Assessing Moral Identity: Development and Validation of a Moral Identity Q-Sort

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Method and Reliabilities

Participants: 71 undergraduates from the University of Notre Dame

Discussion

The Moral Q-Sort is a new technique that aims to assess one's moral personality. Participants sort moral and amoral words with respect to how well the words describe the participants: “Never,” “Almost Never,” “Sometimes,” “Almost Always,” and “Always.” Each category had a set number of traits allowed, to force participants to decide which of the traits were truly descriptive. Traits were from four different categories with 13 words each: positive and negative moral words, and positive and negative amoral words. Participants were given points according to their placement of the traits in each category, and scores were calculated.

Correlational Tests of Validity

**1.000**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q-Sort</th>
<th>Pearson Correlation (95% CI)</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>.452</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>.227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>.300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

In Kohlberg's model of moral behavior, only deliberate moral reasoning prompts moral action (Kohlberg, 1969; 1971). Blasi agrees that moral reasoning predicts moral action (1980), but he also considers a moral identity and commitment to a sense of personal integrity (1980). Rorty and Wong claim that a central moral identity is manifested in social interactions, one's systems of beliefs and desires, and directly in one's actions (1991). The Q-sort used in this study took into account Blasi's definition of a central moral identity.

Our study showed that participants with a higher moral identity score engaged in a more central moral identity, demonstrated a higher level of social well-being. They were also more likely to act pro-socially, instead of for personal gain. High moral identity scores also predicted volunteerism, which supports Rorty and Wong's correlation between centrality of moral identity and moral action.

This study also verified that integrity mediates the link between moral identity and moral action. A participant with a central moral identity was more committed to acting ethically. A commitment to ethical principles was indicative of a greater amount of moral action.

Future Directions

Based on the results of the study, we suggest two possible routes for future study. First, future studies should test the other “effects” of centrality suggested by Rorty and Wong (1991). For example, they suggest that centrality may influence child rearing and socialization, which we need for a longitudinal study of moral personality development. Centrality can influence stimulus salience to the parent, and thus research evaluate whether parents with a central moral identity are more likely to raise children with central moral identities.

Second, research should evaluate the relationships between the Q-sort and existing measures of moral identity. This could not be done in the current study to answer the research question, as the Q-sort was constructed to test these relationships. It would therefore be important to compare the Q-sort to other moral identity measures, if they were implemented at different time points.

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For more information: www.nd.edu/~dlapsle1