Meritocracy and Socially Critical Decisions towards Low Status Groups

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4º Encontro ICS

LISBOA | UNIVERSIDADE DE LISBOA

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Socially Critical Decisions (SCD)

- Decisions about others that may imply serious harm or unequal distribution of relevant material or symbolic resources

- Usually taken under pressure (time pressure, dilemma)

Socially Critical Decisions (SCD)

<u>Examples</u>:

- Shoot vs. not shoot a suspect

- Medical diagnoses

- Moral dilemmas

- Legal decisions

What we know about SCD

- More unfavorable decisions towards Low Status (LS) group members

- Low status groups: blacks, gypsies/romani, immigrants, homeless

What we know about SCD

More unfavorable decisions towards low status groups

(In shooting decisions)

- Question: do we make the same shooting decisions towards White and Black suspects?

What we know about SCD

More unfavorable decisions towards low status groups

(In shooting decisions)

- Participants decide to shoot quicker and more frequently towards black suspects, comparing to white suspects in the same conditions (Correll et al., 2002)

Shooter bias

What we know about SCD

More unfavorable decisions towards low status groups

(In medical decisions)

- LS group members: prescribed fewer tests; receive less sophisticated treatment; quicker diagnosis for several health conditions (Smedley et al., 2002)
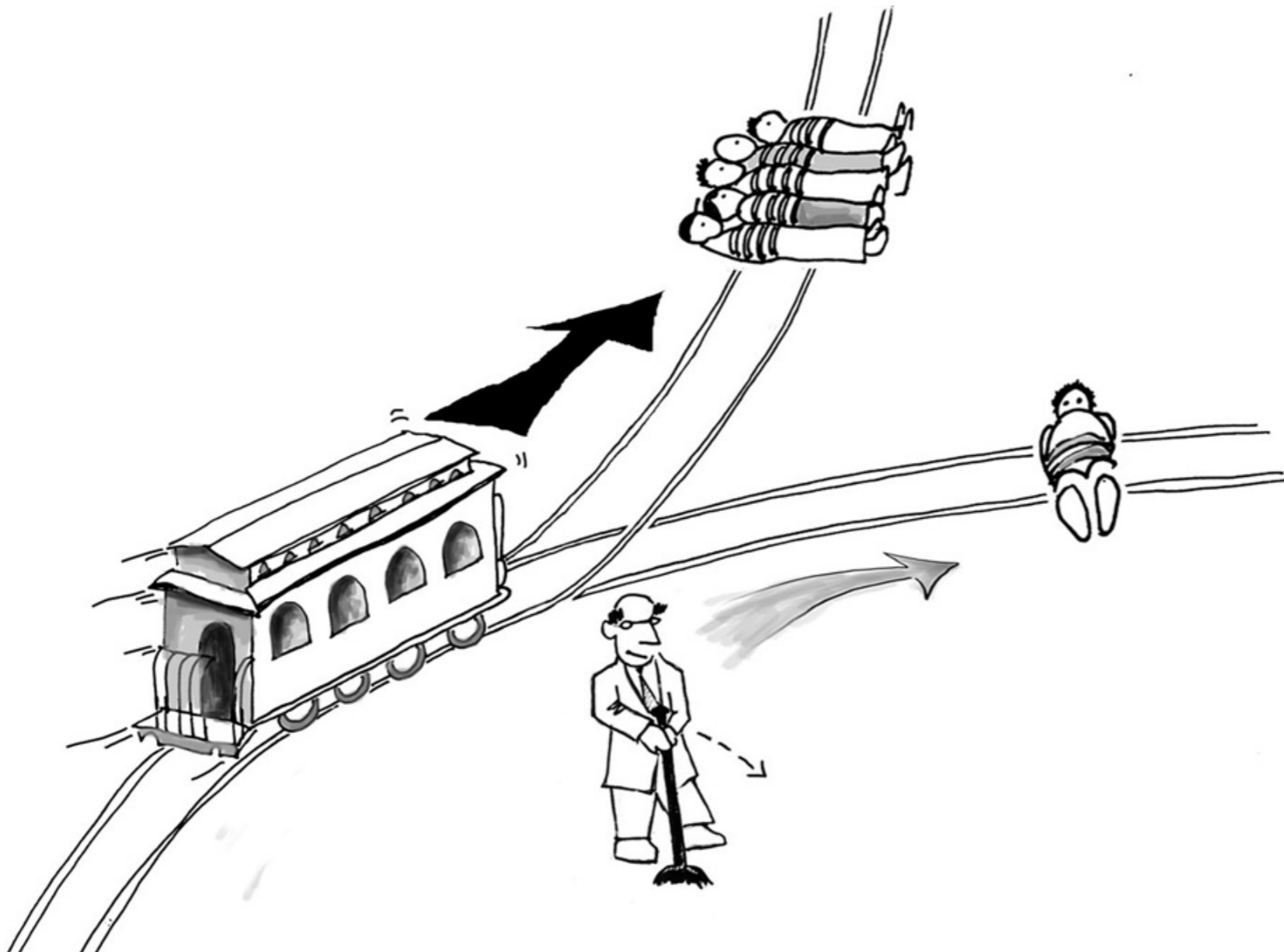
- Even when controlling for income and insurance policies

What we know about SCD

More unfavorable decisions towards low status groups

(In moral dilemmas)

- Trolley problem

What we know about SCD

More unfavorable decisions towards low status groups

(In moral dilemmas)

What we know about SCD

More unfavorable decisions towards low status groups

(In moral dilemmas)

- Trolley problem: Decisions that are unfavorable to the victims (i.e. willingness to sacrifice one victim to save five individuals) are more frequent when the victim belongs to a LS group (Cikara et al., 2010)

What we know about SCD

More unfavorable decisions towards low status groups

(In legal decisions)

- White participants give Black defendants longer sentences than to White defendants (Sweneey & Haney, 1992)

- Even when controlling for a variety of circumstances

Socially Critical Decisions (SCD)

- Research has been more focused in showing this group-based discrimination in SCD than in explaining it

- Research hasn't been considering the role of significant factors that have been shown to impact on these group-based distinctions (e.g. meritocracy)

Meritocracy

Social norm according to which social status and rewards should depend on individual effort and hard work (Kluegel & Smith, 1986)

"Our work, our passion"

"I don't believe in luck, I believe in a work well done"

Meritocracy and prejudice

Although meritocracy is an important norm that regulates society:

- Associated with higher justification of intergroup inequalities (Furnham, 1982; Mccoy & Major, 2007)

- Linked with explicit and implicit racial attitudes (Costa-Lopes et. al, 2017; Vala et al., 2004)

Neglected aspect in SCD research

Meritocracy and SCD

When meritocracy is made salient:

- Low status individuals are not seen as victims of a discriminatory system, but as responsible for their own negative situation (McCoy & Major, 2007)

In turn, this may lead to:

- Legitimized view of the LS groups' negative situation

- This legitimized status perception may lead to more prejudice, and finally to more unfavorable SCD towards low status groups

Research Goals:

- Test the impact of a meritocracy norm on SCD

- Analyze how this impact occurs (i.e. Find the mechanism)

- Test whether different types of decisions (different decisional contexts; snapshot vs. deliberate decisions)

Research Plan:

- 4 workpackages (one for each decisional context)

- Studies generically involve:

    a) Manipulation of the salience of meritocracy

    b) Measurement of SCD outcomes

    c) Measurement of potential mediators

What we've done so far:

- Shooting decisions – NADA!

- Medical decisions: several studies, good data

- Moral dilemmas: several studies, interesting data

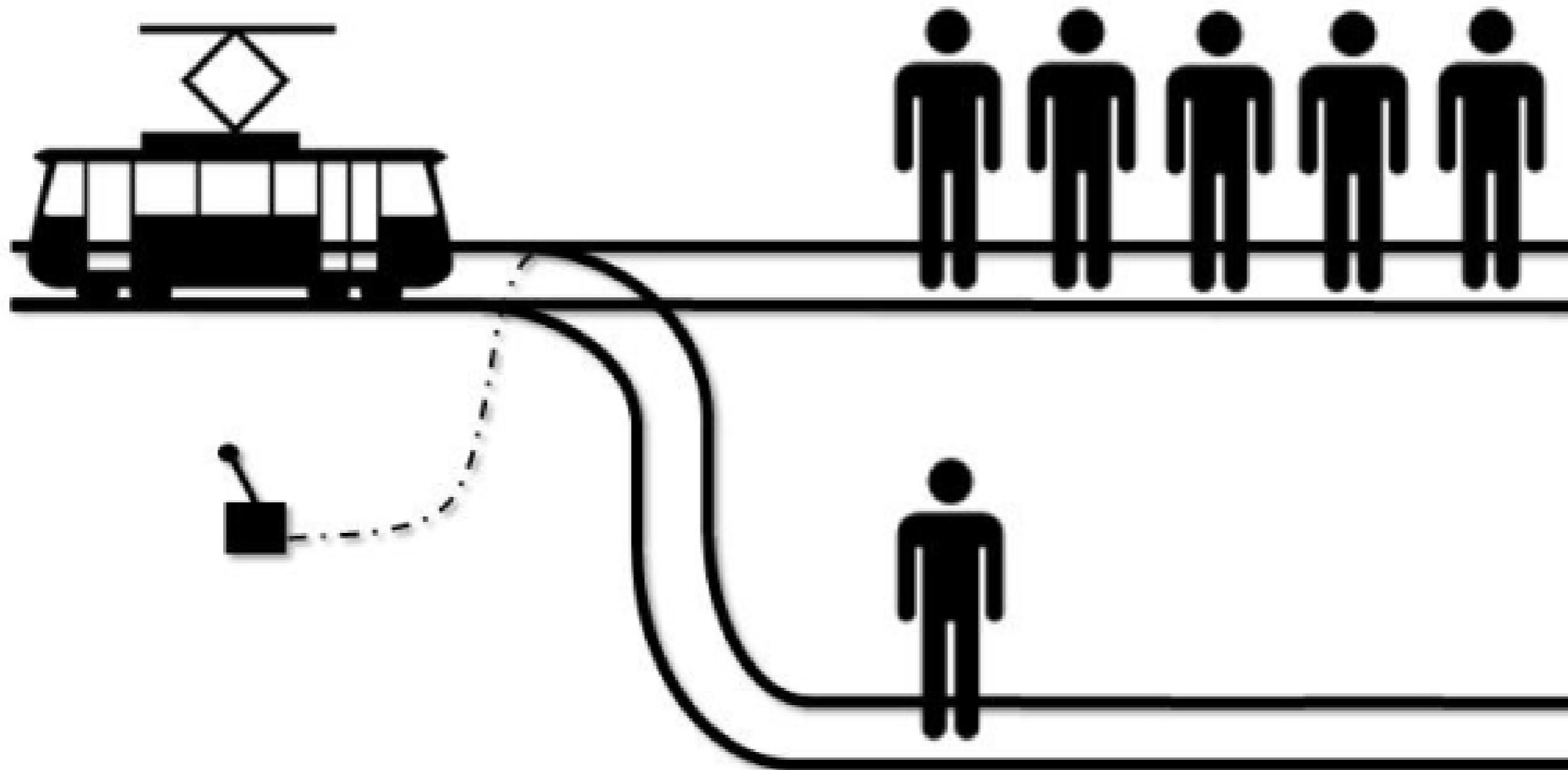- Legal decisions: awaiting FCT decision on call

A Study of the Moral Dilemmas Workpackage:

Procedure:

- Meritocracy manipulated through a *Scrambled Sentence Task*

- SCD measured as the acceptability of sacrifice within a trolley dilemma (How acceptable to pull the lever and sacrifice one to save five)

- Status of the victim manipulated with pictures
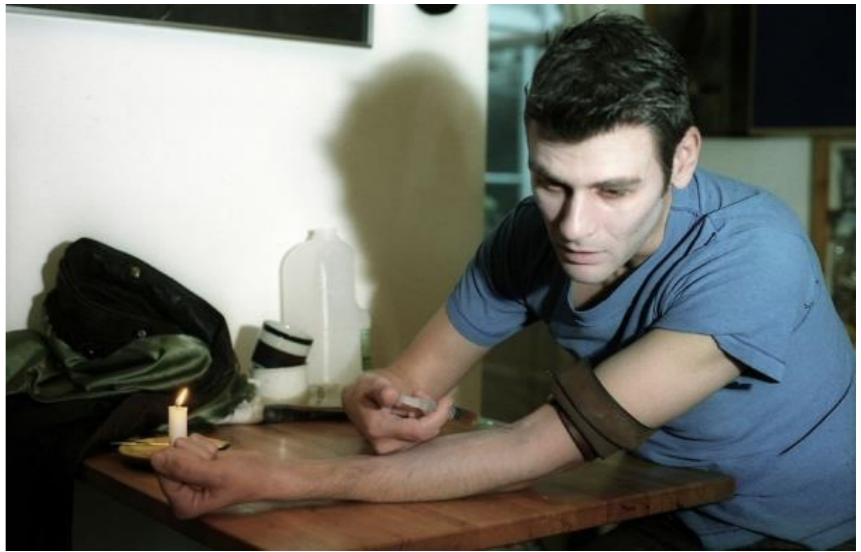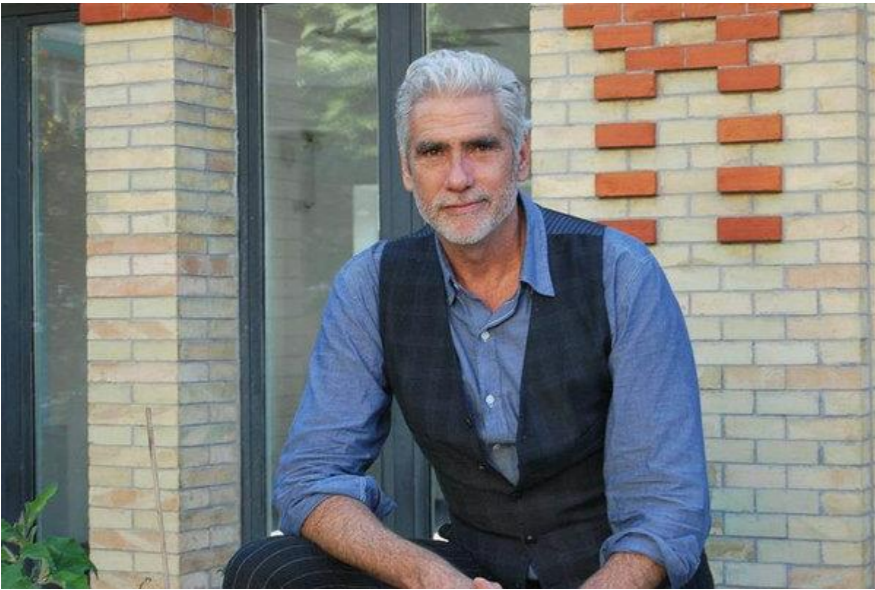
- Study conducted in the lab:

Uma carruagem descontrolada está a ir na direção de cinco homens que estão na linha de comboio. Se nada for feito, a carruagem vai matar esses cinco homens.

Existe uma alavanca que permite mudar a direção da carruagem para outra linha onde está um outro homem. Se a alavanca for acionada, salva-se a vida dos cinco homens na primeira linha, mas o homem na segunda linha irá morrer. A situação encontra-se esquematizada no desenho abaixo:

Abaixo pode ver a fotografia do homem na segunda linha.

Pics used

Results

	Meritocracy	Neutral
High status	6,25 (2,35)	5,9 (2,59)
Homeless	5,08 (2,11)	5,23 (1,79)
Drug addicts	6,23 (2,27)	5,09 (2,17)

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Manipulation of meritocracy

- 18 random sets of 5 words to transform in 18 logical 4-word sentences

men bike unsuccessful lazy are

Lazy men are unsuccessful   **Bike**

Salience of meritocracy

Neutral

10 sentences about Meritocracy

+

8 filler (neutral) sentences

18 neutral sentences