Summary
Social Dominance Orientation Veils Moral Standards Across Different Moral Foundations: Individual Differences in Moral Disengagement

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Which socio-cognitive processes are responsible for bystander apathy in moral violations of organizations? Former studies reinterpreted the Moral Disengagement Theory and showed that moral disengagement mechanisms can lead people to disengage from their moral standards when they witnessed a moral transgression (Grussendorf, McAlister, Sandstrom, Udd, & Morrison, 2002; Jackson & Gaertner, 2010; Jackson & Sparr, 2005; Leidner, Castanol, Zaiser, & Giner-Sorolla, 2010; McAlister, 2001; McAlister et al., 2006). A conclusion of these studies is that an increase in the awareness of moral disengagement may contribute to individual interventions for a mutual understanding of the opposite groups and for a sustainable democracy. The aim of the current study was to provide theoretical knowledge to contribute this awareness by identifying associations between individual differences and moral disengagement.

According to Bandura (1986, 1999), people refrain from moral violations to avoid blaming themselves. However, moral standards do not affect behavior unless self-sanctions are being activated, and there are some psychological processes that lead self-regulative sanctions (or moral respones) to disengage from detrimental behavior (Bandura, 1986; 1990a; 1999). Bandura (Bandura, 1986; 2004; Bandura, Underwood, & Fromson, 1975) categorized these processes (i.e., moral disengagement mechanisms) as reprehensible conduct (euphemistic language, moral justification, advantageous comparison), detrimental effects (minimizing the consequences of detrimental behavior), distorting the agentive relationship between actions and the effects they cause (diffusion of responsibility, displacement of responsibility), and victim (dehumanization, blaming the victim). Two gaps draw attention in moral disengagement studies. First, those studies have considered only one moral foundation (i.e., harm/care); and second, there are limited number of studies concerned with the relationships of moral disengagement with personal and situational variables.

The current study used Moral Foundations Theory for closing the first gap. Haidt and colleagues (Haidt & Joseph, 2004; Haidt & Graham, 2007, 2009) asserted that cultures build their moral systems on universal structures which they labeled as moral intuition systems or moral foundations (i.e., harm/care, justice/reciprocity, authority/respect, purity/sanctity and in-group/loyalty). A former study showed that not only perpetrators use moral disengagement mechanisms, but they can also be used by the witnesses of the moral violation (Yalçın, 2014). However, the question of "Are there any differences in the role of individual differences on moral disengagement across different moral foundations?" has not yet been answered.

This paper evaluated possible individual differences that affect moral disengagement to contribute for closing the second gap. Some researchers investigated this issue and showed that moral disengagement is associated with aggression tendency (Bandura et. al., 1996; 2001); empathy, moral identity, cynicism and locus of control (Detert, Treviño, & Sweitzer, 2008); authoritarianism and social dominance orientation (Jackson & Gaertner, 2010); and belief in a just world (Schlenker, Chambers, & Le, 2012). Because this study was about moral violations of the organizations, I preferred individual differences, which may be considered as crucial for political issues.

Previous studies found positive significant associations of moral disengagement with social dominance orientation (Costello & Hodson, 2009; Hodson & Costello, 2007; Jackson & Gaertner, 2010; Passini, 2008) and right wing authoritarianism (Jackson & Gaertner, 2010; Passini, 2008); and negative significant association of moral disengagement with importance of moral identity (Aquino et al., 2007; Detert et. al., 2008; Reed & Aquino, 2003). Researchers did not reach a consensus about the associations of moral disengagement with political ideology (Schlenker, 2008; Jackson & Gaertner, 2010) and

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religiosity (Hinrichs, Wang, Hinrichs, & Romero, 2012; Osofsky et. al., 2005; Vitell, Keith, & Mathur, 2011). Because previous moral foundation studies mostly showed that left-wing politics is related with harm/care and justice/reciprocity foundations, while right-wing politics, religiosity and social dominance orientation are related with authority/respect, purity/sanctity and in-group/loyalty (Graham et. al., 2009; Haidt & Hersh, 2001; McAdams, Albaugh, Farber, Daniels, Logan, & Olson, 2008; Haidt, Graham, & Joseph, 2009; McAdams et al., 2008; Haidt & Hersh, 2001), the current study investigated these associations in the context of moral violations that defined in different moral foundations.

Method

Participants

Five hundred and twelve (330 females, 158 males, 24 unstated) undergraduate students ranging from 17 to 35 years of age ($M = 21.49$, $SD = 2.08$) from Adnan Menderes University, Aydın participated in the study.

Measures

Scenario based scales (different versions for five moral foundations) for moral disengagement. Five scenario-based scales (Yalçın, 2014) were used to assess the extent to which the participants used the moral disengagement mechanisms in witnessing moral violations. The scales consist of scenarios about moral violations (torturing, dismissal without making a statement and compensation, slapping an old man in the face, disrespect to dead people, disrespect to own national flag) defined in different moral foundations (harm/care, justice/reciprocity, authority/respect, purity/sanctity and in-group/loyalty). The Justice/reciprocity, Harm/care, Purity/sanctity and Ingroup/loyalty scales have three factors each (i.e. Reprehensible Conduct, Obscuring the Agentive Role and Victim subscales). Cronbach's alpha coefficients indicated a satisfactory level of internal consistency and test-retest reliability coefficients indicated a temporal stability.

Social Dominance Orientation Scale. It is a seven-point Likert type self-report measure. Sidanius and Pratto (1999) developed the scale for measuring social dominance orientation. Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the scale was found as .66 to .92 across 14 countries for Sidanius and Pratto's (1999) study, .85 for Turkish version (Karaçanta, 2002) and .84 for the present study.

Right-Wing Authoritarianism Scale. Altemeyer (2006) developed this Likert type scale for measuring authoritarian submission, authoritarian aggression and conventionalism. Güldü (2010) adapted the scale for Turkey and found its Cronbach's alpha coefficient as .85. The current study found Cronbach's alpha coefficient as .86.

Religious Orientation Scale. Onay (2002) developed the scale for measuring cognition, emotion and behavior dimensions of the religious orientation. It is a Likert type scale. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was found as .83 for Onay's (2002) study and .90 for the current study.

The Self Importance of Moral Identity Scale. Aquino and Reed (2002) developed the scale to assess the extent to which the participants consider moral traits at the core of their self-concept. It has two subscales: Internalization (internalized moral identity) and Symbolization (symbolized moral identity). Aquino and Reed (2002) found Cronbach's alpha coefficients as .85 and .83 in two different samples. The current study found Cronbach's alpha coefficient as .63 for Internalization Subscale and .70 for Symbolization Subscale.

Political Ideology. Pariticipants were asked to state their political ideology on a nine point Likert type scale (*1 = Radical Right, 9 = Radical Left*).

Procedure

The questionnaires were applied to each student in classrooms. They were asked to read the informed consent form and to give their consent to the study. The participants were informed about the aim of the study after the application.

Results

Multivariate regression analyses were performed to examine whether individual differences (i.e. political ideology, social dominance orientation, religious orientation, internalized moral identity, and right-wing authoritarianism) predict moral disengagement across violations of each moral principle (i.e. moral disengagement in violations of the principles of harm/care, justice/reciprocity, authority/respect, purity/sanctity and in-group/loyalty). Gender was controlled for in the analysis.

Justice/Reciprocity. The results showed that individual differences explained 8% of the total variance in violation of justice/reciprocity principle. The contribution of predictors to moral disengagement scores in violation of justice/reciprocity principle was significant, $F_{5,320} = 5.05$, $p < .001$. Social dominance orientation ($\beta_{SDO} = 12$, $t = 2.12$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .27$, %95 $CI = [.00, .12]$, $sr^2 = .11$) and internalized moral identity ($\beta_{MI} = -.16$, $t = -2.96$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .07$, %95 $CI = [-.58, -.12]$, $sr^2 = -.16$) had significant contributions to the variance in the moral disengagement scores in violation of justice/reciprocity principle. Accordingly, an increase in the scores of social dominance orientation and a decrease in the scores of internalized moral identity were significantly associated with an increase in the moral disengagement scores in violation of justice/reciprocity principle.

Harm/Care. The results showed that individual differences explained 13% of the total variance in violation of harm/care principle. The contribution of predictors to moral disengagement scores in violation of harm/care principle was significant, $F_{5,313} = 10.24$, $p < .001$. Social dominance orientation ($\beta_{SDO} = .24$, $t = 4.40$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .21$, %95 $CI = [.07, .18]$, $sr^2 = .23$) and right-wing authoritarianism ($\beta_{RWO} = .16$, $t = 1.98$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .32$, %95 $CI = [.00, .10]$, $sr^2 = .10$) had significant contributions to the variance in the moral disengagement scores in violation of harm/care principle. Accordingly, an increase in the scores of social dominance orientation and an increase in the scores of right-wing authoritarianism were significantly associated with an increase in the moral disengagement scores in violation of harm/care principle.

Purity/Sanctity. The results showed that individual differences explained 8% of the total variance in violation of purity/sanctity principle. The contribution of predictors to moral disengagement scores in violation of justice/reciprocity principle was significant, $F_{5,319} = 4.72$, $p < .001$. Social dominance orientation ($\beta_{SDO} = .17$, $t = 2.97$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .24$, %95 $CI = [.03, .13]$, $sr^2 = .16$) and internalized moral identity ($\beta_{MI} = -.14$, $t = -2.50$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .08$, %95 $CI = [-.46, -.06]$, $sr^2 = -.13$) had significant contributions to the variance in the moral disengagement scores in violation of purity/sanctity principle. Accordingly, an increase in the scores of social dominance orientation and a decrease in the scores of internalized moral identity were significantly associated with an increase in the moral disengagement scores in violation of purity/sanctity principle.

Authority/Respect. The results showed that individual differences explained 21% of the total variance in violation of purity/sanctity principle. The contribution of predictors to moral disengagement scores in violation of authority/respect principle was significant, $F_{5,332} = 14.92$, $p < .001$. Political ideology ($\beta_{PI} = .21$, $t = 3.58$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .09$, %95 $CI = [.35, 1.20]$, $sr^2 = .17$), Social dominance orientation ($\beta_{SDO} = .22$, $t = 4.31$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .25$, %95 $CI = [.06, .15]$, $sr^2 = .21$) and internalized moral identity ($\beta_{MI} = -.12$, $t = -2.30$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .10$, %95 $CI = [-.41, -.03]$, $sr^2 = -.11$) had significant contributions to the variance in the moral disengagement scores in violation of authority/respect principle. Accordingly, an increase in the level of being a rightist, an increase in the scores of social dominance orientation and a decrease in the scores of internalized moral identity were significantly associated with an increase in the moral disengagement scores in violation of authority/respect principle.

Ingroup/Loyalty. The results showed that individual differences explained 5% of the total variance in violation of purity/sanctity principle. The contribution of predictors to moral disengagement scores in violation of justice/reciprocity principle was significant, $F_{5,322} = 15.44$, $p < .01$. Internalized moral identity ($\beta_{MI} = -.14$, $t = -2.59$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .10$, %95 $CI = [-.49, -.07]$, $sr^2 = -.14$) had significant contribution to the variance in the moral disengagement scores in violation of purity/sanctity principle. Accordingly, a decrease in the scores of internalized moral identity was significantly associated with an increase in the moral disengagement scores in violation of purity/sanctity principle.

Discussion

The current study examined the relationships between individual differences and moral disengagement across different moral foundations. The results showed that social dominance orientation and internalized moral identity are crucial variables that predict moral disengagement across moral violations of different moral principles. Individuals who had high scores on social dominance orientation continued to use moral disengagement mechanisms and individuals who had high scores on self-importance of moral identity-internalization continued to avoid moral disengagement mechanisms across the features of the moral violation. Preventive interventions to increase awareness of moral disengagement in witnessing moral violations and preventive programs of organizations about moral disengagement should especially take into account those two individual differences. Because of the lack of the similar studies, these findings should be supported by future studies. Besides, future studies should examine moral disengagement in witnessing moral violations in varied contexts. For instance, future studies that would investigate moral disengagement in the contexts of violence against women, intergroup conflicts or discrimination against minority groups can contribute to a better understanding of this phenomenon. In addition to that, future studies can contribute to theoretical and practical knowledge by examining other individual (e.g., values, self-construals, cognitive complexity, intolerance to uncertainty) and situational variables (e.g., characteristics of the subject and the object of the moral violation, mortality salience).