Do Associations Affect Who Gets Blamed?

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Introduction

• Blame and responsibility are ascribed to individuals who are directly or indirectly involved with harmful actions.1

• Parents often are blamed for the actions of their children, without being involved in the child’s actions. If a group is viewed as a single unit, then responsibility is placed on the whole group, even if the action is performed by one member.2

• Blame assignment moves from outcome-based assignment to intent-based assignment before adulthood.3

• Is there a difference in the amount of blame assigned to individuals, where both individuals are not involved in the harmful action, but one is associated with the harming agent while the other is not?

• There is a gap in the knowledge of group entitativity, and how intent and action of members in a group affects distribution of blame.

Research Question: Does the assignment of blame depend on one’s association with a blameworthy agent?

Two Theories of Blame Assignment and Their Predictions

+ blame assigned; -blame not assigned

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action and Intent Theory</th>
<th>Action, Intent, and Association Theory</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Association Intent Action (Chris)</td>
<td>+</td>
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<tr>
<td>Association Intent No Action (Sam)</td>
<td>+</td>
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<tr>
<td>Association No Intent No Action (Nick)</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>No Association No Intent No Action (Mike)</td>
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Method

Results

There was a significant difference in the blame assigned to different actors, F(1,19) = 559.153, p < 0.001. All follow-up pairwise t-tests were significant.

Discussion

1. The data support that association is a factor in assigning blame. Participants assigned significantly more blame to the actor who was simply associated with the harmful actor than the actor who was not associated with him.

2. As previous research has suggested, intent was an important factor in assigning blame as well. Participants assigned more blame to the actors who had harmful intent than to the actors who did not.

3. Previous literature is not consistent with association as a factor for blame assignment. That literature suggested that individuals are more likely to assign blame to an individual rather than a collective group, when individual actions and intentions are identified.6

4. Associated individuals who do not contribute intent or action can receive blame. Parents are blamed for the actions of their child. Association alone is enough to assign blame, as shown by the data.

Future Questions

1. Outcome-to-intent shift occurs between the ages of 5-8. Do 8 year old children assign blame similarly to adults? Do 5 year old children assign blame differently from adults?

2. Does the assignment of blame to group members depend on the group type (i.e., family, business, classmates)?

References

4 Ibid
5 Ibid