Missouri State Human Subjects Protection Application

**Title:** A Validation of the Moral Foundations Dictionary

**Description:** Moral Foundations Theory (MFT) states that moral thinking relies on five foundations: harm/care, fairness/reciprocity, ingroup/loyalty, authority/respect, and purity/sanctity (Haidt, 2012). This theory takes a social intuitionist perspective rather than a rationalist perspective; this social intuitionist perspective views moral thinking as a type of perception understood in an interpersonal context (Haidt, 2001). The five foundations represent five justifications for moral judgments. The harm/care foundation includes moral judgments based on protecting people from harm. The fairness/reciprocity foundation includes moral judgments based on ensuring equality and justice. The ingroup/loyalty foundation includes moral judgments based on faithfulness to groups such as families or nations. The authority/respect includes moral judgments based on upholding tradition. The purity/sanctity foundation includes judgments based on doing virtuous behavior and avoiding “unnatural” behavior. Haidt (2012) reviews numerous studies which tie the endorsement of these foundations to political orientation. Those who identify as liberals typically use only the harm/care and fairness/reciprocity foundations in their moral judgments whereas those who identify as conservative typically consider all five foundations in their judgments. Graham et al. (2011) developed the 30-item Moral Foundations Questionnaire (MFQ) to measure the extent to which people endorse each of the five moral foundations (See Appendix A). Graham and his colleagues found the average reliability of the scale to α = .73, and they found the scale correlated with the Schwartz Value Scale (Schwartz, 1992) and other measures of morality.

In addition the self-reported MFQ, Graham, Haidt, and Nosek (2009) developed a dictionary to measure endorsement of moral concerns in writing and discourse (See Appendix B for dictionary). Graham, Haidt, and Nosek applied this dictionary to sermons of liberal and conservative ministers. They found that liberal ministers tended to use more words related to the harm/care and fairness/reciprocity foundations, and conservative ministers tended to use more words related to authority/respect and purity/sanctity. Liberal ministers unexpectedly used more ingroup/loyalty words, but they used them to praise individuality and/or rebellion which runs counter to the ingroup/loyalty foundation. Only one other study has made use of the moral foundations dictionary. Sagi and Dehghani (2014) studied the use of moral words surrounding 9-11 and in the abortion debates in Congress. Using Latent Semantic Analysis, Sagi and Dehghani examined words from the moral dictionary that occurred with words about 9-11 and abortion. In their first study, they found that following 9-11 more moral words were used in connection to the World Trade Center in the New York Times. In political blogs, they found an increase in moral words occurring with the word *mosque* following talks of building a mosque at ground zero. In Congressional debate, they found that Republicans were more likely to mention abortion and were also more likely to use moral words in reference to abortion. Furthermore, words relating to purity were used more by Republicans whereas Democrats used more words related to fairness.

Given the sparse research of the moral foundations dictionary, the purpose of the current study is to validate the moral foundation dictionary using the MFQ.

**Protocol:**

**Participants:** Target sample will be the human subjects’ participant pool in the Psychology Department. Proposed sample size is 120-200. Participants will be recruited through the SONA system, which displays experimental options for participants to select.

**Materials:** Participants will respond to one of three writing prompts asking about their attitudes on abortion, same-sex marriage, or environmentalism. These topics were chosen as they should create moderately strong moral reactions which should make participants more likely to use words from the moral foundations dictionary. While abortion may be a sensitive topic for some participants, it has been used as a topic for writing prompts in another study of language (Newman, Pennebaker, Berry, & Richards, 2003). In addition, participants will also be asked to complete the MFQ and basic demographic questions. All materials are included as appendices.

**Procedures:** Data will be collected using Qualtrics. Participants will be directed to the consent form first. If they agree to participate in the study, participants will be randomly assigned to one of three writing prompts about their attitudes toward abortion, same-sex marriage, or environmentalism. Participants will be required to write at least 1200 characters which should be approximately 200 words. They will then be asked to complete the MFQ and the demographics questions.

**Study Completion:** After completion of this study, participants will be given course credit. If applicable, the project will be summarized for journal publication, as well as possible conference proceedings.

**Benefits:** Participants will receive course credit for their participant.

**Risks:** There are minimal risks. Participants may be asked to think about the sensitive topic of abortion. They may withdraw at any time with no penalty if they feel uncomfortable.

**Informed Consent:** Attached. Participants will be asked to provide consent at the beginning of the study. No penalty is given for withdrawing from the study.

I hereby agree to conduct this study in accordance with the procedures set forth in my project description, to uphold the ethical guidelines as set forth in the Code of Federal Regulations 45 CFR 46, 45 CFR 160 and 164, and the Missouri State University HIPAA Policy, and to report to the IRB any outcomes or reactions to the experiment which were not anticipated in the risks description which might influence the IRBs decision to sustain approval of the project.

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Erin Buchanan (PI)                                   Kayla Jordan (graduate student)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Appendix A

Writing Prompt 1: In the following textbox, please write about your attitudes on abortion as well as your reasons for this stance.

Writing Prompt 2: In the following textbox, please write about your attitudes on same-sex marriage as well as reasons for this stance.

Writing Prompt 3: In the following textbox, please write about your attitudes on environmentalism (e.g. recycling, clean energy, governmental regulations) as well as your reasons for this stance.

Appendix B

**Moral Foundations Questionnaire (MFQ)**

**Part I: Moral Relevance**

Respond to using the following response options:

*Not At All Relevant Not Very Relevant Slightly Relevant Somewhat Relevant Very Relevant Extremely Relevant*

*Harm:*

Whether or not someone suffered emotionally

Whether or not someone cared for someone weak or vulnerable

Whether or not someone was cruel

*Fairness:*

Whether or not some people were treated differently from others

Whether or not someone acted unfairly

Whether or not someone was denied his or her rights

*Ingroup:*

Whether or not someone’s action showed love for his or her country

Whether or not someone did something to betray his or her group

Whether or not someone showed a lack of loyalty

*Authority:*

Whether or not someone showed a lack of respect for authority

Whether or not someone conformed to the traditions of society

Whether or not an action caused chaos or disorder

*Purity:*

Whether or not someone violated standards of purity and decency

Whether or not someone did something disgusting

Whether or not someone acted in a way that God would approve of

**Part II: Moral Judgments**

Respond to using the following response options:

*Strongly disagree (1)*, *Moderately disagree (2)*, *Slightly disagree (3)*, *Slightly agree (4)*, *Moderately agree (5)*, *Strongly agree (6)*

*Harm:*

Compassion for those who are suffering is the most crucial virtue.

One of the worst things a person could do is hurt a defenseless animal.

It can never be right to kill a human being.

*Fairness:*

When the government makes laws, the number one principle should be ensuring that everyone is treated fairly.

Justice is the most important requirement for a society.

I think it’s morally wrong that rich children inherit a lot of money while poor children inherit nothing.

*Ingroup:*

I am proud of my country’s history.

People should be loyal to their family members, even when they have done something wrong.

It is more important to be a team player than to express oneself.

*Authority:*

Respect for authority is something all children need to learn.

Men and women each have different roles to play in society.

If I were a soldier and disagreed with my commanding officer’s orders, I would obey anyway because that is my duty.

*Purity:*

People should not do things that are disgusting, even if no one is harmed.

I would call some acts wrong on the grounds that they are unnatural.

Chastity is an important and valuable virtue.

Appendix C

**Demographic Sheet**

1. What is your gender? \_\_\_Man \_\_\_\_Woman
2. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What ethnicity do you most identify with? \_\_\_\_European American \_\_\_\_African American \_\_\_\_Hispanic American \_\_\_\_Native American \_\_\_\_Asian American \_\_\_\_Mixed(specify)\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Not American(specify)\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. What is your academic classification? \_\_\_\_Freshmen \_\_\_\_Sophomore \_\_\_\_Junior \_\_\_\_Senior
5. What is your religious orientation?
6. Rate your political orientation on the following scale:

1 (Conservative) to 10 (Liberal)

1. Which of the following parties do you most identify with? \_\_\_Democratic \_\_\_\_Republican \_\_\_\_Independent
2. What is your academic major? ­­­­­­­\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. On a scale from 1(not at all involved) to 10 (highly involved), rate your level of political involvement. \_\_\_
4. On a scale from 1(not at all interested) to 10 (highly interested), rate your level of political interest. \_\_\_
5. Are you a registered voter? \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No