Moral Decision-Making in the Context of Threat and Group Dynamics
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**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.
- Recruitment: recruited online through Amazon Mechanical Turk.
- Limited to American residents age 18 and above, must identify as either Republican or Democrat.

**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.
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**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 differences 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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