

Moral Decision-Making in the Context of Threat and Group Dynamics

Siya Asatkar, Pelin Cunningham-Erdogdu & William B. Swann Jr. Ph.D
Department of Psychology, University of Texas at Austin

Background

- Individuals categorize their social environment into in-groups and out-groups
- Social identity theory states that group memberships inform the self-concept — identity fusion is degree to which one feels enmeshed within a group
- Efforts to protect group may result in extreme, anti-social behaviors

Research Question

Do identity fusion and threat impact an individual's endorsement of immoral behavior against an outgroup?

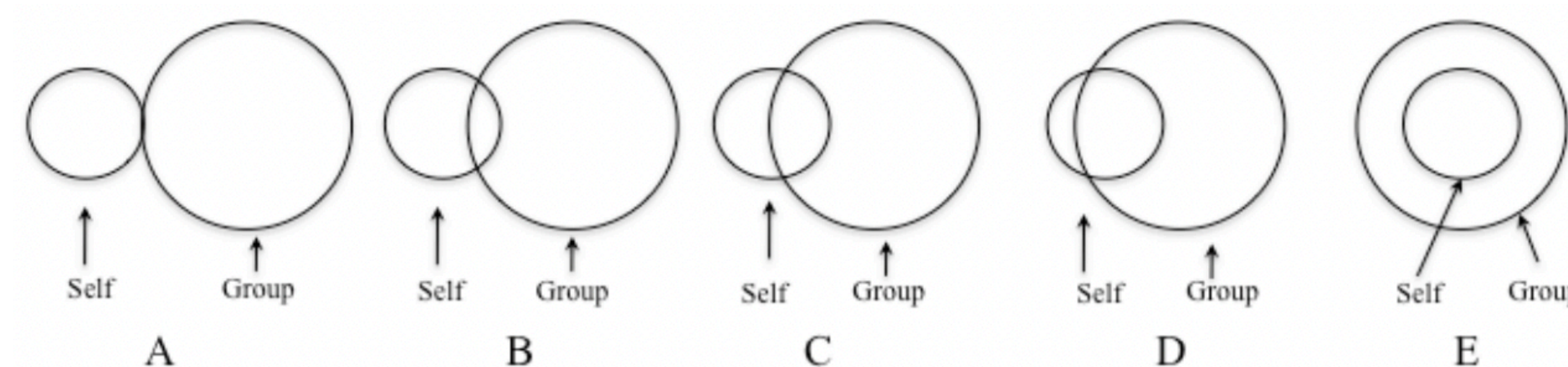
Hypothesis and Design Overview

- Threat to the well-being of an in-group and stronger identity fusion with one's chosen political party will result in the greater willingness of an in-group member to endorse immoral behavior towards members of the opposing political party
- Independent variables
 - threat (high, low)
 - Identity fusion
- Dependent variable
 - Moral behavior questionnaire scores

Methods

- Participants provide demographics information, indicate affiliation with either Republicans or Democrats
- Participants indicate fusion with chosen party using Pictorial Measure of Identity Fusion
- Participants in high threat condition read passage describing economic disaster in U.S.
 - participants in low threat read nothing
- Participants respond to 8-item moral behavior questionnaire (MQ) at end of survey

Pictorial Measure of Identity Fusion



Example Question from MQ

How supportive would you be of:
1. Preventing (Republicans/ Democrats) from working in any capacity?

Threat Passage Headline

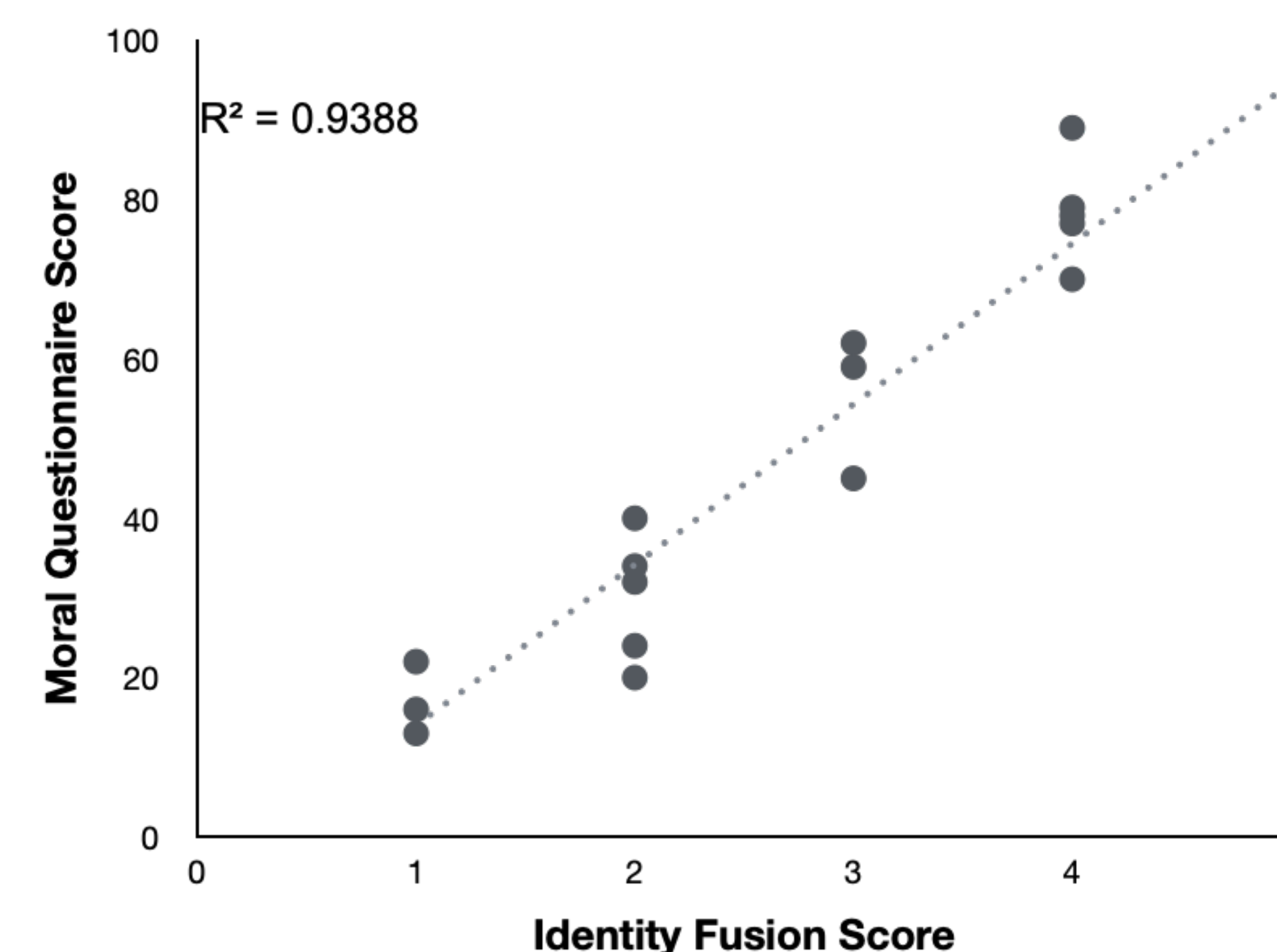
A Crisis Is Coming: All the ingredients are in place for a catastrophic economic and financial market crisis.

Participants

- recruited online through Amazon Mechanical Turk
- limited to American residents age 18 and above, must identify as either Republican or Democrat

Analysis and Expected Outcomes

- MQ scored out of 98 points to account for increasing severity of questions and 1-7 scale of endorsement
- Two-sample t-test to uncover significant differences between high and low threat conditions
- Pearson correlation to determine relationship between identity fusion and MQ score
- Secondary analyses will reveal party-specific differences between MQ scores and degrees of identity fusion, if any
 - Demographic variables such as educational attainment, income level etc. will also be analyzed
- Expected significant different in MQ scores between high and low threat conditions
- Expected positive, direct relationship between identity fusion and MQ scores



Summary

- Exposure to threat has a robust effect on willingness to act immorally towards out-group members
- Identity fusion predictor of group-protective behavior
- Participants may be hesitant to endorse the most extreme behaviors
- Visibility of moral decision-making to others has an impact on endorsement
 - future studies could examine visibility to outgroup members, or general public

References

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