

Conformity on Moral, Social Conventional, and Decency Issues in the United Kingdom and Kuwait

Hessah Alshaalan¹,

Yaniv Hanoch² & Michaela Gummerum¹

¹Department of Psychology, University of Warwick, UK ²Southampton Business School, UK

Introduction

How do people form opinions about moral topics and make moral judgments about whether an action is right or wrong? Are people's moral judgments based on (rational) calculations or influenced by social processes?

- Ever since Asch's (1956) seminar conformity studies, research has shown that adults conform to an incorrect but consistent majority
- Lisciandra et al. (2013): **Conformity in responses to moral, social-conventional, and decency transgressions** in Dutch adults: Type of violation and the social distance between group members mattered for moral conformity
 - in the high social presence groups, participants conformed for all transgression types
 - in the low social presence groups, participants conformed to moral and decency, but less to social-conventional transgressions.
- Kelly et al. (2017): **Do adults conform with moral and decency violations online?**
 - Study 1: participants saw statistical information about how often a particular response was chosen by others (i.e., the descriptive norm). Participants conformed with the descriptive norm both for moral and decency items.
 - Study 2 additionally presented statements with either emotional or rational justifications for the descriptive norms. Participants were more likely to conform with others' ratings of the scenario when they presented a rational rather than an emotional justification.
- Meta-analysis by Bond and Smith (1996): **People from collectivist cultures conform more than those from individualist cultures.**

Research Questions

Do adults conform with a majority's opinion concerning moral, social conventional and decency violations?

Do Kuwaiti participants conform more across violations than UK participants?

Do females conform more than males in the UK and Kuwait?

Methods

Participants

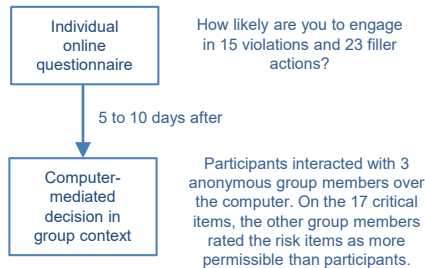
Study 1: 50 British adults (Mage = 31.29 years, SD = 14.76, 34 females, 16 males).

Study 2: 164 Kuwaiti adults (Mage = 21.49 years, SD = 6.14, 90 females, 74 males).

Measures

Moral, decency, and social conventional scenarios (Lahat et al. (2011) and Lisciandra et al. (2013): 5 items measuring moral violations, 5 measuring social-conventional, and 5 scenarios measuring violations of decency (strongly disapprove to strongly approve).
23 Filler items the domain-specific risk-taking scale (DOSPERT. Weber, Blais, & Betz, 2002).

Procedure



$$\text{Conformity } C = |O - M1| - |O - M2|$$

M1: Participants' responses on individual questionnaire
M2: Participants' responses in the group context
O: Other group members' responses.

Example of violation item in group context

Please indicate how much you approve or disapprove:

A family's dog was killed by a car in front of their house. They had heard that dog meat was delicious, so they cut up the dog's head and cooked it and ate it for dinner.

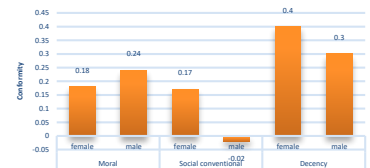
	Strongly disapprove	Disapprove	Slightly disapprove	Neutral	Slightly approve	Approve	Strongly approve
	Strongly disapprove	Disapprove	Slightly disapprove	Neutral	Slightly approve	Approve	Strongly approve

	Strongly disapprove	Disapprove	Slightly disapprove	Neutral	Slightly approve	Approve	Strongly approve
--	---------------------	------------	---------------------	---------	------------------	---------	------------------

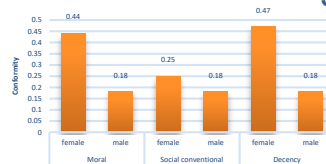
Results

Study 1: United Kingdom

- Significantly higher conformity in the decency than the social conventional domain ($p = .002$) and marginally more conformity in the decency than the moral domain ($p = .051$).
- Conformity in the moral, $t(195) = 4.35, p < .001$, and decency domain, $t(195) = 6.61, p < .001$, differed significantly and positively from 0.
- Study 1 did not reveal any age or gender effects



Study 2: Kuwait



- No effect of moral domain
- Significantly and positively different from 0 in the moral, $t(650) = 8.10, p < .001$, social-conventional, $t(650) = 5.23, p < .001$, and decency domain, $t(650) = 7.55, p < .001$.
- Conformity was larger than 0 in both females, $t(1064) = 11.39, p < .001$, and males, $t(887) = 5.37, p < .001$
- Higher conformity in females than males across domains.

Conclusion

Study 1 replicated results reported by previous research (e.g., Kelly et al., 2007; Lisciandra et al., 2013):

- UK participants were more likely to conform in the decency and moral domain and least likely to conform in the social conventional domain.

In Study 2, Kuwaiti adults showed equal levels of conformity across domains.

→ Western participants might distinguish more sharply between the three domains, while participants from the Middle East conceptualize the moral domain more widely including social-conventional and decency concerns (Graham et al., 2011; Shweder et al., 1987).

Female participants from Kuwait conformed significantly more than males across domains in Study 2, while there was no gender effect among UK participants in Study 1.

This gender effect is in line with previous meta-analyses (Bond & Smith; 1996; Eagly & Carli, 1981). It might be that cultural gender-role expectations, which are more traditional in Kuwaiti society (Kucinkas, 2010), underlie these gender differences.

References

- Asch, S. E. (1956). Studies of independence and conformity: I. A minority of one against a unanimous majority. *Psychological Monographs: General and Applied*, 70, 1-70.
- Bond, R., & Smith, P. B. (1996). Culture and conformity: A meta-analysis of studies using Asch's (1952b, 1956) line judgment task. *Psychological bulletin*, 119(1), 111-137.
- Eagly, A. H., & Carli, L. L. (1981). Sex of researchers and sex-typed communications as determinants of sex differences in influenceability: a meta-analysis of social influence studies. *Psychological Bulletin*, 90(1), 1-20.
- Graham, J., Nosek, B. A., Haidt, J., Iyer, R., Koleva, S., & Ditto, P. H. (2011). Mapping the moral domain. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 101, 366-385.
- Kelly, M., Ngo, L., Chituc, V., Huettel, S., & Sinnott-Armstrong, W. (2017). Moral conformity in online interactions: rational justifications increase influence of peer opinions on moral judgments. *Social Influence*, 12, 57-68.
- Kucinkas, J. (2010). A research note on Islam and gender egalitarianism: An examination of Egyptian and Saudi Arabian youth attitudes. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 49, 761-770.
- Lahat, A., Helwig, C. C., & Zelazo, P. D. (2012). Age-related changes in cognitive processing of moral and social conventional violations. *Cognitive Development*, 27, 181-194.
- Lisciandra, C., Postma-Nilsenová, M., & Colombo, M. (2013). Conformability. A study on group conditioning of normative judgment. *Review of Philosophy and Psychology*, 4(4), 751-764.
- Shweder, R. A., Mahapatra, M., & Miller, J. G. (1987). Culture and moral development. In J. Kagan, & S. Lamb (Eds.), *The emergence of morality in young children* (pp. 1-83). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Weber, E. U., Blais, A. R., & Betz, N. E. (2002). A domain-specific risk-attitude scale: Measuring risk perceptions and risk behaviors. *Journal of behavioral decision making*, 15(4), 263-290.