

Ethical salience and justifications –

Compensatory and non-compensatory mechanism of justifications

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In a nutshell

Meta-analysis indicates participants tend to cheat by a little and to a similar extent for \$1, \$50 and “when stakes are increased 500-fold.” (Abeler et al., 2016, p.8).

We differentiate between the overall level of cheating, and its pattern. Even if the level of cheating is relatively stable (e.g. percentage) different justification mechanisms may be reflected in different patterns of cheating.

We consider here Compensatory vs. Non-compensatory justification patterns.

In a **compensatory** justification, people **use the incentives to justify** unethical behavior. Higher profit justifies unethicality, but lower profit does not. In a Top/Bottom die-roll game, this mechanism leads to a **monotonically increasing relation between incentives and cheating**.

In a **non-compensatory** justification, people use the rules of the game to justify unethical behavior and **are intentionally blind to incentives** to prove ‘it is the principle rather than the profit’. In a Top/Bottom die-roll game, this mechanism leads to a **step-like relation between incentives and cheating**.

We demonstrate that compensatory justification mechanism emerges when the threat to the self is moderate, but non-compensatory justification mechanism emerges when the threat to the self is more intense.

In Studies 1a and 1b participants recall their Mother or Father (moderate vs. more intense threat to the moral-self). Study 1a pretests the manipulation using the matrices task. Study 1b demonstrates the different patterns in a Top/Bottom die-roll game. We use the same game in Study 2a (silence and noise simulate a sense of anonymity or visibility, respectively) and in Study 2b (where Black&White vs. White&White contrast simulate ambiguity vs. clarity).

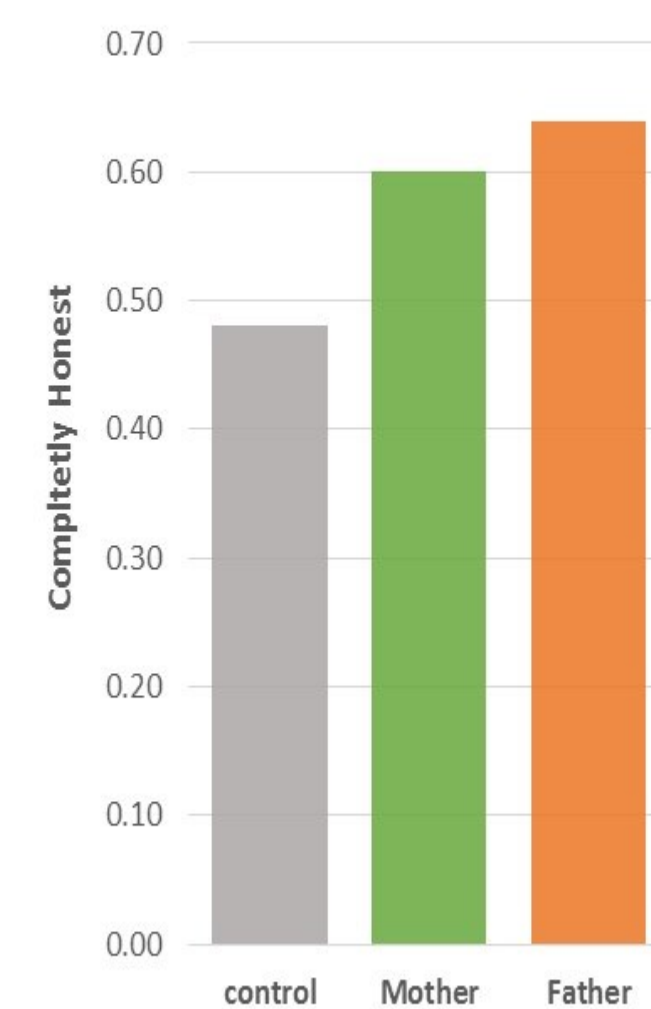
The findings generally support the notion between compensatory and non-compensatory justification patterns

OVERVIEW OF STUDIES

Characteristics of the studies

STUDY	CHOICETYPE	SUBJECT POOL	SAMPLE Size	Lab Study	Matrices Task	Top/Bottom roll-die	Parents as reminders	Physical contrast
1a	Incentive compatible	Undergrad students	205	●	●		●	
1b	Incentive compatible	Undergrad students	80	●		●	●	
2a	Incentive compatible	Undergrad students	104	●		●		●
2b	Incentive compatible	Undergrad students	104	●		●		●

Study 1a – Parents as moral reminders



Mother vs. Father

Participants completed a matrices task (Mazar et al., 2008) In two conditions, participants first closed their eyes and imagined their mother or their father looking directly at them.

A third condition did not include an imagination task.

Control 48% were completely honest.

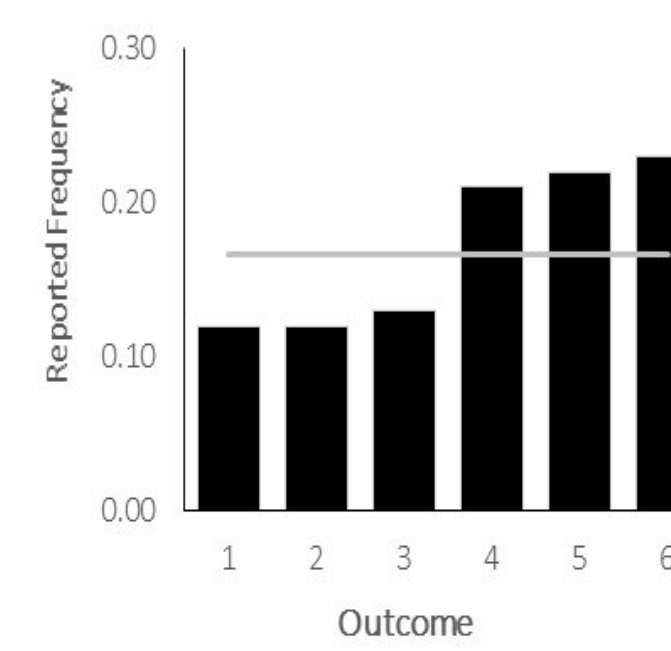
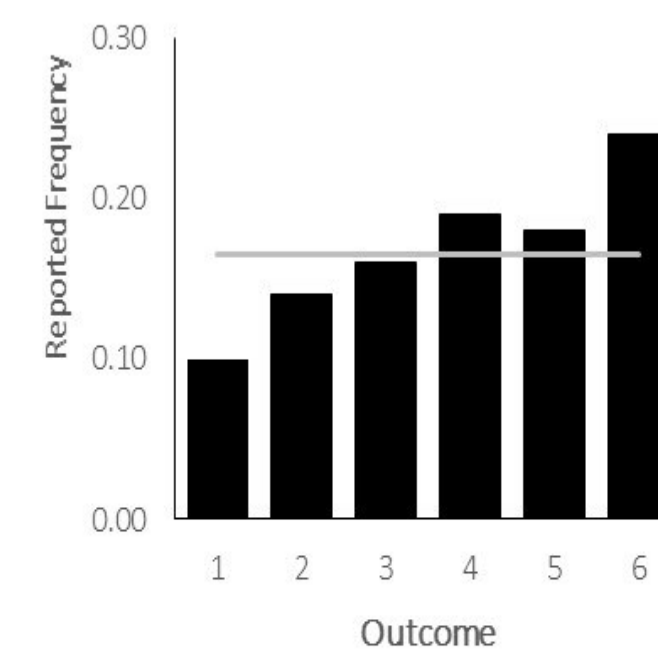
Mother 60% of were completely honest*

Father 64% were completely honest*

Imagining parents (i.e., primary moral agents) can trigger an internal threat to the self and curb cheating

Study 1b - Parents as moral reminders

Figure 1 - Relative frequency for each possible outcome of the die roll

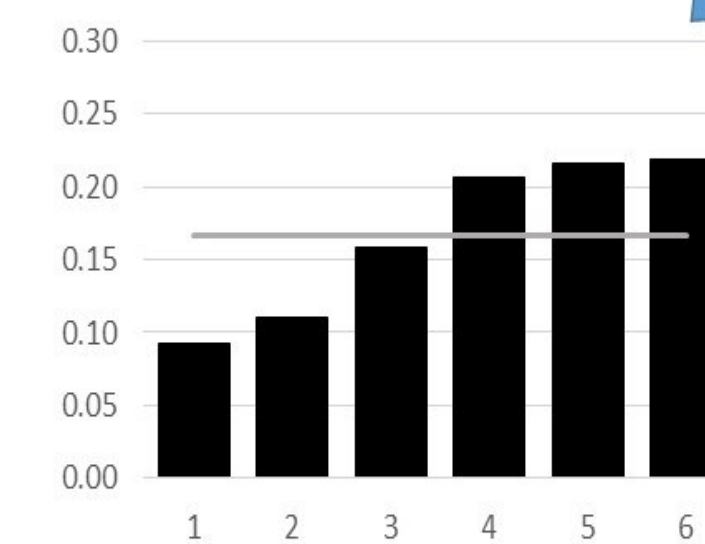
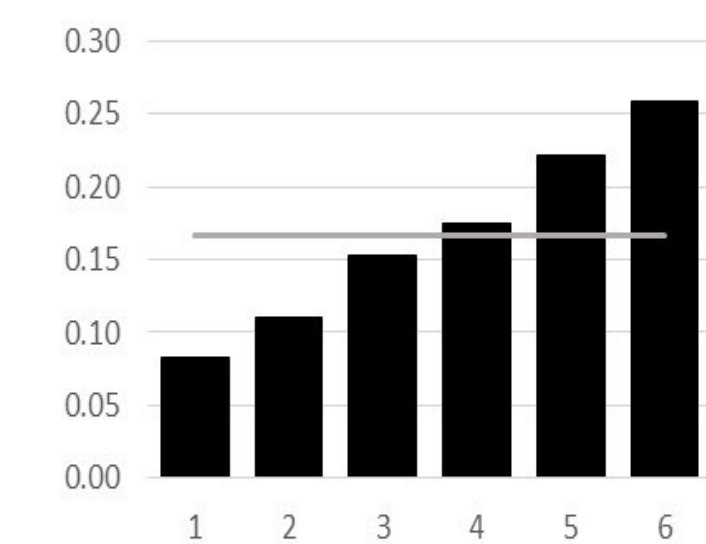


Mother vs. Father

Study 2a - Physical contrast - Auditory

Anonymity vs. Non Anonymity

Figure 2- Relative frequency for each possible outcome of the die roll.



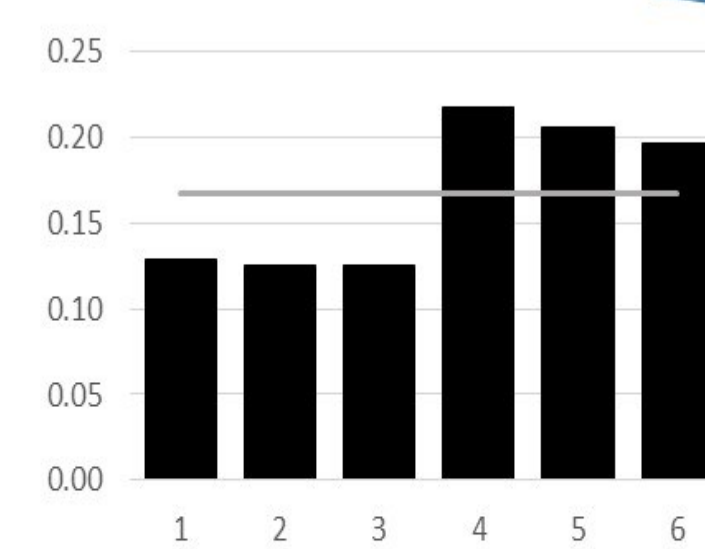
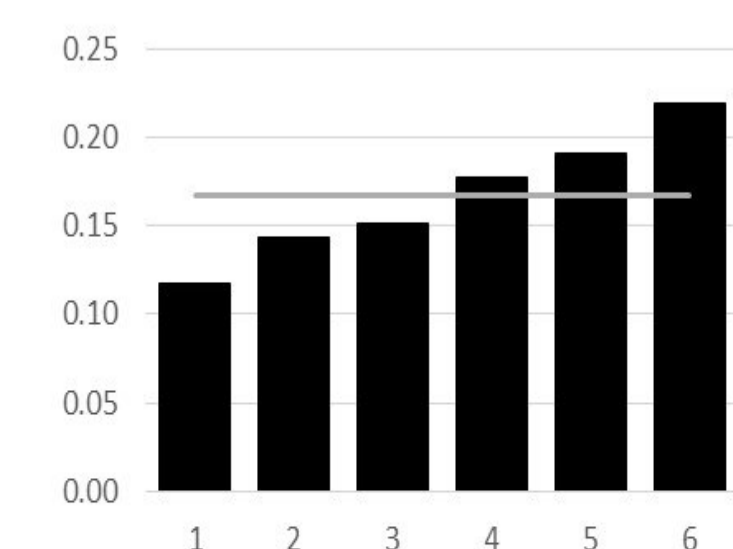
Silence vs. Noise

The left hand panel presents the observed proportions of each outcome under the Low contrast condition (quiet - anonymity) and the right hand panel presents the observed proportions of each outcome under the High contrast condition (noise – no anonymity). A horizontal line at the proportion 1/6 illustrates the expected uniform distribution

Study 2b - Physical contrast – Visual

Ambiguity vs. Clarity

Figure 3 - Relative frequency for each possible outcome of the die roll.



Black White White-White

The left hand panel presents the observed proportions of each outcome under the Low contrast condition (White & White) and the right hand panel presents the observed proportions of each outcome under the High contrast condition (Black & White). A horizontal line at the proportion 1/6 illustrates the expected uniform distribution

Linear regression analysis across Study 2a, 2b.

		Adj. R ²	SE	β	t	p-level	95% CI					
Model 1	Participant	-.002	.000	.000	-.016	.987	(.000, .000)					
	Study							.007	.001	.021	.983	(-.015, .013)
Model 2	Participant	.118	.000	-.004	-.074	.941	(.000, .000)					
	Study							.007	.001	.021	.983	(-.014, .012)
	Contrast*							.017	-.362	-2.689	.007	(-.082, -.012)
	Value*							.004	.232	4.177	.000	(.009, .026)
	Category							.007	.121	2.173	.030	(.003, .023)
Contrast x Value*	.004	.326	2.574	.010	(.002, .019)							
Contrast x Category*	.016	-.290	-2.290	.022	(-.071, .000)							
Contrast x Value x Category	.004	.170	1.340	.181	(-.004, .014)							

The findings demonstrate that compensatory justification patterns emerge when the threat to the moral self is milder, and non-compensatory justification pattern emerge when the threat to the moral self is more pronounced.