

Modern Morality: For Canadians, stealing streaming services generates more of a moral conundrum than assisted dying

Half say that moral values are getting weaker in society, just 10 per cent say they're getting stronger

April 15, 2020 – Moral concepts have [risen and fallen](#) throughout history. Religion, culture and [convenience](#) often play a role in deciding what is right or just, and what is unacceptable or implorable.

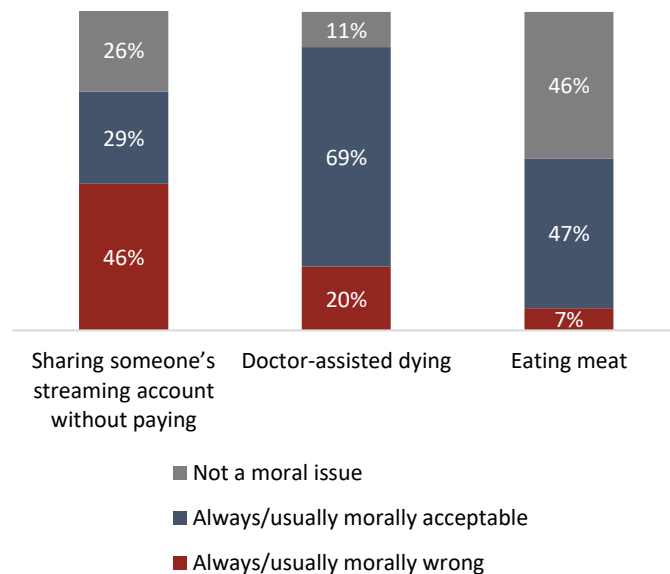
A new study from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute looks into these moral concepts, finding some fascinating modern evaluations of morality. For example, more Canadians say sharing a streaming account without paying is morally wrong (46%) than say this of assisted dying (20%) or abortion (26%).

Much of the difference of opinion over morality likely owes to the fluidity of moral definitions in Canada. While 16 per cent of Canadians say that there are moral absolutes, equal numbers each say there are moral guidelines (43%) to help in conceptualizing right and wrong, or moral grey areas (41%) which leave many of these decisions up to the individual.

More Key Findings:

- The issues or concepts that Canadians view as less morally acceptable include having affairs, cheating on taxes and scientific testing on animals
- The issues or concepts that Canadians find the more morally acceptable include doctor-assisted dying, abortion, and same sex couples raising children
- Older Canadians are more likely to say that Canadian society's values are weakening; 61 per cent of those 55 and over feel this way

Do you consider each to be morally acceptable, morally unacceptable, or not a moral issue?



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from January 21 – 23 among a representative randomized sample of 1,528 Canadian adults who are members of [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 2.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, Executive Director: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl
Dave Korzinski, Research Director: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

About ARI

*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research foundation established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.*

INDEX:

Part One: The moral makeup of Canada

- **Few Canadians believe in moral absolutes**
- **Where do Canadians get their morality?**
- **Are our values getting stronger or weaker?**

Part Two: Assessing morality

- **More Morally acceptable: doctor assisted-dying, abortion**
- **Less Morally acceptable: tax fraud, adultery**
- **Grey areas: sharing a streaming account, pornography**
- **Biggest generational disagreements**

Part One: The moral makeup of Canada

Few Canadians believe in moral absolutes

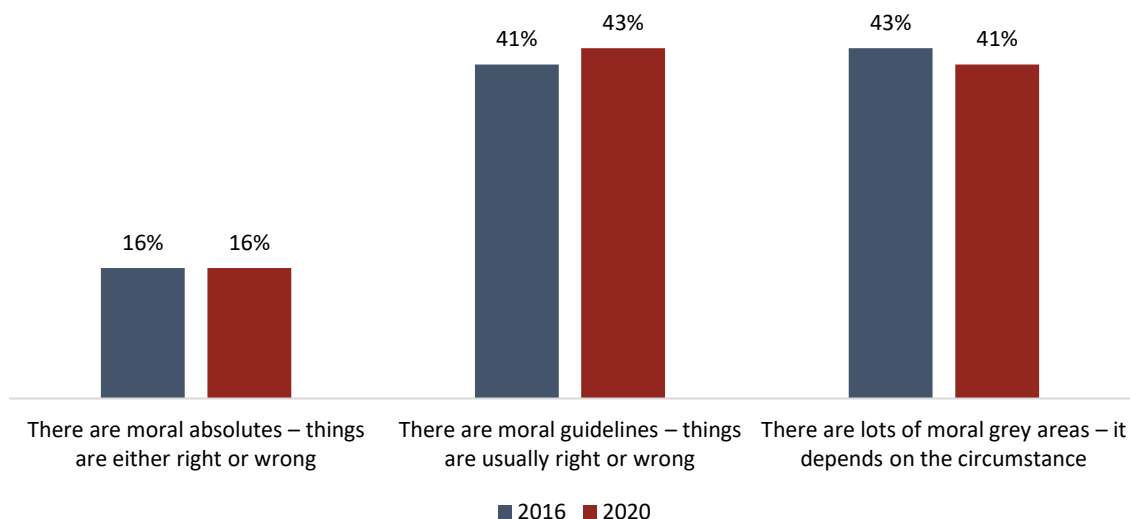
German writer Erwin Sylvanus [once wrote](#) that it is “easy enough to preach morality on a full belly”. This is one way to conceptualize the divergence in morality across contexts and cultures. For some, morality is a convenience that others may not have. In other instances, groups may extend religious moral values to some concepts that seem foreign to a group with less exposure to those ideas.

Perhaps that helps to explain Canadians apparent unwillingness to commit to the concept of moral absolutes. Asked for their views on personal morality, just 16 per cent (that same number who said this in 2016) say that there are moral absolutes – that things are either right or wrong. Canadians are considerably more likely to say that they believe there are moral guidelines or that right or wrong can change across different circumstances:

CONTACT:

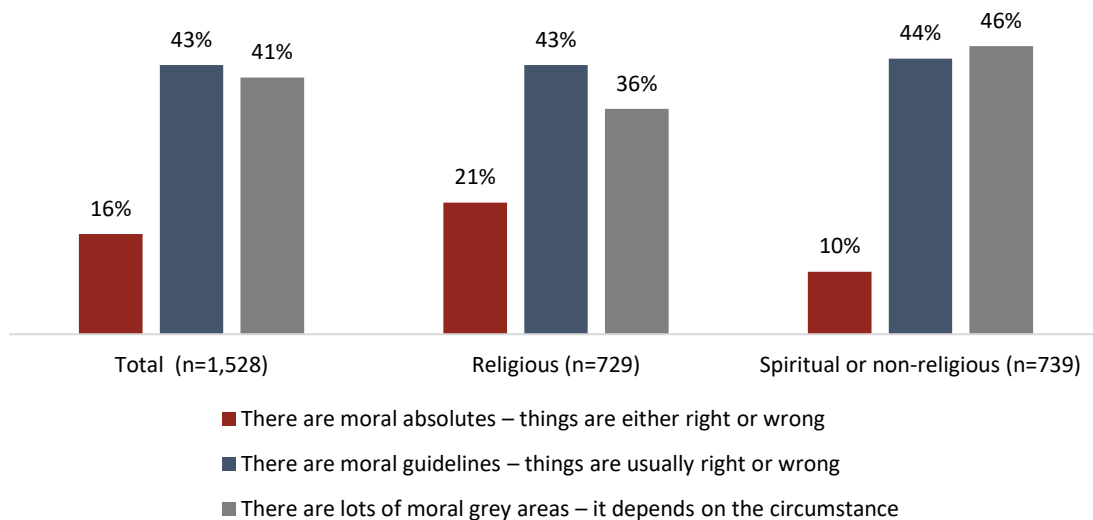
Shachi Kurl, Executive Director: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl
Dave Korzinski, Research Director: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

Which of the following is closest to your own point of view regarding personal morality?



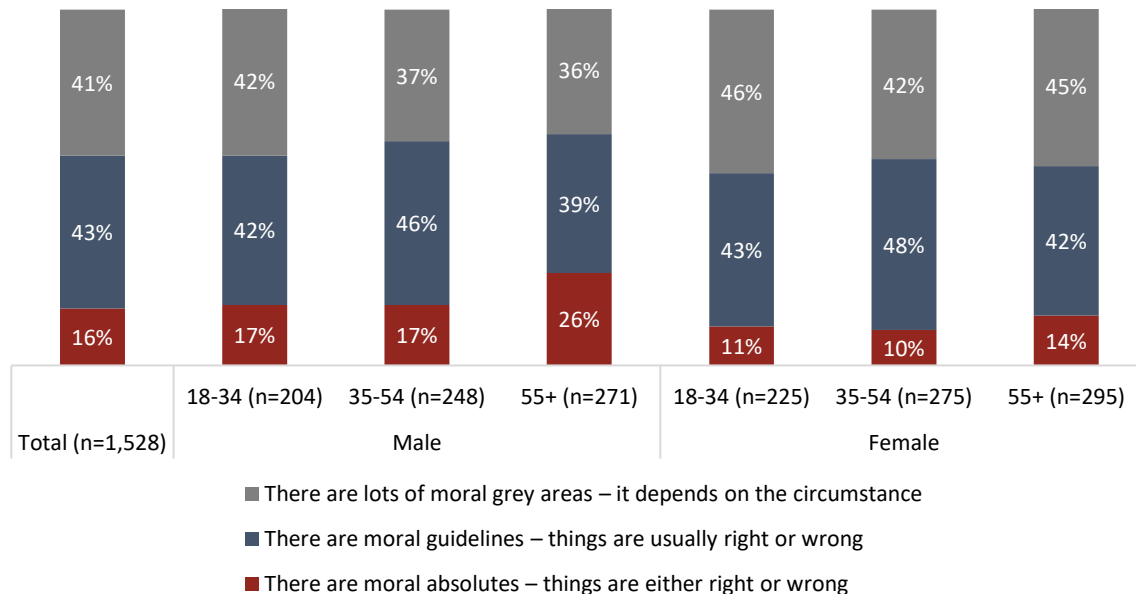
Notably, those who identify as religious are twice as likely to say that there are indeed moral absolutes, however, even among this segment, only one-in-five (21%) say so. A considerable number of both religious and non-religious Canadians lean toward the concepts of moral guidelines and grey areas:

**Which of the following is closest to your own point of view regarding personal morality?
(All Respondents)**



Across age and gender, the proportions holding each view are relatively similar with the exception of men 55 years of age and older:

**Which is closest to your own point of view regarding personal morality?
(All Respondents)**

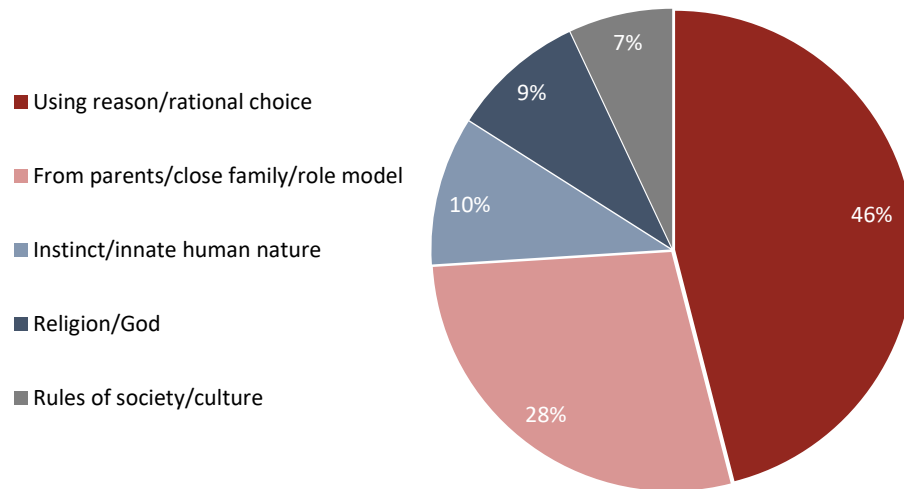


Where do Canadians get their morality?

The question of where morality comes from has a rich history of debate in philosophical circles. Where does someone learn right or wrong? That answer has changed over centuries, through the Enlightenment, and into the 21st century.

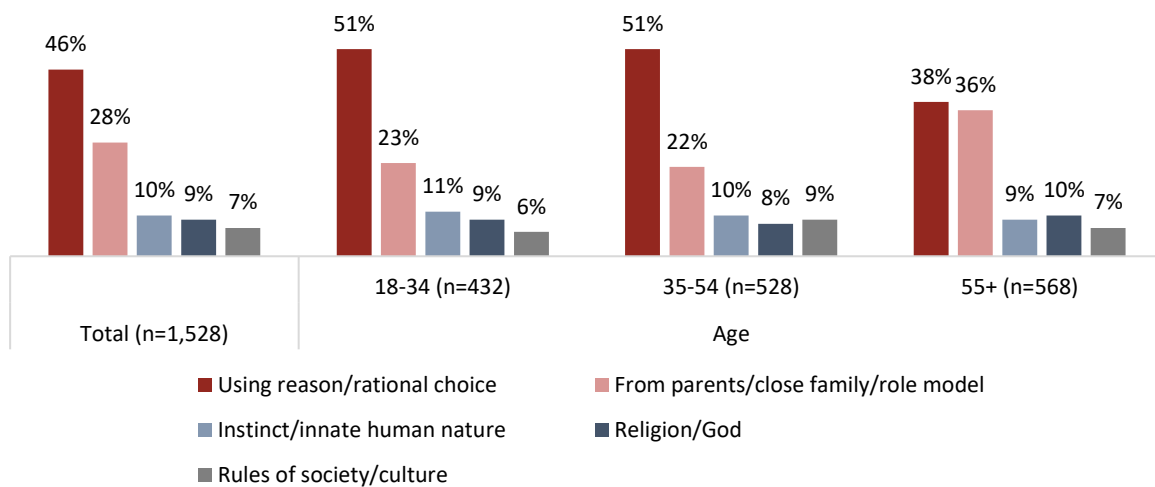
While many people have relied on their religious faith for moral guidance for centuries, that is the case for one-in-ten Canadians (9%) in 2020. It is more common for Canadians to say that they rely on their own definitions of reason and rational choice in order to develop personal moral values, or to say their own personal morality was passed down from parents or a close family member:

**Thinking very broadly about your own personal moral values --
which one of the following has been most important in
developing your moral values? (All Respondents)**



The most significant differences are driven by age of respondent. Older Canadians are much more likely to have relied on their parents:

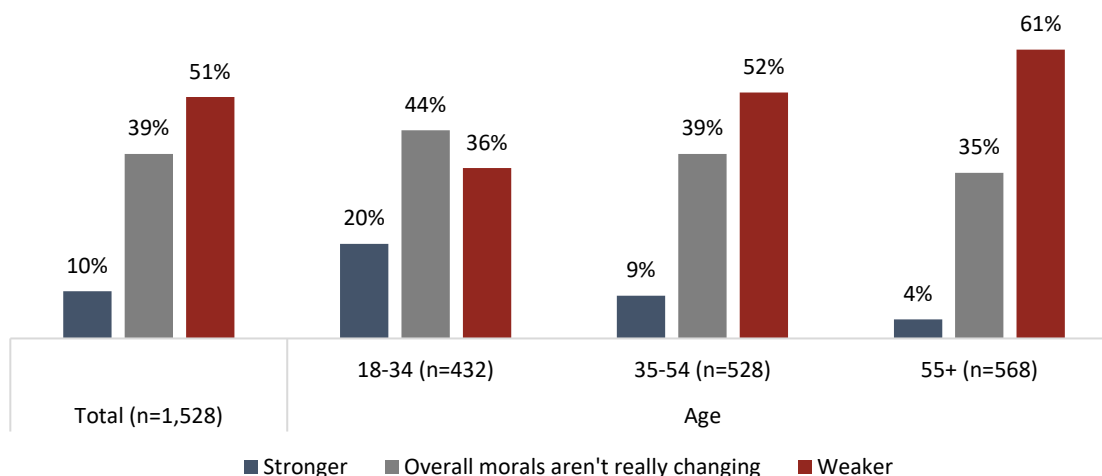
**Thinking very broadly about your own personal moral values -- which one of
the following has been most important in developing your moral values?
(All Respondents)**



Are our values getting stronger or weaker?

Canadians are divided about a number of moral concepts across different age groups. Asked whether they feel moral values in this country are becoming stronger or weaker, younger people are more likely to say that they are becoming stronger, or not changing very much. Meanwhile, half of 35- to 54-year-olds and three-in-five of those 55 years and older that our values are weakening:

All things considered, do you think Canadian society's moral values are generally getting stronger or getting weaker? (All Respondents)



Part Two: Assessing morality

Evidence that many Canadians believe in moral relativism is clearer when considering which issues in society they define as either morally acceptable or morally wrong. The Angus Reid Institute asked respondents whether they believed each of 23 separate issues were always or usually morally acceptable, always or usually morally wrong, or not a moral issue.

More Morally acceptable: doctor assisted-dying, abortion

So, what do Canadians consider morally acceptable? Perhaps surprising to many, the issue that is rated as acceptable by the largest group is one that has been the subject of considerable debate over the last few years - doctor-assisted dying. Seven-in-ten (69%) say that they consider this to be morally acceptable in most cases, while just one-in-five hold the opposite view (20%).

Abortion is slightly more polarizing, with one-in-four saying it is unacceptable in most or all cases, but it is also the issue that generates the second highest number of people saying it is mostly acceptable.

Some [have suggested](#) that due to the significant emissions produced by air travel that it may be immoral to travel when not absolutely necessary. Canadians do not appear buy that argument as of yet, as only one-in-ten say that flying for business (12%) or recreation (11%) is morally wrong.

CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, Executive Director: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl
 Dave Korzinski, Research Director: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

<i>Morally Acceptable</i> Each issue in this table is described as morally acceptable by more than twice as many respondents who describe it as unacceptable			
	Always/usually morally acceptable	Not a moral issue	Always/usually morally wrong
Doctor-assisted dying	69%	11%	20%
Abortion	59%	15%	26%
Same sex couples raising children	53%	31%	16%
Eating meat	47%	46%	7%
Gambling	46%	36%	19%
Flying for recreation	45%	44%	11%
Flying for business	44%	44%	12%

Less Morally acceptable: tax fraud, adultery

There are a number of issues that Canadians agree are almost always morally acceptable. The most universally condemned action is infidelity. Nine-in-ten Canadians (89%) say this is morally wrong. Slightly fewer feel this way about tax evasion (84%), while two-thirds (64%) say that telling jokes about another race is a no go:

<i>Morally Unacceptable</i> Each issue in this table is described as morally unacceptable by at least half of respondents			
	Always/usually morally acceptable	Not a moral issue	Always/usually morally wrong
Having an affair	6%	5%	89%
Not declaring income to avoid paying taxes	6%	10%	84%
Telling jokes about another race	20%	12%	68%
Scientific testing on animals	28%	8%	64%
Spanking a child	28%	12%	60%
Buying sex	29%	13%	59%
Death penalty	35%	8%	57%

CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, Executive Director: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl
 Dave Korzinski, Research Director: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

Genetic engineering	33%	10%	57%
Selling sex	30%	15%	55%
Using single-use plastics like straws and cutlery	18%	31%	51%

Grey areas: sharing a streaming account, pornography

A wide range of actions such as watching pornography, buying a fur coat, not paying for streaming services and driving an SUV are among those that find the least amount of consensus regarding their moral acceptability, making them the issues for which Canadians have the most divided overall views:

<i>Moral Grey Areas</i> <i>Each issue in this table is described as morally acceptable, morally unacceptable and not a moral issue, by at least 20% of respondents</i>			
	Always/usually morally acceptable	Not a moral issue	Always/usually morally wrong
Watching pornography	45%	25%	30%
High schoolers having sex	43%	26%	30%
Sharing someone's streaming account without paying	29%	26%	46%
Buying a fur coat	25%	31%	44%
Keeping a handgun in the house	23%	30%	47%
Buying a gas guzzling SUV	22%	37%	41%

Biggest generational disagreements

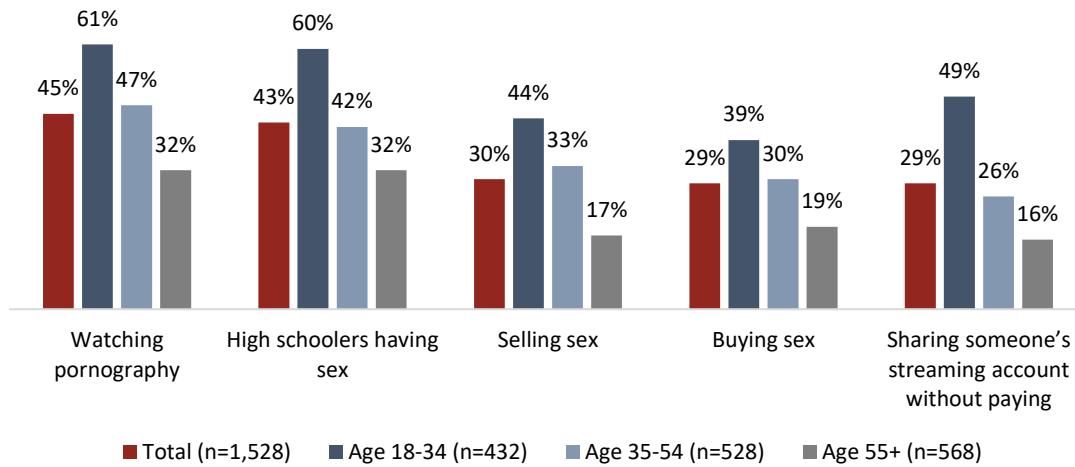
Interestingly, the areas wherein Canadians tend to disagree across generations are predominantly sexual issues. For example, nearly twice as many young people say high schoolers having sex is usually or always morally acceptable, compared to those aged 55+. The same can be said of buying and selling sex. The older Canadians are, the more likely they are to say that each is not morally acceptable.

Meanwhile, there is a massive divide on the morality of using someone else's streaming platform without contributing to paying for it. Half of 18- to 34-year-olds are fine with this (49%), while just 16 per cent of those 55 and older agree:

CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, Executive Director: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl
 Dave Korzinski, Research Director: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

Percentage who say each is usually or always morally acceptable



For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).