

Morality in the Body: Perceived Heartbeat Shapes Moral Behavior

Chen-Bo Zhong

“His heart beat terribly... He concentrated all his energies on thinking of everything and forgetting nothing; and his heart kept beating and thumping so that he could hardly breathe.” In the novel *Crime and Punishment*, Dostoevsky (1866/1996) vividly portrayed the physiological experience of the protagonist Raskolnikov moments before a murder. A pounding heart is commonly experienced when people confront moral dilemmas. While existing research typically treats heartbeat as a peripheral symptom that accompanies cognition and behavior, we found that perceived heartbeats could directly influence moral behaviors by signaling moral values. Using the false feedback paradigm where we led participants to believe that they were listening to their own heartbeat, we found that participants listening to a faster heartbeat tended to refrain from unethical behaviors and engage in more ethical behaviors compared to those listening to a slower, normal heartbeat. Moreover, these effects seem to be weaker when people are mindful or approach the moral dilemma deliberately. We discuss the implications of these findings on the important roles (perceived) physiological experiences might play in moral regulation.

The Ergonomics of Dishonesty: The Effect of Incidental Posture on Stealing, Cheating, and Traffic Violations

Andy Yap, Abbie Wazlawek, Brian Lucas, Amy Cuddy, and **Dana R. Carney**

Research in environmental sciences has found that the ergonomic design of human-made environments influences thought, feeling and action. Here, we examine the impact of physical environments on dishonest behavior. Four studies tested whether certain bodily configurations—or postures—incidentally imposed by our environment lead to increases in dishonest behavior. The first three experiments found that individuals who engaged in expansive postures (either explicitly or inadvertently) were more likely to steal money, cheat on a test, and commit traffic violations in a driving simulation. Results suggested that participants’ self-reported sense of power mediated the link between postural expansiveness and dishonesty. Study 4 revealed that automobiles with more expansive driver’s seats were more likely to be illegally parked on New York City streets. Taken together, results suggest that: (1) environments that expand the body can inadvertently lead us to feel more powerful, and (2) these feelings of power can cause dishonest behavior.

Cleanliness and Moral Judgment: Assimilation and Contrast Effects

Simone Schnall, Oliver Genschow, and Elsa Loissel

Research on the influence of cleanliness on moral judgments has produced conflicting results: Whereas Schnall, Benton and Harvey (2008) showed that priming cleanliness led participants to consider certain moral actions as less wrong, Zhong, Strejcek and Sivanathan (2010) found the exact opposite. In other words, some studies showed an assimilation effect, whereas other studies showed a contrast effect. We suggest that the type of effect depends on the ambiguity of the judgment target, and the extremity of the cleanliness manipulation. Experiment 1 showed assimilation effects when cleanliness was primed through a moderate cleanliness manipulation and judgments were made for ambiguous targets, but contrast effects when the cleanliness prime was extreme and judgments were made for unambiguous targets. Experiment 2 further showed that becoming focally aware of an extreme cleanliness manipulation eliminates its effects on moral judgments. These findings suggest that embodied primes may guide judgment in the same manner as previously documented for semantic primes.

Can a Universal Metaphor Have Culture-Specific Effects? Moral Purity in a Face Culture

Spike W. S. Lee

Morality is associated with purity in numerous societies and languages. This association constitutes the "moral purity" conceptual metaphor that is widely assumed to be pancultural. A universally available construct, however, can still have culture-specific manifestations: we propose that the psychological consequences of moral purity should be sensitive to the bodily modality a culture chronically highlights in expressing sociomoral meanings. Testing this in a Face culture, we find that recalling one's immoral experience elicits the desire and behavioral tendency to clean one's face but not other modalities (Study 1). Indeed, face-cleaning curbs guilt-motivated behavior (Study 2); hands-cleaning does not. These findings reveal how culture matters even for presumably pancultural metaphors. Furthermore, they raise the possibility of a theoretical principle that underlies metaphorical effects such as moral purification and informs the ongoing debate between embodied and traditional models of cognition.