

Embellishment and the Polarization of Moral Judgments
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How do people judge the morality of groups who do negative behaviors for an admirable cause? For example, some participants responded to groups of people who disrupt abortion clinics, in order to save unborn children. In the current study, we tried to answer this question through the lens of Attitude Representation Theory (Lord & Lepper, 1999) and audience tuning (Higgins & Rholes, 1978). Previous research (Lu, 2015) has also shown that using an ART approach, self-radicalization can occur, such that participants can persuade themselves to adopt more extreme moral judgments than before. In this study, participants were presented with a fictitious scenario and then told to either write a letter to their best friend about why their friend should not join that group (embellishment) or about campus architecture (control group). Based on previous research, we hypothesized that those who write to their best friend will later rate the actions of a group as more immoral and want to see the group be punished more. The results provided support for both of our hypotheses since participants writing to their best friend demonstrated self-radicalization. The results suggest that moral judgments can be malleable based on context and circumstance. Broader implications will also be discussed.