

Ethical Decision Making: A Process Influenced by Moral Intensity

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Abstract

Understanding the process in which individuals engage in ethical decision making and the factors influencing this process may be important for developing more effective ethics education and leader development programs. This study investigated three components of ethical decision making: moral awareness, moral judgment, and moral intention, and their relationship with five components of moral intensity: Social Consensus, Magnitude of Consequences, Temporal Immediacy, Proximity and Probability of Effect. The results suggest that as individuals face morally charged situations, their awareness of the moral dilemma, judgments about potential consequences, and intention to act are significantly affected by characteristics of the moral situation.

Keywords: Ethical decision making; moral intensity; moral reasoning; moral development; leader development programs

Introduction

Societies and institutions become more interested in analyzing what makes an ethical, effective leader as they suffer the effects of poor leadership and the resulting polarization and cynicism. How does one develop ethical, effective leaders? In the United States, the long tradition of professional military education and officer development can serve as an exemplar.

The military's emphasis on continuous development and focus on ethical decision making may offer an approach that can be adapted to other professions, including health care. Health care providers and researchers have to make ethical decisions all the time.

This paper, about the results of a study conducted in a professional military education environment with students, aims to foster an intellectual and cultural exchange about how people in any setting make ethical decisions. Once the steps involved in the process of making ethical decisions are recognized and understood—along with the pressures and biases that can influence decision making—then institutions of higher education can explore how to best develop ethical, effective leaders.

In their constant discovery of the world and themselves, students often face morally charged situations. Moral education attempts to prepare individuals to recognize and respond effectively to moral dilemmas. Examining different philosophical approaches to ethics, evaluating the decisions and consequences of historical moral problems, and discussing hypothetical case studies are some of the ways individuals can acquire skills for making ethical decisions. However, these approaches fail to explain the decision-making process and the factors influencing it, and as a result may be limited in their ability to provide students with the tools they need to think through ethical dilemmas.

Current literature on moral development has sought to provide a comprehensive understanding of what determines moral behavior; specifically, research in this area has focused on understanding the process of ethical decision making and factors that influence this process. Knowing how individuals engage in ethical decision making and learning about the factors that influence these decisions may be important in moral education and character development programs. Understanding the process of ethical decision making will allow an individual to be aware of and deliberate about the steps he or she takes when forming a decision and choosing to act. In addition, if external factors influence an individual's decision-making ability, those individuals who can acknowledge these potential influences and take them into consideration will be better prepared to make moral decisions.

Ethical Decision Making: The Four Component Model

James Rest's (1994) theoretical model to explain the process of ethical decision making developed out of a desire to piece together theories and research on moral development and behavior from a variety of perspectives. Not only were researchers looking at moral development from a cognitive-development perspective, arguably the most predominant approach in moral development, but from social, behavioral, and psychoanalytic approaches as well (Rest). According to Rest, a new model was necessary to account for the different findings from each approach. Until this point, significant attention had been given

to the concept of moral judgment, the evaluation of a decision or action as good or bad, as the basis for ethical decision making. In contrast, Rest argued that moral judgment, while important, is not the only, nor the most significant, influence on ethical decision making. Rest proposed that ethical decision making involves four distinct psychological processes: moral sensitivity, moral judgment, moral motivation/intention, and moral character/action.

Moral sensitivity (moral awareness), as described by Rest (1994), refers to an individual's ability to recognize that a situation contains a moral issue. Recognizing a moral issue requires the individual's awareness that his/her actions have the potential to harm and/or benefit other people. Later research broadens this definition, suggesting that moral sensitivity is the decision maker's recognition that a situation has moral content and, as a result, a moral perspective is valid (Reynolds, 2006).

Moral judgment refers to formulating and evaluating which possible solutions to the moral issue have moral justification. This step in the process requires reasoning through the possible choices and potential consequences to determine which are ethically sound.

Moral motivation (moral intention) refers to the intention to choose the moral decision over another solution representing a different value. This component of the ethical decision-making process involves committing to choose the moral value. For example, an individual may recognize two solutions to a dilemma, one that results in an increase of personal power and one that is morally right. In this instance, moral motivation is the individual's intention to choose the value of morality over the value of power.

Moral courage (moral action) refers to an individual's behavior. This component is the individual's action in the situation. This step involves courage, determination, and the ability to follow through with the moral decision.

Though these steps are arranged logically, they are not in a fixed order. Rest (1994) suggested that each component is distinct and can influence the others. Furthermore, failure at any step can result in a failure to make an ethical decision. An individual may have strong moral judgment skills but will not begin to use them if she or he lacks moral sensitivity and fails to recognize a moral issue.

Moral Intensity

The lack of research on the characteristics of a moral issue initiated Thomas Jones's (1991) development of the moral intensity model. Jones argued that the characteristics of the moral issue, what he collectively termed moral intensity, influence ethical decision making. Jones conceptualized his model such that moral intensity might influence each of the components of Rest's Four Component model. The six dimensions of moral intensity are Magnitude of Consequences, Temporal Immediacy, Social Consensus, Proximity, Probability of Effect, and Concentration of Effect. Magnitude of Consequences refers to the degree to which an individual may be harmed by or benefit from the decision maker's action. A greater degree of harm or benefit results in an increase in moral intensity. Temporal Immediacy refers to the length of time between the action and its consequences. An action that results in immediate negative consequences will cause a greater increase in moral intensity than an action for which the consequences are delayed. Social Consensus refers to the degree

of agreement among a social group that an action is good or bad. This social group could be society as a whole (e.g., an illegal act is not morally acceptable by society because a law prohibits it) or a smaller social group, such as an individual's academic peers. A strong Social Consensus that an act is morally wrong increases moral intensity. Proximity refers to the nearness of the decision maker to the individuals potentially affected by the consequences. Proximity can be a feeling of physical, cultural, social, or psychological nearness. An increase in Proximity results in an increase of moral intensity. Probability of Effect refers to the likelihood that the predicted consequences and the expected level of harm/benefit will occur. If the probability that the action will occur and cause the predicted harm is high, moral intensity increases. The final dimension, Concentration of Effect, refers to the relationship between the number of people affected and the magnitude of harm. If the Concentration of the Effect is great, moral intensity increases (Jones, 1991).

The four-step model shown here combines both Rest's and Jones's ideas and is one approach to making practical, pragmatic decisions quickly, with conscious and deliberate awareness of these factors (Figure 1).

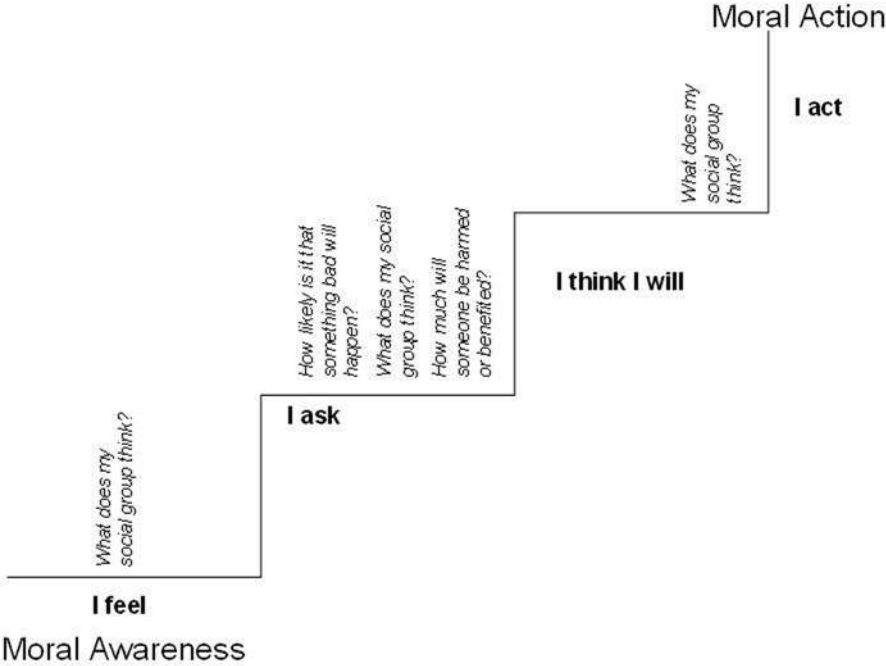


Figure 1. Ethical decision-making model.

Moral Intensity & Ethical Decision Making

Empirical work on the relationships among moral intensity dimensions and ethical decision making is limited. Research in this area tends to be narrowly focused, rarely evaluating multiple dimensions of moral intensity and/or the numerous steps involved in ethical decision making (May & Pauli, 2002).

To date, the research on moral awareness creates at best a vague picture of the relationship between moral awareness and moral intensity. The majority of research on moral awareness suggests the importance of Social Consensus (Chia & Mee, 2000; Barnett, 2001; Butterfield, Trevino, & Weaver, 2000; Frey, 2000; Harrington, 1997; Singhapakdi, Vitell, & Kraft, 1996) and Magnitude of Consequences (Chia & Mee, 2000; Butterfield, Trevino, & Weaver, 2000; Frey, 2000; Singhapakdi et al., 1996) as significant predictors of moral awareness, and the lack of importance of Concentration of Effect as a predictor of moral awareness (Chia & Mee, 2000; Frey, 2000). However, the findings are equivocal for the impact of Proximity, Temporal Immediacy, and Probability of Effect on an individual's sensitivity to a moral issue (Chia & Mee; Frey).

A more consistent relationship exists between moral judgment and the concept of moral intensity as defined by Jones's moral intensity factors than that between moral awareness and the moral intensity factors. Research frequently finds that Social Consensus and Magnitude of Consequences are strong predictors of moral judgment (Morris & McDonald, 1995; Singer, 1998; Barnett, 2001; Harrington, 1997). Studies on the influence of Probability of Effect are inconclusive, and further investigation is needed to provide a clearer understanding. For example, Frey (2000) found Probability of Effect to be a significant predictor of moral judgment, but this dimension was found to have only relatively little influence in another study by Singer (1998). Research on Proximity, Temporal Immediacy, and Concentration of Effect, though not definitive, suggests that these dimensions do not significantly influence an individual's moral judgment (Frey, 2000; Singer, 1998; Barnett, 2001).

Similar to moral judgment, the majority of research on moral intention and moral intensity suggests that Social Consensus, Magnitude of Consequences (Barnett, 2001; Frey, 2000; Singhapakdi et al., 1996), and Probability of Effect (Frey, 2000) are strong predictors of moral intention. Research also indicates that Proximity, Temporal Immediacy, and Concentration of Effect have little to no influence on an individual's moral intention (Barnett, 2001; Frey, 2000).

At this time, research on the relationship between moral action and moral intensity is sparse due to the difficulty in studying moral actions. Nonetheless, Jones (1991) cites a number of previous studies of moral behavior that suggest dimensions of moral intensity will influence moral action. For example, in his research, Stanley Milgram conducted a series of famous studies to learn whether individuals would obey commands from a stranger (wearing a lab coat) who prompted them to inflict increasingly powerful electric volts on another person. The results showed that people who were physically closer to the individual they were asked to shock were less likely to continue to administer the shock (Milgram, 1974 as cited in Jones, 1991). This particular finding potentially provides some basis for the hypothesis that Proximity might influence an individual's moral action (Jones). Though more research is needed to investigate the relationship between moral intensity and moral action, the present study does not include moral action in its investigation because of the inherent challenges of examining individuals' behaviors in moral dilemmas.

Research investigating ethical decision making, moral intensity, and the relationship between the two constructs is continually expanding, but these theories need more empirical support. A comprehensive study exploring multiple dimensions of moral intensity and

multiple steps in the ethical decision-making process would greatly contribute to theory and practice in this field. The present study, exploring moral awareness, judgment, and intention, as well as five of the six components of moral intensity (Social Consensus, Magnitude of Consequences, Temporal Immediacy, Proximity, and Probability of Effect) across five scenarios, provides an opportunity to add to the understanding of the relationships among moral intensity components and steps in ethical decision making. In addition to contributing to the more general field of research on moral development, understanding how individuals respond to moral dilemmas could offer an important addition to ethics education and character development programs.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Data were collected from 812 students (644 male, 168 female) attending a service academy. Students were recruited to voluntarily participate in an anonymous computer survey. The sample included students from all class years, 18.8% seniors, 27% juniors, 29.1% sophomores, and 25.1% first-year students. The race and ethnicity of the sample was 80.7% Caucasian, 7.6% Hispanic, 5.2% Asian American, 3.3% African American, 2.1% Native American, 0.9% Multiracial, and 0.1% Other (Figure 2)

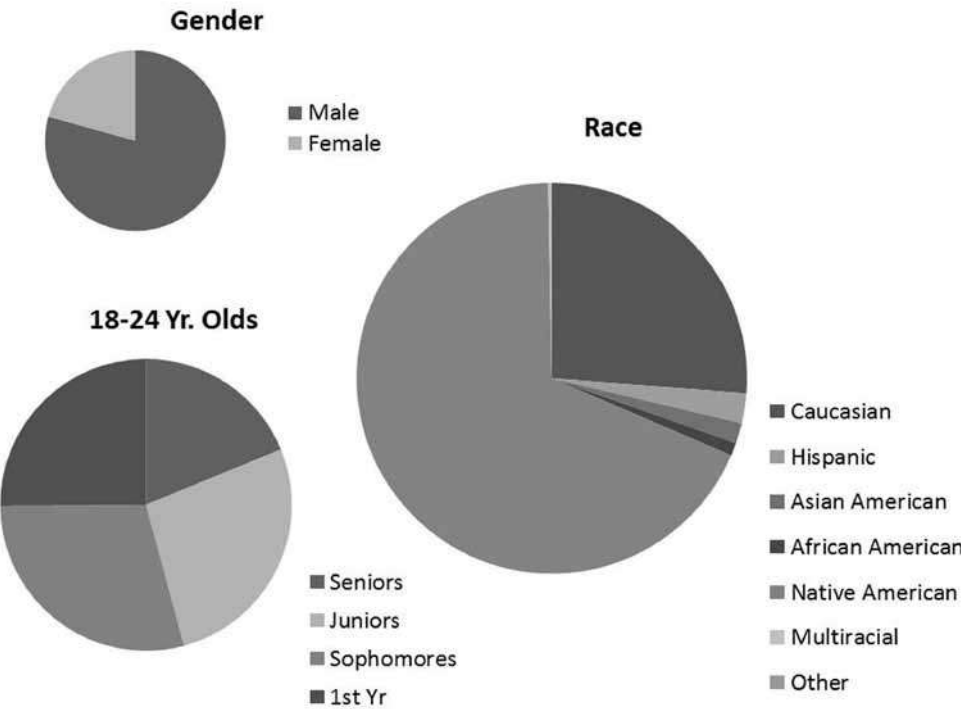


Figure 2. Study demographics.

Measure

The Canadian Department of Defence gave permission to adapt their Ethics Survey, which is not copyrighted (Dursun, Morrow, & Beauchamp, 2003), into a questionnaire in two parts for the purposes of this study. Part I measured individual moral approaches to ethical decision making. Part II was developed to assess three components of Rest's (1994) process of ethical decision making, moral awareness, moral judgment, and moral intention, and the influence of moral intensity on ethical decision making. The results from Part II are the focus of this study.

Part II of the questionnaire consisted of five scenarios, varying in ethical intensity, each describing a moral dilemma and a subsequent action/decision. All five scenarios were adopted from the compilation of Canadian focus group findings in which the military and civilian employees identified the ethical issues to which they were exposed. An initial selection of ten scenarios was pilot tested to insure the relevance of the stimulus for both civilian and military audiences. The scenarios were written in the third person, with the gender unspecified. The final five scenarios chosen for the Canadian survey were then modified for use in this study based on focus group findings from U.S. military officers and midshipmen to confirm the ethical dilemma exposure and relevance for the college student. The five scenarios are described in Figure 3.

- | |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Failure to report someone who damaged equipment by accident 2. A career person who does not select the best person for the job, but rather an outspoken one who complained about unfairness 3. Unfair business practices in grading 4. A leader overlooks a fake claim that was submitted by a subordinate 5. An operational military member gets goods and services from a dealer on the black market |
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Figure 3. Canadian and American scenarios.

Based on the decision made in each scenario, participants were asked a series of 15 questions, assessing their moral awareness, judgment, intention, and perception of five of the six moral intensity dimensions.

Moral awareness was determined by the student's responses to the question "Do you believe that there is a moral or ethical issue involved in the above action/decision?" following each scenario. The questions used a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (completely agree) to 7 (completely disagree). The responses were recoded so that a higher score reflected a higher level of moral awareness. The moral judgment component was composed of seven different judgment factors: just/unjust, fair/unfair, morally right/wrong, acceptable/unacceptable to family, acceptable/unacceptable in our culture, acceptable/unacceptable in our traditions, does not violate/violates an unspoken promise, and does not violate/violates an unwritten contract. Each item used a seven-point Likert scale, with statements reflecting a decision as morally appropriate (1) to morally inappropriate (7). An overall judgment score was computed by summing and averaging the ratings given to each factor. This moral judgment scale was originally developed by Reidenbach and Robin (1988, 1990), and its use in several empirical studies has shown reliability coefficients between .70 and .90 (Barnett,

2001). Moral intention was determined by the student’s responses to the statement “Please indicate the likelihood that you would make the same decision described in the scenario” following each scenario. The questions used a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (definitely would) to 7 (definitely would not).

Basing their responses on the decision or action in each scenario, participants evaluated the five dimensions of moral intensity; these questions measured each dimension on a seven-point Likert scale. Singhapakdi et al. (1996) developed the perceived moral intensity scale that was adapted for use in this study. The first statement measured Magnitude of Consequences (“The possible harm resulting from the decision within the context of that situation would be:” from minor to severe). The second statement measured Temporal Immediacy (“Any negative consequences of that decision are likely to occur:” from after a long time to immediately). The third statement measured Social Consensus (“Most students would consider that decision to be:” from appropriate to inappropriate). The fourth statement measured Proximity (“The specific decision would negatively affect:” from my group to people outside of my group). The fifth statement measured Probability of Effect (“The chances of any negative consequences occurring as a result of that decision are:” from not likely to very likely). Concentration of Effect, the sixth dimension of moral intensity, was not included because other research has failed to find empirical support for its inclusion in the moral intensity construct.

Results

Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations for participants’ responses to questions regarding moral awareness, judgment, and intention. The mean scores for each scenario were averaged to create overall means for moral awareness, judgment, and intention. The results from the study suggest that in general, the participants are morally aware, judge immoral actions negatively, and are inclined towards the intention to act morally. A t-test revealed no significant gender differences for moral awareness, judgment, or intention.

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations: Moral Awareness, Judgment, and Intention; Collapsed Scenarios (N=812)

	Means	Standard Deviations
Moral Awareness (Recoded)	5.23	1.06
Moral Judgment	5.00	.77
Moral Intention	4.78	.85

Regression analyses were conducted to investigate how, if at all, moral intensity dimensions predict moral awareness, judgment, and/or intention.

Table 2 shows the results from a multiple regression analysis of moral awareness and the five dimensions of moral intensity used in this study. The overall regression was significant for four of the five scenarios (F=8.83, p<.01, F=16.04, p<.01, F=19.64, p<.01, F=12.47, p<.01, F=19.06, p>.05). However, while significant, only a small portion of the variation in each scenario, 5%, 9%, 11%, 8%, and 11% for Scenarios 1 through 5

respectively, was accounted for by the moral intensity dimensions. T-tests show that both Social Consensus and Proximity were strong predictors of moral awareness, significantly affecting all five scenarios and four of the five scenarios respectively. There was moderate support for Probability of Effect and Temporal Immediacy, each significantly associated with three of the five scenarios; Magnitude of Consequences was a weak predictor of moral awareness, as significant effects were found with only two of the scenarios. These results suggest that Social Consensus and Proximity are significantly associated with an individual's moral awareness, but Probability of Effect and Temporal Immediacy, while showing some association, have a weaker relationship with moral awareness. The results of this study also indicate that Magnitude of Consequences does not contribute to an individual's recognition that a situation presents a moral dilemma.

Table 2. Multiple Regression Analyses: Moral Awareness and Moral Intensity (N=812)

Variables	Scenario 1 B t	Scenario 2 B t	Scenario 3 B t	Scenario 4 B t	Scenario 5 B t
Model 1					
Magnitude of Consequences	.08 1.99*	.05 1.23	.02 .37	.02 .35	.15 3.23*
Temporal Immediacy	-.01 -.36	-.02 -.51	-.11 2.93**	-.15 -4.06**	-.09 -2.25*
Social Consensus	.10 2.52*	.23 5.98**	.22 5.50**	.16 4.28**	-.08 -2.19*
Proximity	-.10 -2.63**	-.80 -2.34*	-.13 -3.53**	-.18 -5.27**	-.05 1.32
Probability of Effect	.12 2.97**	.05 1.25	.10 2.38*	-.02 -.58	.26 5.55**
F	8.83**	16.04**	19.64**	12.47**	19.06
R²	.05	.09	.11	.08	.11

Note. B is standardized beta coefficient. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 3 shows the results of a hierarchical regression analysis conducted to test the relationship of moral judgment to moral awareness and moral intensity. In the analysis, moral awareness was entered first and found to be a significant predictor of moral judgment in all five scenarios ($p < .01$), though only a small amount of variance was accounted for in each scenario, 12%, 12%, 14%, 9%, and 4% for Scenarios 1 through 5 respectively. A significant change for the R² value occurred in all five scenarios when the moral intensity dimensions were entered into the regression. Overall, moral awareness and moral intensity account for 28%, 48%, 57%, 43%, and 47% of the variation in Scenarios 1 through 5. The addition of moral intensity, with the exception of Scenario 1, explained at least three times the amount of variation in moral judgment as moral awareness. These results suggest that the moral intensity dimensions have more predictive value for an individual's moral judgment than moral awareness. Results from the t-tests for moral intensity's influence on moral judgment indicate that Social Consensus, Magnitude of Consequences, and Probability of Effect, each significantly associated with all five scenarios, were strong predictors of participants' moral judgment. Proximity and Temporal Immediacy were found to be weak

predictors of moral judgment, significantly affecting only two of the five and one of the five scenarios respectively. These findings suggest that an individual's consideration of Social Consensus, Magnitude of Consequences, and Probability of Effect significantly contributes to his/her judgments about a moral situation; Proximity and Temporal Immediacy are less important factors.

A hierarchical regression was conducted to examine moral intention's relationship with moral judgment and moral intensity.

Table 3. Hierarchical Regression Analyses: Moral Judgment, Moral Intensity & Moral Awareness (N=812)

Variables	Scenario 1 B R ²	Scenario 2 B R ²	Scenario 3 B R ²	Scenario 4 B R ²	Scenario 5 B R ²
Model 1 Moral Awareness	.35** .12**	.34** .12**	.38** .14**	.30** .09**	.19** .04**
Model 2 Moral Awareness	.28**	.16**	.17**	.21**	.05
Magnitude of Consequences	.09**	.14**	.10**	.10**	.16**
Temporal Immediacy	-.04	-.08*	-.01	-.02	.03
Social Consensus	.35**	.51**	-.60*	.49**	.42**
Proximity	.00	-.03	-.06*	-.07*	-.03
Probability of Effect	.05 .28**	.12** .48**	.07* .57**	.10** .43**	.24** .47**
R ^{2Δ}	.16**	.37**	.42**	.34**	.44**

Note. B is standardized beta coefficient. *p<.05, **p<.01

As shown in Table 4, moral judgment was entered first and found to be a significant predictor of moral intention for all five scenarios (p<.01). Moral judgment explained 43%, 43%, 53%, 38%, and 52% of the variation for moral intention. Adding moral intensity dimensions in the second step of the regression significantly increased the R² value (p<.01), though the percentages are R^{2Δ} for each scenario are small. This finding suggests that moral judgment is a better predictor of moral intention than moral intensity, but when combined, moral judgment and moral intensity are significantly stronger predictors of moral intention than either alone. T-tests show that Social Consensus, significantly affecting all five scenarios, Magnitude of Consequences, and Probability of Effect, each significantly associated with four of the five scenarios, were strong predictors of moral intention. Results also show Proximity was a moderate predictor of moral intention, significantly associated with three of the five scenarios. Temporal Immediacy was a weak predictor of moral intention, having a significant relationship with only one of the five scenarios. These findings are similar to the

results of moral intensity's relationship to moral judgment. These results indicate that Social Consensus, Magnitude of Consequences, and Probability of Effect significantly contribute to an individual's intention to act in morally charged situations; Proximity is also related to an individual's intention to act, but to a lesser degree. Furthermore, when deciding his/her intention, Temporal Immediacy does not play a significant role in the individual's decision.

Table 4. Hierarchical Regression Analyses: Moral Intention, Moral Intensity & Moral Judgment (N=812)

Variables	Scenario 1 B R ²	Scenario 2 B R ²	Scenario 3 B R ²	Scenario 4 B R ²	Scenario 5 B R ²
Model 1 Moral Judgment	.65** .43**	.65** .43**	.73** .53**	.62** .38**	.72** .52**
Model 2 Moral Judgment	.55**	.47**	.50**	.42**	.57**
Magnitude of Consequences	.07*	.06	.00	.17**	.05
Temporal Immediacy	-.01	-.11**	.03	.05*	.04
Social Consensus	.17**	.22**	.29**	.19**	.19**
Proximity	-.07**	-.06*	-.04	.03	.00
Probability of Effect	.06* .47**	.04 .47**	.02 .58**	.09** .48**	.01 .56**
R^{2Δ}	.05**	.05**	.05**	.10**	.03**

Note. B is standardized beta coefficient. *p<.05, **p<.01

Discussion

Other studies have not researched the service academy population. This study is the first, and it is not a developmental theory-based study. The population of 18- to 24-year-olds in this study is similar to previous studies at all adult ages.

The findings provide evidence supporting the importance of the relationship between moral intensity and ethical decision making. As individuals face morally charged situations, their awareness of the moral dilemma, their judgments about choices and consequences, and their intention to act are significantly affected by specific characteristics of the moral situation.

The results of this study strongly suggest that the moral intensity component, Social Consensus, is significantly associated with moral awareness, judgment, and intention. As students recognize a moral issue, form a judgment, and decide their intention to act, they

are strongly affected by what they believe others within their social group consider morally right or wrong. These findings support previous studies regarding the importance of Social Consensus in ethical decision making (Chia & Mee, 2000; Barnett, 2001; Butterfield et al., 2000; Frey, 2000; Harrington, 1997; Singhapakdi et al., 1996). Conformity studies in social psychology have consistently indicated the significant power of a group over the individual (e.g. Asch's conformity experiments, 1956); as a result, the strong impact of Social Consensus is not surprising. Increasing an individual's awareness of his/her susceptibility to the influence of the social group will provide him/her with the opportunity to consciously consider the extent to which the group may be positively and negatively affecting his/her decision.

The results also indicate that other dimensions of moral intensity are likely to affect specific parts of the ethical decision-making process. Proximity's significant effect on moral awareness suggests that the closer an individual feels to the individual(s) affected by his/her actions, the greater the likelihood that s/he will be aware of the moral issue. However, because of Proximity's weak relationship to moral judgment and moderate relationship to moral intention, its overall association with ethical decision making remains unclear. Previous studies have not reached a consensus on Proximity's role in ethical decision making (Barnett, 2001; Chia & Mee, 2000; Frey, 2000). Perhaps Proximity is an important predictor for moral awareness because individuals may be more sensitive to the potential of their actions to harm or benefit another, if the "other" is closer (physically, culturally, socially, or psychologically) to them.

Participants' moral judgment and their intention to act were strongly associated with Magnitude of Consequences and Probability of Effect. This finding suggests that, as individuals make judgments and form intentions, they consider the consequences of their actions, both the extent of the harm or benefit their actions might cause and the likelihood that those consequences will occur. These results are only partially consistent with previous research. Other research supports this study's assertion that Magnitude of Consequences and Probability of Effect are important predictors for moral judgment and intention (Barnett, 2001; Morris & McDonald, 1995). However, while a number of studies have also found moral awareness to be significantly affected by Magnitude of Consequences (Chia & Mee, 2000; Butterfield et al.; Frey, 2000), this study did not.

The strong association Magnitude of Consequences and Probability of Effect have with moral judgment makes sense. Moral judgment requires the individual to focus on possible choices and consequences, evaluating their value. The extent of harm or benefit of those consequences and the likelihood that they will occur would be reasonable measures by which to form judgments. Similarly, the relationship of Magnitude of Consequences and Probability of Effect to moral intention is also reasonable. Choosing to intend to behave morally rather than follow another choice may force the individual to weigh the costs and benefits of his/her choices; thinking about the extent of those consequences and the likelihood that they will occur may be appropriate ways to determine which course of action to pursue. While moral awareness requires that an individual be sensitive to the possibility that his/her actions may affect other people, in this step of the ethical decision making process, the decision maker may not have formulated potential consequences to evaluate in terms of their magnitude or probability. He or she may simply recognize that any future choices involve the well-being of at least one other person; consequently, moral awareness would not necessarily be as strongly affected by Magnitude of Consequences and Probability of Effect.

As an individual engages in the awareness, judgment, and intention components of the ethical decision-making process, Temporal Immediacy has little influence. This factor of moral intensity, only negligibly affecting moral awareness, judgment, and intention, is the weakest of all the factors. Other studies (Barnett, 2001; Frey, 2000) report similar results, suggesting that Temporal Immediacy should not be included as a dimension of moral intensity.

In addition to exploring the significance of the relationships among the steps in the ethical decision-making process and the dimensions of moral intensity, the analyses used in this study provide insight into the strength of these relationships. An interesting result, worth future exploration, shows that the dimensions of moral intensity do not affect each step in the decision-making process to the same degree. Moral intensity accounts for approximately 5-10% of the variance in moral awareness and moral intention for the five scenarios. In contrast, with the exception of Scenario 1, moral intensity accounts for approximately 30-40% of the variance in moral judgment. This finding suggests that while moral intensity is significantly related to moral awareness, judgment, and intention, its predictive value may be strongest with moral judgment. Future research should further explore the strength of the relationships among moral intensity and the steps in the ethical decision-making process. Similarly, the results also suggest that the steps in the process of ethical decision making are significantly related to one another, but the strengths of these relationships differ. Moral awareness is significantly associated with moral judgment, but explains a smaller proportion of the variance in moral judgment than that explained by moral intensity. In contrast, moral judgment is significantly associated with moral intention and explains a greater proportion of variance in moral intention than that explained by moral intensity. These results indicate that the steps of the ethical decision-making process may not relate to one another to the same degree. More research is needed to explore the relationships between the steps in Rest's process of ethical decision making to provide empirical support for this model.

Conclusion

Future research should take into consideration how much the implicit interpersonal relationships in the dimensions of moral intensity affect ethical decision making. If Temporal Immediacy and Concentration of Effect were excluded, the remaining four dimensions have important interpersonal components. As the decision maker evaluates Proximity, Probability of Effect, Magnitude of Consequences, and Social Consensus, he or she necessarily considers the impact his/her actions will have on other people. The decision maker must ask: How close is this person to me? To what extent will this person be affected by my decision? How likely is it that this person will be affected? What will my peers think? Neither Temporal Immediacy nor Concentration of Effect is as focused on interpersonal relationships; more research is needed to determine if the interpersonal aspect of the other four dimensions contributes to their significant effects.

The findings of this study have important implications for moral education and leader development programs. Recognizing and understanding the steps involved in ethical decision making allows institutions of higher education to educate their students about the process of making ethical decisions and their own strengths and weaknesses. In addition, knowing that specific characteristics of a moral issue significantly influence the process of ethical decision making can help individuals focus on and ask questions about important aspects of the moral issue, allowing them to gather critical information that will help them more thoroughly assess a moral dilemma.

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