**MORAL CONCERNS THROUGH THE LENS OF CULTURE: RESPONDING TO THE
INTERGROUP-LEVEL AUTHORITY DECISIONS**

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Abstract

We consider cultural differences in how moral concerns can shape responses to intergroup-level authority decisions – that is, decisions that allocate outcomes between different groups. We hypothesised that at the individual level, moral foundations may predict how people respond to authority decisions that either favour or disfavour their group, and that this relationship would be different depending on culture. The extent to which those values lead to the expected responses to authority decisions was investigated in two samples of students in Northern Ireland and Malaysia (N = 318). Participants read about two government decisions to distribute prestigious internships between their own and another university (in favouring or disfavoured ratios) and responded to scales measuring their decision acceptance and perceptions of fairness. We found that moral concern for authority - but not loyalty or fairness - predicted how students responded to authority decisions. However, cultural context moderated this effect. For Malaysian students, higher moral concern for authority predicted less preference for the pro-ingroup authority decision, whereas for the Northern Irish sample, the reverse was true. Thus, we demonstrate that the understanding of values is culture-specific and can translate to the opposing behaviours, depending on the context.

Keywords: *moral values; authority; vertical collectivism; cultural orientation; intergroup; Malaysia; Northern Ireland*

Moral concerns through the lens of culture: Responding to the intergroup-level authority decisions

Governments often introduce policies which do not serve well for all groups in society. They may, for instance, increase their annual budget by raising taxes for high-earners to boost benefit entitlements for those in need. In such a case, while such trade-off can be deemed justifiable, some high-earners may be dissatisfied with the tax increase and lobby alongside other affected citizens. On the other hand, some may respect and accept this decision, recognising that it was made by a legitimate authority, even if it makes a disservice to one's own social group. The present research set out to explore how people respond to intergroup-level authority decisions. We tested whether individual's moral values, what people consider as morally right or wrong, can help explain reactions to authority decisions that are favouring or disfavouring the ingroup. Decisions that disfavour the ingroup are particularly troubling: sticking with what is good for one's own group by rejecting such decisions translates to actively disobeying the authority. We investigated how moral values, namely fairness, group loyalty, and respect for authority (Graham et al., 2011, 2012; Haidt, 2012), may guide people's reactions to intergroup-level authority decisions. Moreover, we argue that the cultural context in which values are expressed can further explain how these values may relate to behaviours by providing a contextual frame for the interpretation of values. Thus, the present paper contributes to the research on reactions to authority decisions by considering how cultural contexts may promote certain values and how these values, in turn, are linked to responding to the intergroup-level authority decisions.

Authorities such as the government or the police, yield direct power over citizens' behaviour (Turner, 2005). The extent to which they are effective often relies on citizens' voluntary deference; once the authorities are perceived as legitimate, people are more likely to comply with the law, even despite the physical absence of the authority to impose sanctions for disobeying (Tyler, 2006). Therefore, with legitimate authorities, there is an obligation to accept their decisions because of the belief that they appropriately and representatively serving their society. When the authority decision concerns a social group as a whole, however, members are more likely to consider the outcomes of the authority decision for the group in their responses to the decision (Leung, Tong, & Lind, 2007). Decisions that are favourable to the group are more readily accepted than those that are unfavourable

to the group. In intergroup contexts, authorities using excessive power are deemed as more unfair if they happen to their own group in comparison if they are directed at other groups (Radburn, Stott, Bradford, & Robinson, 2016). Therefore, decisions that favour one's own group are not only accepted more but are also judged as fairer, while decisions that disfavour the group are accepted less and perceived as less fair.

Authority decisions and moral values

Outcome favourability is not the only factor that guides groups' responses to authority decision. When concerning highly moralised issues such as abortion, people are more likely to accept decisions that are in line with their moral values (Bauman & Skitka, 2009; Skitka & Mullen, 2002), regardless of whether they concern their own social groups. Thus, values that individuals hold may predict how one would respond to an authority decision concerning multiple groups in the society. The moral foundations framework proposes that there are five evolved moral values that individuals deeply care about to varying extents: care/harm and fairness/cheating, loyalty/betrayal, authority/subversion, and sanctity/degradation (Graham et al., 2011, 2012; Haidt, 2012). In general, these moral values are capable of predicting individual attitudes from political preferences (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009; Haidt & Graham, 2007) to environmental attitudes (Feinberg & Willer, 2013), religiosity (Johnson et al., 2015), but they have been less systematically investigated in relation to the specific behaviours.

Assumedly, individuals who care about loyalty to their group will consider whether a decision is beneficial or harmful to one's group before accepting it. Moral concern for authority, on the other hand, may guide individuals to accept any decision that is made by someone seen to be in a position of authority because they deeply care about respecting them and by extension, their decisions. Finally, those who express a moral concern for fairness may use the overall fairness of the decision (such as outcome distributions) to determine whether they accept authority decisions. What is worth remarking about moral concerns for authority and loyalty is that they are the binding foundations; their aim is to preserve the traditions and goals of their groups. Therefore, both of them are often linked to negative outgroup attitudes if these outgroups threaten the collective wellbeing of the ingroup (Graham et al., 2012).

Connecting these values to specific behaviours, however, is rarely straightforward. Individuals may hold values which suggest distinct pathways for behaviour. For example, an employee who cares about justice as much as about loyalty may need to emphasise one value over another in the decision on whether to report a colleague's unethical behaviour (Waytz, Dungan, & Young, 2013). Similarly, value-behaviour link is highly context dependent (Bardi & Schwartz, 2003) and what is considered moral and normative may be driven by the cultural context in which these values exist (Hofstede, 1980; Vauclair et al., 2015; Vauclair & Fischer, 2011). How values are understood within their specific contexts therefore may have important implications for our understanding of responses to authority decisions.

Moral values across cultures

In cross-cultural research, the divergence between individualistic and collectivistic countries is frequently compared to understand human behaviour (Bond, 1994). Individualism is concerned with autonomy, personal development and the emphasis on 'I' (Hofstede, 2001) and the opposition to group norm conformity (Gelfand, Triandis, & Chan, 1996). At the other end of the spectrum, in collectivism, the self is viewed as a part of a group or collective, emphasising a strong bond with the group and deference to their norms (Bond & Smith, 1996; Hui & Triandis, 1986). Collectivistic countries are therefore characterised by interdependence and by concern with maintaining group harmony (Yuki, 2003).

Going beyond the traditional individualist-collectivistic distinction, a perspective incorporating another dimension, namely power distance, argues that vertical or horizontal structure within a society also matters (Shavitt, Torelli, & Riemer, 2010; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). The vertical dimension emphasises the hierarchical and inherently unequal in power nature of the groups, endorsing the importance of deterrence to authorities. In contrast, the horizontal orientation is concerned with social equality, egalitarianism, and co-habitation for all individuals and groups (Triandis, 1995). Thus, the cultural orientation framework draws four typologies of culture, expanding further on the traditional theory of individualism-collectivism (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). In the vertical individualist (VI) cultures (such as the UK), people strive competitively to gain relative status to others. In horizontal individualist (HI) cultures (such as Australia), independence is promoted but

not at the cost of equality. In the horizontal collectivistic cultures (HC; such as Israeli kibbutz), interdependence and intergroup equality are both emphasised, whereas in the VC (such as Malaysia; MY) people are interdependent, but also highly hierarchical in their structure. Given our interest in the relations with authorities, we employ this framework in the present study to understand the nature of cultural context in which values may exist in.

What is considered moral is clearly linked to one's cultural upbringing and differences between cultures exist. Contrasting teachings of Confucianism with the Western education highlights that being brought up in those respective cultures shapes reactions to immorality, for example, feelings of shame are more adaptive and accepted in East Asia than in Western societies (Bedford & Hwang, 2003). In terms of moral foundations, Graham et al. (2011) found that Eastern countries (typically more collectivistic) care about loyalty to the ingroup more than their Western counterparts (who tend to be more individualistic). Differences in fairness and authority, however, were very small if any. The latter is somewhat surprising given the evidence that vertical cultures are characterised by submission to authority (Kemmelmeyer et al., 2003; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). Thus, despite vertical countries exhibiting submission to authority in terms of their behaviour, this may not be evident in their value expression, highlighting the bridge between behaviour and values. Despite this, we are not aware of any empirical evidence that consistently addressed both values and behaviours in relation to obeying authorities across cultures. Importantly, these values are not only emphasised at different levels across cultures, but the same value may be associated with different behaviours altogether. For example, although authoritarianism is related to outgroup prejudice in Western countries, higher level of authoritarianism is associated with *more positive* intergroup relations in Singapore, a country whereby multiculturalism is promoted by the government (Roets, Au, & Van Hiel, 2015). In this way, cultures do not only promote specific types of values, but these values may be linked to behaviours in unique ways. As such, the present research conceptualises values as formed, learnt, and expressed through a cultural lens, opening the opportunities for values to be enacted upon distinctly in the cultural frameworks they exist in.

Based on Triandis and Gelfand's (1998) cultural orientations, it becomes clear that VC makes an interesting case for understanding how groups respond to authority decisions. In this context, the

two values tied to the culture, collectivism and hierarchy, may suggest different outcomes while responding to authority decisions that are not beneficial to the group. On one hand, sacrificing for the good of the group is a salient feature of this culture (Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk, & Gelfand, 1995) and the behaviour is motivated by the goals and values that are shared with the broader collective (Triandis, 1988), meaning that there would be an expectation to accept or reject authority decisions based on whether the outcomes are favourable to the group or not. On the other hand, given the structure of vertical societies, authorities are a prominent feature of the hierarchy and conformity is emphasised (Soh & Leong, 2002), which be related to accept the authority decisions regardless of their outcome. Triandis and Gelfand (1998) noted that in the VC, *'if in-group authorities want them [individuals] to act in ways that benefit the in-group but are extremely distasteful to them, they submit to the will of these authorities'* (p. 119). Therefore, VC creates a cultural context whereby disobeying authority decision is counter-normative. In responses to authority decisions, those brought up in the VC context may feel the pressure to agree with the authority; by disobeying authorities, they actively undermine the social power of authorities, which can have a detrimental effect on maintaining the power imbalances that are so fundamental to this culture.

Indeed, in vertical societies, individuals' reactions to the lack of voice provision by power-holders is not as strong as in societies that are more horizontal (van den Bos, Brockner, van den Oudenalder, Kamble, & Nasabi, 2013). In other words, it can be expected that in the vertical cultures, one is more likely to accept authority decisions even if they are made in an unfair way, because of the prominent role that the authorities hold. Vertical cultural orientation is also associated with authoritarianism (Kimmelmeier et al., 2003), or the notion that people must strictly submit to the authority and the conventional norms, even at the expense of political freedom (Altemeyer, 1998). Therefore, vertical societies may be more inclined than horizontal societies to obey the authority decisions.

However, it is not clear whether the same principle would apply if the authority decision was directly opposing the interests of the ingroup. Receiving beneficial outcomes from authorities clearly accomplishes some resource-based goals of the wider collective and thus, collectivists may be more likely than individualists to pursue those on behalf of the group. By the same virtue, they may also

disagree more with decisions that disfavour their group than those in the individualistic cultures.

Therefore, how groups respond to authority decisions may differ across cultures as norms regarding obeying the authorities may not be as prevalent in the individualistic cultures. Furthermore, the moral values that individuals hold may further interact with the cultural norms to affect the extent to which people accept or reject authority decisions.

The present study

The overarching aim of the study was to investigate how groups respond to intergroup-level authority decisions that are either favouring or disfavoursing their group in terms of the extent to which they think those decisions are fair and whether they accept these. Specifically, the study set out to establish how the culture and values interact to shape those responses to authority decisions. There were two goals. The first goal was to consider how people manage values that are not compatible in the context of VC orientation. To investigate this, the present study was set in Malaysia (MY) and a comparison individualistic country, namely Northern Ireland (NI)¹. VC orientation, associated with both higher loyalty and higher concern for authority, can theoretically be related to one of two outcomes in terms of participants' responses to authority decision (see Figure 1). First, as collectivism is more concerned with interdependence and belongingness to groups, authority decisions that favour the ingroup could be more likely to be accepted in the MY sample than the NI sample. In the same vein, it would be expected that decisions which disfavour the ingroup are more likely to be rejected by the MY sample than the NI sample (Hypothesis 1a, collectivism dominance). On the other hand, the importance of hierarchies for harmonious society in the VC makes authorities an essential puzzle piece in the social hierarchy. By disagreeing with authority decisions, such as those that disfavour own group, an individual undermines the authority's power. Therefore, the contrasting prediction is that if the vertical orientation is more prevalent within the VC than collectivism, there may be a pressure within the MY sample to reduce the potential consequences of rejecting authority decisions. This would lead to the MY sample agreeing with both favouring and disfavouring authority decision more than the NI sample and judging those decisions as fairer (Hypothesis 1b, vertical dominance).

¹ The decision to choose Northern Ireland was motivated by convenience.

[Figure 1 here]

The second goal was to test whether the values are expressed in the behaviours in similar or different ways across cultures. As a basis for this, we intended to compare the relative levels of moral concern across the two samples. Following Graham et al. (2011), we did not expect to find any sample differences in terms of moral concern for fairness (Hypothesis 2a) while for loyalty, it was expected that the MY sample would express higher concern for loyalty than in the NI sample because of the hypothesised prominence of VC in the MY sample (Hypothesis 2b). Moreover, in contrast with Graham et al. (2011), it was also expected that the MY sample would value authority more than the NI sample (Hypothesis 2c).

Further to this, moral concerns were theorised to be the driving mechanism behind differences in responses to authority decisions at the individual level. We expected that moral concern for fairness, loyalty, and authority will predict the extent to which ingroup favouring decisions are preferred over outgroup favouring ones. Because values are interpreted through the lens of culture, the relationship between those moral concerns and the responses to authority decisions may unfold differently across the cultures. While binding foundations of loyalty and authority may be related to higher preference for ingroup favouring decisions, what one value means in one cultural context may be understood qualitatively differently to the same value in another cultural context. As Roets et al. (2015) were among the first to challenge the notion that the same value across nations can only be linked to a behaviour in one direction, we decided to further examine this hypothesis in our research in the context of moral values. Thus, the relationship between moral values and the responses to authority decisions was formulated as being moderated by the country sample (fairness, loyalty, and authority as moderators; Hypotheses 3a-c) to assess these claims. These interactions, however, were exploratory in their nature and consequently, we did not predict their directions. Collectively, the present research aims to better understand how authorities can make decisions regarding social groups in more effective ways.

Methods

Participants

Participants ($N = 318$) were invited to take part as long as they were citizens of the country or indicated their ethnic background as either White in the NI sample or Asian in the MY sample.

Participants were students from a NI university ($n = 162$, 62% female) with a mean age of 21.91 ($SD = 5.70$) and from a MY university ($n = 156$, also 62% female) with a mean age of 20.22 ($SD = 2.04$).

Participants were recruited locally by the researchers at both universities. Two vouchers worth £20 were raffled as a participant prize².

Design and procedures³

The study employed a quasi-experimental 2 (Sample: MY vs NI, between-groups) x 2 (Decision favourability: ingroup favouring versus disfavouring; within-groups) design. The questionnaire was administered online in English and took 15 minutes to complete. Procedures were approved by the ethical committee at *Anonymous Institution*. All study materials are included in the online supplement.

Authority decision scenario. First, participants were presented with an article describing a student internship programme at a major multinational company in conjunction with national governments of each respective country. The announcement stated that 15 places will be offered to the ingroup and an outgroup university. Because there are only two universities in NI, the choice of the outgroup university was limited, but in choosing the outgroup university in MY, efforts were made to match their relative status. In both cases, the ingroup university was of a relatively higher status than the outgroup. Following the announcement of the scheme, attention checks were employed, but participants could go back to the previous page to re-read the scenario. Thus, no participants were excluded for failing the attention check.

Decision favourability manipulation. Next, we manipulated the outcome of the authority. The decision regarding the distribution of the internship places was made in either ingroup favourable or unfavourable manner while keeping the distribution ratio the same across both conditions. By doing so, the two decisions should have been judged as objectively unequal as thus, similarly (un)fair. In

² While it was our intention to make the data openly available, we told participants that the data will not be shared unless it was requested. Thus, to follow the ethical procedures, we are happy to provide the individual researchers with an access to the data as long as it is not shared online.

³ See supplementary materials for details of unreported measures.

ingroup favourable decision, participants were told that the government funded outgroup university for similar internships more in the previous year. To account for this disadvantage, the government decided to reserve then internships for the ingroup university and only 5 for the outgroup university. The ingroup unfavourable decision followed the same format, this time with five ingroup university students allowed to be accepted and 10 outgroup university students, this time the reason being ingroup university students are consistently more employable after graduation. The two decisions were presented in a random order and the potential effects of the presentation order were statistically controlled for in all the analyses.

Decision acceptance and perceived fairness. For each of the two decisions, participants responded to the two key outcome variables, namely decision acceptance and perceived fairness. To measure decision acceptance, participants responded to two items: ‘I accept the government decision’ and ‘I agree with the government decision’ on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*; $r = .85$). One item, ‘What do you think about the fairness of this decision?’ measured perceived fairness, also on a five-point scale (1 = *unfair*; 5 = *fair*).

Cultural orientation scale (COS). As we only include two countries in the present study, the cultural orientation of our samples was measured at individual-level only and was included to ensure that the MY sample fitted the VC profile. Triandis and Gelfand's (1998) scale was employed to measure participants' individual preference for the four dimensions of cultural orientation (HI, VI, HC, VC) by responding to 16 items, four per subscale. Participants responded on a scale ranging from 1 = *never or definitely/ no* and 9 = *always or definitely/yes*. All four subscales were internally reliable in the MY sample (HI $\alpha = .76$, VI $\alpha = .73$, HC $\alpha = .80$, VC $\alpha = .81$) and the NI sample (HI $\alpha = .78$, VI $\alpha = .77$, HC $\alpha = .84$, VC $\alpha = .71$).

Moral foundations questionnaire (Graham et al., 2011). Next, 18 subscale items measuring the moral values of ingroup/loyalty, authority/respect, fairness/reciprocity were completed by participants. Nine of these, three per moral concern, assessed to what extent people use these three moral concerns to assess whether something is morally right or wrong, e.g., ‘whether or not someone’s action showed love for his or her country’ (ingroup/loyalty item) or ‘whether or not someone was denied his or her rights’ (fairness/reciprocity item; 1 = *not at all relevant*; 6 = *extremely relevant*). For

the other nine items, participants were asked to judge statements such as ‘Respect for authority is something all children need to learn’ (authority/respect item). Thus, each moral concern was measured by six items; higher scores indicated a higher concern for the moral value. Internal consistency of these subscales was moderate to good in the MY sample (fairness $\alpha = .57$, loyalty $\alpha = .67$, authority $\alpha = .64$) and the NI sample (fairness $\alpha = .64$, loyalty $\alpha = .66$, authority $\alpha = .73$).

Results

Correlations across the two samples are reported in Table 1.

[Table 1 here]

Preliminary analyses⁴

Sample cultural orientation. The NI and MY samples were compared on dimensions of cultural orientation using independent samples t-tests (see Figure 2). The NI sample scored higher in HI ($M = 6.80$, $SD = 1.36$) than the MY sample ($M = 6.18$, $SD = 1.34$), $t(316) = 4.02$, $p < .001$, $d = .45$. On the other hand, the MY sample scored higher in VC ($M = 6.80$, $SD = 1.45$) than the NI sample ($M = 6.34$, $SD = 1.46$), $t(316) = 2.90$, $p = .005$, $d = .33$. The samples did not differ significantly on VI, $t(316) = 1.03$, $p = .305$, or HC orientations, $t(316) = .19$, $p = .853$. Thus, the MY sample fitted the VC orientation in line with our prediction, while the NI sample orientation was more in line with the HI rather than VI. For exploratory purposes, we also combined scores to create a vertical orientation (a mean of VI and VC) and a collectivist orientation (a mean of IC and VC) to compare these between samples. While the NI and MY samples did not differ in collectivist orientation, $t(316) = 1.66$, $p = .10$, but the MY sample expressed higher support for vertical orientation ($M = 5.90$, $SD = 1.08$) than the NI sample ($M = 5.57$, $SD = 1.15$), $t(318) = 2.61$, $p = .009$, $d = .29$. Thus, the vertical orientation appears to be the key cultural difference between the two samples in the present study.

[Figure 2 here]

Responses to authority decisions in MY and NI samples

To address hypotheses relating to the impact of culture on responses to authority decisions, a mixed ANCOVA with the country sample as a between-groups variable, decision favourability as a

⁴ We also checked that the internship was attractive for both student samples. Both scores were above the mid-point indicating the attractiveness and desirability of the scheme.

within-group variable, and order as a covariate was conducted to investigate perceptions of fairness and decision acceptance (see Figure 3). Decision favourability had a significant main effect on perceived fairness, $F(1, 314) = 6.57, p = .011, \eta_p^2 = .02$, with ingroup-favouring decisions ($M = 2.61, SD = 1.17$) perceived as more fair than disfavouring decisions ($M = 2.21, SD = 1.09$). Furthermore, the MY sample ($M = 2.56, SD = .94$) perceived both decisions, regardless of their favourability, as more fair than the NI sample ($M = 2.27, SD = .94$), $F(1, 314) = 7.33, p = .007, \eta_p^2 = .02$. However, Sample*Favourability interaction on perceived fairness was non-significant $F(1, 314) = .19, p = .667$.

Secondly, for perceived fairness, ingroup-favourable decisions ($M = 3.00, SD = 1.14$) were similarly perceived as more fair than ingroup unfavourable decisions ($M = 2.48, SD = 1.09$), $F(1, 314) = 27.32, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .08$. Furthermore, the MY sample ($M = 2.90, SD = .98$) accepted both decisions more than the NI sample ($M = 2.58, SD = .89$), $F(1, 314) = 9.78, p = .002, \eta_p^2 = .03$.

Sample*Favourability interaction on decision acceptance was also non-significant, $F(1, 314) = 2.30, p = .130$. Therefore, the findings support Hypothesis 1b, a prediction that the MY sample would accept authority decisions more than the NI sample, regardless of their outcomes.

[Figure 3 here]

The effects of moral values on responses to authority decisions

Next, a series of independent t-tests were conducted to evaluate sample differences (*Sample*) in moral values (*Fairness, Loyalty, Authority*; see Table 2). Contrary to Hypothesis 2a, the difference between the two samples in terms of moral concern for fairness was marginally significant, $t(316) = -1.99, p = .047, d = .22$, with the NI sample scoring higher on the moral concern for fairness than the MY sample. In line with Hypotheses 2b and 2c, however, the MY sample displayed greater moral concern for loyalty, $t(316) = 5.25, p < .001, d = .59$ and higher moral concern for authority than the NI sample, $t(316) = 4.56, p < .001, d = .51$. Thus, at group-level, the MY sample not only fitted the VC profile more than the NI sample, but they also were more morally concerned about loyalty and authority.

[Table 2 here]

For decision acceptance and perceived fairness, a score reflecting the difference between ingroup favouring and ingroup disfavouring decision was calculated to measure the extent to which

individuals preferred ingroup favouring decisions over ingroup disfavouring, eliminating individual-level differences. Consequently, a score of zero indicated appraising both decisions as the same in terms of perceived fairness and a positive score indicated appraising ingroup-favouring decision as more fair (i.e., a more ingroup-biased response; the same for decision acceptance variable). These variables are referred to as *relative decision acceptance* and *relative perceived fairness* respectively.

To investigate whether these moral concerns were related to relative perceived fairness and relative decision acceptance, they were entered into two separate ANCOVA models, with relative perceived fairness/relative decision acceptance as outcome variables respectively, the country sample as an independent variable and the three moral foundations as covariates, controlling for the effects of order. For relative perceived fairness, moral concern for fairness, $F(1, 308) = 6.86, p = .009, \eta_p^2 = .02$, and moral concern for authority, $F(1, 308) = 6.58, p = .011, \eta_p^2 = .02$, both had significant effects on relative perceived fairness (see Table 3). To check the direction of the effect, a multiple regression was conducted with all three moral concerns as predictor variables. In both cases, higher moral concern for authority, $\beta = .26, t = 3.33, p < .001$, and moral concern for fairness, $\beta = .11, t = 2.02, p = .044$, increased the appraisal of the ingroup-favouring decision as relatively more fair. Moral concern for loyalty did not affect relative perceived fairness, $F(1, 308) = 3.24, p = .073$.

For the second model predicting relative decision acceptance, there were no main effects of moral values on relative decision acceptance (see Table 3). This suggests that judgements of fairness may be more closely linked to individual's values than the relevant behaviour, decision acceptance in this case.

The interaction between moral concern for authority and culture on responses to authority decisions

Addressing Hypotheses 3a-c, the effect of moral concern for authority on the relative perceived fairness was qualified by the interaction with the sample, $F(1, 308) = 8.41, p = .004, \eta_p^2 = .03$. This was not the case for the Fairness*Sample or Loyalty*Sample interaction. The same pattern of interactions was also observed in relative decision acceptance model for Authority*Sample interaction, $F(1, 308) = 11.77, \eta_p^2 = .04$, but not the latter two interactions (see Table 3).

[Tables 3 here]

The Authority*Sample interactions were then probed using PROCESS Model 1 (Hayes, 2012) with moral concern for authority entered as an independent variable and country sample as a moderator of the relationship between moral concern for authority and both relative perceived fairness and relative decision acceptance in their respective models. The models, using bias-corrected bootstrapped ($n = 10,000$) confidence intervals (CI), also controlled for order effects. For relative perceived fairness, the overall model was statistically significant, explaining 4% of variance, $F(4, 312) = 3.46, p = .009$. Authority*Sample interaction, $b = .36, se = .16, p = .021, 95\% CI [.06, .67]$ was uncovered via simple slope analysis (see Figure 4). Moral concern for authority did not predict relative perceived fairness in MY sample, $b = -.01, se = .12, p = .988, 95\% CI [-.24, .24]$, but in the NI sample, higher moral concern for authority predicted perceptions of ingroup-favouring decision as relatively fairer, $b = .36, se = .10, p < .001, 95\% CI [.17, .56]$. Thus, higher moral concern for authority was associated with higher likelihood to perceive ingroup favouring decision as more fair in the NI sample, but not in the MY sample.

[Figure 4 here]

The overall model for relative decision acceptance was statistically significant, explaining 7% of variance, $F(4, 312) = 5.69, p < .001, R^2 = .07$. Moral concern for authority was a significant predictor of relative decision acceptance, $b = -.76, se = .25, 95\% CI [-1.27, -.25]$, which was further qualified by Authority*Sample interaction, $b = .52, se = .16, 95\% CI [.21, .83]$. Simple slope analysis indicated that in the MY sample, higher moral concern for authority was associated with lower relative preference for ingroup favouring decisions, $b = -.24, se = .12, p = .045, 95\% CI [-.48, -.01]$. In the NI sample, however, higher moral concern for authority had the opposite effect and increased the relative decision acceptance preference for ingroup favouring decisions, $b = .28, se = .10, p = .006, 95\% CI [.08, .47]$ (see Figure 5).

[Figure 5 here]

In summary, two moderation analyses found that in the NI sample, higher moral concern for authority was associated with higher preference for ingroup-favouring decisions as they perceived those decisions as fairer and accepted them more than those with low concern for authority. In the MY sample, however, higher moral concern for authority was related to decreased ingroup preference in

terms of decision acceptance (i.e., the behaviour), but it had no effect on the relative perceived fairness.

To probe this effect further, we carried out post hoc analyses for the four outcome variables separately (perceived fairness of ingroup favouring decisions, perceived fairness of ingroup disfavours decisions, decision acceptance of ingroup favouring decisions, and decision acceptance of ingroup disfavours decisions). While the details of the analyses for all four outcome variables are available in supplementary materials, we can ascertain that the interactions we reported above are particularly supported in the case of accepting ingroup disfavours decisions, whereby the interaction term observed was in line with the findings reported above, $b = -.60$, $se = .14$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[-.88, -.33]$, with the simple slopes in the same direction ($b = .32$, $se = .22$, $p = .004$, 95% CI $[-.10, .73]$ for the MY sample and $b = -.29$, $se = .09$, $p = .002$, 95% CI $[-.47, -.11]$ for the NI sample).

Discussion

The present study considered how cultural context may influence how people respond to authority decisions that favours or disfavours the ingroup at the expense of another group. There were two main findings. Firstly, consistently with the vertical dominance hypothesis (H1b), we found that the MY sample deemed all decisions, regardless of favourability, as more fair and also were more likely to accept those decisions than the NI sample. Even though the VC cultures are characterised by the interdependence on other groups, they are willing to accept the decisions of authority that may be against their group. Therefore, conformity and deference to authority appear to be determining their responses to authority decisions. Therefore, the patterns of responses among the MY sample suggest a suppression of collectivistic values whilst supporting authority power and maintaining the vertical dimensions of the culture. This is in line with the finding that VC is primarily linked to the values of conformity (Soh & Leong, 2002). As such, when the demands of authority and group are in competition, people in VC contexts may be more likely to follow the authority.

Our second main finding relates to the role of moral concerns (Graham et al., 2011, 2012; Haidt, 2012). Firstly, cultural differences in the relative importance of these moral foundations were observed, with MY sample considerably more concerned about loyalty and authority, in line with our predictions. This is consistent with the VC depiction of MY, whereby ingroup loyalty and prominence

of authorities is emphasised. Furthermore, in contrast to Graham et al. (2011), the results indicate a significantly higher moral concern for fairness among NI sample in comparison to the MY sample, although the magnitude of the effect was small. Importantly, however, moral concern for authority, although predicting the relative perceived fairness and the relative decision acceptance, had a significant interaction with the cultural context on influencing the behaviour. For the NI sample, higher moral concern for authorities was linked to higher likelihood to perceive ingroup favouring decisions as consistently fairer than outgroup favouring decisions. In other words, those with high moral regard for authorities tended to also respond to authorities' decisions in a way that prefers ingroup favouritism. Furthermore, the same pattern was observed when comparing NI students' responses to the decisions in terms of self-reported acceptance. Therefore, this resonated with the idea that the binding foundations such as moral concern for authority are typically associated with less positive attitudes to outgroups, while protecting the interests of the group (Graham et al., 2012). Thus, in this way, this desire for social stability and submission to authority may be linked with a preference for decisions that favour the ingroup, even at the cost of other outgroups.

However, for the MY sample, the effects of moral concern for authority on responses to authority decisions were closer to our prior theorisation. While the relative perceived fairness was not related to moral concern for authority, MY students that had a higher moral concern for authorities were less likely to exhibit a strong preference for ingroup favouring decisions over ingroup disfavouring ones. Thus, a moral concern for authority, in this context, could be argued to have reduced ingroup favouritism in responses to intergroup-level authority decisions, regardless of whether they perceived to be fair or not.

Implications

These findings are central to our current understanding of the interplay between values and behaviours as they show that the meanings of values are shaped by the cultural context. The data suggests that what it means for individuals to endorse the importance of authorities can be associated with more and less ingroup serving behaviours. Although the evidence presented in the current research cannot account for the mechanisms directly responsible for this, it is likely that the way culture shapes the meaning of such values is responsible for this effect. In other words, even when two

individuals from diverse cultures endorse the same value that obedience and respect to authority is essential, the cognitive representation of this value appears to be different. In the case of the MY, a multicultural nation, intergroup coexistence is specifically what the government promotes (Noor & Leong, 2013) through campaigns such as '1Malaysia', promoting ethnic harmony. Although our study did not concern ethnic groups directly, by holding a high regard for authorities, Malaysian citizens may extend the co-existence views in their everyday life, including the students in their own and other universities. Indeed, this is in line with the effects found in Singapore, another VC country, whereby higher authoritarianism was associated with more positive outgroup attitudes, while it is normally related to outgroup prejudice (Roets, Au, & Van Hiel, 2015). However, whether government policies are directly affecting people's responses to their decisions at intergroup level is a question that requires its own line of investigation.

The present research further contributes on the theorising in the domain of moral foundations by Graham and colleagues (2011). Despite the theory being validated across cultures, demonstrating their universality, these theorists admit the relative importance of each value can differ. Building on the previous research, which established variations in expressed values across countries and cultures (Bardi & Schwartz, 1996; Graham et al., 2011), we demonstrate that values can result in contrasting behaviours. This has important implications for interventions that aim to instil values as a way of promoting certain behaviours as caution needs to be taken when assuming that values such as moral concern to authority will not manifest in contrary behaviours. If the finding that increased moral concern for authorities is associated with individuals preferring authority decisions that serve their group replicates across other individualistic nations, it is important to consider whether governments want to promote a strong sense of moral values in authority. Serving all social groups equally is beyond the scope of the resources authorities may have access to. Thus, authority decisions concerning two or more groups will very likely, in some sense, pit social groups against each other. Consequently, endorsing moral concern for authority may bring further strain on the social systems that authorities represent if it is linked with increased preference for ingroup favouring decisions, even at the expense of the outgroups.

Thus, the present research makes a distinct contribution by demonstrating the importance of the cultural lens on understanding the relationship between moral concern for authority and responses to their decisions. Similarly, studying how social groups respond to authority decisions such as those made by the government has important political implications. Authority decisions that disfavour one's own group or favour other social groups, both of which can be perceived as unjust and unfair can result in protests and other forms of collective action (van Zomeren, Spears, Fischer, & Leach, 2004). While such disobedience with authority may be destructive for the social order, it can also have preventive qualities in cases of non-democratic governments which consistently favour some social groups over others (see Passini & Morselli, 2009 for the discussion on benefits of disobedience).

Limitations

Collectively, the present findings point to some novel processes in the expression of moral values across the cultures. However, the conclusions drawn in this research are limited to a direct comparison between two countries investigated in this research at the individual level. A more comprehensive account of such processes observed in countries with a range of cultural profiles is required in order to build a broad cross-cultural picture. Employing multi-level modelling would also be advantageous, whereby cultural and moral concerns are not only considered an individual-level variable, but also a country-level variable. Research suggests that intersubjective values or perceptions of which values are widespread in the culture can be more predictive of behaviour (Chiu, Gelfand, Yamagishi, Shteynberg, & Wan, 2010). It is the limitation of the present research that we did not consider these values at the cultural level. Nevertheless, the difficulty with conducting such intergroup-level research across multiple settings is ensuring that the groups across testing sites are closely matched and comparable. In the case of the present research, relying on university students was optimal in ensuring that the groups are of similar status and demographics. However, whether sacrifices at the collective level for other university students as opposed to more identity-central groups, such as one's ethnic community, can be comparable, is another question. Future research could study how intergroup-level authority decision scenarios concerning one's more fundamental identities may better link responses to authority decisions with moral values.

Notwithstanding, the present research used self-report responses to decisions as a way of tapping into the behaviour. Admittedly, these responses may not be completely compatible with the real behaviour, i.e. just because someone disagreed with authority decision, this does not mean that they would disobey the authority. People may not agree or accept authority decisions privately, but they may well indicate a level of agreement for the sake of avoiding the confrontation with the power-holder as they find authorities generally threatening (Braithwaite, 2003, 2010). Related to this point is that participants were aware that the decisions were hypothetical and thus, could anchor their responses to the second scenario based on their reaction to the first decision they were shown. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why moral concerns other than authority, such as loyalty and fairness did not systematically predict responses to authority decisions. In the defence of self-report, however, it signifies a concurrent reaction to an authority decision, so it is not subject to memory distortions such as in most of the studies which ask to report behaviours retrospectively. Future research should consider replicating the present results in a face-to-face authority scenario.

Conclusion

In sum, the present research sets an agenda for considering the link between the values and behaviour in light of culture. In other words, we present the relationship between authorities and groups as dynamic and informed by the context of the decision-making, as opposed to being based on the set of prescribed rules of what authority should or should not do to achieve compliance. We argue that the values of the society that authorities serve, whether they are cultural or reflective of people's moral concerns, can determine how one perceives fairness and, subsequently, respond to those decisions. Therefore, authorities must understand what is considered to be acceptable and morally right in order to be endorsed by the wider public (see also Jackson et al., 2012). Otherwise, these values can stand in a way of promoting harmonious relationships between authorities and the public they serve.

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Tables

Table 1

Zero-order correlations

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. PF (ingroup favouring)	—	.41***	.75***	.29***	-.07	-.02	-.01	.01	.05	.03	.13
2. PF (ingroup disfavouring)	.52***	—	.30***	.78***	-.08	-.09	-.02	-.02	-.03	-.08	-.18*
3. DA (ingroup favouring)	.75***	.44***	—	.39***	.02	.03	-.04	-.07	.05	.01	.00
4. DA (ingroup disfavouring)	.50***	.77***	.48***	—	-.06	.17*	.02	-.04	-.00	-.14	-.25**
5. HI	.10	.04	.09	.02	—	.16*	.06	-.10	.13	-.09	-.18*
6. VI	.17*	.01	.21**	.10	.27***	—	-.21**	.06	-.15	.09	.24**
7. HC	.02	-.03	.02	.04	.05	-.06	—	.38***	.19*	.15	.15
8. VC	-.07	-.05	.02	-.04	.06	.04	.42***	—	.02	.35***	.38***
9. Fairness	.02	-.13	.02	-.04	.18*	.14	.26***	.34***	—	-.01	-.12
10. Loyalty	.07	.07	.11	.14	-.03	.18*	.33***	.57***	.36***	—	.68***
11. Authority	.06	.06	.08	.23**	-.06	.10	.27***	.40***	.32***	.68***	—

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Values for the MY sample are below the diagonal and the NI sample values are above.

Table 2

Moral concern scores by sample with associated independent t-test statistics

Moral concern	Sample	N	M	SD	t	d
Fairness	MY	156	4.68	.63	-1.99*	-.22
	NI	162	4.82	.64		
Loyalty	MY	156	4.02	.78	5.25***	.59
	NI	162	3.55	.83		
Authority	MY	156	4.02	.76	4.54***	.51
	NI	162	3.59	.91		

Note: * $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$

Table 3

ANCOVA exploring the effects of target of sample (MY vs NI) on relative perceived fairness and relative decision acceptance along with the interactions qualified by moral concerns

Source	Relative perceived fairness		Relative decision acceptance	
	$F(1, 308)$	η_p^2	$F(1,308)$	η_p^2
Sample	1.02	<.01	3.40	<.01
Fairness moral concern	6.86**	.02	3.28	<.01
Loyalty moral concern	3.24	<.01	.12	<.01
Authority moral concern	6.58*	.02	.09	<.01
Sample*Fairness	.12	<.01	.02	<.01
Sample*Loyalty	1.31	<.01	.93	<.01
Sample*Authority	8.41**	.03	11.77***	.04
Order	.63	<.01	9.67**	.03

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. F value and the effect size are displayed.

Figures

Figure 1. Hypotheses 1a and 1b summarised.

Figure 2. Cultural orientation preferences in MY and NI samples. *Note:* The box represents the lower and upper quartile and the horizontal line denotes median. Outliers are marked with a dot.

Figure 3. Distribution of perceived fairness and decision acceptance scores in favouring and disfavoured decisions across the MY and NI samples. *Note:* The box represents the lower and upper quartile and the horizontal line denotes median. Outliers are marked with a dot.

Figure 4. Authority*Sample interaction on relative perceived fairness.

Figure 5. Authority*Sample interaction on relative decision acceptance.

Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4

Figure 5