Psychological Factors Influencing Religious Congregation Members' Reporting of Alleged Sexual Abuse

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Abstract

The sexual abuse of children within religious institutions has become a topic of increasing public concern in recent decades. However, to date there has been little in the way of psychological analyses of the processes by which congregation members judge the credibility of alleged abuses, or whether they would intend to report such allegations to the police. In this study, we examined the roles of ingroup identity, moral foundations, and social dominance orientation on reporting intentions and allegation credibility assessments among Church of England congregation members ($n = 454$) and non-religious controls ($n = 457$). While there were few predictors of reporting intentions, we found that churchgoers were consistently more sceptical of allegations of abuse, with these trends being differentially moderated by ingroup identification, the endorsement of various moral impulses, and anti-egalitarianism. We discuss our data in light of ongoing attempts to improve reporting procedures within the Church.

Key words: sexual abuse, mandatory reporting, religion, moral foundations theory, social identity, social dominance orientation

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Alleged Sexual Abuse

In August 2018 a report was published of a two-year Grand Jury investigation into widespread sexual abuse of children in six Catholic dioceses in Pennsylvania. The publication received global media coverage; even when measured against similar reports from around the world, the Pennsylvania report produced particularly damning findings. It revealed a deliberate cover-up of the abuse by church authorities. In what may prove to be the report's defining phrase, the Grand Jury concluded that the Church engaged in systematic behaviours that looked "like a playbook for concealing the truth" (Office of the Attorney General, 2018, p. 3).

The theme of institutional cover-up is now part of the permanent landscape against which abuse scandals are framed. What has perhaps received less attention is the psychological dynamics involved when people in institutional settings hear allegations of abuse in those same settings. Research with professionals in health (White et al., 2015) and education (Webster, O'Toole, O'Toole, & Lucal, 2005) highlight the complexities involved in coming to decisions regarding reporting suspected abuse. Brackenridge (2001) notes that those who are onlookers are likely to be themselves involved in the institutions in which abuse occurs, and therefore to have habitual allegiances to those institutions and the people within them. As a result, these onlookers – who may be those most likely to observe or receive the initial signs or reports of abuse – may find it difficult to align their sympathies with those of sexual exploitation survivors.

In recent years, the response of churches to the sexual abuse of children has been subject to several national inquiries (e.g., the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Australia; RCA; and the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse; IICSA). Repeating oft-repeated themes in similar reports worldwide, the RCA found

a "culture of secrecy" regarding child sexual abuse in religious settings (Royal Commission, 2017a, p. 531). Notably, the RCA also found that onlookers are so personally invested in the integrity of the accused that they "minimise, ignore or deny an incident involving a friend, family member or other trusted adult in order to protect themselves' from the sense of betrayal that believing the allegation would bring about" (p. 532).

Whilst much of the focus of commissions, reviews and inquiries is on the behaviour of leaders in institutional and religious settings, a comprehensive approach is needed to address broader issues at all levels of religious communities. As the RCA concluded:

'…institutional cultures are created, maintained and shared by all members of the institution. They are built from the bottom up as well as the top down. The safety of children in religious institutions is a shared responsibility of all adults in those institutions' (Royal Commission, 2017b, p. 266)

In the present study we are interested in identifying some of the potential predictors of abuse allegation reporting intentions and credibility assessments within the Church of England. We ran a large-scale survey to examine these in relation to ingroup- and outgroup-perpetrated abuse and compared the responses of Church congregation members to a control sample of non-religious individuals. In the subsequent sections, we briefly identify some possible moderators of such responses, before describing the specific work that we have conducted.

Potential Moderators of Institutional Abuse Reporting Behaviours

Ingroup social identity. In a recent experimental study of religious people's allegations of sexual abuse allegation credibility, Minto, Hornsey, Gillespie, Healy, and

Jetten (2016) undertook to test whether a social identity approach might fit responses to ingroup-perpetrated sexual abuse. Using more than 1,000 participants over two studies, Minto et al. (2016) reported that Christians of both Catholic and non-Catholic denominations were more likely to be sceptical about an allegation of sexual abuse made against a Catholic priest. However, these effects were moderated by religious identification (but not by ambiguity of guilt) among Catholic participants. That is, Catholics who identified strongly with their faith were more likely to be sceptical of the allegation (i.e., they judged the alleged victim as less trustworthy, as compared to the alleged perpetrator) than those who identified with their faith to a lesser extent. Minto et al. (2016) noted how these effects were unexpected, as "ingroup behaviour tends towards the rapid exclusion of the deviant" (Harper & Perkins, 2018, p. 34). Instead, it might be that onlookers from within the Church acknowledge the presence of the 'deviant' (i.e., the priest) internally, but that externally acknowledging this would act as a greater threat to the reputation of the institution. As such, cover up behaviour is engaged, and allegations are suppressed.

Moral foundations. Away from a motivated approach to bolster and justify one's central social identity, members of religious congregations may have deeper, perhaps non-conscious reasons for not reporting cases of alleged abuse within their communities. One such framework for understanding this might be moral foundations theory (Haidt & Graham, 2007; Haidt & Joseph, 2004; see Table 1), which asserts that a set of intuitive moral impulses guide our decision-making and social cognition.

Table 1. Overview of moral foundations theory

Moral foundation	Description	Associated moral behaviours
Care	We are biologically designed to care for our young, and those who are unable to care for themselves	1. Protection and compassion for children and those unable to care for themselves
Fairness	We are driven to gain social resources through reciprocal altruism and mutual co-operation. Rewards and punishments are given out proportionately.	1. Support for the fair distribution of social resources, based upon shared social values 2. Anger towards those who gain resources through unfair or unjustified means
Loyalty	Historically, we needed to form coalitions with kin in order to protect our own tribes from enemies	1. Patriotism and pride in one's group and national identity 2. Development of strong relationships based on homogeneous ideologies
Authority	We require organised social structures in order to operate effectively. These are typically organised as hierarchies	1. Deferment to agreed social hierarchies 2. Respect for social leaders
Purity	We are driven to avoid physical and behavioural pathogens that threaten the wellbeing of our bodies or social norms	1. A drive to avoid exposure to disease 2. Expressed disgust at socially-taboo ideas

Harper and Harris (2017) have suggested that this framework may play a role in the various ways that we respond to alleged cases of sexual offending. That is, 'individualising' foundations (care and fairness) might guide supportive responses to victims, as they are geared towards the protection of those who might be perceived as vulnerable (Haidt, 2012), while 'binding' foundations (authority, loyalty, and purity) have been found to be associated with increased levels of victim blaming in cases of both sexual and non-sexual crime (Niemi & Young, 2016). Whether these foundations interact with religiosity and ingroup offence allegations, though, is still an unexplored area of research.

The Present Study

In this study, we sought to examine the predictors of self-reported reporting intentions and credibility assessments of allegations of institutional sexual abuse. Further, we were interested in any differences between religious and non-religious participants in relation to allegations made against institutional abuse allegations within the Church of England. Specifically, we investigated the roles of ingroup identification, moral foundations, and (owing to the hierarchical nature of Church organisation) social dominance orientation (SDO; Ho et al., 2015). In line with Minto et al. (2016), we expected religious participants' ingroup identification to predict leniency (i.e., lower credibility assessments and reporting intentions) when allegations were made against ingroup members. Owing to the lack of published data on moral foundations and SDO, these analyses were exploratory, and no specific hypotheses were made.

Method

Participants

Using sample size rules of thumb for regression analyses, we set a minimum of 100 participants per sample for each vignette we used (see *Materials*). As such, we wanted to recruit a minimum of 300 participants in two samples: one religious (Church of England congregation members), and one non-religious (total $N = 600$).

A total of 1,001 people clicked on the web link hosting our survey. Of these, 19 people provided no data whatsoever, indicating non-consent to participation. Further, 29 people did not meet our eligibility criteria, and indicated a religious affiliation other than 'Church of England' or 'non-religious'. Given the large sample size, we removed all participants who did not provide full data across the survey ($n = 42$). As such, the final sample was comprised of 911 participants (57% female; $M_{age} = 49.29$ years, $SD = 18.61$). Of these, 454 classified themselves as members of the Church of England (63% female; $M_{age} = 63.18$ years, $SD = 13.20$) and 457 were non-religious controls (51% female; $M_{age} = 35.52$ years, $SD = 11.64$).

Materials

Demographics. Participants were asked to provide their sex (male/female), age (in years), and asked whether they belonged to the Church of England in an initial demographic screening questionnaire.

Ingroup identification. A 14-item measure of ingroup identification was adapted from Leach et al. (2008). Each item (e.g., "I feel solidarity with other Anglicans") was rated using a seven-point scale (*strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*). Scores across all items were averaged to produce a composite score for ingroup identification ($\alpha = .90$). The reference group was manipulated for each subsample to increase the validity of the responses collected.

Moral foundations questionnaire. We used the 32-item moral foundations questionnaire (MFQ; Graham et al., 2012) to examine participants' respective endorsement of the moral foundations. The MFQ is comprised of two sections: 'relevance' to moral decision-making (e.g., "Whether or not someone suffered emotionally"; care foundation), scored using six-point Likert scale, anchored from 0 (*not at all relevant*) to 5 (*extremely relevant*); and 'judgements' of moral propositions (e.g., "People should not do things that are disgusting, even if no one is harmed" – purity foundation), scored using a six-point Likert scale, anchored from 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Two catch questions ("Whether or not someone was good at math"; "It is better to do good than to do bad") examine whether participants are paying attention to the scale when responding and encourage participants to use the extremes of the scales, leaving 30 usable MFQ items (six per foundation) for scoring. Average scores for each foundation ($M_\alpha = .68$) were computed using syntax obtained from MoralFoundations.org.

Social dominance orientation. We measured participants' SDO using Ho et al.'s (2015) 16-item scale. This measure contains measures of two facets of SDO: 'dominance' (e.g., "Some groups of people should be kept in their place"; $\alpha = .84$) and 'anti-egalitarianism' (e.g., "We should not push for group equality"; $\alpha = .85$). Each item is rated using a seven-point Likert scale, anchored from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. Scores for each facet were computed by averaging response scores for relevant items.

Vignettes. We created three vignettes depicting a historical act of alleged sexual abuse against a male child. Each vignette was identical, save for the occupation or organisational role of the alleged perpetrator. In these vignettes, either a priest, church warden, or football coach had been accused of an act of molestation after being approached by a boy's parent

because of her concerns about the boy's possible homosexuality. The full wording of each vignette is provided in the Appendix. Attention to the vignette was checked by asking participants to write a short description of the scenario.

Vignette judgements. Three outcome scales were used. First, we asked participants to rate how likely they would be to report the alleged offence to the police using a single sliding scale anchored from 0 (*extremely unlikely*) to 10 (*extremely likely*). We then used Minto et al.'s (2016) questions to measure allegation credibility by asking participants how likely it was that the alleged victim and perpetrator were (a) honest, (b) manipulative, (c) trustworthy, and (d) dishonest. These items were rated on sliding scales anchored from 0 (*extremely unlikely*) to 10 (*extremely likely*). Average scores for victim credibility ($\alpha = .89$) and perpetrator credibility ($\alpha = .85$) were calculated, before an index of 'allegation credibility' was computed by subtracting the perpetrator credibility score from the victim credibility score. As such, 'allegation credibility' ranged from 0-10, with high scores indicating higher assessments of the allegation's credibility.

Procedure

Our two subsamples were recruited using specific methods to garner maximum engagement. The religious sample was recruited using a network of communications and safeguarding officers, who were based in local parishes. Specifically, we recruited from different geographical areas (London, East Midlands, South East England, South West England, and North East England) to ensure a degree of diversity in our final sample. The survey link was distributed among parish distribution lists by the officer in charge, who made it clear to email recipients that the survey was voluntary in nature, and completely anonymous. The non-religious sample was recruited using *Prolific*, a crowdsourcing platform

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where participants can take part in short online studies for small financial compensation. In this study, we displayed our study advertisement to eligible participants (eligibility criteria were that participants must be aged over 18 and identify as atheist/non-religious) in exchange for £0.75.

On clicking the survey link, participants provided their informed consent and demographic information (sex, age, and religious affiliation), before responding to one vignette, which was randomly allocated by the Qualtrics survey software. After completing their responses to their given vignette, all participants completed the remaining scales in a randomised order. On completion, all participants were fully debriefed as to the nature and aims of the study, and thanked for their time. This procedure was approved by the Nottingham Trent University College of Business, Law, and Social Sciences Ethics Committee, and conformed to British Psychological Society ethical principles.

Results

We analysed our data in four stages. First, we examined between-groups differences on our key study variables in relation to religious grouping or vignette. Next, we examined the role of ingroup identification in participants' outcome judgements to replicate and supplement the findings of Minto et al. (2016). We then investigated whether the endorsement of the various moral foundations (Haidt, 2012) affected these outcomes in a way that was consistent with previous theorising (Harper & Perkins, 2018). We finally examined the different effects of facets of SDO on reporting and credibility outcomes. We present between-groups descriptive data in Table 2, and regression coefficients (all unstandardized in accordance with PROCESS output information; Hayes, 2017) from predictive analyses in Table 3. For brevity, we only discuss significant results in depth, but we report all statistical

information in these Tables. All between-groups interactions in our predictive analyses are presented in Figures 1-5.

Between-Groups Outcome Differences

We ran a 2 (Group: Religious vs. Non-Religious) × 3 (Vignette: Priest vs. Warden vs. Coach) multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), with institutional threat, likelihood to report the allegation, allegation credibility, ingroup identification, the five moral foundations, and the two facets of SDO as dependent variables. There was a significant main effect of Group in relation to perceptions of institutional threat ($F(1, 905) = 30.00$, $p < .001$), allegation credibility ($F(1, 905) = 29.82$, $p < .001$), and ingroup identification ($F(1, 905) = 30.00$, $p < .001$), with religious participants scoring lower than non-religious participants. There were also differences between these groups in their endorsement of the loyalty ($F(1, 905) = 9.23$, $p = .002$), authority ($F(1, 905) = 16.44$, $p < .001$), and purity ($F(1, 905) = 257.06$, $p < .001$) moral foundations, with religious participants scoring higher than those in the non-religious group.

There was a significant effect of Vignette only in relation to ingroup identification ($F(2, 905) = 3.62$, $p = .027$), with participants identifying more with their ingroups in the warden perpetrator condition as compared to the coach condition. There were no Group × Vignette interactions.

Table 2. Between-groups differences on core study variables

Variable	Priest vignette		Church warden vignette		Football coach vignette	
	Religious ($n = 151$)	Non-Religious ($n = 153$)	Religious ($n = 155$)	Non-Religious ($n = 153$)	Religious ($n = 148$)	Non-Religious ($n = 151$)
Institutional threat	8.41 (1.93)	8.69 (1.50)	8.16 (1.93)	8.96 (1.33)	8.39 (1.51)	9.04 (1.22)
Likelihood to report	8.37 (2.11)	8.01 (2.36)	8.01 (2.47)	8.17 (2.34)	8.09 (2.33)	8.16 (2.31)
Allegation credibility judgement	1.58 (2.90)	3.56 (3.10)	1.19 (2.68)	3.50 (3.35)	1.84 (3.07)	3.67 (3.27)
Ingroup identification	4.45 (1.01)	4.11 (0.93)	4.56 (0.93)	4.21 (1.02)	4.35 (0.92)	4.00 (0.96)
MFQ: Care	4.75 (0.77)	4.62 (0.67)	4.74 (0.73)	4.75 (0.66)	4.73 (0.76)	4.59 (0.79)
MFQ: Fairness	4.73 (0.66)	4.64 (0.62)	4.67 (0.67)	4.73 (0.55)	4.71 (0.65)	4.58 (0.76)
MFQ: Loyalty	3.23 (0.95)	3.15 (0.83)	3.30 (0.84)	3.09 (0.90)	3.29 (0.89)	3.06 (0.85)
MFQ: Authority	3.70 (0.94)	3.50 (0.83)	3.75 (0.86)	3.55 (0.98)	3.88 (0.95)	3.55 (0.87)
MFQ: Purity	4.24 (1.06)	3.07 (0.99)	4.14 (1.05)	3.18 (1.01)	4.20 (1.04)	3.11 (0.90)
SDO: Dominance	1.93 (0.77)	2.28 (0.90)	1.92 (0.69)	2.28 (0.90)	1.95 (0.74)	2.40 (0.87)
SDO: Anti-Egalitarianism	2.36 (0.88)	2.29 (0.94)	2.37 (0.88)	2.29 (0.90)	2.35 (0.79)	2.35 (0.84)

Note. MFQ = moral foundations questionnaire. SDO = social dominance orientation. Data represent mean values with standard deviations in parentheses.

Ingroup Identification

    Likelihood to report the allegation. We ran a moderated moderation analysis using Model 3 of the PROCESS macro for SPSS (version 3.0; Hayes, 2017). In this analysis, ingroup identification was our focal predictor (X), the scaled likelihood to report score was our outcome variable (Y), and our moderators were religious grouping (W) and vignette (Z). We included perceptions of the institutional threat posed by the allegation as a covariate, as this could have implications for the strength of the effects of ingroup identification on outcomes (Harper & Perkins, 2018; Ståhl, Eek, & Kazemi, 2010).

    This model explained a small but statistically significant proportion of the variance in reporting intentions, $R^2 = .029$, $F(8, 902) = 3.41$, $p = .001$. Higher levels of ingroup identification predicted an increased likelihood to report, $B = .16$, $t(902) = 2.02$, $p = .044$. There was also a significant three-way interaction between ingroup identification, religious grouping, and vignette, $B = .42$, $t(902) = 3.93$, $p = .033$. There were no other main effects or interactions (see Table 2).

    For the priest vignette, there was no significant association between ingroup identification and likelihood to report outcomes for either group of participants. When the abuse perpetrator was a church warden, ingroup identification had no effect on likelihood to report among non-religious participants ($B = .07$, $p = .552$) but a significant and positive effect for religious participants ($B = .26$, $p = .025$). This suggests that ingroup identification predicted the reporting of ingroup abuse among religious participants, which is inconsistent with our hypotheses and the results of Minto et al. (2016) in a Catholic sample. Similarly, among participants presented with the abuse vignette with a football coach as the perpetrator, ingroup identification did not predict intentions to report the allegation for non-religious participants ($B = -.11$, $p = .492$), but had a significant positive effect for religious participants ($B = .43$, $p = .011$).
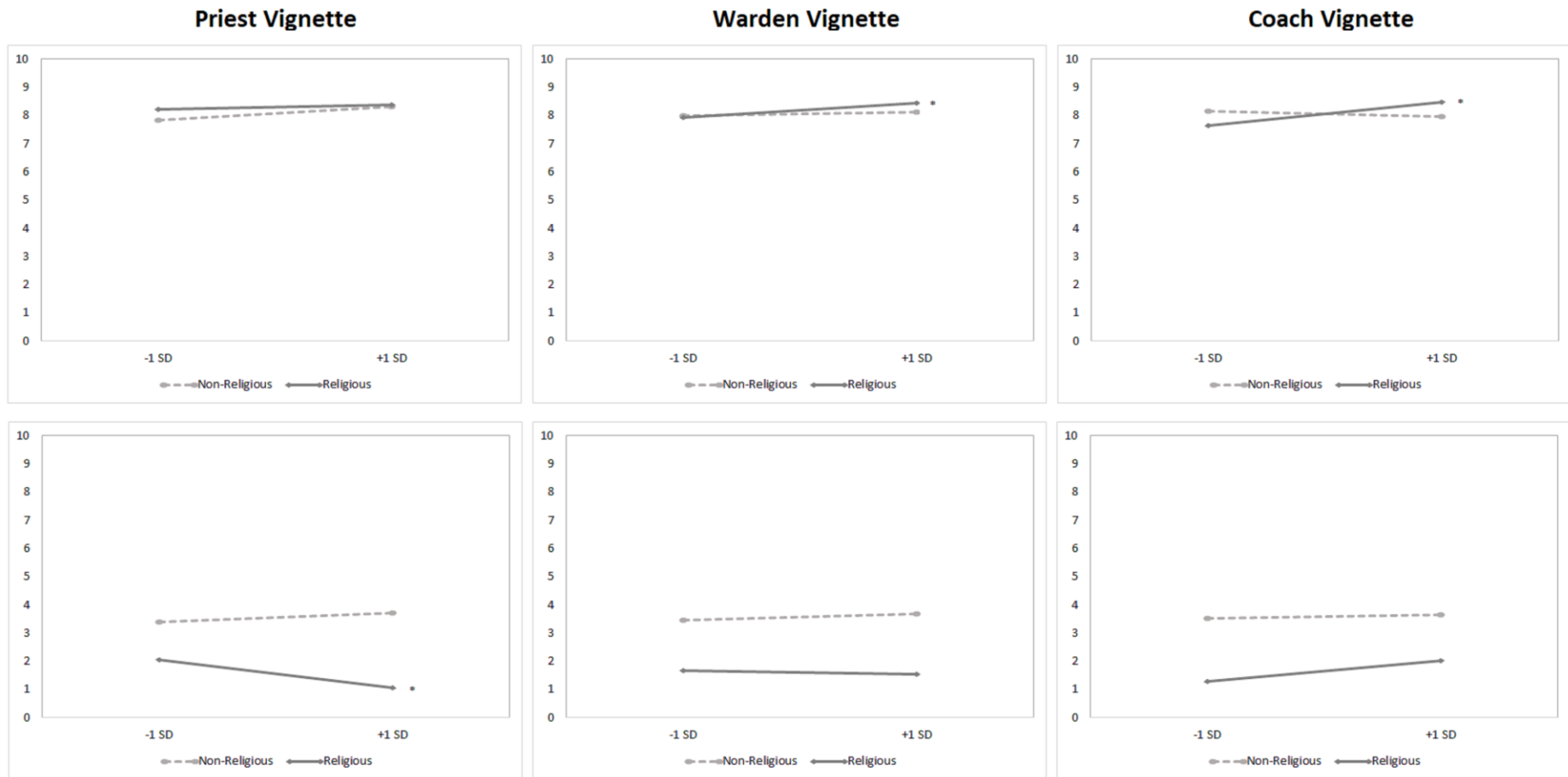
Figure 1. Interactions between ingroup identification, religious grouping, and vignette on the study outcome variables (top graphs = likelihood to report; bottom graphs = allegation credibility). Asterisk indicates significant regression coefficient.

Allegation credibility judgements. We next re-ran the same model in PROCESS as reported above, with the exception of using allegation credibility judgements as our outcome (Y) variable. This model was statistically significant, $R^2 = .114$, $F(8, 902) = 14.54$, $p < .001$. In contrast to the likelihood to report results, ingroup identification did not have a unique effect on allegation credibility judgements, $B = .03$, $p = .799$. However, religious participants were less likely to judge the allegation they read about as credible, as compared to the non-religious group, $B = -1.96$, $p < .001$. There was also a significant three-way interaction between group, vignette, and ingroup identification, $B = .60$, $p = .023$.

Decomposing this interaction, ingroup identification had no effect on non-religious participants' judgements of any allegation's credibility. However, for religious participants there was a significant association between higher ingroup identification and lower judgements of an allegation's credibility when the perpetrator was a priest ($B = -1.50$, $p = .015$). There was no significant effect of ingroup identification for religious participants for either of the other allegations. This is consistent with our hypothesis about ingroup identification predicting lower levels of allegation credibility assessments for ingroup-perpetrated cases of child abuse, and supports Minto et al.'s (2016) findings in relation to Catholics.

The Effects of Moral Foundations

Likelihood to report the allegation. We ran a series of moderation analyses using Model 3 of the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2017). As in previous sections, our focal predictor (X) was each respective moral foundation, our moderators were our religious grouping variable (W) and vignette condition (Z), and here the outcome variable was the scaled likelihood to report score (Y). Owing to the setup of the PROCESS macro, we

conducted separate analyses for each moral foundation, with the other foundations as covariates in each model.

We found no moderated moderation effects for the care (R^2 = .017, $F(11, 899)$ = 1.39, p = .172), fairness (R^2 = .015, $F(11, 899)$ = 1.22, p = .270), or purity foundations (R^2 = .020, $F(11, 899)$ = 1.69, p = .072). This suggests that these foundations had no effect on likelihood to report outcomes (though see Figure 2, where the individual regression slopes suggest a significant effect of the care foundation on reporting intentions for warden- and coach-perpetrated abuse among non-religious participants).

The model for the loyalty foundation explained a small but statistically significant proportion of the variance in reporting intentions, R^2 = .022, $F(11, 899)$ = 1.83, p = .045. Within this model, the only significant regression coefficient was the loyalty × group interaction (B = -.42, p = .018). Interrogating this, loyalty had little effect on reporting intentions among religious participants, but significantly reduced these intentions in the non-religious group. This was not moderated by vignette in the omnibus test, but the individual regression coefficients suggested that these effects may be limited to the warden- and coach-perpetrated allegations (see Figure 2).

The model for authority was statistically significant, R^2 = .023, $F(11, 899)$ = 1.93, p = .032. The authority foundation itself uniquely predicted lower reporting intentions (B = -.28, p = .031). There was also a significant authority × group interaction (B = -.37, p = .029), with higher levels of authority predicting decreased intentions to report an allegation among religious (but not non-religious) participants. This interaction was further moderated by vignette (B = -.44, p = .039), and limited to warden- and coach-perpetrated abuse.

Figure 2. Interactions between moral foundations, religious grouping, and vignette on the likelihood to report outcome variable. Graphs represent data relating to the care foundation (top), through fairness, loyalty, authority, and purity (bottom). Asterisk indicates significant regression coefficient.

Allegation credibility judgements. We repeated the previous analyses with allegation credibility judgements as the outcome variable. The model for the care foundation explained a significant proportion of the variance in this outcome, $R^2 = .181$, $F(11, 899) = 18.03$, $p < .001$. In this model, the care foundation ($B = .65$, $p < .001$) and religious group ($B = -2.20$, $p < .001$) both had unique main effects of credibility assessments, with higher endorsement of this foundation predicting greater perceptions of allegation credibility, and being religious predicting greater suspicion. There was a significant interaction between these variables ($B = -.91$, $p < .001$), with higher endorsement of the care foundation predicting higher credibility assessments for non-religious participants (but not religious participants). This was not moderated by the vignette condition.

The model for the fairness foundation mirrored that of the care model, $R^2 = .179$, $F(11, 899) = 17.76$, $p < .001$, with fairness ($B = .49$, $p = .012$) and religious group ($B = -2.19$, $p < .001$) both predicting credibility assessments as main effects. These variables did not interact.

For the loyalty foundation ($R^2 = .183$, $F(11, 899) = 18.34$, $p < .001$), there were also significant main effects of loyalty ($B = -.45$, $p = .004$) and religious grouping ($B = -2.18$, $p < .001$). Here, though, higher endorsement of the foundation predicted lower allegation credibility judgements. There was also a significant interaction between these variables ($B = -.87$, $p < .001$), with higher endorsement of the foundation predicting lower credibility judgements among religious participants only.

These loyalty effects were identical within the model for authority, $R^2 = .179$, $F(11, 899) = 17.86$, $p < .001$. That is, higher endorsement of the authority foundation ($B = -.39$, $p = .020$) and membership of the religious group ($B = -2.19$, $p < .001$) both uniquely predicted lower perceptions of an allegation's credibility. These variables further interacted ($B = -.70$, $p = .001$), with the foundation main effect only being present for religious participants.

In relation to the model for the purity foundation (R^2 = .180, F(11, 899) = 17.90, $p <$ .001), there was the same significant main effect of religious grouping (B = -2.21, $p <$ .001), and also a significant main effect of vignette scenario (B = .30, p = .033). This was attributable to lower credibility assessments being made by all participants about the football coach-perpetrated case than both religious vignettes. There was a significant purity × group interaction (B = -.56, p = .004), with higher endorsement of the purity foundation having positive effects on credibility assessments among non-religious participants (but not religious participants). This was further moderated by vignette (B = -.63, p = .011), with the non-religious purity effects only being present for the warden- and coach-perpetrated allegations (see Figure 3).

The Effects of SDO

Likelihood to report the allegation. We ran separate moderated moderation analyses using Model 3 of the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2017) to test the effects of SDO on our key outcome variables. As in previous sections, our focal predictor (X) was each facet of SDO, our moderators were our religious grouping variable (W) and vignette condition (Z), and the outcome variable was likelihood to report (Y). Each non-focal facet was entered as a covariate in each model. These regression models are depicted graphically in Figures 4 and 5.

The model for the dominance facet explained a small but statistically significant proportion of the variance in participants' likelihood to report the allegation they read about, R^2 = .028, F(8, 902) = 3.26, p = .001. However, the only significant predictor in this model was the anti-egalitarianism facet covariate term (B = -.39, p = .001). This was replicated in the model examining the focal predictive effect of anti-egalitarianism, R^2 = .030, F(8, 902) = 18.34, $p <$ .001. That is, anti-egalitarianism significantly predicted a lower self-reported propensity to report the given allegation of sexual abuse (B = -.39, p = .001).
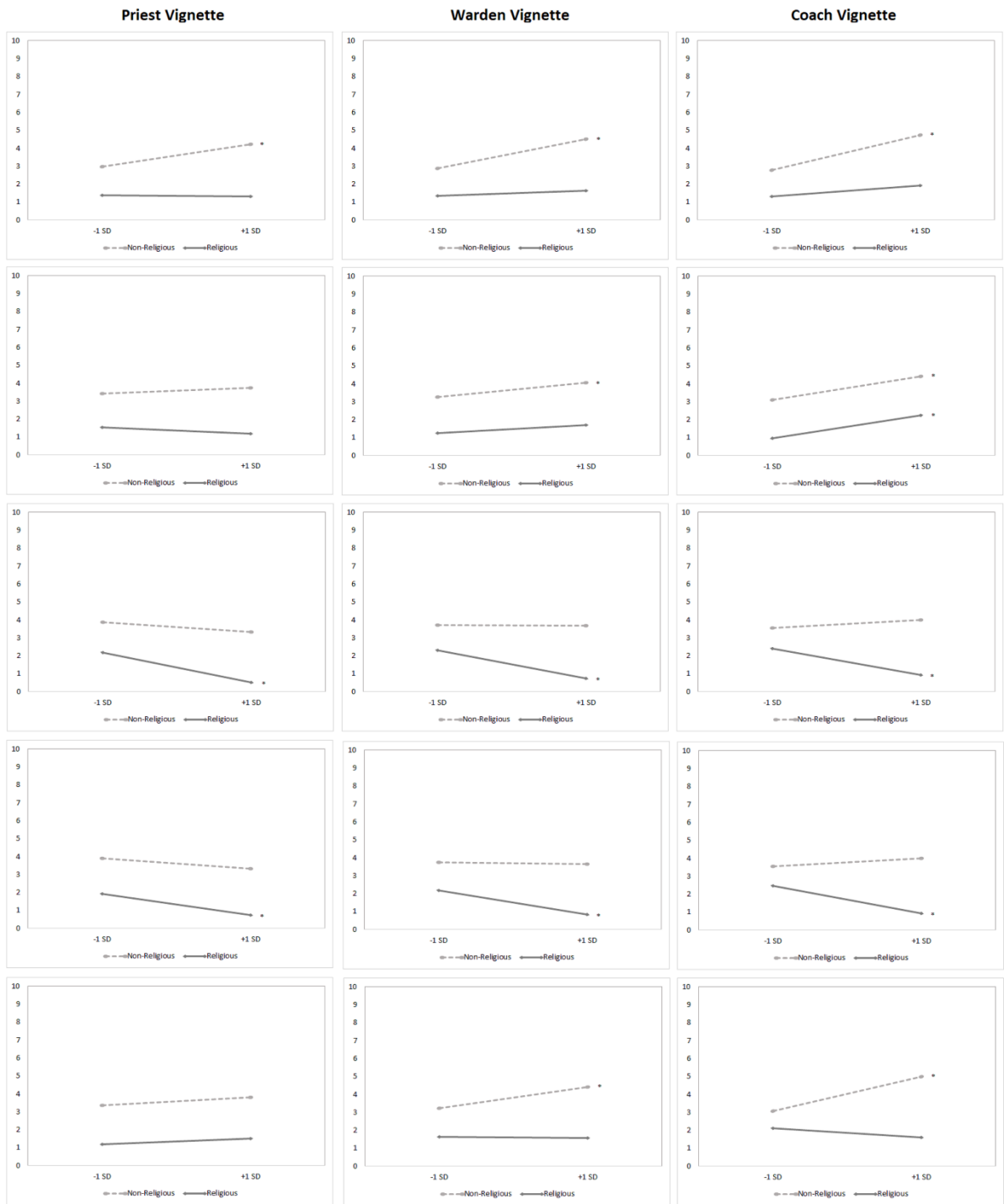
Figure 3. Interactions between moral foundations, religious grouping, and vignette on the allegation credibility outcome variable. Graphs represent data relating to the care foundation (top), through fairness, loyalty, authority, and purity (bottom). Asterisk indicates significant regression coefficient.
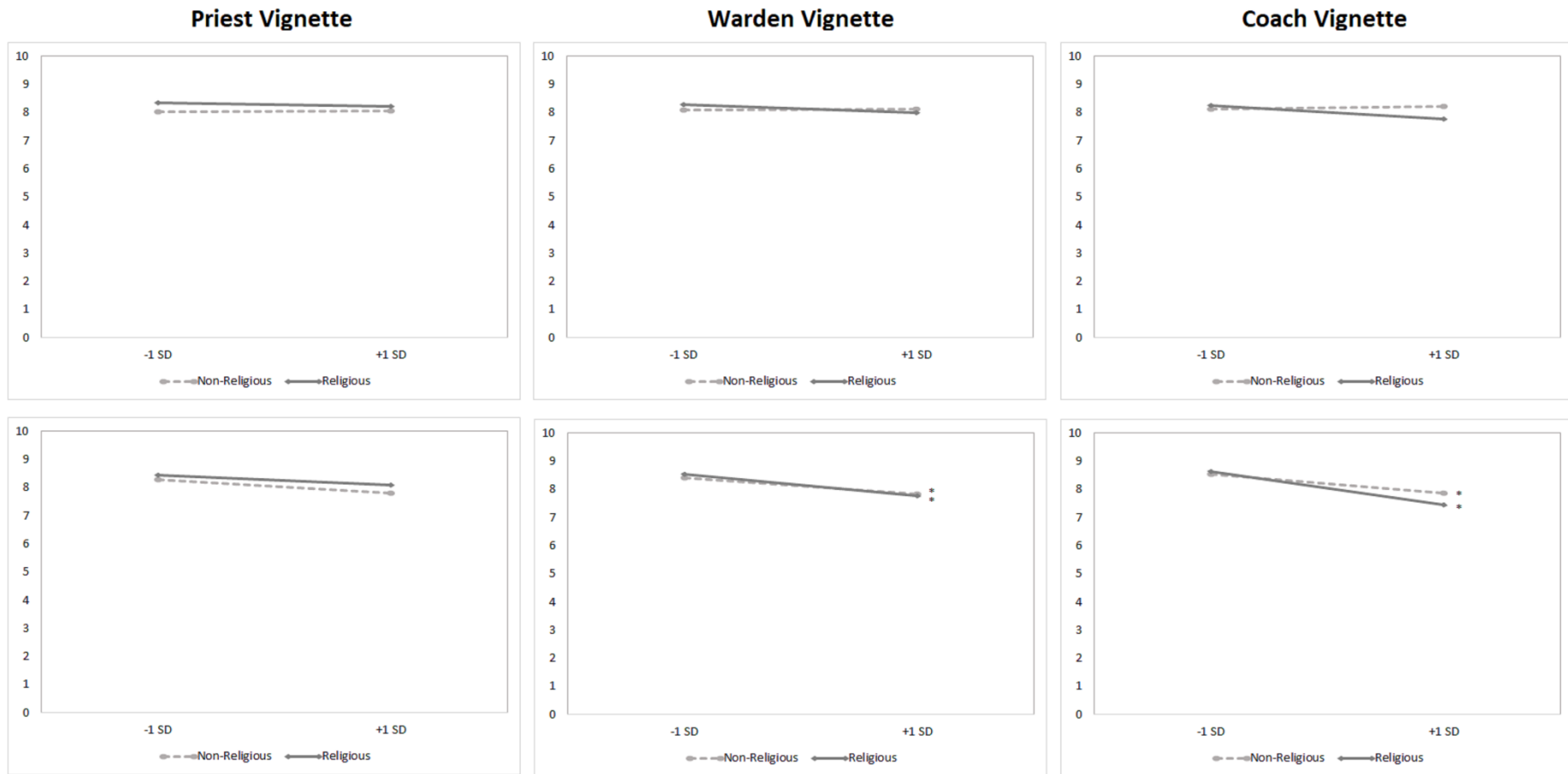
Figure 4. Interactions between social dominance orientation, religious grouping, and vignette on the likelihood to report outcome variable (top graphs = dominance; bottom graphs = anti-egalitarianism). Asterisk indicates significant regression coefficient.

Allegation credibility judgements. We repeated the above analyses with allegation credibility judgements as the outcome variable. The models for both facets of SDO were almost identical, and explained a significant proportion of the variance in credibility assessments, Dominance model: $R^2 = .167$, $F(8, 902) = 22.62$, $p < .001$; Anti-Egalitarianism model: $R^2 = .166$, $F(8, 902) = 22.37$, $p < .001$. Both facets had significant main effects on these judgements, with higher levels of endorsement predicting more suspicion about the credibility of allegations (Dominance: $B = -.42$, $p = .010$; Anti-Egalitarianism: $B = -.64$, $p < .001$). Consistent with the previous analyses, religious participants were more suspicious of allegations in both models (Dominance model: $B = -2.19$, $p < .001$; Anti-Egalitarianism model: $B = -2.18$, $p < .001$). There were no other significant effects.
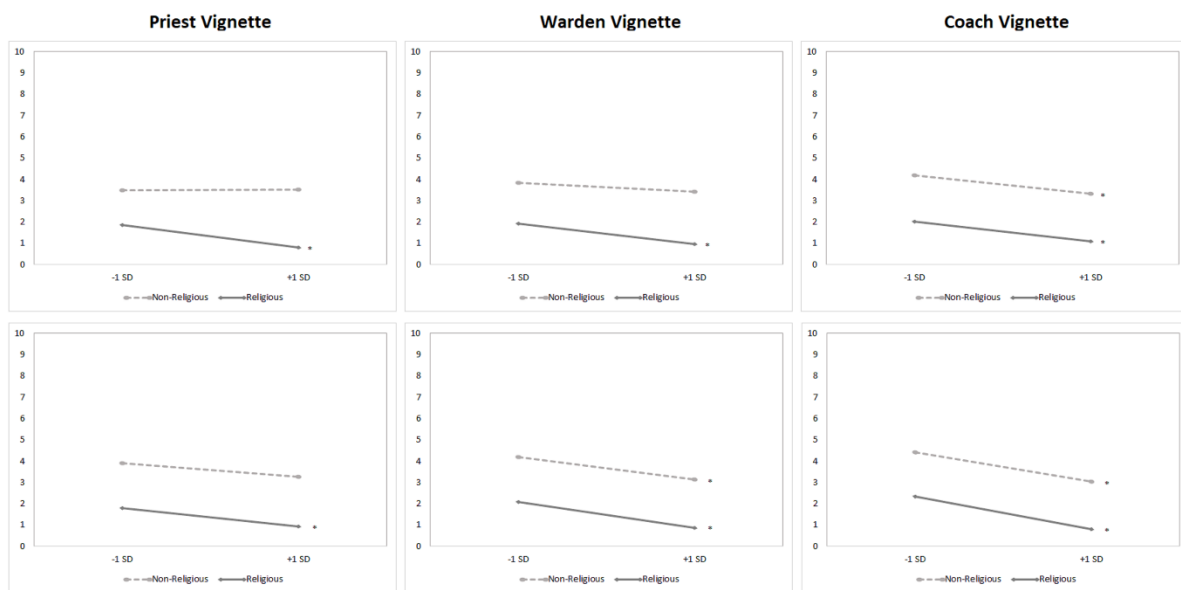

Figure 5. Interactions between social dominance orientation, religious grouping, and vignette on the allegation credibility outcome variable (top graphs = dominance; bottom graphs = anti-egalitarianism). Asterisk indicates significant regression coefficient.

Table 3. Unstandardized regression coefficients predicting study outcomes

Variable	Priest vignette		Church warden vignette		Football coach vignette	
	Religious (*n* = 151)	Non-Religious (*n* = 153)	Religious (*n* = 155)	Non-Religious (*n* = 153)	Religious (*n* = 148)	Non-Religious (*n* = 151)
Likelihood to report outcome						
Ingroup identification	.09	.24	.26*	.07	.43*	-.11
MFQ: Care	.12	.20	.07	.36*	.01	.52*
MFQ: Fairness	-.11	-.10	.05	.03	.22	.16
MFQ: Loyalty	.04	.17	-.09	.33*	-.22	.49*
MFQ: Authority	-.33	-.31	-.47**	-.10	-.62**	.12
MFQ: Purity	.09	.09	-.11	.16	-.30	.23
SDO: Dominance	-.08	.02	-.18	.03	-.28	.04
SDO: Anti-Egalitarianism	-.22	-.27	-.44**	-.33*	-.67***	-.39*
Allegation credibility outcome						
Ingroup identification	-.50*	.17	-.07	.12	.37	.07
MFQ: Care	-.03	.87**	.19	1.10***	.40	1.34***
MFQ: Fairness	-.26	.26	.35	.63*	.96**	1.00***
MFQ: Loyalty	-.94***	-.31	-.89***	-.03	-.85***	.25
MFQ: Authority	-.65**	-.32	-.74***	-.04	-.84***	.23
MFQ: Purity	.15	.20	-.03	.53**	-.22	.85***
SDO: Dominance	-.61*	.02	-.58**	-.26	-.55	-.53*
SDO: Anti-Egalitarianism	-.50*	-.38	-.69***	-.60**	-.88***	-.81**

Note. Coefficients represent predictive values after controlling for relevant constructs (see text for full details).

* *p* < .05   ** *p* < .01   *** *p* < .001

Discussion

Ingroup identification played no role in predicting reporting intentions or credibility judgements for non-religious participants. However, among religious participants this construct predicting significantly lower allegation credibility assessments when the accused was a priest (vs. a church warden or football coach). Further, ingroup identification predicted higher reporting intentions among religious participants, but only when the accused was *not* a priest. These findings combine to suggest that the centrality of the Christian identity predicts more doubt over centrally-perpetrated abuse (i.e., by a priest), and lower reporting intentions. This is in line with Minto et al.'s (2016) social identity approach to understanding religious participants' responses to ingroup abuse.

Moral impulses were differentially associated with responses to alleged sexual abuse. This was most pronounced in credibility assessments, with few predictive effects being observed in the 'likelihood to report' data (which is possibly due to socially desirable).

Care being associated with higher credibility assessments makes conceptual sense in the context of MFT as this foundation is associated with a drive to protect the innocent and vulnerable from harm. A potential victim of sexual abuse fulfils this brief (Harper & Harris, 2017), and so the main effect of the care foundation might reflect some sympathy with the victim, and a higher degree of condemnation aimed towards the alleged perpetrator of abuse. Fairness is intricately linked to the notion of justice, and so a positive association between this foundation and higher allegation credibility may be symbolic of a desire for an adequate and appropriate judicial outcome to the alleged abuse reported in the vignettes used here. Explaining the main effects of the binding foundations is more effortful. Loyalty, for example, might be expected to be associated with higher allegation credibility judgements at a global level, as believing an allegation and seeking a judicial ending would mean ridding society of a proverbial 'bad apple' (i.e., an alleged sexual abuser). However, given that our

abuse scenarios were framed as taking place within organisational or institutional settings, allegation credibility assessments may be reversed as reporting the abuse from within an institution may be viewed by those high on this foundation as disloyal. Similarly, an endorsement of the authority foundation might be expected to be associated with higher allegation credibility judgements, as doing so would lead to switch justice being meted out following an alleged abuser breaking the law. However, we observed the opposite trend, with authority being negatively associated with credibility assessments (and reporting intentions). Examining the items that load onto the authority factor, it seems that many reflect themes related to social order (e.g., "Respect for authority is something all children need to learn"), and so may reflect themes related more to SDO than rule-based morality. Our purity foundation findings are unsurprising, given that the scenarios were written in a way that reflected suspected homosexuality on the part of the alleged victim. This likely primed a disgust response among those scoring high on the purity foundation (Barnett, Öz, & Marsden, 2018), leading to lower levels of allegation credibility among these participants.

Each of these foundation main effects (with the exception of fairness) were moderated by religious grouping. For care and purity, being part of the religious subgroup eliminated the main foundation effects. That is, for religious participants, care and purity had no significant effects on allegation credibility judgements. This is potentially indicative of some religious impulse (see below) eliminating these psychological effects. For loyalty and authority, the main effects were present only among those who identified as being religious. Given that these binding foundations are more common among socially conservative groups (Graham et al., 2012) this is perhaps unsurprising, as values that are more prevalent and important in specific groups are likely to exert a greater effect on the decision-making processes of members of those communities.

The data for SDO reflect the result that an anti-egalitarian orientation (i.e., the view that social inequalities are just, and should not be addressed by external force) is associated with a deference to internal authority, but an aversion to external authority. That is, it may be that those high on this construct have a general aversion to the imposition of both social justice (e.g., the redistribution of wealth, or affirmative action schemes) *and* criminal justice. Instead, they prefer interpersonal conflicts to be addressed in-house, rather than by involving some kind of external arbiter of the law. This may explain why this facet of SDO in particular exerts a strong effect on both reporting intentions and allegation credibility judgements. This importance of SDO – specifically anti-egalitarianism – demonstrates how institutional cover-ups of abuse can occur. If we conceptualise the anti-egalitarian impulse as a general aversion to externally-administered justice, we can see how priests can remain in institutional settings with formal organisational warnings rather than formal criminal charges being brought against them.

Condemning the Accused as an 'Un-Christian' Response to Abuse Allegations?

The most consistent finding in our dataset was that religious participants – across the board – were more sceptical of abuse allegations than non-religious participants. We speculate that participation in organised Christianity is closely correlated with a moral orientation not highlighted in the MFQ. This may be termed a 'forgiveness' orientation arising, for Christians, from biblical commands such as: "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you" (Matthew 7:1-3). Kempe, Silverman, Steele, and Silver (1962) noted that physicians, even when confronted with obvious circumstantial evidence of child abuse, can attempt to "obliterate such suspicion from their minds". Acknowledging the difficulties in understanding this tendency, the authors speculated that "one possibility is that

the arousal of the physician's antipathy in response to such situations is so great that it is easier for the physician to deny the possibility of such attack than to have to deal with the excessive anger which surges up in him when he realizes the truth of the situation". It may be that a similar dynamic exists Christians, whose commitment to 'do not judge' is so great that it suppresses the tendency of non-Christians, not so committed, to give greater credibility to allegations of abuse and report those allegations to the authorities when other pertinent factors (e.g., the care foundation of morality) are present. As White and Terry (2016) highlight, a primary goal of forgiveness in Christianity is the renewal of Christian living; forgiveness is essentially restorative, and an expression of unconditional Christian love. Interpreting the findings of this study may be assisted by considering the impact of this paradigm on Christians whose moral intuitions are strongly influenced by it. When confronted with the possibility of child abuse, it is not that these Christians are aiming for justice and missing, but that they are aiming for something else entirely.

This offers a unique theoretical opportunity to conceptualise how an effective safeguarding training policy may look for those within religious groups. That is, relying on traditional policy-based approaches (e.g., when abuse is alleged, one should follow a particular protocol), it may be more appropriate to embed theological messages into safeguarding training packages. The Church of England has already started to do this, by beginning to publish reflective texts that explore the concepts of safeguarding within the theological framework of ecclesiology. This approach is an acknowledgement that whilst forgiveness and reconciliation are the central themes in Christian faith, teaching in this area has sometimes been "unbalanced and badly formulated" (Cocksworth, n.d.). To date, no systematic evaluation of such a training package has taken place, though this would be a useful and potentially fruitful avenue for future study in institutional safeguarding research.

Limitations and Future Directions

Our data and methods are not without limitation. For example, the use of vignettes wherein the alleged victim was presented as potentially struggling with his sexuality is an important confound. Negative judgements of homosexuality have long been associated with conservative groups, with these being heightened among religious groups which may condemn such individuals on the basis of scripture (Hayes, 1995; Kirby & Michaelson, 2008). In our planning of this project, we initially sought to replicate and extend the work of Minto et al. (2016), and so adapted their specific vignettes to our geographical context. A potentially fruitful idea for future research to explore would be to test our effects using vignettes that do not contain such confounding variables (e.g., testing 'homosexual' and 'heterosexual' abuses). Relatedly, there are broader structural and contextual issues present in this area of research that individual-level psychometric measures cannot explore. That is, Churches and other institutions have been the subject of widespread public debate and scrutiny over their handling of sexual abuse allegations. While we attempted to control for defensive responding in the form of an ingroup identification scale, we acknowledge that this is not necessarily an accurate measure of this. Instead, future research may look to use system threat paradigms from within the system justification literature (Kay & Friesen, 2011). In these studies, participants are exposed to mock news stories that are system-enhancing or system-threatening. By experimentally manipulating threat in this way, it may be possible to account for additional variance in our outcome variables by also examining responses to broader social narratives in a more direct way.

The unexpected effects of particular moral foundations (e.g., authority) may be representative of some underlying issue related to the measurement of this construct. Ours is not the first study to highlight such a problem with the MFQ as a measure of moral foundations (see also Graham et al., 2012; Harper & Hogue, 2018). A face validity

examination of the items loading on to the authority foundation suggests that many of these might actually reflect a subtle form of SDO, rather than a distinct factor about the importance of rule and social order. As such, future studies might look to systematically examine the measurement of intuitive moral foundations in a way that makes use of larger pools of initial items, or corresponds to the alleged intuitive or automatic nature of these constructs (e.g., using survey-based implicit association tests; Carpenter et al., 2018).

We observed a significant difference in our samples' propensities and motivations for 'reporting' (likelihood to report outcomes) and 'believing' (allegation credibility outcomes). Similarly, the relationship between these outcomes was small when examining their correlation across the sample, $r = .31$, $p < .001$. Logically, reporting intentions should follow naturally from levels of belief in an allegation. Future studies might look to investigate whether the gap between these two outcomes are genuine, or if exaggerated likelihood to report intentions reflect the selection of the 'correct' (i.e., socially desirable) response.

The apparent importance of SDO in relation to decreased allegation reporting intentions and credibility assessments (both in these specific analyses and the authority factor of the MFQ) should not be minimised and has substantial practical implications from a safeguarding perspective. That is, it may be that some theological positions within Christianity (and indeed in other religious groups) may be more susceptible to low reporting and belief rates. To our knowledge, no studies have empirically tested levels of SDO within different Christian theological groupings. However, given the strong opposition to equal marriage or the women in leadership in some Christian groups, we might assume this to be stronger in these communities. As such, specific safeguarding training aimed at addressing SDO-related ideas might be most suitable in these groups.

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Appendix

Priest Vignette

A 32 year old man has accused a Church of England priest of sexually abusing him when he was 13 years old. It is known that the boy's mother sought counselling from the priest around the time of the alleged offence due her belief that her son was homosexual. The boy has claimed that the priest gained his trust by providing treats, access to alcohol, and free run of his house.

On the day of the alleged assault, the boy visited the priest after a Church service. The priest reportedly brought the boy up to his bedroom, removed both their clothes, fondled the accuser, and attempted to initiate oral sex. After the alleged assault, it is suggested that the priest gave the boy warnings about the sinful nature of homosexuality.

At present, only selected members of the Church are aware of the allegation. The priest has argued that the case is suspect because the accuser is the only apparent victim, and suggests that if he was guilty, there would surely have been other victims come forward. He further argues that the accuser's past use of illegal drugs may have impaired his recollection of the alleged assault. The alleged victim of the abuse has now divulged this information to you, looking for advice about his next move.

Church Warden Vignette

A 32 year old man has accused a Church of England warden (a volunteer who assists a priest within a church parish) of sexually abusing him when he was 13 years old. It is known that the boy's mother sought counselling from the warden around the time of the alleged offence due her belief that her son was homosexual. The boy has claimed that the warden gained his trust by providing treats, access to alcohol, and free run of his house.

On the day of the alleged assault, the boy visited the warden after a Church service. The warden reportedly brought the boy up to his bedroom, removed both their clothes, fondled the accuser, and attempted to initiate oral sex. After the alleged assault, it is suggested that the warden gave the boy warnings about the sinful nature of homosexuality.

At present, only selected members of the Church are aware of the allegation. The warden has argued that the case is suspect because the accuser is the only apparent victim, and suggests that if he was guilty, there would surely have been other victims come forward. He further argues that the accuser's past use of illegal drugs may have impaired his recollection of the alleged assault. The alleged victim of the abuse has now divulged this information to you, looking for advice about his next move.

Football Coach Vignette

A 32 year old man has accused a youth football coach of sexually abusing him when he was 13 years old. It is known that the boy's mother sought counselling from the coach around the time of the alleged offence due her belief that her son was homosexual. The boy has claimed that the coach gained his trust by providing treats, access to alcohol, and free run of his house.

On the day of the alleged assault, the boy visited the coach after a football match. The coach reportedly brought the boy up to his bedroom, removed both their clothes, fondled the accuser, and attempted to initiate oral sex. After the alleged assault, it is suggested that the coach gave the boy warnings about the damaging nature of homosexuality.

At present, only selected members of the youth football club are aware of the allegation. The coach has argued that the case is suspect because the accuser is the only apparent victim, and suggests that if he was guilty, there would surely have been other victims come forward. He further argues that the accuser's past use of illegal drugs may have impaired his recollection of the alleged assault. The alleged victim of the abuse has now divulged this information to you, looking for advice about his next move.