

The Influence of Ethnolinguism and Cultural Diversity on the Moral Judgement of Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

The concept of morality is often cited in reference to social groups and variance in cultural practices, yet there exists a scarcity of empirical evidence regarding the presence or the lack thereof of a relationship between these abstract constructs. The present research sought to identify whether ethnolinguistic groups held any sway over the development of moral judgements. Additionally, it also examined whether an individual's exposure to cultural diversity in adolescence in terms of their ethnic or linguistic background and the presence of group boundaries played a role in the judgements against ingroups and outgroups. The research indicated that while one's identification or sense of belonging to an ethnolinguistic group did not necessarily affect the development of moral judgements, an individual's early experiences in adolescence as well as conceptions regarding group boundaries and criteria for membership in the same did have a considerable impact. It also indicated that gender differences may exist in the development of moral judgement, prompting further research regarding the same.

Keywords: Morality, Moral judgement, Ingroups, Outgroups, Social exclusion, Ethnolinguistic identity, Group boundaries, Cultural exposure

In the midst of a globalised world, the notions of ingroups and outgroups are often in a state of flux due to dynamic practices that ensue within one's community, kinships, profession, and other social networks that people find themselves surrounded with. Cultural norms refer to a societal rule, value, or standard that delineates an accepted and appropriate behaviour within a culture. These norms play a central role in guiding notions of correct and moral behaviour in the minds of individuals and lend coherence to the standards by which they lead their lives as well. In addition to cultural norms, upbringing and exposure to multicultural experiences and their respective social practices in the early stages of one's lifespan both predict one's level of identification with a certain social group as well as their norm adherence in the society in which they reside (Manchi et al., 2009).

The question of whether individuals' concepts of ingroups and outgroups remain constant in terms of their upbringing in the stages of late childhood and the onset of adolescence or not is one that needs to be posited. According to the shifting standards model, individuals make

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moral judgements on different social groups based on standards that reflect the present stereotypes regarding them. This model suggests that group-based biases on the basis of moral judgement would be more likely to occur in individuals who hold a tendency to categorise certain groups as moral and others as immoral. Those who hold the latter orientation have been observed to be associated with strong negative attitudes towards minorities and other stigmatised outgroups (Sawaoka et al., 2014).

In accordance with Kohlberg's theory, moral judgments are assumed to occur in different stages, which are sequential, universal, and approximately related to age. Environmental factors have the capacity to speed up, slow down, or stop the development, but they do not change the sequence of development, nor can they create structures. Stages in the development of moral judgment may reflect fundamentally the restructuring of the modes of role taking and how attitudes may be formed (Parikh, 1980). When considering how perceptions towards ingroups and outgroups could be shaped in the stage of preconventional morality, it is plausible that a child may be induced to form social judgements while weighing the consequences of punishment in the face of straying away from conventional perspectives concerning these social groups, as well as grasping the mutual benefits of conformity, where social exchanges are optimal when the beliefs of the self and the social standards of the society are in alignment. The next stage of conventional morality would be characterised by the development of objectivity and independent thought, coupling with a newfound desire of orientation towards the maintenance of the prevailing law and order in the status quo. Kohlberg asserted that his stages were universal in nature, though cultural variations across his descriptions of early and adolescent thought have been identified, where later conventions of morality reflect Western ideals of the Enlightenment and individualism and are not entirely compatible for collectivistic societies, where interdependence between socio-cultural groups bear more prevalence (Fleming, 2006).

It may be concluded that moral judgement does form a central piece in the formation of attitudes towards individuals who belong to the ingroup and outgroup categories when they reach the stage of young adulthood. Further, the cultural norms that permeated their upbringing, with the inclusion of their sociodemographic factors such as their belonging to a certain ethnolinguistic group have the potential to shape their experiences as well.

This proposal sets forth to examine how early experiences in a certain cultural context influences the moral judgements of college students towards ingroups and outgroups. It aims to understand if being raised in a homogeneous or a heterogeneous social setting could have a formative impact on the moral judgements of young adults when exposed to members hailing from diverse backgrounds and bearing varying social identities, and launching an enquiry into the point of origin of social attitudes fostered towards or against them.

There is a distinct lack of studies that explore how early exposure to cultural diversity could influence the morality of individuals in a later stage of their life, especially when they reach a higher degree of autonomy to make their own decisions and judgements regarding their social environment. While diversity in the domain of moral judgement has previously been explored extensively in the form of gender, age, and sex (Gasser et al., 2013; González-Álvarez, J., 2015; Caparo et al., 2017), there are yet to be comprehensive studies of note that have been capable of integrating early cultural exposure, transition across the stages of development, as well as the accompanying evolution of their belief systems when encountering members of ingroups and outgroups. The implications of such a study would be able to effectively capture the influence of early crucial events in an individual's life and

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examine whether future moral decision-making and adherence or deviation to the norms ascribed by society would occur. There is also a paucity of such studies conducted in India, a nation rich in ethnolinguistic groups and cultural diversity, where the results could be of immense significance in curbing discrimination and facilitate national integration for the greater good of the society.

Objectives

The objectives of this research are to examine the following:

1. Does ethnolinguistic identity constrain the moral judgements associated with ingroups and outgroups in young adults?
2. Does exposure to cultural diversity in adolescence measured in terms of linguistic and ethnic background and group boundaries influence future moral judgements associated with ingroups and outgroups?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

During the COVID-19 pandemic, recent research conducted on the basis of acceptance or rejection of social distancing norms identified that participants had a tendency to isolate the concept of norm deviation in order to justify their outgroup derogation. This suggests that strict regulations and laws that are implemented during exceptional circumstances causes individuals to form harsh moral judgements against members of outgroups and further consolidates the 'us- versus-them' divide. Moreover, when the common census implies that migrants or immigrants may be responsible for breaking the enforced social norms, the moral judgements and retributive measures that were suggested against them were higher than originally anticipated by the authors of the study (Van Assche et al., 2020). It was concluded that the phenomenon of outgroup derogation occurred more so than ingroup ostracism when deviance from social norms was observed. This indicates that social exclusion of outgroups could take place in the absence of any ingroup chauvinism or expressed prejudice.

Existing research on adherence to perceived cultural norms has primarily placed emphasis on responses to events in which the ingroup often serves as a reference and provides consensual validation in the precipitation of moral judgement. In a study, Manchi et al. (2009) hypothesised that ingroup identification and the aspect of Need for Closure (NFC) would interact to influence the levels of norm adherence of the participants. Evidence was gathered for the conclusion that the measure of high NFC, when combined with strong ingroup identification, is considerably related to a stronger intention to follow the perceived ingroup norms when presented with hypothetical situations. It was later postulated that NFC individuals adhere to perceived cultural norms in order to seek consensus because cultural norms are consensually validated knowledge structures that could subsequently lend weight to their sense of belonging.

A study by Moncrieff and Lienard in 2018 measured the levels of moral judgement of Croatians hailing from both urban and rural regions regarding Serbians, nationals with whom they had shared a history of conflict. Moral scenarios in the form of case vignettes will be presented to the participants involving characters of a given sociocultural group either assisting or not assisting individuals belonging to a different sociocultural group. The results of the is research indicated that Croatians residing in rural regions passed harsher moral judgements on the protagonist than their urban counterparts. It was determined that there was a significant difference in the measurement of within-coalition and without-

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coalition groups, and that demographic variables do have a sizeable effect on moral judgements.

A study on the cultural factors that influence moral judgements and behaviours revealed that major cultural variations exist in terms of moral values, especially ones pertaining to fairness and the exhibition of prosocial behaviour. Cultural differences within societies were observed to be just as substantial in the assessment of moral judgements, and moral foundation endorsements and judgements could very well vary within nations, such as the vegetarian and non-vegetarian subcultures in India. In other words, variability in moral thinking could be substantial within societies as much as outside them, which indicates that the possibility of social exclusion within the members of one's own community is just as high as those who may be considered as foreign (Graham et al., 2016).

Recent research has identified that information on group morality was the primary determinant of group pride, identification, and impression formation. Brambilla et al. (2013) investigated how the morality of ingroup and outgroup targets affects perceived threat and behavioural intentions. After manipulating moral characteristics that were ascribed to ingroups and outgroups, it was concluded that behavioural intentions were influenced solely by moral information, and that participants expressed less desire to interact with targets who were depicted as lacking moral qualities than those depicted as highly moral.

Taking the aforementioned findings of research undertaken under the purview of moral judgement with respect to various social groups and norms, the present proposal aims to examine how the concept of ethnolinguistic identity could influence the morality of individuals where ingroups and outgroups are concerned. The formation of groups during adolescence and the subsequent identification of individuals with beliefs in the presence of a diverse cultural context could be facilitated with the existing theories that indicate the variation in moral values and the social exclusion that could follow (Graham et al., 2016).

METHODOLOGY

Participants and design

Young adults (18 - 25 years) from the various colleges in Bangalore will be invited to participate in the study. A sample of 200 participants (50% female) will be recruited via convenient sampling. Informed consent will be sought from them. The key objectives of the research would be explained to them preceding the implementation of the procedure. A within- subjects design will be employed in this proposal where the same participants will be tested on multiple conditions. This study will incorporate three measures for fulfilling the objectives of the research, in the form of the Ethnolinguistic Identity Questionnaire, a few supplementary questions regarding cultural diversity and group boundaries, and the case vignettes that will comprise of several moral scenarios respectively. The total scores of the participants on each measure will be examined based on the scoring key for the two questionnaires and the within- coalition and without-coalition score for the case vignettes. After statistical analysis, the effects of the confounding variables on moral judgement will be observed in the findings and the subsequent implications will be discussed.

Tools

- Participant Information and consent Form – Questions that may be raised by the participant regarding the nature of the research and confidentiality are addressed here. The purpose of the study and relevant information regarding the research will be described here.

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- Demographic details form – A sheet for the collection of the demographic information of the participant will be provided.
- Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure - A tool based on the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure by Phinney and drawing concepts from the ethnolinguistic identity theory by Giles and Johnson will be developed will be constructed for the measurement of the ethnolinguistic component of the research. The subjects will be asked to indicate the significance of their ethnic identity and their native language to themselves. The MEIM primarily measures the ethnic identity and the ethnic identity achievement of individuals in an effort to quantify their exploration of morals and commitment to their ethnic group, as well as their efforts to learn more about their background and the role of ethnicity in their lives. It was chosen as the template for its high reliability (.90) and the fact that it is considered to be an ideal measure for the examination of diverse groups (Phinney, 1992).
- A questionnaire comprising four sections will be designed to assess the objectives of the research. Aspects of the Ethnolinguistic Identity Theory were adapted with the existing MEIM in this measure for the purpose of assessment. The first section of the questionnaire examined the subjects' identification with the ethnic group and consists of a 5- point Likert Scale ranging from the choices marked at either end, 'extremely important to me' and 'not at all important to me'. The subjects will be asked to indicate the significance of their ethnic identity and their native language to themselves. Likewise, the subscales of affirmation and belonging, cultural identity, and group boundaries will be measured in the second, third, and the fourth sections of the questionnaire. Respectively for the assessment of the participants' ethnolinguistic identity as well as their moral judgements towards their own as well as other social groups.
 - a. Ethnic identity - This subscale intends to assess the participants' self-identification with the ethnic group in order to facilitate assessment for those who have distinct parental backgrounds.
 - b. Affirmation and Belonging - This subscale intends to assess the participants' ethnolinguistic pride, their satisfaction in terms of group membership, as well as their sense of belonging and attachment to the group.
 - c. Cultural Identity - This subscale intends to assess the participants' sociodemographic details and belief systems, attitudes towards acculturation, and involvement in cultural activities and traditions. The participants would be instructed to provide responses to this subscale based on their experiences in adolescence rather than their present experiences in adulthood.
 - d. Group boundaries - This subscale intends to assess the participants' conformity to ingroup norms, their perception of interethnic group membership, and social comparisons with outgroups.
- Vignettes for Study (comprise specific scenarios invoking ingroup and outgroup behaviours and activities)

For the assessment of moral judgements towards individuals who belong to one's ingroup as well as outgroup, four moral scenarios in the form of case vignettes will be created, in which two characters who belong to the same or distinct ethnolinguistic groups interact.

A description in which one character performs a morally incorrect behaviour towards the other is provided in the scenario.

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Example (1) – Individuals who belong to the same ethnolinguistic group (Within- coalition): A Malari woman is walking home after buying groceries at the supermarket when she sees that a Malari woman has fallen and dropped her bag of vegetables. She does not assist the woman and continues her journey.

Example (2) – Individuals who belong to distinct ethnolinguistic groups (Without-coalition): A Kanali woman is walking home after buying groceries at the supermarket when she sees that a Malari woman has fallen and dropped her bag of vegetables. She does not assist the woman and continues her journey.

The moral scenarios in the vignettes will be based on similar ones employed in Moncrieff and Lienard's study for the assessment of moral judgement of in-group and out-group harm in Croatian communities. Each moral scenario will be built around an interaction between members belonging to the same or distinct ethnolinguistic groups, where the protagonist performs a morally unacceptable behaviour to the detriment of the secondary character. Five moral scenarios would be created in such a manner for the evaluation of the participants' moral judgements. For each vignette, the participants will be asked to evaluate the action (How good or bad is what the first character did?) on a 1 (extremely bad) to 5 (extremely good) scale and their moral evaluation scores will be calculated.

PROCEDURE

The primary objective of this research is to identify how the aspects of cultural diversity and ethnolinguism affect the moral judgement of college students pertaining to their ingroups and outgroups. After taking their informed consent and being illuminated about the goals of the research, the participants of the study would first be administered the questionnaire comprising five sections where items regarding their identification with their ethnolinguistic group, affirmation and belonging, cultural identity, and group boundaries will be assessed.

Next, the dimensions of cultural diversity and group boundaries the participants will be assessed by the administration of the supplementary questions to the MEIM questionnaire. The participants will be instructed to read the questions carefully and choose the response that is best applicable to their identity and mark them while keeping their experiences during adolescence in mind. The level of cultural diversity of every participant with respect to their belonging in a dominant or a non-dominant sample will be calculated with the scoring key.

The participants will be subsequently provided with sheets that contained four case vignettes that depicted moral scenarios. These moral scenarios will be created with both within-coalition and without-coalition conditions, where the characters presented in them interact with a member of their own ethnolinguistic group and with a character belonging to a different ethnolinguistic group respectively. In these scenarios, the participants will be asked to read social situations where the primary character behaves in a morally incorrect manner (A Malari woman is walking home after buying groceries at the supermarket when she sees that a Kanali woman has fallen and dropped her bag of vegetables. She does not assist the woman and continues her journey.) and to rate the behaviour of the former on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (extremely bad) to 5 (extremely good). Each participant's within-coalition moral evaluation score would be computed as the average of their ratings for the two scenarios involving characters from the same ethnolinguistic group. Each participant's without-coalition moral evaluation would be computed as the average of their ratings for the two scenarios involving characters from distinct ethnolinguistic groups.

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The moral choices on the case vignettes will be compared across coherent and opposite ethnolinguistic affiliations of the participant and the case. Chi-square and odds ratios will be used to compare these totals.

Ethical Considerations

This research proposal has been prepared keeping the safety and well-being of the participants in mind. The informed consent of the participants will be obtained from prior to the administration of the study. The participants will not be subjected to any harm during the course of research. They have the right to withdraw from the study at any stage if they wish to do so.

The anonymity of the participants involved in the proposal will be maintained for the sake of their confidentiality. The sensitive nature of the moral scenarios and several aspects of the research that may be subject to misunderstanding would be clarified so that no group is prejudiced against as a consequence of the research. All the prior research that has been employed for the construction of the questionnaire and as a reference for the concepts involved will be provided their due credit.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research yielded a number of insights regarding the questions put forth in the onset of the study. Firstly, it was observed that in a total of 157 responses selected as a sample, an individual's ethnolinguistic identity assessed in terms of the three ethnolinguistic groups (Indo -Aryan, Dravidian, and Sino-Tibetan) that was measured employing the participants' responses in case vignettes and their demographic forms, 86% of individuals who identified as Indo -Aryan and 88% of Dravidians respectively indicated responses that the actions of the character against a member of the outgroup ranging from "Extremely bad" to "Somewhat bad". None of the participants of the study had identified themselves as Sino-Tibetan. While this did not indicate a substantial difference, it was discovered during the preliminary analysis that 97% of the females of the study had recorded a "bad response" for the morally dubious behaviour of the character against a member of the outgroup while only 90% of the males had recorded the same. This may indicate that gender differences do, in fact, play a role in the development of moral judgements, in that females rated morally incorrect acts harsher than males did as well a harsher judgement of outgroups. Research that examines the role of gender in the moral judgements of ingroups and outgroups could be performed in the future to consolidate these findings.

The participants' identification with their ethnolinguistic group, affirmation and belonging, cultural identity, and ethnic identity were assessed using the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure for the same purpose and a correlation with their ethnolinguistic group was performed as a statistical test. The results of this section indicated that out of a maximum score of 48 from a scale of strongly agree to strongly disagree, the individuals who identified as Indo -Aryan and Dravidian yielded average scores of 34.4 and 37 respectively. This indicates that an individual's ethnolinguistic identity does not have a significant effect on the development of moral judgements associated with ingroups and outgroups in any statistically significant manner. The total scores were obtained by reversing the negative items in each subscale, summing across the different items, and subsequently calculating the mean.

Table 1: Means obtained by individuals based on their ethnolinguistic identification

Ethnolinguistic group	Mean
Indo-Aryan	34.4
Dravidian	37

Table 2: Moral judgements of participants based on fixed boundaries and ingroup identification

Moral judgement mean	Fixed boundaries mean	Ingroup identification mean	Multilingual Backgrounds mean
28.6	25.4	27.3	14.6

Secondly, towards the assessment of whether exposure to cultural diversity in adolescence measured in terms of linguistic and ethnic background as well as cultural diversity would influence the future moral judgements of the participants, four supplementary questions were employed and scored. A correlational study indicated that the participants who believed in fixed boundaries and the stringent criteria of their ethnolinguistic groups were more likely to make fewer harsh judgements (By a margin of 3.2 and 1.3, respectively) regarding the morally incorrect behaviour of the character in the case vignettes than others who did not. However, it did not point to any form of significant correlational difference between being surrounded by members of different ethnic groups (15.9), or being raised in a multilingual background with moral judgements (14).

CONCLUSION

The objectives of this research were to identify how the aspects of cultural diversity and ethnolinguism affect the moral judgement of college students pertaining to their ingroups and outgroups and the role of cultural diversity towards the same. Based on the obtained results, it may be concluded that an individual's perception of group boundaries and a stricter definition of what constitutes an ethnolinguistic group during the stage of adolescence would have a consequential impact on the state of mind of these same individuals upon reaching adulthood.

This may, in turn, lend credence to the notion that morality is a social construct that is highly shaped by early experiences and has pervasive effects on judgement formation long after taking root.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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