* (personal/social/moral)—again, one for each summary variable. This revealed main effects for domain on both types of tolerance: for support, $F(2,202) = 61.7$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .38$; for prohibit, $F(2,198) = 61.8$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .38$. For those issues participants had grounded non-objectively, they were the most willing to support, and the least willing to prohibit, divergent beliefs and values about personal issues—while being the

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Table 2.4. Domain classification and objectivity grounding percentages, Study 3

| Total | Personal | Social | Moral | Relative | Objective |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Selling children on Internet | 2% | 15% | 84% | 38% | 62% |
| Owning slaves | 4% | 16% | 81% | 40% | 60% |
| Buying forced-labor products | 3% | 25% | 72% | 63% | 37% |
| Destroying religious symbol | 13% | 20% | 67% | 66% | 34% |
| Overcharging customers | 17% | 20% | 63% | 61% | 39% |
| Cheating on spouses | 25% | 15% | 60% | 71% | 29% |
| Abortions | 42% | 3% | 54% | 59% | 41% |
| Mother smoking while pregnant | 42% | 4% | 54% | 81% | 19% |
| False reporting on taxes | 12% | 38% | 50% | 44% | 56% |
| Incest | 11% | 43% | 45% | 55% | 45% |
| Cloning body parts | 42% | 13% | 45% | 87% | 13% |
| Burning flags | 23% | 48% | 30% | 71% | 29% |
| Engaging in vigilante justice | 26% | 41% | 33% | 81% | 19% |
| Eating human flesh | 29% | 38% | 33% | 56% | 44% |
| Piercings and tattoos | 86% | 10% | 4% | 66% | 34% |
| Choosing a major | 81% | 14% | 4% | 42% | 58% |
| Driving fuel-inefficient cars | 70% | 19% | 10% | 76% | 24% |
| Eating factory-farmed animals | 68% | 11% | 20% | 79% | 21% |
| Failing to recycle | 54% | 29% | 16% | 83% | 17% |
| Same-sex marriage | 46% | 25% | 30% | 65% | 35% |
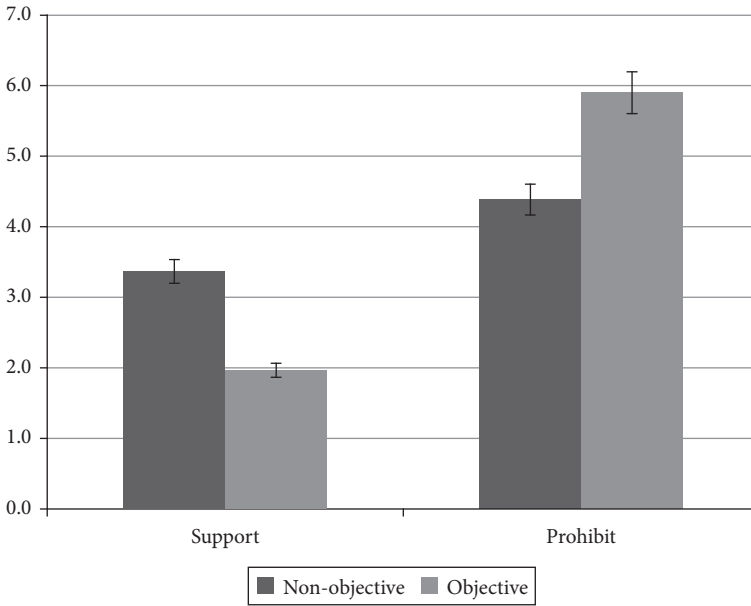
**Figure 2.7**  Difference in tolerance for divergent beliefs and values between non-objectively- and objectively-grounded moral issues, Study 3.

least willing to support, and the most willing to prohibit, divergent beliefs and values about moral issues. And, finally, we examined the effect of objective grounding across domains by conducting two paired-sample t-tests—one for each summary variable—that compared the social and moral domains (there was no factual domain). This revealed once again a significant difference between the social and moral domains—people were more willing to support, and less to prohibit, divergent beliefs and values about objectively-grounded social issues than they were objectively-grounded moral issues (Figure 2.8).

*Same vs. different cultures.* Previous research found people's judgments about moral transgressions to vary as a function of whether they involved members of the same or different cultures (Sarkissian et al., 2011; Wainryb et al., 1998, 2004). And paired-sample t-tests revealed that our participants were also somewhat more accepting of divergent moral beliefs and values in a different society than in their own, $t$s $(257) = 1.9$–$2.5$, $p$s $= .05$–$.013$. A closer look revealed that this was only

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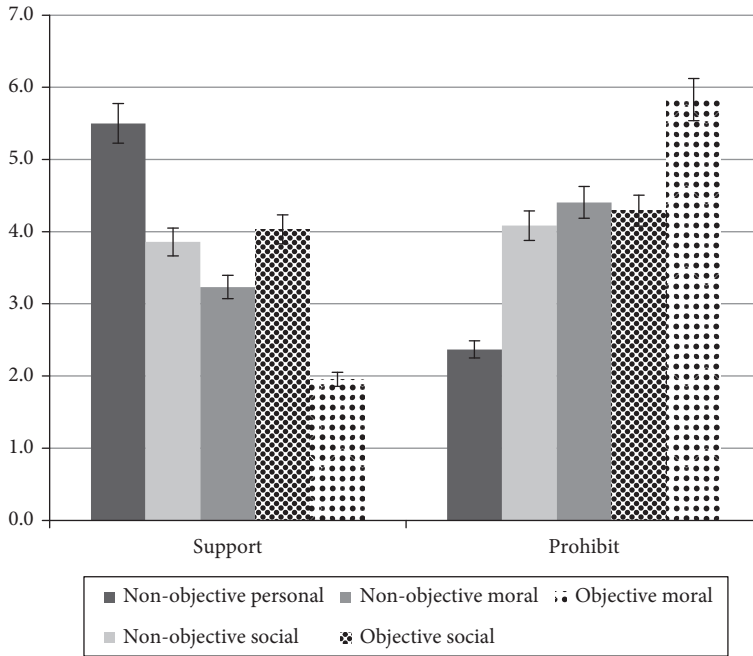
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**Figure 2.8** Difference in tolerance for divergent beliefs and values for non-objectively-grounded personal, social, and moral issues and objectively-grounded social and moral issues, Study 3.

true for the *non-objectively*-grounded moral issues, $ts(204) = 2.8–2.9$, $p$s = .002–.004; for objectively-grounded moral issues, there was no difference in participants' attitudes about the condoning or prohibition of divergent beliefs and values, regardless of whether it involved their own or a different society, $ts(181) = .05–.80$, *ns*.

*Perceived consensus?* We tested the mediational relationship discovered in Study 2 using our summary variables and both perceived consensus variables. Starting with consensus within one's own community, we separately regressed willingness to support and willingness to prohibit divergent moral beliefs and values onto grounding, revealing it to be predictive of both (support: $B = -.49$, $p = .008$; prohibit: $B = .74$, $p < .001$). Next, we found grounding to be predictive of consensus ($B = .34$, $p = .004$). And finally, when entering grounding and consensus together into each equation (one for willingness to support and one for willingness

to prohibit), grounding ceased to be predictive of willingness to support ($B = -.32$, *ns*) but not of willingness to prohibit ($B = .59$, $p < .001$), while consensus remained so for both (support: $B = -.50$, $p < .001$; prohibit: $B = .44$, $p < .001$). Sobel tests reveal the mediational (indirect) effect of perceived consensus (within one's own community) on the relationship between grounding and people's willingness to support and their willingness to prohibit divergent moral beliefs to be significant, $Zs = -2.5$ and $2.5$, $p$s $< .001$.

The same pattern was discovered using consensus within a different community: as above, grounding was predictive of willingness to support and to prohibit (support: $B = -.49$, $p = .008$; prohibit: $B = .74$, $p < .001$) and grounding was also predictive of consensus ($B = .38$, $p < .001$). And when grounding and consensus were entered together into each equation, grounding ceased to be predictive of willingness to support ($B = -.28$, *ns*), but not willingness to prohibit ($B = .54$, $p < .001$), while consensus remained so for both (support: $B = -.50$, $p < .001$; prohibit: $B = .44$, $p < .001$). Sobel tests reveal the mediational (indirect) effect of perceived consensus (within a different community) on the relationship between grounding and people's willingness to support and their willingness to prohibit divergent moral beliefs to be significant, $Zs = -2.9$ and $3.0$, $p$s $< .001$.

These results suggest that both measures of perceived consensus functioned as complete mediators of the relationship between objectivity and willingness to support divergent moral beliefs and values and as partial mediators of the relationship between objectivity and the willingness to prohibit divergent moral beliefs and values. So, once again, this suggests that one plausible explanation for the relationship between people's meta-ethical commitments and their willingness to accept/condone divergent beliefs and values is that taking an objectivist stance involves—and possibly even generates—the expectation of stronger and more widespread social consensus, which makes divergent beliefs less acceptable (and makes those who hold them stand out as *outsiders*).

Interestingly, perceived consensus only partially mediated the relationship between grounding and willingness to prohibit. Grounding remained independently predictive, though its effect, after controlling for consensus, was somewhat reduced. This suggests that, when it comes to advocating for prohibition, not only is an objectivist meta-ethical stance related to the expectation for stronger social consensus (making

disagreement less acceptable) but also it independently supports the acceptability of social prohibition—if something (such as selling children on the Internet) is viewed as objectively wrong to do, then outlawing it seems appropriate, and even desirable, no matter how many people agree.

## General discussion

Taken together, the studies reported here provide support for the developing view that people are meta-ethical pluralists, treating morality as a complex, heterogeneous set of issues—some grounded by the beliefs, values, and practices of individuals/cultures and some by mind-independent features of the world (such as unwarranted harm) that run deeper.

These studies also provided support for the hypothesis that meta-ethical pluralism performs a particular psycho-social function. While simply viewing an issue to be *moral* is enough to generate discomfort and avoidance of divergent others—relative to people who viewed the same issue as one of personal choice/preference—nonetheless grounding it objectively appears to heighten that intolerance, being related to a dramatic drop in private and public support for the divergence and an increased willingness to introduce social prohibition against it.

Why this is the case is not fully understood at this point, though perceived consensus appears to play a role. If our mediation model is correct, then one important difference between participants' non-objective and objectively grounded beliefs is that the latter include a sense of agreement, of having a shared belief system. This suggest that objectively-grounded moral issues involve (and perhaps even generate) an expectation of consensus—not just that everyone else *should* agree with me, but that everyone *does* agree with me. Such an expectation makes anyone who disagrees an *outsider*: an out-group member worthy of rebuke.

Of course, this does not explain why we also found greater intolerance for objectively-grounded moral issues than objectively-grounded social issues. Future research is clearly needed to delve more deeply into the cognitive/affective differences between the two domains. But, meanwhile, it seems safe to say that when it comes to promoting the acceptance of divergent beliefs and values, yes—people's meta-ethical commitments *do* matter.

Of course, this means they matter just as much if our goal is the opposite (i.e. wanting to *lessen* people's tolerance for particular beliefs

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and values—e.g. gender inequality, domestic violence). It is with this in mind that we'd like to end with a story.

Every year our university selects a "college reads" book for entering freshman. This year it was *Eating Animals*, by Jonathan Safran Foer. This turned out to be fortunate, because it serves as an interesting concrete example of the psycho-social function of meta-ethical pluralism. In the book, Foer does two things: 1) he clearly establishes that our mass-production of animals for consumption is a deeply problematic *moral* crisis, and 2) he simultaneously maintains that people *must be allowed to choose* how to respond to this crisis for themselves.

While for many card-carrying vegetarians/vegans this latter step feels like an unnecessary (to some, even unacceptable) "pulling of the punches," our research suggests that Foer's approach is likely to achieve something that other approaches—i.e. those that unflinchingly hammer on the hard ("objective") moral facts of the matter—may not, which is appealing to (and helping to shift the thinking of) those who are not already part of the "choir." Consider: over a thousand copies of the book were purchased for dissemination and discussion throughout the year, by both students and faculty—and thus it was read by many people (younger and older) who do not agree with, but might be influenced by, his view. On the other hand, several more "hard-line" books on the subject (i.e. books that, like Foer, established the first point but that then rejected the second point in favor of mandatory social intervention/legal prohibition) were rejected as too extreme and therefore disrespectful of the wide and varied opinions of the targeted audience. So while the message of these books may be just as important, it is not being heard.

If our thesis about meta-ethical pluralism is correct, then perhaps people must *first* be willing/able to recognize the moral significance of an issue before they can be convinced that it mandates changes in their behavior—and the shifting of an issue into the moral domain takes time; it takes personal/social reflection, discussion, and respect for different perspectives. It is also likely that only *after* an issue has found solid footing in people's moral conscience can they begin to collectively recognize, and act in accordance with, its full moral weight.

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