The Moral Foundations taxonomy: Structural validity and relation to political ideology in Sweden

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ABSTRACT

Although Moral Foundations Theory claims that the foundations of morality are universal, there are still few studies addressing it through non-English measures. In the current research, 540 persons filled out a Swedish translation of the Moral Foundations Questionnaire, and 332 of them filled out political attitude measures. Confirmatory factor analyses suggested that the fit of the five-factor model was better than alternative models but not optimal, replicating previous findings. Concerns with fairness and prevention of harm predicted political identity leftward, mediated mainly by preference for equality, and concerns with loyalty, authority, and sanctity predicted political identity rightward, mediated mainly by resistance to change and system justification, as hypothesized. Fairness and authority concerns were the best predictors of political ideology.

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1. Introduction

Moral proclivities have recently been getting increased attention as individual difference constructs, within the domain of "characteristic adaptations" (McAdams & Pals, 2006) or "worldviews" (Nilsson, 2014). *Moral Foundations Theory* (MFT; Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009; Graham et al., 2013; Haidt & Joseph, 2004) is a particularly influential approach, based on the notion that moral psychology has traditionally been biased by a liberal, individualistic, Western perspective, conceiving of morality in terms of protection of the rights and welfare of individuals while ignoring the fact that people in non-Western or non-liberal contexts – perhaps the majority of humanity – tend to intuitively moralize also concerns with protecting the integrity of groups, social systems, and souls. According to this theory, intuitive moral judgments rest upon at least five distinct foundations: (1) *care/harm*, which involves caring for others and avoiding to inflict harm or suffering upon them, (2) *fairness/cheating*, which involves concerns about fairness, equality, justice, and the avoidance of cheating others, (3) *loyalty/betrayal*, which involves loyalty and other obligations to your in-group, and the avoidance of betrayal, (4) *authority/*

subversion, which involves conformity with the social order, through obedience, respect for authority, and traditional role fulfilment, and protection of the social order from subversion, and (5) *sanctity/degradation*, which involves concerns about physical and spiritual purity, including chastity, wholesomeness, suppression of desires, and the avoidance of contamination and degradation.

Graham et al. (2009) suggested that the former two foundations represent an "individualizing" form of morality, focused on the rights and welfare of individuals, and associated with political liberalism, whereas the latter three represent a "binding" form of morality, focused on strengthening groups and institutions and suppressing selfishness by binding individuals into roles and duties, and associated with political conservatism. The hypothesized association between moral foundations and political ideology has generated ample empirical support (Davies, Sibley, & Liu, 2014; Graham et al., 2011; Kim, Kang, & Yun, 2012; van Leeuwen & Park, 2009).

Another key tenet of Moral Foundations Theory is that the postulated foundations have a universal evolutionary basis, forming a "first draft" of a person's moral "taste buds", which is organized prior to experience but also, to some extent, modifiable by experience; it was originally based partly upon reviews of research on morality across cultures, from an anthropological perspective, and on phylogenetic precursors of human morality in primates, from an evolutionary perspective (Graham et al., 2013; Haidt & Joseph, 2004). The presumed universality of the

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moral foundations implies that it is crucial to investigate the extent to which the hypothesized factorial structure and relation to political ideology can be recovered in different cultures and languages. Indeed, Graham et al. (2013) "see MFT's current and future development being one of *method-theory co-evolution*, with theoretical constructs inspiring the creation of new ways to measure them, and data from the measurements guiding development of the theory". They are currently evaluating the potential inclusion of additional foundations within the moral foundations framework, but the original five-factor model has generated most research so far.

The five-factor model is today being cross-culturally evaluated through the *Moral Foundations Questionnaire.* This instrument was evaluated by Graham et al. (2011), who ran confirmatory factor analyses on data from samples of participants from many different parts of the world, who completed the English version of this scale through the yourmorals.org website. They found that the five-factor model had better fit than the individualizing-binding two-factor model and a three-factor model based on the Shweder, Much, Mahapatra, and Park (1997) distinction between ethics of autonomy (i.e. harm and fairness), community (i.e. loyalty and authority), and divinity (i.e. sanctity). Studies from Korea (Kim et al., 2012), Italy (Bobbio, Nencini, & Sarrica, 2011), Germany (Bowman, 2010), and New Zealand (Davies et al., 2014) have shown similar results. But model fit has typically fallen short of conventional criteria of fit, especially in the case of non-English versions of the scale.

Our purpose here is twofold. First, we contribute to the cross-cultural evaluation of moral foundations theory, by replicating the confirmatory factor analyses from Graham et al. (2011) and the correlation between moral intuitions and self-identified political ideology from "left" to "right" (cf. Van Leeuwen & Park, 2009), on a Swedish translation of the moral foundations questionnaire. Although Sweden is certainly at the liberal, Western end of the cultural spectrum, it is very different from, for example, the United States, in the sense that it has a long history of social-democrat rule and a political discourse defined mainly by opposition between social democrats and socialists (the left-wing) and social-liberals and libertarians (the right-wing), rather than liberalism versus conservatism. Sweden is perhaps the most secular and liberal country in the world, ranking as the most extreme of the advanced post-industrial democracies on the Inglehart and Welzel (2010) global cultural map. Indeed, one might wonder whether loyalty, authority, and sanctity matter at all to the left–right dimension in Sweden, which is defined mainly by attitudes to equality and free-market support (Cochrane & Nevitte, 2009; Nilsson & Jost, 2012).

Second, we test a new perspective on how moral intuitions shape political ideology, drawing on an influential framework introduced by Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, and Sulloway (2003), which divides political attitudes into resistance to change and preference for equality and postulates the need to justify the current system as a key force structuring the left–right continuum. We hypothesize that the effects of the individualizing foundations on left–right political identity are mediated primarily by preference for equality, because these foundations are concerned with the rights and welfare of individuals, and we hypothesize that the effects of the binding foundations on political identity are mediated primarily by resistance to change and system justification, because they are concerned with the protection of social, cultural, and religious systems. Similar to this, Federico, Weber, Ergun, and Hunt (2013) found that harm and fairness are aligned with social dominance orientation (SDO) and competitive-jungle beliefs and that loyalty, authority, and sanctity are aligned with right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) and dangerous-world beliefs. But SDO conflates preference for equality with group-based dominance and RWA conflates

resistance to change with patriotism, religiosity, and deference for authority. By focusing on resistance to change, preference for equality, and system justification per se we hope to further clarify the relationship between morality and political ideology.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants were 540 adults (mean age 24.0 years, SD = 4.6 years; 63.2% women) studying the social sciences, humanities, law, or engineering. A subset of 332 persons completed political attitude measures (mean age 23.7 years, SD = 3.5 years, 69.6% women).

2.2. Material

2.2.1. The Moral Foundations Questionnaire (Graham et al., 2009)

The Moral Foundations Questionnaire was translated into Swedish by a researcher and back-translated into English by a professional translator (freely available at www.moralfoundations.org). It measures each of the foundations with three items assessing the perceived relevance of moral concerns and three items assessing agreement with moral judgments. Participants respond to the relevance items on a Likert scale ranging from 0 (Not at all relevant) to 5 (Extremely relevant) and to the judgment items on a Likert scale ranging from 0 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). The latter response bar was substituted for a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree) for 207 of the participants; these responses were linearly transformed onto the 0–5 scale. Sample items include "Justice is the most important requirement for a society" (fairness) and "People should not do things that are disgusting, even if no one is harmed" (sanctity).

The lowest Cronbach alpha reliability estimates were obtained for harm, α = .57, which had two corrected item-total correlations lower than .3, and loyalty, α = .58, for which all three judgment items had corrected item-total correlations lower than .3 with the entire scale and lower than .2 with each other. Fairness, authority, and sanctity all had α = .66 and one corrected item-total correlation lower than .3.

2.2.2. Political ideology

We measured political identity ("Where would you place yourself on the following scale of political orientation?") on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Extremely left-wing) through 5 (Neither/neutral) to 9 (Extremely right-wing) (N = 540). Because few participants chose the extreme response options 1 (N = 6) and 9 (N = 2), we collapsed the 1 and 2 (N = 69) and the 8 and 9 response options (N = 9). We measured system justification with a Swedish translation (Nilsson & Jost, 2012) of the eight-item (e.g. "Society is set up so that people usually get what they deserve") system justification scale (Kay & Jost, 2003), which includes two reversed items, α = .83. We measured resistance to change with eleven items (e.g. "If you start changing things very much, you often end up making them worse"), including two reversed items, α = .75, and preference for equality with fifteen items (e.g. "Prosperous nations have a moral obligation to share some of their wealth with poor nations"), including six reversed items, α = .86, on the basis of previous attempts to isolate these components of ideology (Nilsson & Jost, 2012).

2.3. Statistical procedure

Structural equation modeling was run in AMOS 20.0. All calculations were based upon the covariance matrix and the maximum