

Head and Heart Metaphors for Moral Decision Making: Conceptual or Communicative?

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Abstract & Introduction

Do you follow your head or your heart?

People who “self-locate” in the head tend to make more rational decisions than those who “self-locate” in the heart (Fetterman & Robinson, 2013).

We replicate this finding, suggest an alternative interpretation, and then extend it.

We manipulated the salience of the head/heart metaphors—by using them (a) in a single sentence, (b) a more elaborate paragraph, or (c) by emphasizing one in contrast to the other.

**Do people make decisions consistent with the metaphor they received?
Does it metaphor salience matter?**

Study 1: Replicate Prior Work

Fetterman & Robinson, 2013 (Study 5).

500 people from Amazon’s Mechanical Turk

1) “Irrespective of what you know about biology, which body part do you more closely associate with your self?” [Choose 1: Head OR Heart]

2) 5 moral dilemmas, for example:

In the novel and movie Sophie's Choice, a Polish woman, Sophie Zawistowska, is arrested by the Nazis and sent to the Auschwitz death camp. On arrival, she is "honored" for not being a Jew by being allowed a choice: One of her children will be spared the gas chamber if she chooses which one should be killed. If she does not choose, both of them will be killed.

- I would choose a child to be killed (Rational Response)
- I would NOT choose a child to be killed (Emotional Response)

3) Attention Check + Big Five Inventory

Study 2: Metaphor Framing

1) Identical to Study 1, except instead of choosing the body part people most associate with self, participants (1,000 people on Amazon’s Mechanical Turk) randomly received one of 2 metaphor frames (head/heart) at 1 of 3 salience conditions:

Low salience: instantiated metaphor only in the instructions

Next you will read short scenarios and should report what you would do if you were in them. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions. Just [follow your heart/use your head] to make the judgment that you think is right. Please read each carefully because you will be asked to answer other questions about them later.

Medium & High salience: passages that instantiated the metaphors more explicitly

Plato said that there are three parts of the soul. The first is our appetites or desires; the second is hot-blooded emotion; and the final is rational, conscious awareness. But these three parts of ourselves do not play equal roles in making us who we are. The [head/heart] is the most crucial for defining who we are. The [head/heart] is where we find our true self.

Medium salience continued

If we are to live a long and prosperous life, we must always listen to our [head/heart]. George Washington, Abe Lincoln, and Michelle Obama are just a few of the incredibly successful people who have followed Plato’s advice in never losing sight of the fact that their [head/heart] holds the key to who they truly are.

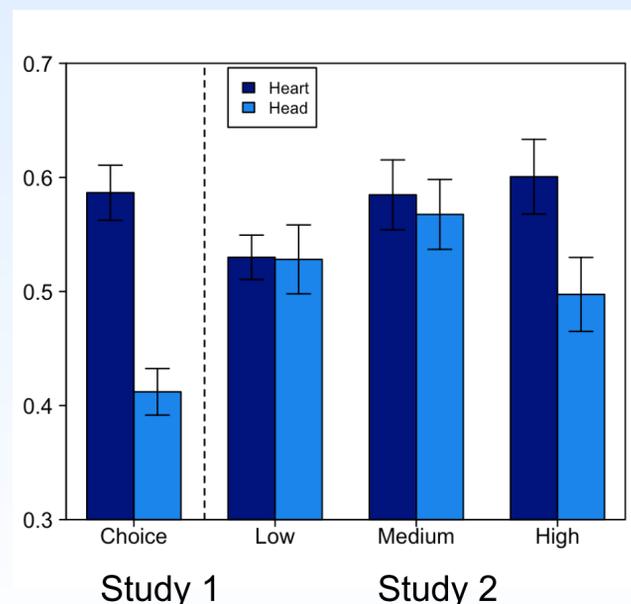
High salience contrasted the main metaphor with the alternative

If we are to live a long and prosperous life, we must always listen to our [head/heart, even if it conflicts with our heart/head]. George Washington, Abe Lincoln, and Michelle Obama are just a few of the incredibly successful people who have followed Plato’s advice in never losing sight of the fact that their [head/heart] holds the key to who they truly are, even if it means disregarding what their [heart/head] tells them.

2) Same 5 dilemmas as in Study 1

3) Attention Check + Big Five Inventory

Results



Head/Heart metaphors influenced decisions for moral dilemmas only when the main metaphor was explicitly contrasted with an alternative (high salience).

Figure 1. Proportion of dilemmas solved emotionally in Study 1 (choice) and in Study 2 by metaphor and salience conditions.

The same items (dilemmas 2, 4, 5) showed larger effects on decision making when people self-identified with a metaphor (Study 1) as when they were presented with one (Study 2, high salience).

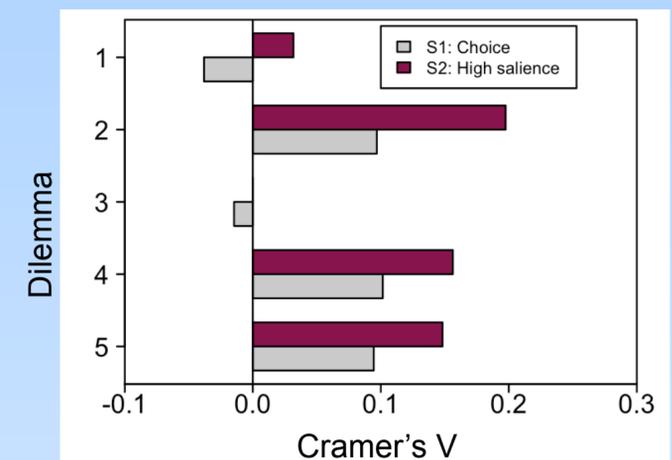


Figure 2. Effect size by item (moral dilemmas 1-5) for the metaphor choice task in Study 1 and in the high-salience condition of Study 2.

More positive Cramer’s V = more congruent responses (i.e. heart and emotional responding; head and rational responding).

Discussion

Explicitly contrasting metaphors may facilitate metaphorical reasoning.

Alternate explanation for Fetterman & Robinson, 2013: when participants chose the metaphor they self-identified with (head or heart) they were effectively comparing the two options → highlighted chosen metaphor’s entailments.

Explicit contrast may be a pragmatic signal to reader that a metaphor is being used deliberately.

Future work: What is the role of comparison in metaphor processing more generally?

Fetterman, A. K., & Robinson, M. D. (2013). Do you use your head or follow your heart? Self-location predicts personality, emotion, decision making, and performance. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 105*(2), 316–334.