

Abstract

Moralization is suggested to incorporate two forms, moral recognition (i.e., starting to attach moral relevance to a particular issue), and moral amplification (i.e., increasing moral relevance attached to issues). As the Chinese government had been implementing mask mandates in the past three years of the COVID-19 pandemic, Chinese adolescents might have demonstrated both forms of moralization of mask-wearing. According to the Moral Foundation Theory (MFT), people mainly rely on six fundamental aspects of moral concerns (i.e., Care/harm, Fairness/cheating, Loyalty/betrayal, Authority/subversion, Sanctity/degradation, and Liberty/oppression) to make moral judgments. The current research investigated the relationship between reliance on different moral foundations and the moralization of mask-wearing during the COVID-19 pandemic. Moral recognition was measured by a domain classification task based on the social domain theory, and moral amplification was measured by the perceived wrongness of non-mask-wearing behaviors and participants' internalization of the importance to wear a mask in public areas. Results show that the correlations between reliance on the Liberty/oppression foundation and both forms of moralization were negative, while the Loyalty/betrayal foundation was positively associated with moralization. Furthermore, this study tested the relationship between participants' moralization of mask-wearing during the COVID-19 pandemic and their future willingness to wear a mask if other respiratory disease epidemics were to occur. Both forms of moralization (i.e., moral recognition and moral amplification) positively correlated with the future willingness of mask-wearing in an imagined respiratory disease outbreak.

Keywords: moralization, moral foundation theory, social domain theory, adolescent