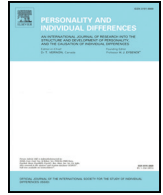




Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Personality and Individual Differences

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/paid

Linking longitudinal dynamics of justice sensitivity and moral disengagement[☆]

Simona Maltese^a, Anna Baumert^{b,*}

^a Department of Psychology, University of Koblenz-Landau, Fortstr. 7, 76829 Landau, Germany

^b Max-Planck Institute for Research on Collective Goods, Kurt-Schumacher Str. 10, 53113 Bonn, Germany

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 28 January 2017

Received in revised form 25 June 2017

Accepted 28 June 2017

Available online xxxx

Keywords:

Justice sensitivity

Perpetrator

Beneficiary

Moral self-regulation

Moral disengagement

Personality development

Longitudinal

ABSTRACT

Despite conceptual overlap between justice and morality, dispositional justice sensitivity (JS) has not been linked to processes of moral self-regulation. In a 1-year longitudinal study with four timepoints ($N = 515$) we tested how intra-individual changes in JS (from the perpetrator and beneficiary perspectives) and dispositional moral disengagement (MD) were associated. Both JS perspectives were negatively correlated with the inclination to use MD strategies at each timepoint. There was also correlated change. Intraindividual changes in perpetrator and beneficiary JS between T1 and T2 were negatively correlated to intraindividual change in dispositional MD between T1 and T2. Moreover, intraindividual changes in beneficiary JS between T2 and T3 predicted intraindividual changes in MD between T3 and T4. Results are consistent with the proposition that these JS perspectives reflect the strength of internalized justice standards that render MD strategies ineffective for avoiding negative self-reactions.

© 2016 Published by Elsevier Ltd.

1. Introduction

Individuals differ in their readiness to perceive injustice and in the strength of their emotional, cognitive, and behavioral reactions. Dispositional Justice Sensitivity (JS) has been differentiated according to the perspectives from which injustice can be experienced, as victim, observer, beneficiary, or perpetrator (Schmitt, Baumert, Gollwitzer, & Maes, 2010). Individuals who are sensitive to injustice from perpetrator, beneficiary, or observer perspectives have been found to act in accordance with justice principles and take other's concerns into account even under conditions when selfish behavior is tempting (e.g., Lotz, Schlösser, Cain, & Fetchenhauer, 2013). Individual differences in perpetrator, beneficiary, and observer JS have been hypothesized to capture the individual concern for justice and represent the psychological strength of justice standards (Baumert, Rothmund, Thomas, Gollwitzer, & Schmitt, 2013; Schmitt et al., 2010). Here, we focus on perpetrator and beneficiary perspectives because those are thought to involve the strength of guilt reactions to own deeds or outcomes. Distinguishing these perspectives, perpetrator sensitive individuals are thought to anticipate feeling guilty about their own potential wrongdoings, whereas beneficiary sensitive individuals feel guilty

about illegitimate advantages that they passively benefit from. Here, we investigated how these perspectives of JS are linked to processes of moral self-regulation in a longitudinal design.

Theories of moral agency spell out the psychological processes that determine moral behavior. Because moral and justice-related behavior have a large conceptual overlap (Baumert et al., 2013; Folger, Cropanzano, & Goldman, 2005), theories of moral agency can provide important insights into how JS shapes behavior. A key mechanism in moral agency is moral self-regulation (Bandura, 1991). We hypothesized that processes of moral self-regulation operate efficiently in perpetrator or beneficiary sensitive individuals, keeping their actions well in line with their internalized justice standards. For this reason, we expected a negative relation between perpetrator or beneficiary JS and dispositional moral disengagement (MD). The latter reflects the inclination to rely on psychological strategies that disable moral self-regulation, allowing the individual to violate his/her own moral standards without negative psychological consequences (Bandura, 1999). Particularly, we investigated how developmental dynamics in the two concepts are related to each other. We hypothesized that enduring changes in JS might precede changes in dispositional MD and tested (lagged) correlated change across four timepoints in young adults who were transitioning to university.

1.1. Moral self-regulation and moral disengagement

Moral self-regulation is thought to operate through self-monitoring, self-judgment, and self-reaction processes, which hold behavior in line with internalized moral standards. Bandura (1991) proposed that

[☆] This research was supported by a grant to the second author from the German Research Foundation, No. BA3883/4-1.

* Corresponding author at: Max-Planck Institute for Research on Collective Goods, Kurt-Schumacher Str. 10, 53113 Bonn, Germany.

E-mail addresses: maltese@uni-landau.de (S. Maltese), baumert@coll.mpg.de (A. Baumert).

individuals monitor their behavior and evaluate it in relation to their internalized moral standards. By anticipating or experiencing affective self-reactions (self-respect when moral standards are upheld; guilt or self-condemnation when moral standards are violated), Bandura (1991) hypothesized that individuals reinforce the self as a moral agent. However, Bandura (1999) also emphasized powerful psychological strategies that help individuals situationally disengage from their own moral standards. For example, positively reconstruing behavior, denying negative consequences, or blaming the victims of harmful actions serve to avoid self-sanctions that would otherwise follow immoral behavior.

Systematic interindividual differences in the inclination to apply such disengagement strategies have been observed, and people high in dispositional MD have been found to be self-oriented, less prone to guilt reactions, and less prosocial (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996). There is abundant evidence that high MD is associated with various kinds of antisocial behavior (e.g., Paciello, Fida, Tramontano, Lupinetti, & Caprara, 2008; Shulman, Cauffman, Piquero, & Fagan, 2011).

1.2. Justice sensitivity and moral disengagement

Because justice represents a core domain of morality, and, vice versa, a central aspect of justice involves the quality of agency (Baumert et al., 2013; Folger et al., 2005), it seems plausible that mechanisms of moral self-regulation could be involved in shaping justice-related reactions. Based on accumulating evidence that perpetrator and beneficiary sensitivity predict prosocial behavior, Schmitt et al. (2010) proposed that JS captures the strength of individual justice concerns. If this is the case, processes of moral self-regulation should be particularly efficient in high-JS persons. Strong internalized justice standards should make the application of MD strategies unlikely for two reasons. First, these strategies might not be sufficient to enable such people to subjectively live up to their high justice standards. For example, even when one's own responsibility for an injustice is low (i.e., under conditions of diffusion of responsibility), letting this injustice prevail might not satisfy a person's high internalized justice standards. Second, the utilization of MD strategies might itself become the subject of self-monitoring and thus a potential source of self-condemnation. For individuals with strong justice standards, these standards can be expected to play roles in more situations than for individuals with lower standards, and these standards might be applied more consistently to one's own behavior across situations (Aquino, Reed, Thau, & Freeman, 2007; Bandura, 1991).

Based on these arguments, we expected perpetrator and beneficiary sensitivity to be negatively associated with dispositional MD. More important, intraindividual changes in perpetrator or beneficiary sensitivity were expected to trigger (and thus precede) the opposite changes in dispositional MD. To gain insight into the intraindividual dynamics of JS and MD, we adopted a longitudinal design with four timepoints and investigated correlated and lagged correlated change.

This design allowed us to disentangle two possible accounts of a psychological association between JS and MD. JS might reflect the strength of justice standards that impede the application of moral disengagement strategies. Alternatively, instead of reflecting the strength of justice standards, beneficiary and perpetrator sensitivity might reflect a susceptibility to guilt reactions (Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007). Being prone to react with guilt to illegitimate advantages or to one's own wrongdoings could stem from the ineffective application of MD strategies. If this is the case, intraindividual changes in JS should follow from (and thus be preceded by) intraindividual changes in dispositional MD.

1.3. Development and change

Previous longitudinal studies found rank-order stabilities of the JS perspectives and MD between 0.40 and 0.65 across timespans of

6 weeks to 4 years (e.g., Baumert et al., 2014; Bondü, Hannuschke, Elsner, & Gollwitzer, 2016; Paciello et al., 2008; Schmitt, Gollwitzer, Maes, & Arbach, 2005). These results indicate that JS and MD can be considered personality dispositions. Additionally, these results highlight the possibility of substantial intraindividual changes in these dispositions across time. So far, we know only a little about the causes of changes in JS and MD.

Bondü and Elsner (2015) speculated that maturation and related increases in social-cognitive and moral skills that occur in childhood and adolescence could play critical roles in JS. It also seems likely that socialization through role models and institutional implementations of justice principles shape the strength of internalized justice concerns (Bandura, 1991). Throughout adulthood, and particularly in young adulthood (e.g., McAdams & Olson, 2010) intraindividual changes in JS might be triggered by life transitions and associated changes in social roles and the importance of values (Roberts, Wood, & Caspi, 2008). For example, certain career steps can bring along increased responsibilities for other persons that might make the possibility of one's own wrongdoings salient and particularly aversive (Toegel, Anand, & Kilduff, 2007). On the level of day-to-day experiences, it has been proposed that individual experiences of justice and injustice might have sensitizing effects (Bondü, Rothmund, & Gollwitzer, 2016). So far, longitudinal studies have mainly focused on the influences of changes in victim sensitivity (e.g., Bondü, Rothmund, et al., 2016).

For dispositional MD, a general decline in late adolescence has been observed and attributed to processes of maturation characterized by increased self-regulatory capacities. Furthermore, it has been argued that self-justifying mechanisms can become cognitive habits and subsequently increase the probability to misbehave over time (Paciello et al., 2008). However, this might be a lingering process because change is achieved through the gradual diminution of self-sanctions such that people do not fully recognize the changes they are going through (Bandura, 1991). Emphasizing the importance of role models and social learning processes, longitudinal studies of dispositional MD in adolescence have shown that deviant peers and experiences of violence and aggression predict increases in MD (Fagan & Tyler, 2005) and that adolescents' MD increasingly resembles that of their close friends (Caravita, Sijtsma, Rambaran, & Gini, 2014). Enduring changes in reinforcement patterns might also explain intraindividual changes in dispositional MD across adulthood, but longitudinal studies on dispositional MD have usually focused primarily on adolescence.

In sum, notwithstanding a certain degree of temporal stability, JS and MD are subject to intraindividual change across the lifespan, and developmental mechanisms are only partly understood.

1.4. Present research

Our study involved four timepoints across 1 year, spanning the transition to university. We deliberately invited participants who were about to start their first semester at university and scheduled the first assessment before the start of the semester. As research on personality development has shown, transitions are associated with mean-level personality changes and a substantial amount of interindividual differences in intraindividual change (e.g., McAdams & Olson, 2010; Specht et al., 2014).

Thus, we expected only medium-level rank-order stabilities in JS and MD and substantial interindividual differences in intraindividual change across the four timepoints. This design allowed us to test whether JS (perpetrator and beneficiary) would be negatively associated with dispositional MD at each timepoint (Hypothesis 1) and whether intraindividual changes in JS would be negatively associated with intraindividual changes in MD (Hypothesis 2). Most important, we tested for lagged correlated change and expected that intraindividual changes in JS would be followed by intraindividual changes in MD in the opposite direction after the next measurement occasion (Hypothesis 3).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/11016196>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/11016196>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)