

Context Creates Compromise: How Contextual Information and Social Distance Affect Moral Judgment in Filipino Culture

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Morally ambiguous activities bear different moral impressions across contexts and cultures. 107 college students were presented with four different vignettes of a person getting intoxicated and then asked to answer a morality-rating scale pertaining to the heavy drinker. The vignettes differed in perceived social distance (the heavy drinker being a close friend versus a stranger) and contextual information (the person drinking because of the internal trait of sensation-seeking versus the external occurrences of peer influence). Results show that a heavy drinker was rated more moral when drinking due to an external occurrence of peer influence rather than an internal trait of sensation seeking ($p=.015$), and that there was no difference in moral judgment when the heavy drinker was a close friend or a stranger. Findings help shed light on the complex interplay of culture and context when examining moral judgment formation in a Filipino context.

: moral judgment, heavy drinking, contextual information, social distance, alcohol, social psychology, judgment formation, morality

studies, two localized factors were selected for manipulation: contextual information and social distance.

Contextual information was chosen because it is a realistic hurdle that is faced in day-to-day conversation. We believe that altering certain information about a story can lead to a significant change in perception and moral judgement formation. When talking about the morally grey area of heavy drinkers, people may be more quick to attribute certain traits in different ways based on present context. Our study contrasts the act of heavy drinking in a social and individual context. Contextual information is also culturally bound, with studies showing Eastern and Western differences in taking into account internal and external aspects when making a moral judgment (Li, et. al., 2012).

Cross-cultural research says that there are “differences in weight when talking about social aspects, interactions, descriptions and attributions” (Miller and Boyle, 2013), which is why social distance was the second chosen variable. How differently would you judge a person if he or she was a friend or a stranger? The degree to which Filipinos construe relationships with others is unique, and highly dichotomized (Enriquez, 1978). Pe-Pua and Protacio-Marcelino (2000) elaborate on this dichotomy, saying that “[i]n social situations, Filipinos assign the person they’re interacting with in two categories: (one of us), or (outsider). The two categories dictate and guide the level of interaction (outsiders) can be treated with the basal level of (treating with civility), to a higher (being along with), while (one-of-us), can be treated with pa (understanding & acceptance) or even further levels of (being one-with).”

We proposed that the presence of contextual information or social distance affects a person’s moral judgment of heavy drinkers. In particular, 1) Contextual information will have a main effect on a person’s moral judgment of heavy drinkers; 2) Social distance will have a main effect on a person’s moral judgment of heavy drinkers; and, 3) There will be no interaction effect between social distance and contextual information.

METHOD

Sample

One hundred seven participants were sampled from students currently taking Psychology 101 in the University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City. This study employed a between subjects design with random assignments to a treatment group.

Variables

This study utilized a 2 (Contextual Information: Internal, External) x 2 (Social Distance: close friend, stranger) between subjects factorial design. The first independent variable was contextual information. The internal level refers to the personality of the character in the vignette while the external level refers to a specific real world situation. The second independent variable was social distance. The main character of the vignette is a very close friend or in the Filipino context, hindi-ibang-tao (one-of-us). The second level of this variable is socially distal or high social distance, or ibang-tao (outsider). The main character in the vignette would be someone who is not a large part of the participant's life, a distant classmate in a regular college class.

The dependent variable was judged morality: the level of morality that the participants believe the main character in the vignette possesses. This variable was measured based on a sevenpoint morality scale that was constructed based on previous research and a survey.

Materials

A two-part survey was designed to construct the scales that were used for the experiment proper. The first part of the survey asked participants to list words associated with "people who drink a lot." Thematic analysis was used to sort frequent responses and create themes that were used to write the vignettes in the experiment proper. In accordance with aforementioned literature, "sensation-seeking" and "peer influence" were chosen as variables for contextual information. Social distance was dichotomized into "close friend" versus "stranger" in accordance with literature on dichotomized Filipino relationships (Pe Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000).

To construct a morality scale, we asked participants to rate certain acts as moral or immoral along a seven-point Likert scale. Participants were presented with various moral situations such as

They then placed these situations along the constructed morality spectrum, ranging from 1 being immoral, 4 being amoral, and 7 being moral. Factor Analysis was used to determine which components tested cohesively for morality. An initial 38 situations were trimmed down to four situations, which we labeled as negative morality ratings. Cronbach's alpha was then used in the remaining component to determine the coherence and reliability of the constructed morality scale (0.848).

Procedure

This study adopts the methodological framework of Eyal, Liberman and Trope's (2008) study by evaluating the process of constructing moral judgments through indirect questioning. Participants were tasked to read a vignette, depicting Sam, who engages in heavy drinking. There were four vignettes, each with restatements to differ in

For contextual information, Sam was shown to engage in heavy drinking due to an external trait of peer influence (

[roommates: co-member in a university organization] got me drunk.") or due to an internal trait of sensation-seeking

For social distance, Sam was shown to be either a close friend

[GE: general education] classes). A manipulation check was then done to ensure that participants

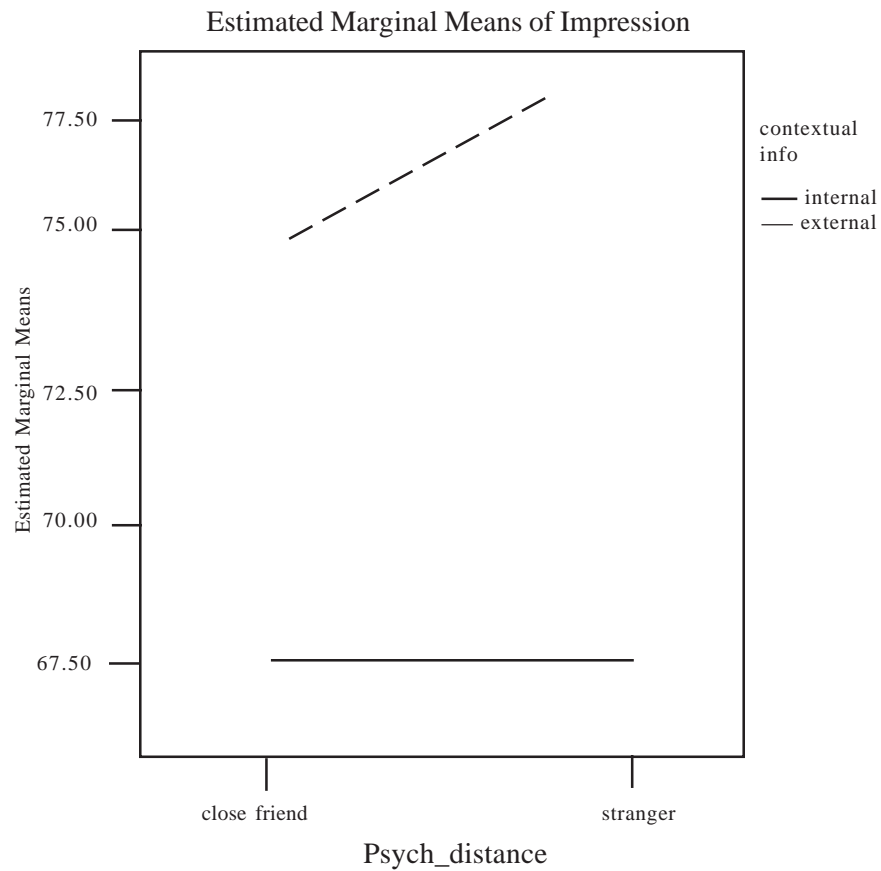
Participants were task donked to reevaluating the coherence, of consistency

understood their relationship with Sam (friend vs. stranger) and anceaR4ral(5 T yger)Tj Od 0 the 0994 T

The data was recorded and analyzed quantitatively using IBM SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) version 20. Results were analyzed using a two-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) with an a-level of .05.

RESULTS

In a two-way ANOVA, the moral judgments with different Contextual Information: internal factors ($M = 12.29$, $SD = 3.80$) and external situations ($M = 10.57$, $SD = 3.25$) and Social Distance: close friend ($M = 11.47$, $SD = 3.54$) and stranger ($M = 11.47$, $SD = 3.76$), as well as their interaction effect were tested for significance on the moral judgment of heavy drinkers.



Contextual Information was a significant factor when placing moral judgment on drinkers, with individuals judging Sam as “less moral” when drinking due to an internal trait of sensationseeking as compared to an internal trait of sensation seeking $F(1, 3) = 6.130, p = .015$. Social Distance was found to be an extremely insignificant factor that did not affect individuals who judged Sam. With $F(1,3) = 0.000, p = .998$, Sam being a friend or stranger did not affect individuals’ evaluation of his morality. These results show that social distance is extremely negligible in judging the morality of heavy drinkers.

There was also no significant interaction effect, with $F(1, 3) = .098, p = .755$. This shows that social distance and contextual information do not have an interaction effect when evaluating morality.

DISCUSSION

Modern theories and frameworks of morality look towards a more cultural and nuanced lens to create context-specific frameworks (Miller & Boyle, 2011). One hypothesis states that moral judgments are affected by several factors, and we chose to zero in on two culturally-bound variables: contextual information and social distance. Our data showed that participants evaluated the heavy drinker as more moral when drinking because of an external occurrence vs. an internal trait. Our data also showed that there was no difference in rating when the participant was socially distant vs. proximal. There was also no interaction effect between the two independent variables.

Context and Compromise: Internal

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To tie the two ideas together, a person may go from _____ to _____ in two sentences. However, due to kapwa psychology, there is a uniform base moral regard of anybody regardless of level of interaction or _____. This uniform level of moral regard could be the reason why Sam was not judged differently being a friend or stranger.

Interaction Effects: Cultural Blankets

As seen from the results, there was no significant interaction effect between the two variables. In a study done relating the level at which people construe moral situations and contextual information, Eyal and colleagues

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