

Are moral foundations used for decision-making in moral conflict?

An examination using free description

Ryoma IBARAKI, Kiriko SAKATA (Hiroshima University)

Introduction

- Recently, **Moral Foundations Theory** (MFT; e.g., Graham, Haidt & Nosek, 2009; Haidt & Graham, 2007) has become very pervasive in moral psychology
- According to MFT, there are at least 5 moral foundations that can be combined into two superordinate concepts in terms of function

Individualizing Foundations

- Harm / care
- Fairness / reciprocity

Place emphasis on individual rights and welfare



Trade-off

Individualizing vs. Binding
(e.g. right to abortion, acceptance of refugees)

Binding Foundations

- Ingroup / loyalty
- Authority / respect
- Purity / sanctity

Place emphasis on group-binding loyalty, duty, and self-control



⇔ **Moral psychological research has not examined the relationship between the content of moral thinking and moral decision-making in specific scenarios**

Purpose: Exploring the relationship between moral thinking and moral decision-making in moral conflict using the free description method

Hypothesis: Descriptions that affirm or deny specific moral foundations would predict the direction of moral decision-making

Method

Participants: 169 Japanese students (79 females, 89 males, 1 unknown, $M_{age} = 19.2 \pm 1.36$)

Questionnaire:

- Traditional festival scenario
 - Read a moral dilemma scenario that included a tradeoff between respect for the rights and emotions of out-group members (i.e., **individualizing foundations**) and respect for the traditional value of in-group members (i.e., **binding foundations**)
 - They made a decision between the two and wrote freely about the reasoning behind their decision
- Individualism and collectivism scale (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998, 17items, partially revised)
- Moral Foundations Questionnaire (Graham et al., 2011, 22items)

Result

Two coders evaluated each description (PABAKs > .82)

- Which foundations?
- Affirming or denying?

- The number of participants for the description distribution of **Individualizing foundations/Binding foundations, Affirm/Deny** (Table 1)

Table 1
Frequency distribution of free-description content

Content of Description	Number of Occurrences				
	0	1	2	3	4
Individualizing-Affirm	111	49	5	1	0
Binding-Affirm	71	59	25	11	0
Individualizing-Deny	165	1	0	0	0
Binding-Deny	52	71	36	5	2

Result

Correlations between scales (Table 2)

Table 2
Means, standard deviations, and correlations between scales

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Decision (7point)	2.77	1.80	—								
2. Individualizing (MFQ)	4.64	0.58	-.14 +	(.79)							
3. Binding (MFQ)	3.65	0.52	.08	.36 **	(.74)						
4. Horizontal Individualism	3.31	0.62	-.08	.01	.10	(.65)					
5. Vertical Individualism	3.22	0.63	.09	-.03	.09	.18 *	(.58)				
6. Horizontal Collectivism	3.78	0.52	-.13 +	.44 **	.30 **	.02	-.16 *	(.56)			
7. Vertical Collectivism	3.29	0.56	.11	.25 **	.33 **	.03	.01	.44 **	(.60)		
8. Difficulty of decision	3.84	1.87	.31 **	.07	.12	-.15 *	-.05	-.01	.10	—	
9. Gender	1.47	0.50	.03	.20 *	.20 **	-.05	-.10	.22 **	-.08	.06	—
10. Age	19.21	1.36	.03	-.10	-.02	.01	-.07	-.13 +	-.18 *	.01	-.01

Note. • For "Decision (7point)", the closer to 1 means "respect for the rights and emotions of out-group members", the closer to 7 means "respect for the traditional value of in-group members".

• The alpha coefficients are shown in parentheses.

** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, + $p < .10$

Multiple regression analysis (Table 3)

- A description that denied the **binding foundations** strongly predicted a decision that respected the rights and emotions of out-group members
- While HC predicted a decision that respected out-group members, VC predicted a decision that respected the traditional values of the in-group
- Difficulty of decision-making was related to the decision-making corresponding to the **binding moral values**

Table 3
Multiple regression analysis predicting decision-making in the moral conflict scenario

	Admit participation 1 - 7	Protect the custom
Gender		.07
Age		.05
Difficulty of decision		.12 *
Horizontal Individualism		-.07
Vertical Individualism		.06
Horizontal Collectivism		-.16 *
Vertical Collectivism		.19 **
Individualizing-Affirm (FD)		-.15 *
Binding-Affirm (FD)		.15 *
Binding-Deny (FD)		-.57 **
R^2		.54 **

Note. FD = Free Description

$F(10,149) = 17.56$, $R^2 = .54$, $p < .001$, all VIFs < 1.45

** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, + $p < .10$

Discussion

- Hypothesis was supported**
- **Moral foundations are used in moral decision-making**
 - The existence of people who think **binding foundations** are inconsequential may be the biggest factor in the appearance of differences in moral decision-making
 - HC and VC also predicted moral decision-making in the opposite direction
- Theoretically consistent with the concept (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998)
 - Need to consider the process on decision-making based on the difficulty of the decision

References

- Graham, J., Haidt, J., & Nosek, B. A. (2009). Liberals and conservatives rely on different sets of moral foundations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 96, 1029-1046.
- 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.
- Haidt, J., & Graham, J. (2007). When morality opposes justice: Conservatives have moral intuitions that liberals may not recognize. *Social Justice Research*, 20, 98-116.
- Triandis, H. C. & Gelfand, M. J. (1998). Converging measurement of horizontal and vertical individualism and collectivism. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74, 118-128.