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PSYC 575 Prospectus

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Mode of Final Project: Presentation

**The Effect of Cooperation Intention on Metaethical Ratings**

**Background**

We sometimes find ourselves to hold different moral opinions than our friends, co-workers, or others we need to get along with. How do we respond to situations where our relational goals (e.g. to get along with others) are in conflict with our moral beliefs? In previous work, people tend to rate moral beliefs as more a matter or preference than a matter of fact (Therialt et al., 2017). To extend this work, we ask whether disagreement with targets who people intend to cooperate with may affect how people view morality. Specifically, we propose that people who are motivated to preserve the integrity of their relationship will solve this tension by adopting more *subjectivist* meta-ethical beliefs (i.e., view morality more as a matter of preference rather than objective fact).

**Design and data structure**

At the beginning of the experiment, participants indicate their attitudes on a number of statements (*N* = 9). Then, participants are randomly assigned to two conditions. In the cooperation condition, they are told they will cooperate with another player on a task and subsequently learn that the target disagrees with them on the moral statements they evaluated earlier. In the competition condition, participants are told they will compete against another player, who they subsequently find to disagree with them on those statements. Finally, participants indicate their meta-ethical belief for each statement—that is, to what extent is it a matter of fact vs. preference. To measure meta-ethical belief, participants make three ratings 1), to what extent the statement is a matter of fact, 2) if someone disagrees with them on the statement, to what extent they are mistaken, and 3) to what extent there is a correct answer as to whether the statement is right or wrong. By comparing participants’ meta-ethical beliefs between the cooperation and competition conditions, we will see whether the motivation to get along with others leads participants to adopt a more subjectivist (i.e. less objectivist) view of morality, when they find themselves in disagreement. We are also interested in exploring whether the extent to which participants thought they disagreed with the target overall and on each item may predict metaethical rating.

The data have two levels; level-1 (the within-cell level) contains the three meta-ethical ratings and one perceived consensus rating each participant makes for each of the 9 moral statements. Level-2 contains two crossed variables: item and person.

**Analysis plan**

We plan to conduct a cross-classified random effect analysis. To begin, we will calculate ICC and design effects to see whether random effects at both the item and person levels are needed in the analysis. We will also evaluate the assumptions for running linear mixed models-- namely, linearity (using marginal model plots), homoscedasticity, and normality (using residual plots).

Then, we plan to run a baseline model predicting a combined metaethical rating score using random intercepts for subject and item: metaethical\_ratings ~ (1|subject) + (1|item). Next, to determine which (if any) random slopes to include in the full model, we will compare models with random slopes for subject and item to see if they are significant. We will also use likelihood ratio tests to determine the fixed effects to include. We plan to test fixed effects for *condition* (cooperation vs. competition) and *perceived agreement*, both subject-level variables. We will finally calculate R^2 to determine effect sizes for each predictor and in total.

The data analytic scripts and supplemental materials for this project will be available at <https://github.com/jluo19/PSYC575FinalProject>.

**Supplemental Materials**

**Moral statements:**

Nine statements are selected from a list of 72 statements used in Theriault et al. (2017). The selected statements involve relatively low societal consensus as well as political relevance, so if two people disagree on them, they are unlikely to see each other as unreasonable. Below are the nine statements:

1.     It is unethical for businesses to promote sugary products to children.

2.     It is fine for doctors to accidentally kill a small number of patients per year.

3.     Private beaches are immoral, as everyone should be able to share the space.

4.     It is wrong to cheat when playing games such as Monopoly.

5.     Universal donors should be obligated to donate their blood.

6.     Sport fishing to kill and eat fish is barbaric and evil.

7.     Dog racing is harmful and exploitative to the dogs being raced.

8.     It is wrong to use animals as disposable space shuttle test pilots.

9.     It is unjust for businesses to allow apples to rot rather than giving them to the needy.

**Dataset**

*N* = 440, 354 of which passed the manipulation checks.

**Codebook**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Variable name** | **Variable meaning** | **Variable level** |
| *id* | De-identified id, unique for each participant | Subject-level |
| *Condition* | Experimental condition (cooperation & competition) | Subject-level |
| *statement* | Moral statement # (1-9) | Item-level |
| *consensus.ct* | Perceived consensus rating for each statement (absolute difference from midpoint (50); centered within participants). | Between-cell level |
| *extremity.ct* | Extremity of attitude on each moral statement (i.e. distance from midpoint (3.5), regardless of direction; centered within subjects) | Between-cell level |
| *affiliate\_ratings\_1* | “How much do you like your partner/opponent?” (raw score) | Subject-level |
| *affiliate\_ratings\_2* | “How much would you like your partner/opponent to succeed on the task?” (raw score) | Subject-level |
| *affiliate\_ratings\_6* | “How motivated would you be to get along with your partner/opponent?” (raw score) | Subject-level |
| *perceived\_agreement* | [manipulation check] “How much did your partner/opponent disagree or agree with you?” (1: completely disagree – 5: completely agree) | Subject-level |
| *reasonableness* | “How reasonable does your partner/opponent appear to you?” (1: not at all – 5: completely) | Subject-level |
| *reasonableness.ct* | Reasonableness judgment. Centered between subjects | Subject-level |
| *perceived\_poli\_1* | “What do you think your partner/opponent’s political orientation is?” (1: liberal – 5: conservative) | Subject-level |
| *political\_orien* | “What is your political orientation?” (1: conservative - 7: conservative) | Subject-level |
| *mutual\_agreement* | Does the participant agree with their target on each moral statement? (1: agree; 0: disagree) | Between-cell level |
| *rating\_type* | [Meta-ethical judgment] “To what extent is this statement about facts?” (1: not at all, 6: completely) | Between-cell level |
| *objectivism.rating* | [Meta-ethical judgment] Average of the three ratings above. | Between-cell level |
| *Demographics* | Age, gender, race, political orientation | Subject-level |

**Reference**

Theriault, J., Waytz, A., Heiphetz, L., & Young, L. (2017). Examining overlap in behavioral and neural representations of morals, facts, and preferences. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, *146*(11), 1586.