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Authors

Majima, Yoshimasa

Nakamura, Hiroko

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Does tactile softness and hardness alter our acceptance of utilitarian judgment?

Yoshimasa Majima

Hokusei Gakuen University, Sapporo, Hokkaido, JAPAN

Hiroko Nakamura

Nagoya University, Nagoya, Aichi, Japan

Abstract: Present study examines the effect of incidental haptic sensations on acceptance of utilitarian judgment—seeking greater happiness in exchange for a few victims—under personal and impersonal moral dilemmas. Recently, Nakamura et al. (2014) indicated that physical coldness reduced empathic concern and facilitated utilitarian judgment in personal moral dilemma. It is also shown that tactile sensations such as softness and hardness affect our social judgment and empathic feeling to others. In this experiment, participants palmed either a soft cotton cushion or a hard iron tube while making moral judgments. Results showed that the hardness did not solely facilitate utilitarian judgment, however sex-tactile sensations interaction was modestly significant in personal dilemma. Specifically, males seemed to be more utilitarian while palming the iron tube. Results also showed that males were more utilitarian when they felt the sacrificed individuals were socially distant. Furthermore, contrary to expectation, high empathic feelings strengthened utilitarian judgment.