

**SELF-DISTANCE MITIGATES THE EFFECT OF CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS ON
MORAL REASONING**

by

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For my Dad, wish you were here.

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ABSTRACT

What factors determine how people decide whether a behavior is right or wrong, good or bad, moral or immoral? Over the past decade-and-a-half, moral psychologists have increasingly identified various psychosocial processes that help answer this question. However, virtually all of this research involves asking people to reason about the behavior of unrelated strangers. Although informative, this approach runs the risk of failing to account for the influence that interpersonal relationships have on judgment and decision-making. Over the course of four experiments, the current research extends relationship science into the moral domain by examining how relational distance (i.e., psychological closeness to the person one is reasoning about) and self-distance (i.e., psychological closeness to one's self) influence moral reasoning. I hypothesized that as either type of distance increases, relationally partial (e.g., loyal) decisions would decrease and morally impartial (e.g., honest) decisions would increase. The findings from the four experiments supported this prediction. Specifically, I found that close relational construals negatively influenced honesty and that this effect was mitigated by the activation of abstract-ethical construals through self-distancing. This research integrates three generative streams of research: morality, close relationships and self-control, to demonstrate both the flexibility and regulation of intrarelatational moral reasoning.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“The problem is that most of the research in (moral psychology) ... focuses almost entirely on how people make sense of, judge, and respond to the interactions of unrelated strangers. (Moral psychologists) have little to say about how people think of interactions that occur between parent and child, brother and sister, and other closely related individuals. We also often ignore moral judgments and moral feelings that concern spouses, close friends, colleagues, allies, and compatriots, these are the interactions that matter the most, and that our failure to explore them leads us to ask the wrong questions, design the wrong studies, and develop the wrong theories.”

– Paul Bloom (2011)

“A science of human behavior and development that neglects the influence of the individual’s interpersonal relationships is destined to be inaccurate and incomplete”

- Harold H. Kelley (1983)¹

Over the past 20 years, the explosion of research in moral psychology has revealed a diverse set of psychosocial processes that influence moral judgment and decision-making (see Dinh & Lord, 2013; Haidt & Kesebir, 2010; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2012; Sinnott-Armstrong,

¹ This quote is from Reis, Collins, & Berscheid (2000), attributed to H.H. Kelley (1983)

2008 for reviews). However, as informative and useful as this research has been on balance, I believe that the intrarelational dimension of human morality has been detrimentally underexplored.

I am not alone in this thinking. Within the past few years a small group of social scientists have championed an effort to recognize the influence of relationship context (properties of a situation that are shaped by an individual's interpersonal relationships; A.P. Fiske, 1992; Bugental, 2000; Clark & Mills, 2012; Kelley, Holmes, Kerr, Reis, & Van Lange, 2003; Reis Collins, & Berscheid, 2000) on moral cognition and behavior (Bloom, 2011; Clark & Boothby, 2013; Greenwood, 2011; Haidt, 2008; Janoff-Bulman & Carnes, 2013; Moore & Gino, 2013; Rai & A.P. Fiske, 2011; Van Lange & Joireman, 2008). However, due to the infancy of this movement, there has been little research to back up this conjecture (for exceptions see Carnes, Lickel, & Janoff-Bulman, 2015; Gino & Galinsky, 2012; Koleva, Seltermann, Iyer, Ditto, & Graham, 2013; Miller & Bersoff, 1992; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2012; Simpson & Laham, 2015; Waytz, Dugan, & Young, 2013).

This lack of research on *intrarelational morality* (moral cognition and behavior that takes place within the context of a person's interpersonal relationships), as the quote by Paul Bloom above lucidly articulates, has led moral psychologists and behavior ethicists to engage in narrowly focused research and incomplete theorizing. The focus of this dissertation is three-fold. First, I aim to not only highlight, but also address, the important, and historically neglected, intrarelational dimension of moral cognition and behavior by exploring the effect of close relational construals (subjective mental representations of a situation in which close interpersonal relationships are involved) on moral reasoning. Second, I seek to expose the psychological mechanism (construal level; Trope & Liberman, 2010) that I believe underpins the relationship

between close relational construals and moral decision-making. Third, I test an intervention technique (self-distancing through self-talk; Kross, Bruehlman-Senecal, Park, Burson, Dougherty, Shaback, & Bremner, Moser, & Ayduk, 2014) that I believe counteracts the negative effect of close relational construals on impartial (i.e., fair) moral decision making by altering the level at which the situation is construed.

Intrarelational morality

Most of the research conducted by psychologists interested in understanding moral judgment has, for the most part, asked people to evaluate the behavior of unknown strangers. For example, in his seminal work on moral development, Kohlberg (1969, 1981) asked participants to reason about a man named *Heinz* stealing medicine for his dying wife. Haidt (2001) tested his paradigm shifting, social-intuitionist hypothesis by asking participants to describe their reaction to two siblings, *Mark and Julie*, having sex. And, in arguably, the most popular experimental vehicle in moral psychology over the past 15 years - the trolley problem (Foot, 1967; Thompson, 1976) - participants are asked if they would push *the fatman* to his death in order to save five people (e.g., Greene, Sommerville, Nystrom, Darley, & Cohen, 2001).

Moral dilemmas are scenarios, often hypothetical, designed to model complex situations where people are forced to make a tradeoff decision between competing moral obligations (e.g., honesty vs. benevolence; Appiah, 2008; Levine & Schweitzer, 2014). The artificial moral dilemma is a useful and effective tool for understanding how people make moral judgments and decisions (e.g., Greene, et al., 2001; Rest, Narvaez, Thoma, & Bebeau, 1999). Originally developed by ethicists (i.e., moral philosophers) as a means for testing intuitions and logic about normative morality (what one *ought* to do), moral dilemmas have been fully adopted by moral

psychologists and behavioral ethicists² as methodological instruments used to answer questions about descriptive and predictive morality (what one *is* or *is going* to do). Artificial moral dilemmas have proven remarkably useful to moral psychologists in developing and propagating the most important psychological theories of moral judgment and decision-making (e.g., rational-developmental [Kohlberg, 1958; Piaget, 1965/1932; Turiel, 1983], social-intuitionist / neo-sentimentalist [Haidt, 2001, 2007; Mikhail, 2000], and dual-process [Greene et al., 2001; Cushman, 2013]). However, as is the case with any methodological tool, the artificial moral dilemma has its limits (e.g., Bartels & Pizarro, 2011; Bauman et al., 2014; Laham & Crone, 2015; Rosen, 1980).

The line between moral philosophy and psychology is both distinct and nebulous (Gibbs, 2014; Kristjánsson, 2011). The essential goals are divergent but interrelated. Although both fields are ultimately interested in what leads to the *good* life (Dewey, 1972/1887; James, 1950/1890; Peterson & Seligman, 2004), where the field of moral philosophy is concerned with developing frameworks that proscribe what is morally correct, moral psychology aims to describe and predict what people actually think, feel, and do in morally relevant situations (Bloom, 2013; Doris, 2005). These diverging aims of moral philosophy and psychology shed light on a particular quality of the artificial moral dilemma that is problematic for its use in moral psychological research.

Ethicists use hypothetical moral dilemmas as vehicles to explore the logical implications and boundaries of normative intuitions, principles and theories (Appiah, 2008; e.g., Foot, 1967; Singer, 1972; Thompson, 1976). This, coupled with the traditions in ethics to focus more on

² Although, it could be argued that there are differences between moral psychologists and behavioral ethicists, I will, throughout this manuscript, refer to these two groups of scientists interchangeably.

natural (i.e., global, impartial) as opposed to *special* (i.e., local, partial) rules and obligations (Helm, 2013; Jeske, 2014; Jollimore, 2000), lends itself to use artificial moral dilemmas that involve generic, unidentifiable agents (i.e., strangers). This convention allows for the most conservative and objective comparisons of moral logic within and between the major traditions of moral philosophy (e.g., deontology, consequentialism, and virtue ethics; Nadelhoffer, Nahmias, & Nichols, 2010) while buffering ethicists from committing logical errors like the naturalistic fallacy when exploring their intuitions and developing their arguments (Hume, 1978/1739; Moore, 1903).

As useful as this practice is for moral philosophers, it only partially fulfills the directive of moral psychologists (Bloom, 2011; Clark & Boothby, 2013). Judging the behavior of strangers helps to satisfy one of the key goals of research psychology: discovering basic processes that underlie cognition and behavior (S.T. Fiske, 2014), and using strangers as experimental stimuli, allows psychologists to test theoretical models of moral judgment while adhering to basic scientific principles such as internal validity, parsimony, and generalizability. However, due to the asymmetry between *who* participants are judging in psychological research and *who* people are judging in their everyday lives (Sowden, Petkov, Hotaling, Kim, Kross, & Hofmann, 2015) an over reliance on the *stranger-as-stimuli* approach leads to questions about the ecological validity of experimental findings and the completeness of theories in moral psychology, which violate another directive of the discipline: model actual behavior (Baumeister, Vohs, & Funder, 2007; Hofmann, Wisneski, Brandt, & Skitka, 2014; Nisbett & Wilson, 1977).

Moral judgment is inherently social. Judgments are moral when they are directed toward an agent who is presumed to possess the ability to follow social norms (Malle et al., 2012). This

means that moral judgments are not only social, but also interpersonal. Moral judgment occurs when one person evaluates the behavior of another person in terms of moral correctness (good and right vs. bad and wrong). Interpersonal moral judgment, the most general category of moral judgment, can be partitioned into two subcategories, one that applies to the evaluation of strangers (which the *stranger-as-stimuli* model covers) and another that applies to the evaluation of non-strangers (i.e., interpersonal relationships; which the *stranger-as-stimuli* model doesn't cover). Considering that the latter moves moral psychological research towards both improved ecological validity and theoretical completeness, it's reasonable to believe that developing an experimental paradigm that maintains the usefulness of the artificial moral dilemma while incorporating *intrarelatational* moral judgment would allow for the modeling of the psychological tension that emerges when moral obligations compete, while capturing a more valid representation of our everyday moral lives.

Although *stranger-as-stimuli* artificial moral dilemmas are well suited to address generally applicable tradeoff dilemmas like those that involve *natural* obligations in conflict (e.g., utilitarian vs. deontological; Greene et al., 2001, 2004; Kohlberg, 1981), they are not equipped to deal with conflicts involving *special* obligations. An example of a moral dilemma involving a *special* obligation is when a person must choose between honesty and interpersonal loyalty. This type of moral dilemma is typified by the case of David and Ted Kaczynski. In 1995, David Kaczynski, after realizing that his brother, Ted, was the Unabomber, had to make a tradeoff decision between a *natural* obligation (inform the authorities that the Unabomber was his brother; i.e., utilitarian ethics) and a *special* obligation (stay tight-lipped and protect his brother from harm; i.e., parochial ethics). This class of moral dilemma, where *natural* obligations (e.g., maintaining one's moral integrity; being honest) are pitted against special obligations (an

obligation that is dependent on the interpersonal relationship between the judge and the agent; e.g., being loyal) is, what I call the *loyalty dilemma*.

Interpersonal morality (moral psychological theory and research that is derived from conflicts between natural obligations and is explored using *stranger-as-stimuli* based experimental paradigms) is not adequately equipped to examine the social-psychological inner workings of *loyalty dilemmas*. Only *intrarelational* morality (moral psychological theory and research that is derived from conflicts involving special obligations and explored using *relationships-as-stimuli* based experimental paradigms) can properly examine the causes, correlates, and consequences of loyalty dilemmas. In the current research, I test this assertion by first developing an experimental paradigm that can rightfully examine psychosocial processes that theoretically influence intrarelational moral judgment and decision-making. I then use this paradigm to test a set of hypotheses about the interaction between two proposed factors that influence intrarelational moral decision-making and the psychological mechanisms that underlie this relationship. The first factor, *outcome severity*, has been a well-documented situational determinant of interpersonal moral cognition and behavior (e.g., Jones, 1991; Walster, 1966). The second factor, *relational distance*, is an underrepresented construct in moral psychology that is unique to *intrarelational* moral judgment and decision-making.

Outcome Severity

Regardless of which psychological process has primacy (see the age old debate between intuition and reason; Haidt, 2001; Hume, 1960/1777; Kant, 1993/1785; Kohlberg, 1981; Pizarro & Bloom, 2003), most models of moral judgment begin with moral awareness (i.e., the detection of a norm violation; Cushman, Young, & Greene, 2010; Haidt, 2001, Malle et al., 2012; Rest, 1986; Van Berkum, Holleman, Nieuwland, Otten, & Murre, 2009). Moral awareness is

dependent on both the saliency and consequence of a behavior (Jones, 1991). The saliency and consequence of a norm violating behavior is determined by factors related the people involved (judge, agents, patients, and bystanders), the situation at hand (the social context), and the behavior being committed (the act; Gray, Young, & Waytz, 2012; Haidt, 2001; Jones, 1991; Malle et al., 2012; Rest, 1986). Research has demonstrated that along with moral valance of the act (moral vs. immoral; Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001; Taylor, 1991), the behavior-related factor most relevant to moral awareness is outcome severity (Bartels et al., 2015; Shaver, 1970; Walster, 1966).

Outcome severity describes the magnitude of the issue being evaluated (Robbennolt, 2000). Research has demonstrated that the severity of an act serves as a strong predictor of moral judgment (e.g., Barnett, 2001; S.T. Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Harrington, 1997; Lincoln & Holmes, 2011; Morris & McDonald, 1995; Robbennolt, 2000; Singer & Singer, 1997; Tennen & Affleck, 1990; Walster, 1966). Severity is related to increased moral awareness, judgment, and action due to the saliency (e.g., armed robbery is more noticeable than pick pocketing) and consequence (e.g., lying about earning a Ph.D. is more detrimental to a prospective employer than lying about where the degree was earned) of an unethical act (Barnett, 2001; Jones, 1991).

Research has shown that as the severity of the act increases, the desire to deter future occurrences of the act and punish the perpetrator of the act increases as well (Baumeister, 2005; Henrich et al., 2006; Haidt, Koller, & Dias, 1993). Research has also demonstrated that as the severity of an act increases people are more likely to be more sensitive, judgmental, and attendant to the act (Lincoln & Holmes, 2011; Singhapakdi, Vitell, & Kraft, 1996). For example, Lincoln & Holmes (2011) found that among military academy cadets the moral severity of an act was strongly correlated with increased moral sensitivity, judgments about potential

consequences, and the motivation to act. This positive relationship between severity and moral awareness, judgment, and action has also been demonstrated with more diverse samples such as university students and marketing professionals (Barnett, 2001; Singhapakdi, Vitell, & Kraft, 1996). Due to this recognized relationship between severity and moral awareness, judgment, and action, in the current research, I predicted that outcome severity would have a positive influence on impartial ethical decision-making (i.e., the decision to be honest in loyalty dilemmas).

Relational distance

One of the more robust findings from across the social sciences is that the people in our lives (i.e., our interpersonal relationships) play a prime role in shaping our thoughts, feelings, behavior, and wellbeing (C. Peterson, personal communication, 2010-2012; Reis, Collins, & Berscheid, 2000). Our interpersonal relationships affect every aspect of our psychology and behavior (e.g., Aristotle – the Nicomachean Ethics, 1999; Berscheid & Reis, 1998; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Bowlby, 1982; Coan, Schaefer, & Davidson, 2006; de Waal, 1996; A.P. Fiske, 1992; Hawkley, Burleson, Berntson, & Cacioppo, 2003; House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988; Mikulincer et al., 2005; Peterson, 2006; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Reis & Gable, 2003; Vaillant, 2015). This effect is not limited to our close relationships. Humans have evolved to cooperate within large, interconnected social-relational networks (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Deci & Ryan, 1985; 2000; Tomasello, 2014).

We all are at the center of our own large social network made up of all of our interpersonal relationships. Each relationship in our social-relational network differs by degree of closeness. One could argue, that to some degree, all of our interpersonal relationships are included in our self-concept, however it would be hard to argue that our close relationships are the most included because they have the most impact on our lives (Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson,

1991; Kelley, Berscheid, Christensen, Harvey, Huston, Levinger, McClintock, Peplau, & Peterson, 1983). This high degree of *self-other overlap* causes us to reason about our close relationships more similar to how we reason about ourselves than we do distant relationships and strangers (Aron, Lewandowski, Mashek, & Aron, 2013; Galinsky, Ku, & Wang, 2005). In other words relational distance (psychological closeness to the person one is reasoning about relative to the other relationships in one's social network) is conversely related to the degree of difference between self-other evaluations (Jones & Nisbett, 1972; Lieberman, Gaunt, Gilbert, & Trope, 2002; Pronin, Lin, & Ross, 2002). With this, I predicted that people would judge the immoral behavior of a close relationship (low relational distance) more appropriately than they would a distant relationship (high relational distance). I make this prediction based on two theoretical perspectives: evolutionary psychology (Buss, 2004; Darwin, 1998/1871) and construal level theories (CLT; Trope & Liberman, 2010).

Self-enhancement motives expand to close relationships

First, from an evolutionary perspective (Darwin, 1998/1871; Dawkins, 1976/1989; Krebs, 2008), the idea of expanding the self-preservation instinct to encompass close dyadic partners helps explain the preferential treatment people habitually demonstrate to close others (i.e., kin selection; Hamilton, 1964; reciprocal altruism; Trivers, 1971; familism; Banfield, 1958; and parochialism; Bernhard, Fischbacher, & Fehr, 2006). Humans have evolved to attend to, care for, and sacrifice in the name of their kin and clan (i.e., close others) more frequently than distant and unrelated others (Dunbar, 1993).

In situations where a close dyadic partner has committed an immoral act the self-preservation motive expands to the dyadic partner (Batson & Collins, 2011), elicits cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957; Wicklund & Brehm, 1976), and leads to moral disengagement by

the reconstruing of held moral values and beliefs (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996; Detert, Trevino, & Sweitzer, 2008). When people are attempting to understand the cause of immoral behavior, they are more likely to make situational attributions for those perpetrators that are more included in the self-concept and dispositional attributions for those who are less included (Batson, Thompson, Seuferling, Whitney, & Strongman, 1999; Cushman, 2008; Knobe, 2009; Knobe & Fraser, 2008; Merritt, Effron, & Monin, 2010).

This *expansion* of the self-preservation motive to close others also includes non-rational motives that, on the surface don't appear to be adaptive (e.g., self-serving bias in attribution; Miller & Ross, 1975; illusion of control; Langer, 1975; the better-than-average-effect; Alicke, Klotz, Breitenbecher, Yurak, & Vredenberg, 1995; Klar, 2002; illusory superiority; Kruger & Dunning, 1999), but upon closer examination, help us successfully navigate our ultrasocial world. Self-enhancement is one of these non-rational, self-preserving motives. Self-enhancement – a person's desire to maintain, increase, or protect their positive (to include moral) self-view (Allport, 1955; Barkan, Ayal, Gino, & Ariely, 2010; Leary, 2007; Rosenberg, 1979; Sedikides & Gregg, 2008) – has evolved as an adaptive mechanism for social interaction (Taylor & Brown, 1988, 1994; Trivers, 2011). Self-enhancement, like other self-preservation motives, is expanded to close relationships at a higher degree than to distant relationships (acquaintances) and unrelated others (strangers).

Close relationships produce low-level construals

Second, according to construal level theory (CLT; Trope & Liberman, 2010), as psychological distance from the *here and now* increases, construals of the situation become more abstract. Psychologically close situations produce low-level, concrete construals, whereas psychologically distant situations produce high-level, abstract construals. Low-level construals

are unstructured, contextualized representations of a situation that include its subordinate and incidental features. Comparatively, high-level construals are schematic, decontextualized representations emphasizing the core, superordinate features of a situation. High-level construals preserve the essential and invariant properties of a situation, while low-level construals preserve the minute and peripheral detail of a situation, emphasizing the situation's uniqueness rather than its similarity to other situations. A psychologically distant perspective allows one to see the big picture and perceive the gist of the situation-as-a-whole (Trope & Liberman, 2012).

The effects of reconstrual through psychological distance have been demonstrated in a wide variety of different domains to include emotional reactivity to negative events (Kross & Ayduk, 2008; Kross et al., 2009) creativity (Förster, Friedman, & Liberman, 2004), accuracy (Wakslak & Trope, 2009), negotiation (Henderson, Trope, & Carnevale, 2006), attraction (Liberman & Trope, 1998; Liviatan et al., 2008), self-improvement (Freitas et al., 2001; Kross, Duckworth, Ayduk, Tsukayama, & Mischel, 2011), power (Smith & Trope, 2006), politeness (Stephan, Liberman, & Trope, 2010), and social stress (Kross et al., 2014).

Recently, CLT has been extended into the moral domain. In a series of experiments, Eyal and colleagues demonstrated that people who evaluated harmless moral violations from the perspective of another person (high-level social-psychological distance) judged the behavior more harshly than people who judged the same violations from a self-immersed perspective (low-level social-psychological distance; Eyal, Liberman, & Trope, 2008, 2014; Gong & Medin, 2012, 2014; Zezelj & Jokic, 2014a, 2014b). In the current context, Eyal et al.'s results are complementary to the finding by Lammers (2012) that abstraction (high-level construals) leads people to judge themselves more leniently compared to strangers (i.e., increased hypocrisy). Together, these findings, along with the research that has shown that psychological distance

enhances global processing (Forster, Liberman, & Kuschel, 2008), that global moral principles like honesty and fairness underlie moral decisions (Lammers & Stapel, 2009; Tanner, Medin, & Iliev, 2008), and the connection between abstract mindsets and intuitions related to utilitarian ethics (e.g., care and fairness; Napier & Luguri, 2013) demonstrates that there is a relationship between psychological distance, construal level, and moral judgment and decision-making.

This line of logic (that psychological distance and construal level are related to moral judgment) coupled with the fact that close relationships are, by their very nature, construed more idiosyncratically (i.e., low level) than causal or distant relationships (i.e., high level; Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992; Berscheid & Reis, 1998; Reis & Patrick, 1996), I predict that people will think more concretely about close relationships (low relational distance) and more abstractly about distant relationships (high relational distance) when deliberating about an intrarelational moral dilemma. This will lead people will rely more on abstract moral principles related to utilitarian values like care, justice, fairness, and honesty when judging the behavior of a distant relationship or unrelated stranger. Conversely, when judging the behavior of a close relationship people will be more likely to focus on the unique, concrete aspects of the relationship (e.g., characteristics, sentiments, and memories associated with that particular dyadic partner) and parochial moral values like relationally bounded altruism, familial respect, hierarchy, and local sanctions (Bernard, Fischbacher, & Fehr, 2006; Brewer, 1999; De Dreu, Nijstad, & van Kippenberg, 2008; Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009).

Thus, when people are asked to judge an acquaintance, the increased psychological distance between themselves and the relationship produces high-level construals that are more conducive to processing information pertaining to the ethicality of the situation (e.g., the consequential impact of the act committed). This ease of processing invokes general moral

principles (i.e., stealing is bad, telling the truth is good) that lead to a more utilitarian, relationally impartial decision. Conversely, when people are asked about the behavior of a close relationship, the reduced psychological distance between themselves and their partner produces low-level construals that are more conducive to processing specific information about that person and the relationship that should lead to a more relationally partial, parochial decision.

Self-distance

Along with relational distance, there are other ways in which distance is created from the *here and now* (e.g., spatial, temporal, social, & hypothetical; Trope & Liberman, 2010). One of more recently conceptualized, easy to implement, and pragmatically effective methods for stimulating the reconstrual process through psychological distance is the self-distancing paradigm developed by Kross and colleagues (Kross & Ayduk, 2011; Kross et al., 2014). The basic premise of self-distancing is that people possess the capacity to separate the *reasoning self* from the *experiencing self* when thinking about difficult situations, and this *egocentric transcendence* stimulates self-regulation. Self-distancing has proven to be an effective intervention for people dealing with negative, difficult and stressful self-relevant situations, emotions, and decisions (e.g., Ayduk & Kross, 2010; Kross & Ayduk, 2011; Kross & Grossman, 2012; Kross et al., 2014).

Psychological distance between the reasoning and experiencing self occurs in the self-distance paradigm when people think about a difficult situation from a detached, *fly-on-the-wall* perspective through either visualization (i.e., looking through the eyes of a disinterested observer) or linguistic self-talk (i.e., using one's name or non-first person pronouns) manipulation (Kross, Ayduk, & Mischel, 2005; Kross et al., 2014). Taking this perspective facilitates the activation of high-level construals via psychological distance through the

separating of the reasoning and experiencing selves. This process activates global, abstract processing (i.e., seeing the big picture) and deactivates local, concrete processing (i.e., focusing on the narrow details of the situation) which is more prevalent in a self-immersed mindset where the reasoning and experiencing selves are one in the same (Kross et al., 2014). With this, I hypothesize that reasoning about a loyalty dilemma from a self-distanced perspective would neutralize the negative effect of close relational construals on morally impartial utilitarian decision-making in loyalty dilemmas and make reasoning about a close other compare less to judgments about the *self* and more to judgments about an *other* (Aron et al., 2013; Lammers, 2012).

Overview of the research

To test my thesis that the negative effect of close relational construals on impartial utilitarian judgment and decision-making could be mitigated by the activation of abstract-ethical construals during self-distanced reasoning, I conducted four studies. In Study 1, I explored the influence of relational distance on moral judgment by repurposing an effective and popular experimental paradigm from the study of cooperation. In Study 2, I expanded this investigation to encompass moral decision-making by developing an experimental paradigm that allows for the examination intrarelatational moral tradeoff decision-making (the loyalty dilemma) in a way that is both controlled and ecologically valid. In Studies 3 & 4, having found evidence for a negative relationship between close relational construals and utilitarian moral judgment and decision-making (Studies 1 & 2), I set out to test my hypotheses that a) high-level (abstract-ethical) construals mediate this relationship (Study 4), and b) that these parochial (relationally partial) tendencies can be regulated by self-distancing through self-talk (Studies 3 & 4).

CHAPTER 2

STUDY 1: RELATIONAL DISTANCE AND MORAL JUDGMENT

In the first experiment, I set out to explore the basic question: Do we evaluate the moral / immoral behavior of our close interpersonal relationships differently than we do the behavior of acquaintances and strangers? To do this, I used a tried and true experimental paradigm from the study of cooperation, which has recently been posited as the essence of human morality (Greene, 2013). I hypothesized that people would judge the moral (i.e., cooperative) behavior of close relationships (low relational distance) less appropriate than they would the behavior of acquaintances (i.e., distant relationships; high relational distance) and strangers (unrelated). However, when judging the immoral (i.e., selfish) behavior of an agent people would judge close relationships more appropriately than acquaintances and strangers.

I made these hypotheses based on research that has shown that close relationships are thought of more like the *self* and less like an *other* in the allocation of resources (Aron et al., 1991) and that people are more likely to hold strangers more morally responsible for unethical behavior than they do their own (Valdesolo & DeSteno, 2007). To test this hypothesis, participants were instructed to imagine that they were witnessing a close relationship, acquaintance, or stranger either cooperate or defect (i.e., act selfishly) in a modified version of the *Prisoner's Dilemma* (PD; Liebrand, Wilke, Vogel, & Wolters, 1986; Luce & Raiffa, 1957; Poundstone, 1992). The PD has been used extensively across both the natural and social sciences

to explore how and why people cooperate (or not) in interdependent (i.e., exchange) situations (Axelrod & Hamilton, 1981; Kelly et al., 2003; Nowak & Sigmund, 1993). In the current study, the PD was used as situational stimuli to evoke the moral judgment of an observed agent's behavior. The goal was to demonstrate that relational distance plays a role in the moral judgment of both moral and immoral behavior.

Method

Participants. Three hundred sixty four individuals (mean age = 38.4, $SD = 13.28$, 49.5% women 73.1% White) from Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk)³ participated in this study for \$.50. I calculated my target sample size using an estimated effect size, f , of .2, which would require a sample size of approximately 384 participants for the study to be powered at 95%⁴. In addition to the 364, 45 participants (8.9% of the sample) were excluded from the sample for failing a relational distance manipulation check. The relational distance manipulation check was used to ensure that participants were truly thinking about a close or distant relationship depending the condition they were assigned. After deciding whom participants were going to think about, they were presented a modified version of the Inclusion of Other in the Self (IOS) Scale (IOS; Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992; see figure 1) and asked to select which pairs of circles best represented the relationship they were thinking about. Participants in the close relationship condition who did not select the 7th, 8th, or 9th pairs of circles were excluded from the sample and

³ MTurk is a web service that matches requesters (e.g., researchers) with members willing to complete web-based tasks for a specified reward. Several evaluations of MTurk have shown that it is a reliable and valid source of psychological data (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011; Paolacci & Chandler, 2014). Previous studies have shown that Internet-based samples can provide useful and valid data for psychological research (Srivastava, John, Gosling, & Potter, 2003). Moreover, such samples are often more diverse than traditional undergraduate samples with respect to age, relationship status, and income (Gosling, Vazire, Srivastava, & John, 2004).

⁴ I calculated the target sample size using G*Power Version 3.1.7 (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buckner, 2007).

participants in the distant relationship condition who did not select the 1st, 2nd, or 3rd pairs of circles were excluded from the sample for failing to follow the experimental instructions. I believe that excluding these participants is important to the validity of the current research due to the robust literature on how different close relationships are construed from non-close relationships (Argyle & Henderson, 1984; Aron et al., 1991; Berscheid et al., 1989; DePaulo & Kashy, 1998; Granovetter, 1973; Krackhardt, 1992; Maxwell, 1985; Mills, Clark, Ford, & Johnson, 2004; Parks & Floyd, 1996). This exclusion rate is consistent with the rates found in previous research (Oppenheimer et al., 2009).

Cover story. Participants were recruited for a study examining the processes involved in person perception and evaluation.

Measurements and Procedures.

Relational distance.

At the beginning of the experiment participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions that varied by relational distance (close, distant, strangers). In the close relationships (i.e., low relational distance) condition participants were asked to identify one of their closest interpersonal relationships from their social-relational network. In the distant relationships (i.e., high relational distance) condition participants were asked to identify one of their most distant relationships. In the strangers (i.e., non-relationships) condition participants were not asked to generate anything about an interpersonal relationship.

To assist participants in the close or distant relationships condition, they were shown the modified IOS scale (figure 1) as a way for them to think about their social-relational network as a whole and to identify either a close or distant (depending on the condition) relationship. The IOS is designed to measure the perceived closeness of an interpersonal relationship using seven

different Venn diagrams (i.e., pair of circles) varying in degree of overlap between two circles. In each diagram, one of the circles represents the self and the other represents the dyadic partner. The overlap between the two circles ranges from no overlap (high relational distance) to almost full overlap (low relational distance).

In the close relationships condition, participants were presented the Modified-IOS and asked to think a person in which there was a high degree of self-other overlap represented by the set of circles with the most overlap (low relational distance; 9 on the Modified-IOS scale). In the distant relationships condition, participants were presented the Modified-IOS and asked to think about a person within their social-relational network with whom there was the least degree of self-other overlap represented by the set of circles with the least amount of overlap (high relational distance; 1 on the Modified-IOS scale). Once participants selected their relationship, they were asked to provide the name, gender, relationship type (e.g., mother, coworker, or neighbor) of the relationship, as well as complete the relational distance manipulation check. Allowing participants to decide for themselves who they were closely or distantly related to, instead of forcing a participant's relationships into relationally normative strata (e.g., mother is close, neighbor is distant), allowed me to capture each participant's subjective account of relational distance instead of fitting a normative account of relational distance on to each individual's social-relational network⁵.

Moral / immoral behavior.

⁵ Social psychological research that has used relational stimuli as an independent variable typically asks people to think about predetermined relational categories (e.g., Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000; Goldstein & Cialdini, 2007; Kouchaki, 2011; Waytz, Dugan, & Young, 2013). I believe that this decreases the validity of the research due to the fact that not everyone is close / distant to the same types of people (e.g., not everyone is close to their mother, and not everyone is distant from their neighbor).

After identifying their relational partner (in the close and distant relationship conditions), participants next read the following scenario:

You are watching (the name of the relationship that was identified earlier) play a game with another person. There is a total of \$1,000,000 at stake in this game. The game is simple, both ____ and the other player must choose to either share or keep the money. If both ____ and the other player chose to share the money they will split the money \$500,000 to ____ and \$500,00 to the other person. If both and the other person decide to keep the money than both receive nothing, \$0 to and \$0 to the other person. If ____ choses to share the money and the other person choses to keep the money, ____ will receive \$0 and the other person will receive \$1,000,000. If ____ choses to keep the money and the other person choses to share the money, ____ receives \$1,000,000 and the other person receives \$0. In this game each decision is made in isolation; there is no way for ____ and the other player to communicate with each other. Also, the choices are made simultaneously and cannot be changed once they are made.

After reading the scenario, participants were then randomized into one of two experimental conditions in accordance to the two possible decisions that players can make in the prisoners dilemma: *cooperate* or *defect*.

Cooperate.

Participants assigned to the cooperate condition were told that (the name of the relationship that was identified earlier) decides to **share** the money.

Defect.

Participants assigned to the defect condition were told that (the name of the relationship that was identified earlier) decides to **keep** the money.

Moral judgment.

Participants were then asked to rate the appropriateness of the decision on a seven-point scale with anchors on either end of the scale (1 = not appropriate and 7 = very appropriate).

Results and discussion

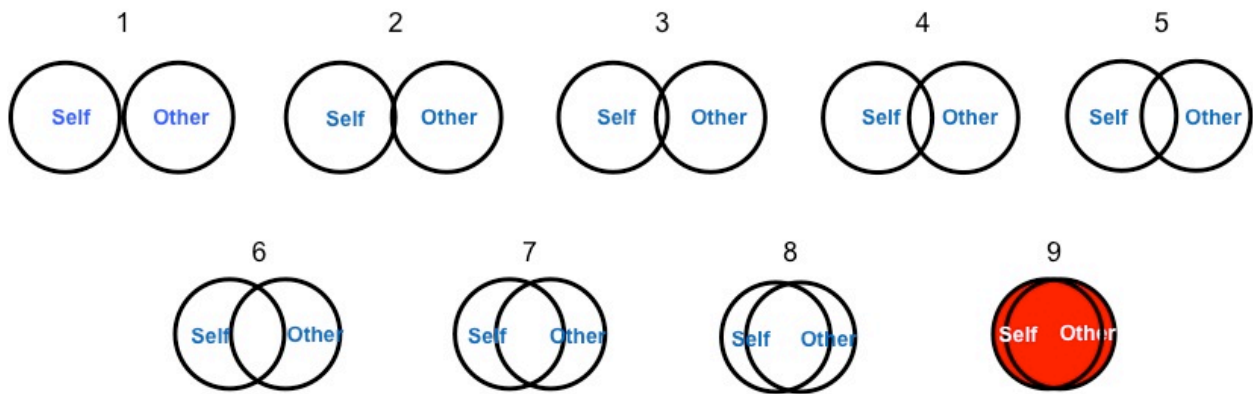
A two-way ANOVA yielded, a main effect for the agent's decision (cooperate, defect), $F(1, 362) = 218.96, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .38$, no main effect for relational distance (close, distant, stranger), $F(2, 361) = 1.58, p = .16$, and an interaction between the two variables on participants' moral judgments of the agent's behavior, $F(2, 358) = 4.58, p = .01, \eta_p^2 = .03$. Exploring this interaction further, I found that there was no effect for relational distance in the cooperate condition, $F(2, 180) = .63, p = .54$, however, in the defect condition there was an effect for relational distance, $F(2, 178) = 5.05, p = .01, \eta_p^2 = .05$. Planned comparisons between the three levels of relational distance in the defect condition show that there is a significant difference between the moral judgments of close relationships ($M = 4.08, SD = 2.29$) and strangers ($M = 2.95, SD = 1.94$), $t(132) = -3.12, p = .02, d = .57$, 95% confidence interval (CI) = $[-1.87, -.4]$, but no difference between distant relationships ($M = 3.6; SD = 2.01$) and strangers, $t(119) = -1.76, p = .08$, or close and distant relationships, $t(105) = -1.17, p = .24$. The results show that participants in the defect experimental condition, on average, rated the agent's behavior as inappropriate (below the midpoint, 3.5 on the 7-point scale) when judging a stranger, whereas the actions of close relationships were, on average, judged as appropriate (above the midpoint), with distant relationships straddling the midpoint (see fig. 2).

These results confirm my hypothesis that relational distance plays a role in moral judgment, but this conclusion is limited by the design of this experiment. Although the prisoner's dilemma paradigm has proven useful for studying the tension between self-interested and moral motives, there is an element of fantasy involved when it's used as stimuli for third party moral judgment. It takes a degree of imagination to visualize a person, especially someone with whom you are close too, participating in a decontextualized game where the distribution of a significant amount of money hinges on a single interdependent set of decisions. Furthermore, in this experiment, participants were asked to either reason about a close relationship, an acquaintance, or a stranger in a *one-shot*, separate decision paradigm. This, between-subjects, method is well suited for modeling evaluations of strangers because all strangers are qualitatively equal (i.e., all strangers are the same, relationally speaking). However, *iterative*, joint decision (i.e., within-subjects) paradigms are better suited for modeling evaluations pertaining to interpersonal relationships because there are qualitative differences between the interpersonal relationships that occupy our social-relational network and these differences are relevant in our everyday person perception and judgment (Berscheid, 1999; Clark & Mills, 1979; Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2008; Gilbert, 1998; Kelley, 1983). These limitations might help to explain why the experiment yielded an overall significant effect for relational distance, but failed to produce pairwise differences between the close and distant, and stranger and distant conditions. The goal of Experiment 2 was to address these limitations, improve the experimental validity, both internal and external, and further explore the relationship between relational distance and moral reasoning.

Figures

Figure 1: Modified Inclusion of the Other in the Self (IOS) Scale (Version 1)

Close relationship manipulation



Distant relationship manipulation

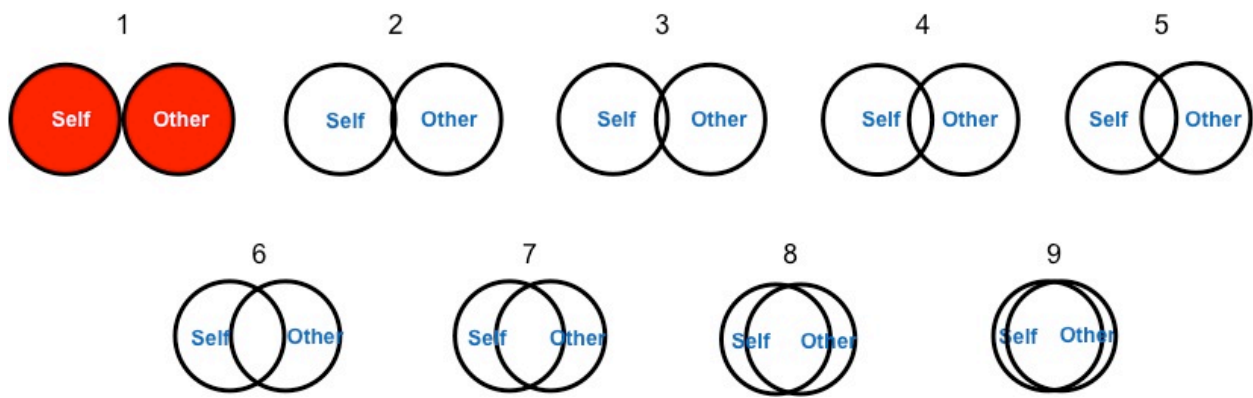


Figure 2: moral judgment of moral (cooperative) and immoral (selfish) behavior by relational distance (close, distant, stranger)

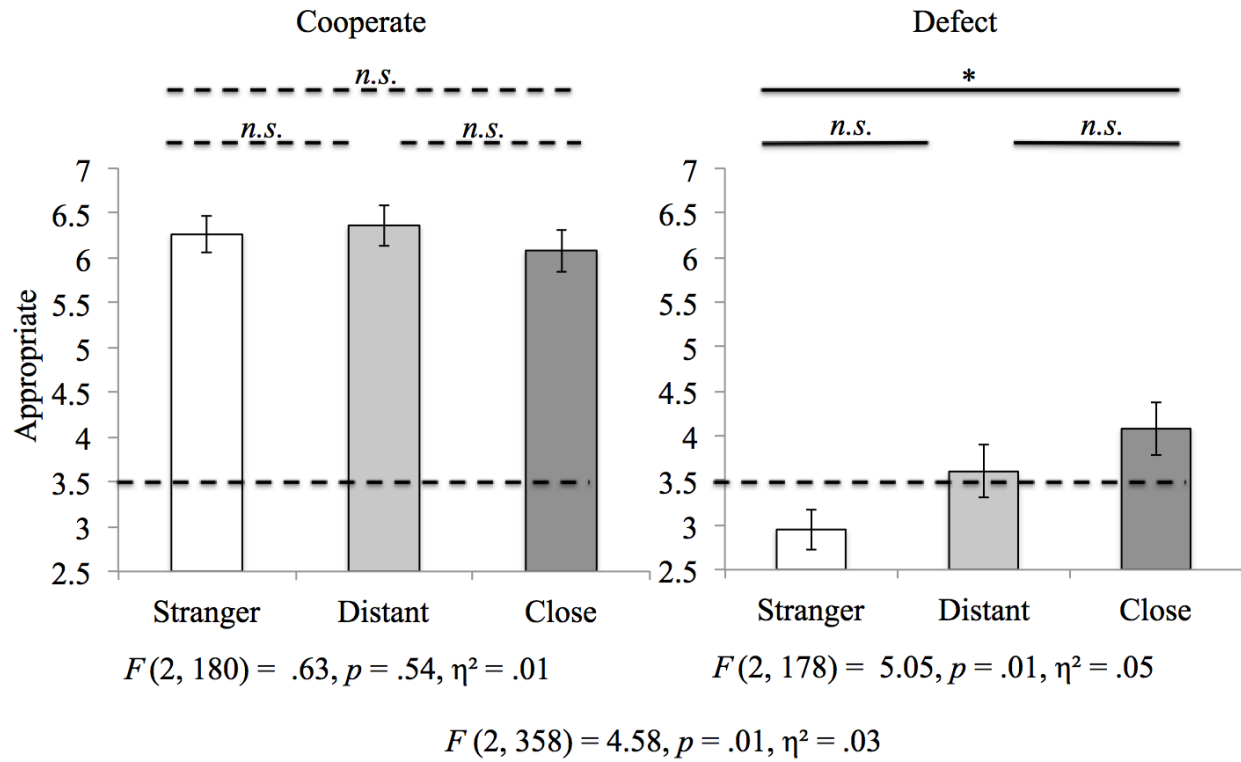


Table 1: Descriptive statistics (cell size, mean, and standard deviation) by agent decision (cooperate, defect) and relational distance (close, distant, stranger)

Agent decision	Close relationships	Distant relationships	Strangers
Cooperate	N = 53	N = 56	N = 74
	M = 6.08	M = 6.36	M = 6.26
	SD = 1.52	SD = 1.26	SD = 1.24
Defect	N = 60	N = 47	N = 74
	M = 4.08	M = 3.6	M = 2.95
	SD = 2.29	SD = 2.01	SD = 1.94

CHAPTER 3

STUDY 2: RELATIONAL DISTANCE AND MORAL DECISION MAKING

(THE LOYALTY DILEMMA)

In Study 1, I found evidence that relational distance influences the moral judgment of immoral (selfish), but not moral (cooperative) behavior. In Study 2, I wanted to build on this finding by a) broadening the inquiry from moral judgment to intrarelatational moral decision-making⁶, b) improve the validity of the findings through the use of a more diverse sample and a more realistic paradigm, c) examine, in more in fine-grain detail, the effect of relational distance on moral cognition within a person's social-relational network, and d) gain a better understanding of how relational distance, a *person-centered* moral stimuli (Uhlmann, Pizarro, & Diermeier, 2015), interacts with outcome severity (Walster, 1966), an important *act-based* moral stimuli that has been often used and well implicated in the study of moral cognition (Jones, 1991; Robbennolt, 2000).

To accomplish these four goals I developed a novel, relationship-based, moral dilemma (i.e., the loyalty dilemma) where participants would be asked to make a tradeoff decision between honesty (relationally impartial, utilitarian ethics) and loyalty (relationally partial, parochial ethics). These dilemmas varied on two factors: (a) the relational distance between the

⁶ This is important because research has demonstrated that there are discrepancies between moral judgments and decisions (see Tassy et al., 2013)

agent and the judge (3 levels: close; casual; distant), and (b) the severity of the unethical act committed by the agent (3 levels: serious; moderate; mild).

To ensure that I was properly capturing a representative sample of each participant's social-relational network across the full spectrum of relational distance the experiment began by asking participants to identify nine different interpersonal relationships from their social-relational network that varied by relational distance. Next, participants were presented nine different interpersonal moral dilemmas that varied by both relational distance and outcome severity. Due to the nature of the research question at hand, using a within- vs. between-subjects design in for this experiment allowed me to model intrarelational moral decision-making in a more ecologically valid and psychologically realistic way.

Research has demonstrated that people evaluate choices differently when making joint (repeated, within-subjects) vs. separate (isolated, between-subjects) decisions (Bartels, 2008; Hsee, Loewenstein, Blount, & Bazerman, 1999; Uhlmann, Pizarro, Tannenbaum, & Ditto 2009). Having participants jointly judge a representative sample of their social-relational network while systematically controlling for relational distance and outcome severity not only helps with the experiment's internal validity (i.e., control for unmeasured differences between participants, establish the effect for the two experimental variables, decrease measurement error, and make better inferences about causality), it also improves it's external validity.

A joint decision design inherently makes participants simultaneously compare both the different unethical acts (that vary by severity) and the people from their social-relational network (that vary by relational distance). These simultaneous comparisons more accurately reveal just how participants' judgments and decisions are influenced by the experimental factors in concert. Furthermore, the use of *one-shot* (separate decision) games (e.g., social dilemmas; Van Lange,

Joireman, Parks, & Van Dijk, 2013) and moral dilemmas (e.g., Trolley problems; Greene et al., 2001) have been shown to be well suited for studying the moral evaluations and decisions pertaining to strangers because all strangers are qualitatively equal (one stranger equals another stranger). However, iterative paradigms (joint decisions) are better for studying the moral evaluations and decisions pertaining to relationships because there are various qualitative differences between the interpersonal relationships that occupy our social-relational network (Berscheid, 1999; Clark & Mills, 1979; Kelley, 1983). Using a joint (vs. separate) evaluative method in this experiment is a more realistic model of everyday moral judgment and decision-making (Bartels, 2008; Uhlmann et al., 2009).

In each of the loyalty dilemmas, participants would read a vignette that described one of their relationships (varying by relational distance) committing an unethical act (varying by severity) at the end of the scenario they would be asked to make a tradeoff decision between telling the truth or lying about the behavior to a third party authority figure. I predicted that there would be an effect for severity on the tradeoff decision insomuch that as severity increased so did the likelihood of participants telling the truth. I also predicted that there would be a similar effect for relational distance on the tradeoff decision that was found in the first study: that as relational distance increased so did the likelihood of telling the truth. I also expected these factors to interact such that in the context of close relationships (close relational construal) the effect of severity would be significantly diminished when compared to the effect for severity in the context of casual and distant relationships (non-close relational construals).

I make this hypothesis based on the theoretical justifications for predicting the main effect for relational distance (expansion of self-enhancement motives & construal level) and outcome severity (salience and consequence) presented earlier (see chapter 1), the results of my

first experiment (close relationships behaving immorally are judged less harshly than distant relationships; see chapter 2), and the multidisciplinary evidence that has shown distinctive differences in how people think about close relationships compared to non-close (i.e., casual & distant) relationships within their social networks (e.g., Argyle & Henderson, 1984; Aron et al., 1991; Berscheid et al., 1989; DePaulo & Bell, 1996; Granovetter, 1973; Kelley et al., 1983; Krackhardt, 1992; Maxwell, 1985; Mills, Clark, Ford, & Johnson, 2004; Parks & Floyd, 1996). For example, research has shown that close relationships inspire more intense emotions (Reis & Patrick, 1996), facilitate more altruistic (vs. selfish) deception (DePaulo & Kashy, 1998), and generate more positive (e.g., forgiveness) and negative (e.g., conflict) motives than non-close relationships (Holmes & Murray, 1996; McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997).

Putting this all together, people think more concretely and contextually about close relationships and more abstractly about distant, or casual relationships. In the context of a loyalty dilemma, people may rely on abstract moral principles like justice, fairness, and honesty when judging the behavior of a casually or distantly related relational partner. Conversely, when judging the behavior of a close dyadic partner people focus on the unique, concrete aspects of the relationship (e.g., characteristics, sentiments, and memories associated with that particular relational partner). Thus, when people are faced with a loyalty dilemma involving a casually or distantly related relational partner, the increased psychological distance between themselves and the agent produces high-level construals that should be more conducive to processing information pertaining to the ethicality of the situation (e.g., the consequential impact of the act committed). This increased ease of processing invokes general moral principles (i.e., stealing is bad, telling the truth is good) that lead to a more utilitarian, relationally unbiased (i.e., disloyal; honest) decision. Conversely, when people are asked about the behavior of a close dyadic

partner, the reduced psychological distance between themselves and their partner produces low-level construals that are more conducive to processing specific information about that person and the relationship that should lead to a more relationally biased, parochial (i.e., loyal; dishonest) decision. In sum, my analysis suggests that close relational construals will dampen the effect of outcome severity in loyalty dilemmas.

I tested this prediction by presenting participants with a series of nine loyalty dilemmas that varied on the three levels of relational distance (close, causal, distant) and the three levels of outcome severity (mild, moderate, serious). Participants read each dilemma and then were forced to make a choice between being honest or loyal.

Method

Participants. Participants were one hundred and three introductory psychology subject pool students (55.3% women; 95.4% between the ages of 18 and 24; 63.4% White) at the University of Michigan and two hundred and twenty one American adults (55.7% women; $M_{\text{age}} = 37.5$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 12.6$; 75.6%; 75.6% White) recruited through MTurk. To improve the validity of the research, two different sampling techniques were used to obtain a demographically diverse sample (both university undergraduates and MTurk workers) from different experimental environments (in the lab and over the internet)⁷. In the student sample each participant was awarded class credit for participating in the experiment. In the MTurk worker sample each participants were paid \$.75 for participating in the experiment. A target sample of 315 participants was calculated based on an estimate of 35 participants per cell, the anticipated low to medium effect ($w = .2$), and the increased statistical power produced by the study's repeated

⁷ Social psychological research that utilizes only one of these sampling techniques (university students in the laboratory or MTurk workers over the internet) has been criticized (see Hauser & Schwarz, 2015 and Paolacci & Chandler, 2014 for reviews), particularly in moral psychology (e.g., Damon & Colby, 2015). The current research recognizes this critique and attempts to address it by using both sampling techniques in unison.

measures design (Cohen, 1988; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013; McClelland, 2000; Mackinnon, 2015). In addition to the 103 participants in the student subject pool sample, 36 participants (25.9% of the sample) were excluded from the analysis for failing the manipulation checks for meaningful responses. In addition to the 221 participants in the MTurk sample, 15 participants (6% of the sample) in the experiment were excluded from the analysis for failing the manipulation checks for meaningful responses. This exclusion rate is consistent with the rates found in previous research (Hauser & Schwarz, 2015; Oppenheimer et al., 2009). The techniques used to identify careless responses were based on Meade & Craig (2012)'s recommendation to insert special items into the survey as a way to catch inattentive or careless participants. This exclusion rate is consistent with the rates found in previous research (Oppenheimer et al., 2009). There was no difference between the two different samples on the dependent variable (i.e., loyalty; $\chi^2 = .6, p = .439$ and the results of a Kolmogorov-Smirnov test show that there is no difference between the distributions of the two samples), so all further analyses collapse the two samples into one.

Cover story. Participants were recruited for a study on the influence of interpersonal relationships on decision-making.

Measurements and Procedures.

Relational distance.

At the beginning of the experiment participants were asked to identify nine relational partners (i.e., interpersonal relationships) from their social-relational network. To ensure that this nine-person set represented the full spectrum of the participants' social-relational network in terms of relational distance, they were asked to organize these relationships into three different categories based on degree of relational distance. Three of the nine relationships would represent

their close relationships (low relational distance), three would represent their casual relationships (moderate relational distance), and the remaining three would represent their distant relationships (high relational distance). Participants were told that the word relationship was a broad term that referred to anyone they mutually interacted with on a recurring basis.

To assist participants with this exercise, they were provided with the Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale (IOS; Aron et al., 1992; see figure 3). Participants were presented the IOS and asked to think about three different relationships from their social network that were represented by the two sets of circles with the most overlap (low relational distance; 6-7 on the IOS scale), three relationships represented by the two sets of circles with the least amount of overlap (high relational distance; 1-2 on the IOS scale), and three relationships represented by the three sets of circles with moderate overlap (moderate relational distance; 3-5 on the IOS scale). Once participants selected their nine relationships they were asked to provide the name, gender, and relationship type (e.g., mother, coworker, or neighbor).

Outcome Severity.

Once participants had identified the nine representative relational partners from their social-relational network, they were then presented with nine different scenarios. In each scenario, the participant imagined that they were witnessing one of their dyadic-relational partners commit one of nine different stealing behaviors that varied by outcome severity.

To derive the nine different stealing behaviors used in the current study, I conducted a pilot study on MTurk with participants not included in the main study. In the pilot study, participants (N = 138) were asked to rate eighteen different stealing behaviors on ethical

severity⁸ (see appendix 1 for the eighteen different stealing behaviors used in the pilot study). Subjects rated the eighteen behaviors on a scale of 1 (not severe) to 7 (very severe) using a sliding scale. Using the results from the pilot study (see appendix 1), the eighteen stealing behaviors were organized into three categories of severity (serious, moderate, and mild). From this group of 18 behaviors, the following nine stealing behaviors were selected for use in the experiment based on their realism, conceptual distinctiveness, and representativeness of the three ordinal degrees of severity: burglary, credit card fraud, blackmail, shoplifting, eating at a restaurant and not paying (i.e., dining and dashing), keeping merchandise that was sent to the wrong address, lying about the reason for returning merchandise, eating merchandise while shopping and not paying, and the illegal downloading of music over the internet.

To ensure that these behaviors were not only conceptually distinct and representative, but also statistically distinct and representative, I first computed the internal consistency of the three behaviors within each category to ensure that they cohered (mild severity: illegal download; $M = 3.03$, $SD = 1.81$, eating while shopping and not paying; $M = 3.63$, $SD = 1.7$, and lying about a return; 4.02 , $SD = 1.78$; $\alpha = .83$; moderate severity: shoplifting; $M = 4.9$, $SD = 1.49$, dining & dashing; 4.9 , $SD = 1.47$, and keeping merchandise; $M = 4.56$, $SD = 1.55$; $\alpha = .81$; and serious severity: burglary; $M = 6.01$, $SD = 1.1$, credit card fraud; $M = 5.83$, $SD = 1.18$, and blackmail; $M = 5.78$, $SD = 1.29$; $\alpha = .87$). Next, I averaged the three scores for each category together (mild severity: $M = 3.57$, $SD = 1.52$, moderate severity: $M = 4.77$, $SD = 1.29$, and serious severity: $M = 5.83$, $SD = 1.11$) and compared these composite means to one another to ensure that each of the three categories were distinct (mild – moderate: $t(138) = 13.99$, $p < .001$; mild - serious: $t(138) = 17.62$, $p < .001$; and moderate – serious: $t(137) = 13.14$, $p < .001$). The results of these tests

⁸ The 18 behaviors used in the pilot study were derived through a cursory review of the categories associated with the legal definition of theft (Burton, 2006).

demonstrate that each category of severity was: a) represented by a coherent set of three stealing behaviors, and b) distinct from the other two categories (see table 2)⁹.

Intrarelational moral decision-making.

To create the loyalty dilemma, participants were asked, after reading each situation, to make a moral tradeoff – a binary “this or that” decision between two courses of action that may both lead to morally undesirable effects (Bartels et al., 2015; Baron & Spranca, 1997; Tetlock et al., 2000). They could tell the truth and acknowledge that they knew their dyadic partner committed the stealing behavior (i.e., the fair and impartial utilitarian moral decision), or they could lie and say that they did not know that their relational partner committed the stealing behavior (i.e., the relational biased parochial moral decision). By moving from a continuous measure of moral judgment that was used in Study 1, to a dichotomous measure of moral decision-making, I hoped to a) move beyond measuring moral judgment to intrarelational moral decision making because of the often cited discrepancy between moral judgments and behavior (Bergman, 2004; Blasi, 2005; Eisenberg, 1986; Haidt, 2001; Reynolds, 2006; Werber & Gillespie, 1998), and second, I wanted to remove the ambiguous *moral middle ground* that is created when participants can select from multiple scaled responses and truly create a moral tradeoff where participants were forced choose only one of the undesirable options (Bartels et al., 2015; Baron & Spranca, 1997; Tetlock et al., 2000). Below is an example of one of the nine scenarios that a participant could have read:

⁹ To increase the realism and applicability for the student sample two of the stealing behaviors were exchanged with another stealing behavior from the same level of severity. The “return broken merchandise” scenario was replaced with “unauthorized hacking of Wi-Fi” and the “stealing from a department store” was replaced by “plagiarism.” These substitutions did not change the results of the distinctiveness, or the representativeness, tests of the nine types of stealing within the three categories of severity.

You have just witnessed *(one of the names of the relationships that were identified earlier)*, your supervisor intentionally leave a restaurant without paying his check. A police officer approaches you and asks, “Do you know anything about this?”

After reading each scenario participants must answer either:

“No, ____ (your supervisor) did not intentionally leave a restaurant without paying his check.”

Or,

“Yes, ____ (your supervisor) did intentionally leave a restaurant without paying his check.”

In the above example, the participant was presented with the name of one of their relational partners that they identified in first part of the experiment. The two options reflect the trade off between maintaining one’s moral integrity (i.e., honesty; utilitarian ethics) and remaining devoted to a relational partner (i.e., loyalty; parochial ethics). In each dilemma one of the nine stealing behavior was randomly paired with one of the nine relational partners that subjects previously identified as the actor of the immoral behavior¹⁰. Thus, to create the loyalty dilemma, relational partners of varying relational distance (close, casual, distant) were randomly crossed with the stealing behaviors of varying outcome severity (serious, moderate, mild) in a counter-balanced, two-factor, three-level, pseudo-Latin square design (Broota, 1989; Cochran & Cox, 1992).

Results and discussion

¹⁰ Information about the relational partners (name and relationship type) was populated from the relationship questions (described in the previous section) into the loyalty dilemma scenarios and answer options via the *pipelined text* option in Qualtrics (i.e., the data collection instrument used for this study).

I submitted participants' moral decisions to a 3 (relational distance: close, casual, distant) x 3 (outcome severity: serious, moderate, mild) generalized estimated equation logistic regression with both factors being repeated. As expected, the main effect for relational distance was significant ($\chi^2 [2, n = 324] = -228.12, p < .001$). Participants were significantly more loyal when reasoning about a close relationship (low relational distance; 75.1%) then when reasoning about a casual (moderate relational distance; 61.1%; $\chi^2 = -62.37, p < .001$, OR = 1.92 [1.63, 2.51]) or distant relationship (high relational distance, 40.1%; $\chi^2 = -237.56, p < .001$, OR = 5.19 [4.21, 6.4]). The main effect for outcome severity was also significant ($\chi^2 [2, n = 324] = 159.92, p < .001$). Participants were significantly less parochial when reasoning about a seriously severe act (high severity; 44.9%) when compared to moderately (moderate severity; 57.7%; $\chi^2 = 55.13, p < .001$, OR = 1.68 [1.46, 1.92], or mildly severe act (low severity; 70.4%; $\chi^2 = 179.33, p < .001$, OR = 2.92 [2.50, 3.42]). Table 1 shows the frequency and percentage of loyal decisions by relational distance and outcome severity.

Importantly, I also observed a significant relational distance by outcome severity interaction ($\chi^2 [4, n = 324] = 15.56, p = .004$). Pairwise comparisons indicated that the severity of the act that people reasoned about was less likely to influence people's decisions when they imagined a close relationship ($\chi^2 = 31.67, p < .001$) committing the act then when they reasoned about a casual ($\chi^2 = 91.3, p < .001$) or distant ($\chi^2 = 92.92, p < .001$; see Figure 4) relationship stealing something. The effect size capturing the magnitude of the effect of severity on participants' loyalty judgments (signified by the odds ratio [OR] of the coefficient) was significantly smaller for close relationships (OR = 2.2 [1.67, 2.89]) relative to both the casual (OR = 3.8 [2.89, 4.99]; $\chi^2 = -9.32, p = .002$) and distant relationships (OR = 4.23 [3.16, 5.68]; $\chi^2 = -10.74, p = .001$; see Figure 5). In contrast, the effect sizes characterizing the effect of severity

on moral decision-making were equivalent (i.e., not significantly different) for moderate and causal relationships ($\chi^2 = .37, p = .54$). These findings demonstrate that the severity of the unethical act committed by the agent influenced people's moral decisions more powerfully when they reasoned about casual and distant as opposed to close relationships.

Figures

Figure 3. The inclusion of the other in the self-scale (IOS; Aron et al., 1992)

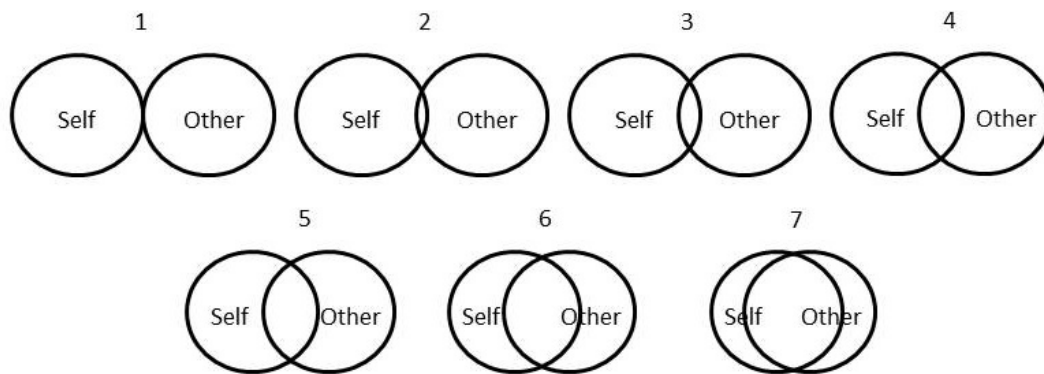


Figure 4: Loyalty decisions by levels of relational distance and outcome severity

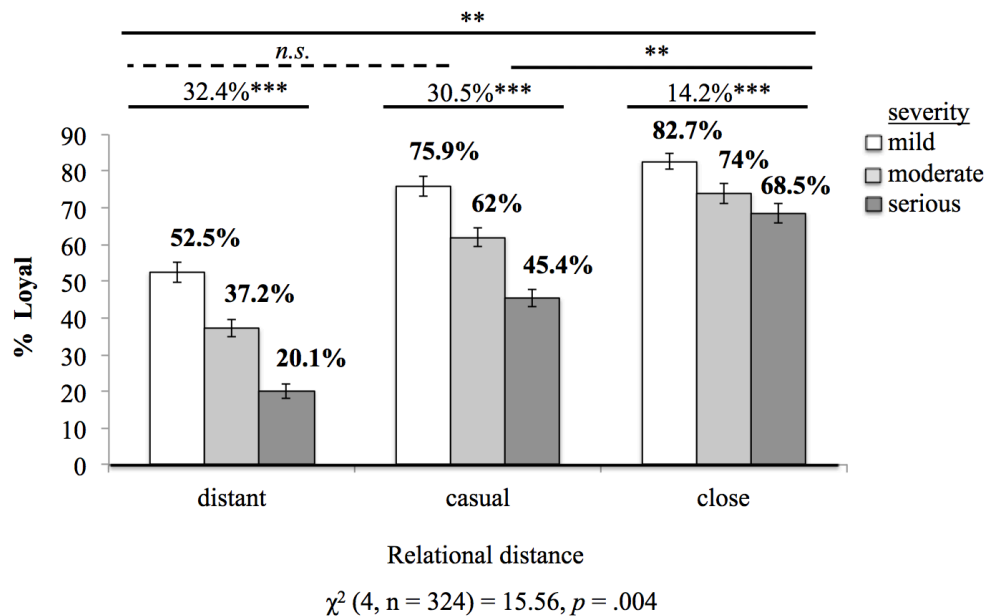
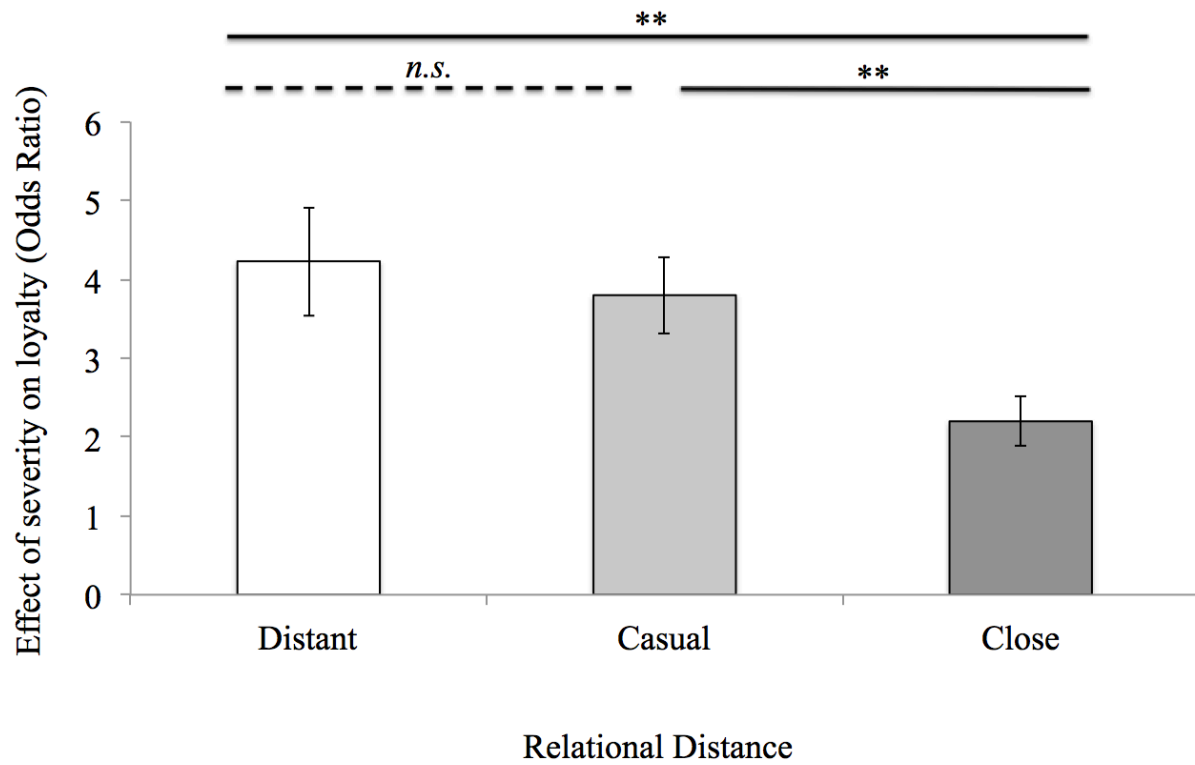


Figure 5: The effect of severity on loyalty by level of relational distance (close, casual, distant)



Tables

Table 2. Descriptive statistics from the stealing behavior pilot study

The stealing behaviors are ordered from the least (1) to the most (18) severe

1) Illegal Download (M = 3.03, SD = 1.81)	10) Dine & dash (M = 4.90, SD = 1.47)
2) Hacking Wi-Fi (M = 3.46, SD = 3.46)	11) Shoplift (M = 4.90, SD = 1.49)
3) Bootleg (M = 3.59, SD = 1.78)	12) Pickpocket (M = 5.38, SD = 1.36)
4) Eating merchandise (M = 3.63, SD = 1.7)	13) Taking computer (M = 5.49, SD = 1.41)
5) Trespass (M = 3.78, SD = 1.64)	14) Blackmail (M = 5.78, SD = 1.29)
6) Lying about return (M = 4.02, SD = 1.78)	15) Credit Card Fraud (M = 5.83, SD = 1.18)
7) Keeping package (M = 4.56, SD = 1.55)	16) Burglary (M = 6.01, SD = 1.1)
8) Check Bouncing (M = 4.65, SD = 1.54)	17) Robbery (M = 6.38, SD = 1.1)
9) Plagiarism (M = 4.79, SD = 1.61)	18) Kidnap (M = 6.67, SD = .92)

Table 3. Loyalty ratio and percentage by level of ethical severity and relational distance

Level of severity	Close relationships	Casual relationships	Distant relationships
Serious acts	222/324 68.5%	147/324 45.4%	67/324 20.1%
Moderate acts	239/323 74%	201/324 62%	120/323 37.2%
Mild acts	268/324 82.7%	246/324 75.9%	170/324 52.5%

CHAPTER 4

STUDY 3: SELF-DISTANCE AND THE LOYALTY DILEMMA

In Study 1, I found that individuals were more likely to judge the immoral behavior of a close relationship more appropriate than the same behavior committed by an acquaintance or a stranger. In Study 2, I found that when people were asked to make a tradeoff decision between telling the truth (i.e., impartial utilitarian ethics) and lying about a relational agent committing an unethical act (i.e., partial parochial ethics), as the relational distance between the judge and agent increased, the likelihood that the judge would be honest increased as well. Moreover, the positive effect of outcome severity on honesty was moderated by relational distance insomuch that in the context of close as opposed to non-close (causal or distant) relationships, the effect of severity on moral decision-making was significantly reduced.

Having established that the effect of relational distance on moral decision-making might be caused, in part, by its dampening effect on the severity's efficacy in close relationships, in Study 3 my goal was two fold. The first goal was to replicate the results from Study 2. The second goal was to test the hypothesis that reasoning about a loyalty dilemma from a self-distanced perspective would neutralize the dampening effect of close relational construals on severity.

I made this prediction based on the extant research on self-distancing which has proven to be an effective intervention for people dealing with negative, difficult, and stressful self-relevant

situations and decisions (Ayduk & Kross, 2010; Kross & Ayduk, 2011; Kross & Grossman, 2012; Kross et al., 2014) Recently, self-distancing has been shown to adaptively influence tangentially related moral-relational concepts like boosting wisdom (Grossman & Kross, 2014; Kross & Grossman, 2012), overcoming stereotype threat (Dougherty, Kross, and Sekaquaptewa, in-prep), and reducing biased thinking (Bremner, Goldberg, & Kross, under review) by activating high-level, abstract-ethical and deactivating low-level, concrete-relational construals.

In the third experiment, I examined whether self-distancing would mitigate the dampening effect of relational distance on severity by using the same experimental paradigm that was used in Experiment 2 while randomly assigning participants to either a self-immersed or self-distanced experimental condition by having them think about the loyalty dilemmas using either first person pronouns (self-immersed) or non-first person pronouns and their own name (distanced). This, linguistic, self-talk procedure has been shown to effectively separate the *reasoning self* from the *experiencing self* during introspection, and help people deal with negative and stressful situations (Kross et al., 2014).

Method

Participants. Participants were two hundred and six introductory psychology subject pool students (54.9% women; 99% between the ages of 18 & 24; 68.3% White) at the University of Michigan and two hundred MTurk workers (55.5% women; 20.1% between the ages of 18 & 24, 30.2% between the ages of 25 & 34; 63% White). In the student sample each participant was awarded class credit for participating in the experiment. In the MTurk worker sample each participants were paid \$1.00 for participating in the experiment. The necessary sample size for this study was modeled from the calculation used in Study 2 (adjusting for the anticipated effect size of $w = .3$ based on the results from Study 2), In addition to the 206 participants in the

student subject pool sample, 68 participants (24.8% of the sample) were excluded from the analysis for failing the manipulation checks for meaningful responses. In addition to the 200 participants in the MTurk sample, 27 participants (11.9% of the sample) in the experiment were excluded from the analysis for failing the manipulation checks for meaningful responses. This exclusion rate is consistent with the rates found in previous research (Hauser & Schwarz, 2015; Oppenheimer et al., 2009). There was no difference between the two different samples on the dependent variable ($\chi^2 = .446, p = .504$; and the results of a Kolmogorov-Smirnov test show that there is no difference between the distributions of the two samples), so all further analyses collapse the two samples into one.

Cover story. Participants were told that they were participating in a study that was examining how language influences person perception.

Measurements and Procedures.

Self-distancing. To test the hypothesis that self-distancing would reduce the effect for relational distance on interpersonal moral judgment, I randomly assigned participants to one of two conditions, self-immersed or self-distanced, while using the same experimental paradigm (relational distance by ethical severity on loyalty judgment) that was used in Study 2. To manipulate self-distance, I used the linguistic, *self-talk*, experimental technique developed by Kross and colleagues (Kross et al., 2014).

Procedure. After agreeing to participate, participants began the experiment by providing their first name and then conducting the same *relational distance* exercise that the participants in Experiment 2 completed¹¹. Once participants had identified their nine interpersonal relationships

¹¹ Participants in Experiment 3 were provided modified (9 Venn-diagrams) version of the IOS used in Experiment 1 instead of seven Venn-diagram IOS used in experiment 2. The 9 Venn-diagram IOS use used for this study instead of the 7 Venn-diagram IOS for exploratory reasons. I

and provided the names, gender, and relationship type for each of their nine relational partners they were presented with the following instructions (the differences between the self-immersed and self-distanced conditions are underlined, bolded, and italicized):

“In this study, we are interested in examining the different ways people think about themselves when they make decisions. Some people report thinking about themselves using *first person pronouns / their own name, and other non-first person pronouns*, so that’s what we’d like you to do. In the next part of this study you will be placed in a series of situations. In each of these situations you will be asked to make a decision. Please use *the first person pronouns, I, me, and my / your name, and other non-first person pronouns* as you think about and decide what to do in each situation. In other words, as you think about what is happening in each situation, ask yourself things like, “What facts *am I / is [subjects first name]* considering *as I am / [subjects first name]* is making this decision.” Before you begin please take a moment and practice using *first person pronouns (e.g., I, me, and my) / your name, and other non-first person pronouns* as you make decisions.

Think about a few decisions that you have to make in the near future. As you think about these decisions, use *first person pronouns / your name, and other non-first person pronouns*.

Here are few examples:

wanted to explore the possibility that the uneven distribution of options between the three levels of relational distance (2 for close, 3 for casual, and 2 for distant) may have influenced the results from Study 2.

“What should I / [subject’s name] have for dinner tonight?”

“What am I / is [subject’s name] going to do this weekend?

“My favorite ice cream is...”

Once you’ve practiced using first person pronouns / your name, and other non-first person pronouns and you feel comfortable making decisions using first person pronouns / your name, and other non-first person pronouns [we will continue].”

Next, participants were presented with nine different *loyalty dilemmas* in the same fashion that they were presented to the participants in Experiment 1.

Results and discussion

Self-immersion, relational distance, and intrapersonal moral judgment. To see if the dampening effect of close relational construals on outcome severity that was demonstrated in Study 2 was replicated in the immersed condition in Study 3, the data from the self-immersed condition was analyzed in the same way the data from Study 2 was analyzed (a 3 [relational distance; close, causal, distant] x 3 [outcome severity: serious, moderate, mild] generalized estimated equation logistic regression with both factors being repeated)¹². There was both a main effect for relational distance ($\chi^2 [2, n = 197] = -177.54, p < .001$) and outcome severity ($\chi^2 [2, n = 197] = -78.54, p < .001$) as well as a significant interaction between the two ($\chi^2 [4, n = 197] = 11.26, p = .024$). Pairwise comparisons indicated that the severity of the act that people reasoned about was less likely to influence people’s decisions when they imagined a close relationship ($\chi^2 = 12.19, p < .001$) committing the act then when they reasoned about a casual ($\chi^2 = 34.43, p < .001$) or distant ($\chi^2 = 52.11, p < .001$; see figure 7). The effect size capturing the magnitude of the

¹² The immersed condition in Study 3 was an exact replication of Study 2.

effect of severity on participants' loyalty judgments was significantly smaller for close relationships (OR = 1.88 [1.32, 2.68]) relative to distant (OR = 4.47 [2.97, 6.72]; $\chi^2 = 10.87, p = .001$), but not casual relationships (OR = 2.68 [1.94, 3.71]; $\chi^2 = 2.1, p = .15$). Additionally, there was a difference in the effect of severity on loyalty between the casual and distant relationships ($\chi^2 = 4.88, p = .03$; see Figure 8). Table 2 shows the frequency and percentage of loyal decisions by relational distance and outcome severity in the immersed condition.

Self-distancing, relational distance, and interpersonal moral judgment. To see if the dampening effect of close relational construals on outcome severity that was demonstrated in Study 2 was mitigated in the distanced condition in Study 3, the data from the self-distanced condition was analyzed in the same way the data from Study 2 was analyzed (a 3 [relational distance] x 3 [outcome severity: high, moderate, low] generalized estimated equation logistic regression with both factors being repeated). There was both a main effect for relational distance ($\chi^2 [1, n = 209] = -157.66, p < .001$) and outcome severity ($\chi^2 [1, n = 209] = -115.54, p < .001$), however the interaction between the two was not significant ($\chi^2 = 2.24, p = .692$). Pairwise comparisons indicated that the severity of the act that people reasoned about was just as likely to influence people's decisions when they imagined a close relationship ($\chi^2 = 40.03, p < .001$) committing the act as when they reasoned about a casual ($\chi^2 = 47.15, p < .001$) or distant ($\chi^2 = 55.55, p < .001$; see Figure 9). The effect size capturing the magnitude of the effect of severity on participants' loyalty judgments was no different for close relationships; OR = 3.18 [2.22, 4.54]) relative to casual (OR = 3.25 [2.32, 4.55]; $\chi^2 = .01, p = .919$) or distant relationships (OR = 4.05 [2.8, 5.85]; $\chi^2 = .93, p = .335$). The difference between casual and distant relationships was non-existent as well ($\chi^2 = .85, p = .356$; see Figure 10). Table 3 shows the frequency and percentage of loyal decisions by relational distance and outcome severity in the immersed condition.

Comparing the effects for severity on loyalty between the self-distance conditions.

Although these results indicate that self-distancing does mitigate the dampening effect of close relational construals on the effect of severity in loyalty dilemmas, a more refined analysis was necessary to understand where exactly this effect was unfolding. To do this, I compared the effects of severity between the two self-distance conditions within each strata of relational distance (close, casual, distant). Results of these three direct comparisons show that there is a marginally significant difference in the effect for severity between the two self-distance conditions in the context of close relationships ($\chi^2 = 3.54, p = .06$), but not casual ($\chi^2 = 1.179, p = .277$) nor distant relationships ($\chi^2 = 1.177, p = .278$).

Further analysis shows that this difference in the effect for severity between the two self-distance conditions in close relationships is driven by a reduction in loyal decisions made in the close relational construal by serious outcome severity loyalty dilemmas. The only significant difference in loyalty between the two self-distance conditions across the nine different scenarios (relational distance [close, causal, distant] by outcome severity [serious, moderate, mild]) is in the close by serious condition. In these dilemmas there is a 9% reduction in loyalty between the self-immersed (72%) and self-distanced condition (63%; $p = .055$; see figure 11).

The results from the immersed condition show that the effect for severity is different between close and distant relationships, as was the case in experiment 2, but the results also shows that the difference in effect for severity between casual and close, casual and distant relationships may not be as clear as was originally inferred from Experiment 2. To gain a clearer understanding of the relationship between relational distance and outcome severity in loyalty dilemmas and clear up these incongruent results, I meta-analyzed the Study 2 data with the data from the immersed condition from Study 3 by merging the two together. This procedure is both

conceptually feasible (self-immersion is the likely the default self-distanced perspective people utilize in their everyday lives; Ayduk & Kross, 2010; White, Kross, & Duckworth, 2015) as well as statistically legitimate (there is no difference between the two samples on the dependent variable, $\chi^2 = 1.6, p = .28$, and the results of a Kolmogorov-Smirnov test show that there is no difference between the distributions of the two samples). As expected, the main effect for relational distance was significant ($\chi^2 [2, n = 521] = -400.93, p < .001$). Participants were significantly more loyal when reasoning about a close relationship than when reasoning about a casual or distant relationship (moderate and high relational distance, respectively). The main effect for outcome severity was also significant ($\chi^2 [2, n = 521] = 235, p < .001$). Participants were significantly less loyal when reasoning about a seriously severe act when compared to moderately or mildly severe acts. Table 5 shows the frequency and percentage of loyal decisions by relational distance and outcome severity for this analysis.

As predicted, I also observed a significant relational distance by outcome severity interaction ($\chi^2 = [4, n = 521] = 24.41, p < .001$). Pairwise comparisons indicated that the severity of the act that people reasoned about was less likely to influence people's decisions when they imagined a close relationship ($\chi^2 = 43.72, p < .001$) committing the act than when they reasoned about a casual ($\chi^2 = 126.29, p < .001$) or distant ($\chi^2 = 144.45, p < .001$; see Figure 12) relationship stealing something. The effect size capturing the magnitude of the effect of severity on participants' loyalty judgments was significantly smaller for close relationships (OR = 2.08 [1.68, 2.59]) relative to both the casual (OR = 3.33 [2.7, 4.11]; $\chi^2 = -10.56, p = .001$) and distant relationships (OR = 4.31 [3.39, 5.46]; $\chi^2 = -20.86, p < .001$; see Figure 13). In contrast, the effect sizes characterizing the effect of severity on moral decision-making were equivalent (i.e., not significantly different) for moderate and causal relationships ($\chi^2 = 3.3, p = .07$). These findings

help to clear up some of the ambiguity between studies 2 and 3 and solidify the claim that the severity of the unethical act committed by the agent influenced people's moral decisions more powerfully when they reasoned about casual and distant as opposed to close relationships.

Figures

Figure 6: Modified Inclusion of the Other in the Self (IOS) Scale (Version 2)

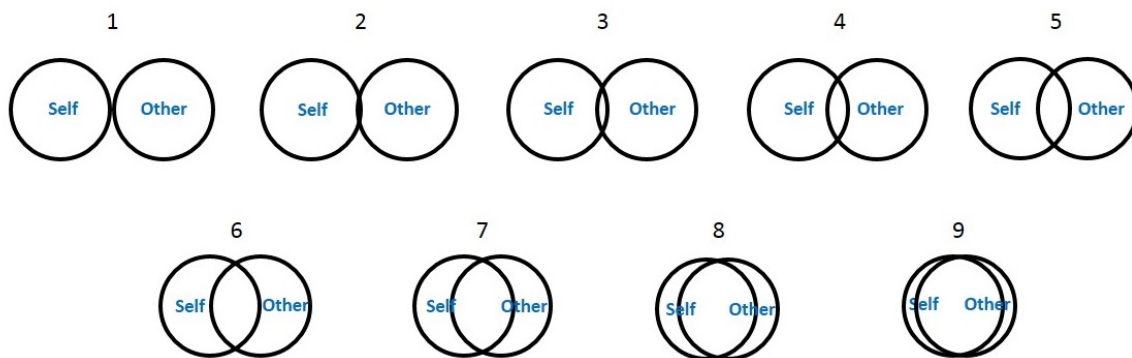
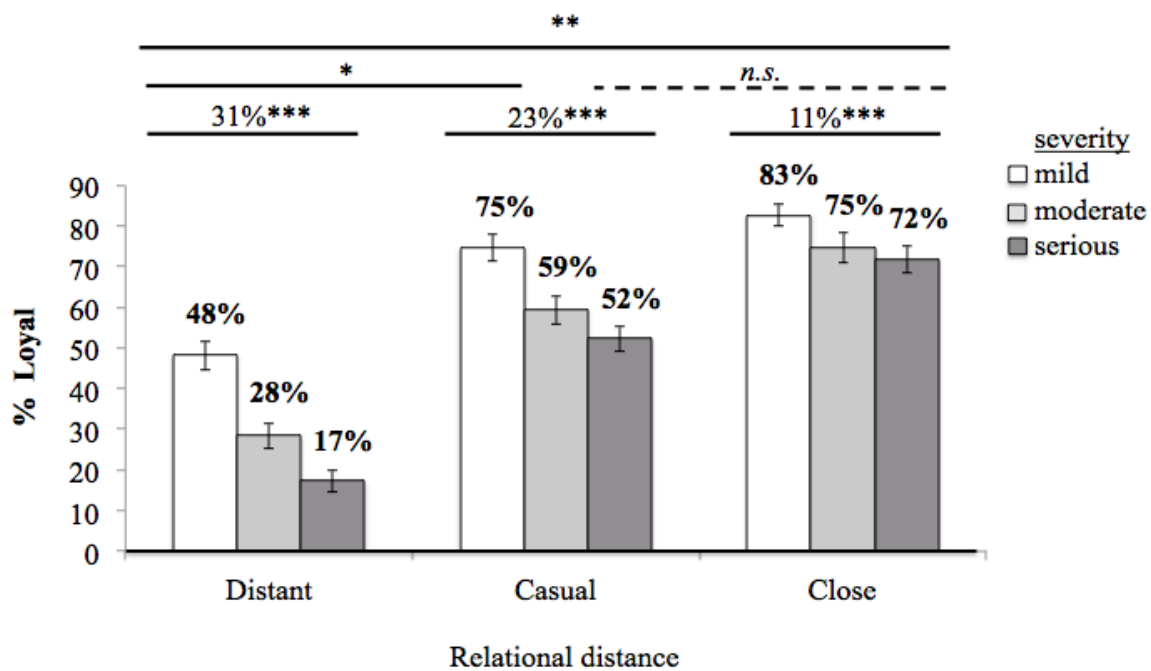


Figure 7: Loyalty decisions by levels of relational distance and outcome severity in the self-immersed experimental condition



$$\chi^2 (4, n = 197) = 11.26, p = .02$$

Figure 8: The effect of severity on loyalty by level of relational distance (close, casual, distant) in the self-immersed experimental condition

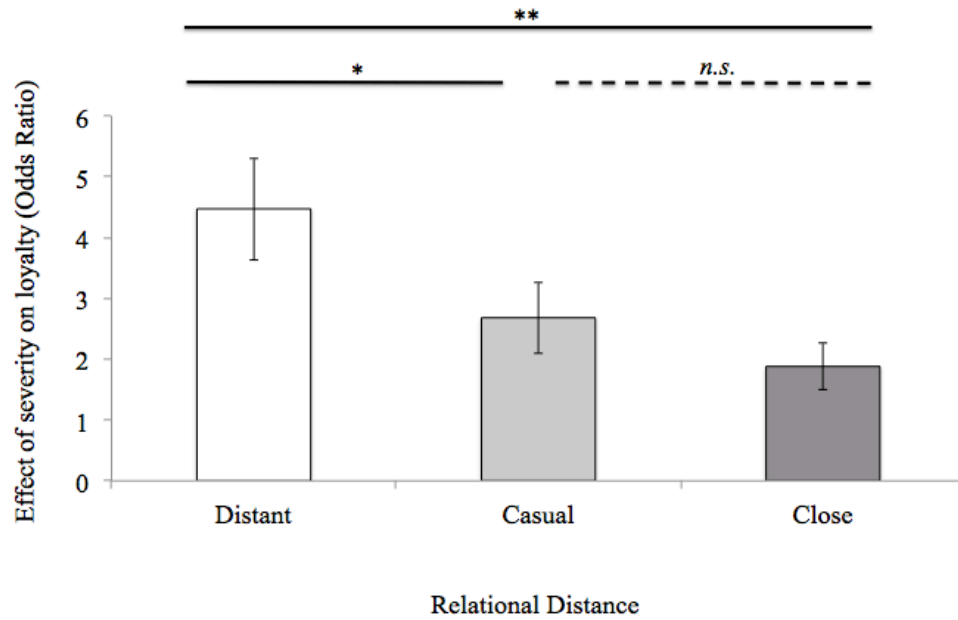


Figure 9: Loyalty decisions by levels of relational distance and outcome severity in the self-distanced experimental condition

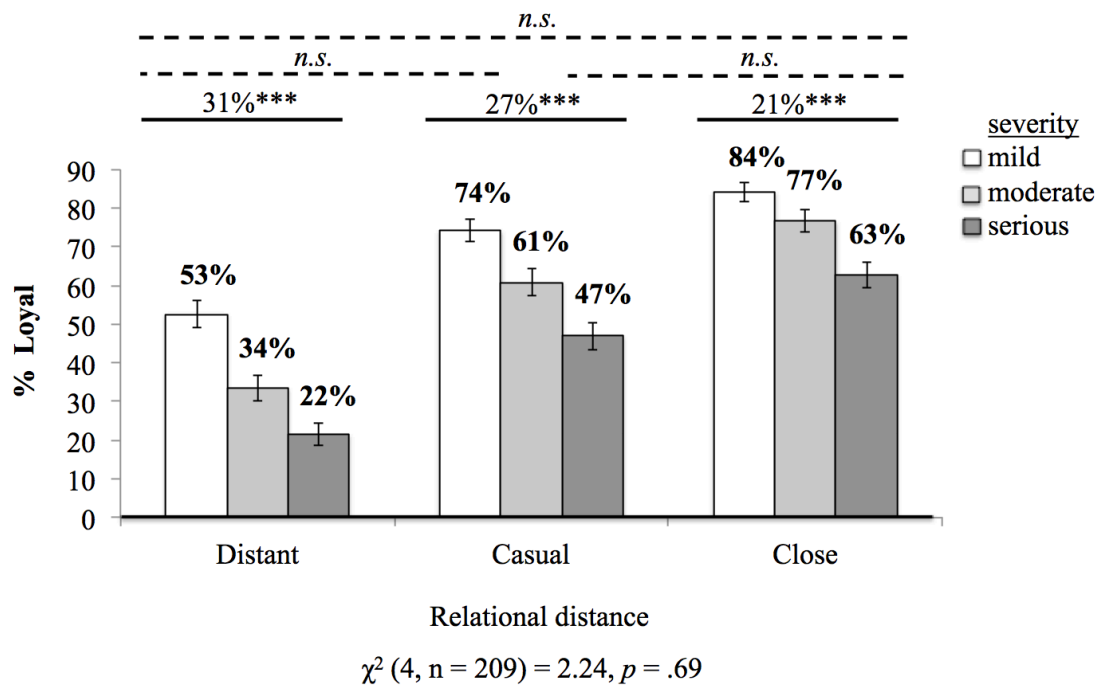


Figure 10: The effect of severity on loyalty by relational distance (close, casual, distant) within the self-distanced experimental condition

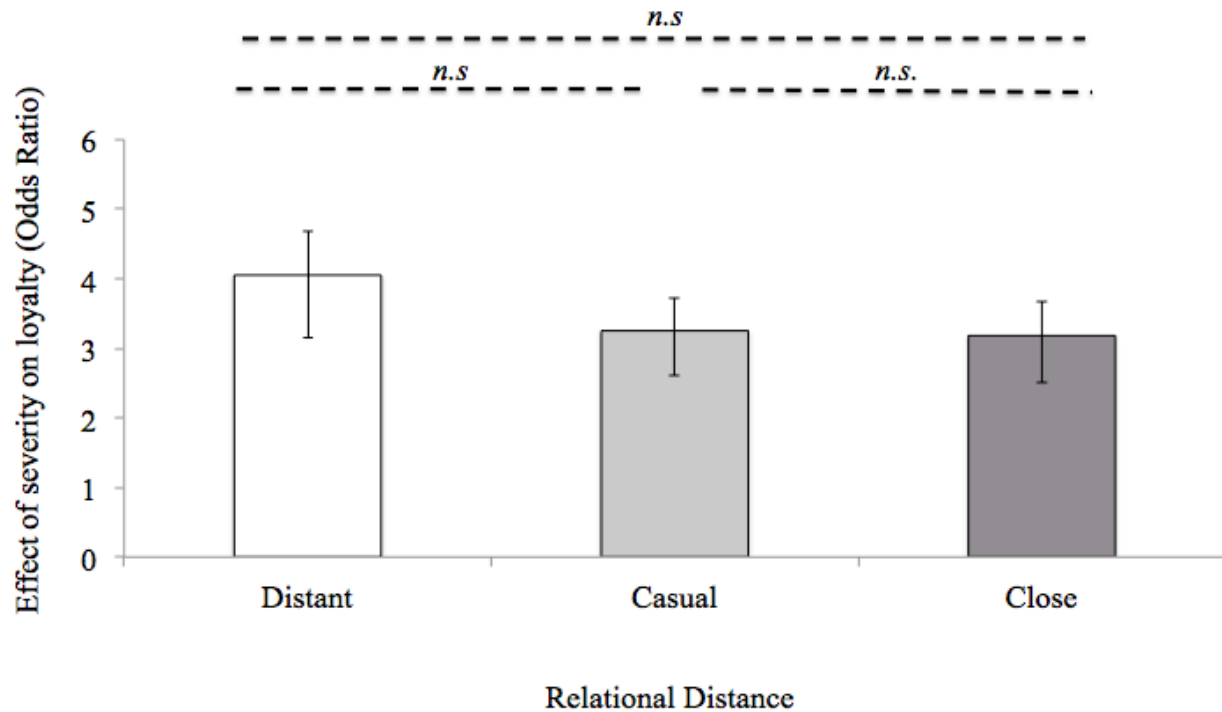


Figure 11: Loyalty decisions in close relationships by self-distance experimental condition

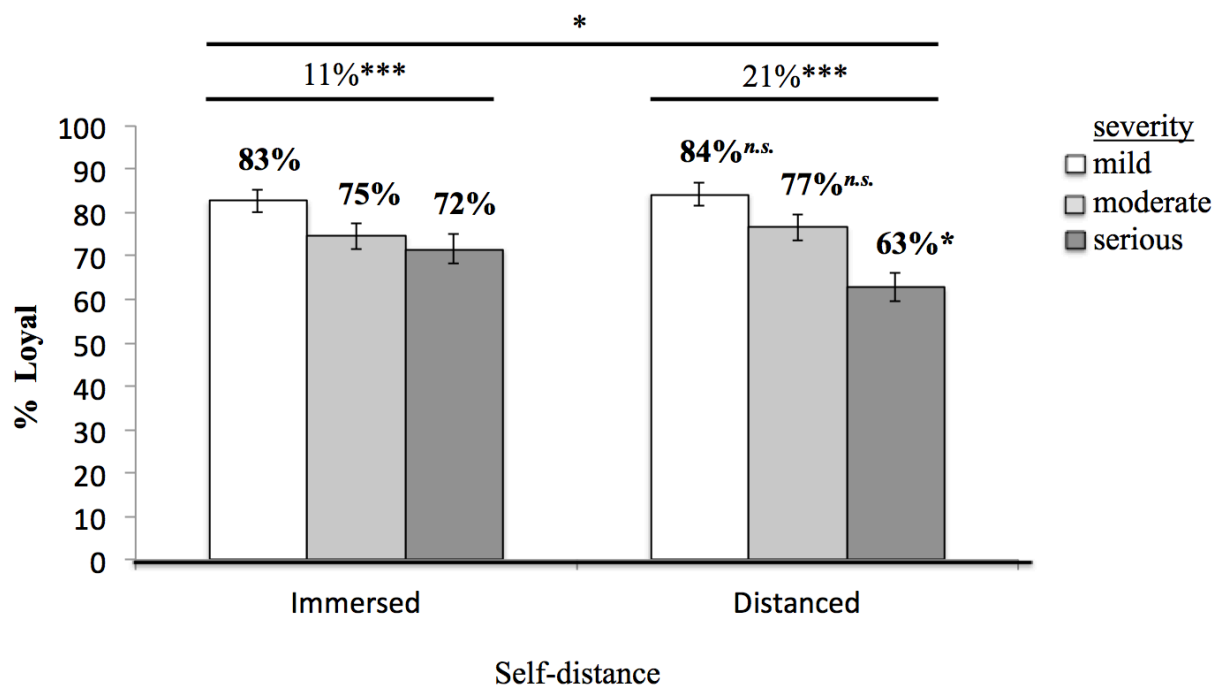


Figure 12: Loyalty decisions by levels of relational distance and outcome severity when combining Study 2 and Study 3 self-immersed datasets together

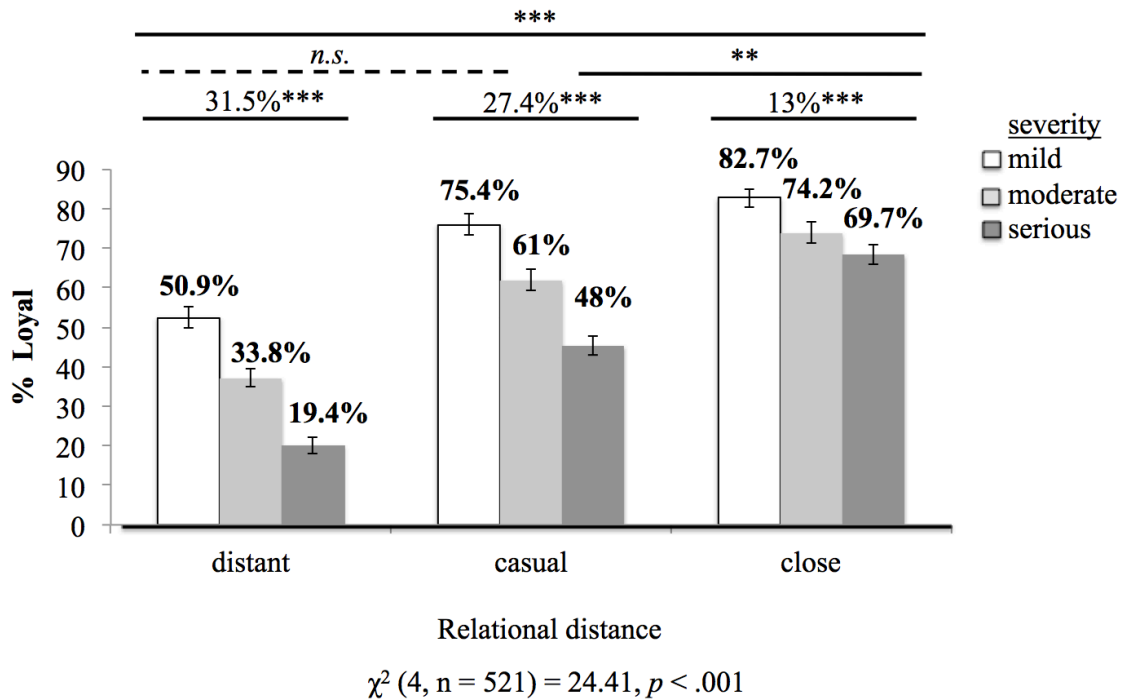
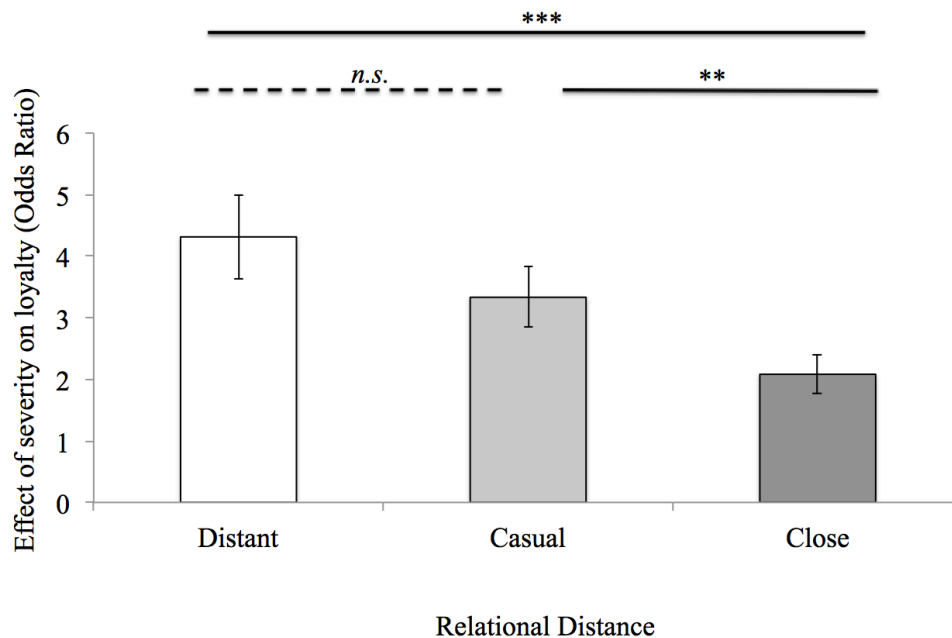


Figure 13: The effect of severity on loyalty by relational distance (close, casual, distant) within the combined Study 2 and Study 3 self-immersed experimental condition dataset



Tables

Table 4. Loyalty ratio and percentage by level of ethical severity and relational distance in the self-immersed condition

Level of severity	Close relationships	Casual relationships	Distant relationships
Serious acts	141/197 71.6%	103/197 52.3%	34/197 17.3%
Moderate acts	147/197 74.6%	117/197 59.4%	56/197 28.4%
Mild acts	163/197 82.7%	147/197 74.6%	95/197 48.2%

Table 5. Loyalty ratio and percentage by level of ethical severity and relational distance in the self-distanced condition

Level of severity	Close relationships	Casual relationships	Distant relationships
Serious acts	131/209 62.7%	98/209 46.9%	45/209 21.5%
Moderate acts	160/209 76.6%	127/209 60.8%	70/209 33.5%
Mild acts	176/209 84.2%	155/209 74.2%	110/209 52.6%

Table 6. Loyalty ratio and percentage by level of ethical severity and relational distance in the combined Study 2 and Study 3 self-immersed experimental condition dataset

Level of severity	Close relationships	Casual relationships	Distant relationships
Serious acts	363/521 69.7%	250/521 48%	101/521 19.4%
Moderate acts	386/520 74.2%	318/521 61%	176/520 33.8%
Mild acts	431/521 82.7%	393/521 75.4%	265/521 50.9%

CHAPTER 5

STUDY 4: SELF-DISTANCE, ABSTRACT-ETHICAL THINKING, AND INTRARELATIONAL MORAL DECISION MAKING

Having found evidence that self-distance mitigates the dampening effect of close relational construals on severity in loyalty dilemmas in Study 3, my goal for Study 4 was two-fold. First, I wanted to replicate the finding from Study 3 using a more focused and precise design, and second, I wanted to test the hypothesis that high-level, ethical-abstract construals accounted for the positive effect of self-distancing on impartial utilitarian decision-making in loyalty dilemmas involving close relationships. Based on an interpretation of the results of my first three experiments and the body of scholarship on the effects of psychological distance (Trope & Liberman, 2012; Kross & Ayduk, 2011) on moral construal (Eyal & Liberman, 2012; Lammers, 2012; Napier & Luguri, 2013), I hypothesized that abstract-ethical thinking would underpin the effect of self-distance in loyalty dilemmas involving close relationships and serious ethical violations.

I make this prediction based on Construal level Theory (CLT; Trope & Liberman, 2012), and the extant work done with self-distancing (Kross & Ayduk, 2011; Kross et al., 2014). Self-distancing activates high-level construals by creating psychological distance between the *reasoning self* and the *experiencing self*, which allows for a more global, rational processing of

the information pertaining to the situation as compared to a self-immersed perspective where there is no psychological distance between the *reasoning* and *experiencing selves*.

Unlike the previous three experiments where I was interested in the effect of the full social-relational spectrum (low, moderate, and high relational distance) on interpersonal moral judgment, in Study 4, I limited my focus to the examination to close relationships. I did this because the data from the first three experiments showed that the most interesting effects on interpersonal moral judgment were occurring in the context of close relationships (the positive evaluation of immoral behavior in Experiment 1, the reduced effect of severity in Experiment 2, and the effect of self-distance in Experiment 3). This observation is supported by the broad literature on the interpersonal relationships that has repeatedly demonstrated how our close relationships disproportionately affect every aspect of our behavior and well-being when compared to other, more casual interpersonal relationships that make up our social-relational network (e.g., Berscheid, Christensen, Harvey, & Huston, 2002; Bowlby, 1982; Dunbar, 1993; Haslam, 2004; Krackhardt, 1992; Mashek & Aron, 2004; Peterson, 2006).

In my fourth experiment, I examined whether high-level, abstract, ethical construals mediated the regulatory effect that self-distance has on the moderated relationship between close relational construals and seriously severe ethical violations in loyalty dilemmas. I did this by randomly assigning participants to one of four conditions (2 [severity: serious, mild] by 2 [self-distance: immersed, distanced] and similar to the studies 2 and 3 have them make a tradeoff decision between relationally impartial, utilitarian ethics (i.e., honesty) and relationally partial, parochial ethics (i.e., loyalty), however, in this experiment participants were asked, prior to making their decision to write about their thoughts and feelings during contemplation using either first person pronouns (self-immersed condition) or their name and non-first person

pronouns (self-distanced condition). Hypothesis and condition-blind raters coded these open-ended participant responses for high-level, abstract ethical construals and low-level, concrete relational construals.

Method

Participants. Participants were 250 introductory psychology subject pool students (59.2% women; $M_{\text{age}} = 19.2$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 1.11$, $\text{Range}_{\text{age}} = 17\text{-}24$; 71.4% White) at the University of Michigan. Participants were awarded class credit for participating in the experiment. In addition to the 250 participants in the sample, 92 participants (26.9% of the sample) were excluded from the analysis for failing the same relational distance manipulation check that was used in Study 1. This exclusion rate is consistent with the rates found in previous research (Oppenheimer et al., 2009). The target sample size of 232 participants (58 participants per cell, for 4 cells) was met. The target sample size was calculated using Java applets for power and sample size (Lenth, 2006-2009) using .95 power and medium effect size estimates (Aberson, 2010; Cohen, 1988; Scherbaum & Ferreter, 2009).

Cover story. Participants were told that this was a study examining how differences in language influence how people think about other people and their behavior.

Close relationships (i.e., best friend prompt). At the beginning of the experiment participants were asked to think about a person in their lives that they would consider being very close too, someone that they would categorize as their best friend. To assist participants with this exercise they were shown a modified version of the Perceived Interpersonal Closeness Scale (PICS; Popovic, Milne, & Barrett, 2003; see figure 14) as a way for them to think about their social-relational network as a whole and to identify the person with whom they were the closest.

The PICS, like the IOS (used in Studies 1-3), is designed to measure the perceived closeness of an interpersonal relationship. However, unlike the IOS, the PICS, uses six concentric circles with the self in the middle. The distance between the center circle (i.e., the self) and another circle represents the level of closeness between the self and another person with longer distance representing lower levels of closeness (high relational distance) and shorter distance representing higher levels of closeness (low relational distance).

To help participants visualize their closest relationship a red dot was placed on the first circle and participants were told:

“The circle at the center of this picture represents you and the five concentric circles that radiate from the center circle represent decreasing degrees of relationship closeness. If you were to organize all of your interpersonal relationships on this diagram, your closest relationships would be placed next to the center circle, your most distant relationship would be placed outside the outermost circle, and the rest of your relationships would be arrayed between the innermost and outermost circles based on how close they are to you. For this exercise, please think about the person who you consider to be your closest friend (i.e., best friend). This person would be represented by the red dot located on the innermost circle.”

The PICS was used in this study instead of the IOS for two reasons: 1) generalizability. I wanted to establish several tools that could help measure relational distance, and 2) seeing if the loss of participants from Study 1 using the IOS as the relational distance manipulation check was due to over-exposure to the IOS (used as both experimental stimuli and as the manipulation check).

Measurements and procedures.

Severity (serious or mild)

Once participants finished identifying their best friend (i.e., close relationship) they were randomly assigned to one of two conditions that varied by severity (serious, mild). In the mild condition participants were asked to image the following situation (these scenarios were used in Study 3 and serve as prototypical representatives of mild and serious severity):

“You and name of best friend from above are hanging out together at a local café.

While at the café you observe “best friend” log in to his/her computer and illegally download music over the Internet. You are sure, without any doubt, that this is what happened. There is absolutely no way that this could be mistaken for anything else.

“Best friend” leaves the café before you.

As you are leaving the café, a man stops you and asks to speak with you. After you agree to speak with him, he shows you a badge and introduces himself as a law enforcement agent investigating Internet-related crime. He asks you if you have witnessed any Internet related illegal activity such as hacking, fraud, or intellectual property theft (e.g., illegally downloading music) today.

In answering this question, you can either tell the officer that you did witness

“best friend” illegally download the music or that you did not see “best friend” illegally download the music.”

In the serious condition participants were asked to image the following situation:

“You and name of best friend from above are hanging out together at a local café.

While at the café you observe “best friend” log in to her computer and use another person’s credit card to purchase merchandise without that person’s authorization. You are sure, without a doubt, that this is what happened. There is absolutely no way that this could be mistaken for anything else.

“Best friend” leaves the café before you.

As you are leaving the café, a man stops you and asks to speak with you. After you agree to speak with him, he shows you a badge and introduces himself as a law enforcement agent investigating Internet-related crime. He asks you if you have witnessed any Internet related illegal activity such as hacking, fraud (e.g., unauthorized use of another person’s credit card), or intellectual property theft today.

In answering this question, you can either tell the officer that you did witness “best friend” use another person’s credit card to purchase merchandise without that person’s authorization or that you did not see “best friend” use another person’s credit card to purchase merchandise without that person’s authorization.”

Self-distance (immersed or distanced)

After reading the scenario, participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions that varied by self-distance (immersed, distanced). In the self-immersed condition participants were asked to do the following:

We are interested in learning about the different ways people think. Some people report thinking to their selves in the first person (in other words, using the pronoun “I” when thinking about themselves) when engaging in certain activities, so this is one type of thought that we are interested in examining. For example, when doing something, someone might think: “I think... I feel...”

In a moment we are going to ask you to decide on how you would respond to the officer. But first, in order to investigate the effects of first-person thinking on this decision, we would like you to write about what you are thinking and feeling about this situation for the next few minutes. As you write about the thoughts and feelings that you are currently experiencing, please use the first person pronouns “I” and “me” as much as possible.

Why are you having the thoughts and feelings that you are having about this decision?

What underlying causes might exist for your current thoughts and feelings?”

In the self-distancing condition participants were asked to do the following:

We are interested in learning about the different ways people think. Some people report thinking to their selves in the third person (in other words, using the

pronouns “he” or “she” and using their own names when thinking about themselves) when engaging in certain activities, so this is one type of thought that we are interested in examining. For example, when a person with the name *John* is doing something, he might think: “John is thinking that... He is feeling...”

In a moment we are going to ask you to decide on how you would respond to the officer. But first, in order to investigate the effects of third-person thinking on this decision, we would like you to write about what you are thinking and feeling about this situation for the next few minutes. As you write about the thoughts and feelings that you are currently experiencing, please use the third person pronouns “he” or “she” as well as your own name as much as possible.

Why are you having the thoughts and feelings that you are having about this decision?

What underlying causes might exist for your current thoughts and feelings?

Next, to capture the cognitive (construal level) and motivational (ethical engagement) processes under investigation participants were asked participants were told to do the following:

Please take a few minutes to write down what factors you are considering as you contemplate your response. Again, please use first person (for the immersed condition) / your name and other non-first person (for the distanced condition) pronouns as you describe your deliberation by using first person pronouns such as

I, me and my (for the immersed condition) / your first name (Jeff)¹³, you, and
he/she (for the distanced condition) as you write.

Participants were then provided a space to write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Finally, participants were asked to make a loyalty decision (similar to the choice made by participants in the first three experiments). Using a 6-point scale with the anchors being *very unlikely* and *very likely*, participants will be asked the following:

In your response to the officer how likely are you to tell him that you did witness
“best friend” illegally download music over the Internet (mild severity) / use
another person’s credit card to purchase merchandise with that person’s
authorization (serious severity)?

Content analyses.

Two teams of trained coders, blind to both the study’s hypotheses and the condition to which each participant was assigned, coded participants’ responses for the open-ended question. Responses from the self-distance condition were translated into the 1st person by a separate team of research assistants. Following the translation, another research assistant was randomly provided a set of responses that contained both original 1st person responses (self-immersed) and translated 1st person response (self-distanced) and instructed to guess if each response was either an original or translated response. The results of this test indicate that the translated responses were indistinguishable from the original responses (.42 accuracy rate).

The abstract-ethical construal team, comprised of two research assistants, was assigned to code the open-ended responses for abstract-ethical construals ($\alpha = .78$) using the following code:

¹³ Participants provided their first name at the beginning of the experiment.

To what degree does the participant focus on the ethicality of the situation to describe his/her thoughts and feelings?

Code 0 – if there is no mention of the ethicality of the situation

Code 1 – if the ethicality of the situation is a minor theme, less than 25% of the response focuses on the ethicality of the situation, but it is not a prominent theme

Code 2 – if the ethicality of the situation is a moderate theme, between 25% and 50% of the response focuses on the ethicality of the situation, but it is not the predominant theme

Code 3 – if the ethicality of the situation is the major theme

See table 6 for example responses that fit each of abstract-ethical construal code.

The concrete-relational team, comprised of two research assistants, was assigned to code the open-ended responses for concrete-relational construals ($\alpha = .75$) using the following code:

To what degree does the participant focus on the agent or their relationship with the agent when describing their thoughts and feelings about the situation?

Code 0 – if there is no mention of the agent, or the participant's relationship with the agent

Code 1 – if the agent, or the participant's relationship with agent is a minor theme, less than 25% of the response focuses on the agent, or the participant's relationship with the agent, but it is not a prominent theme

Code 2 – if the agent, or the participant’s relationship with agent is a moderate theme, between 25% and 50% of the response focuses on the agent, or the participant’s relationship with the agent, but it is not the predominant theme

Code 3 – if the agent, or the participant’s relationship with agent is the major theme

See table 7 for example responses that fit each of abstract-ethical construal code.

I calculated the ethical-relational construal variable by subtracting the relational construal scores from the ethical construal scores and dividing composite by 2. Both coding team-pairs were provided multiple model examples of each code and participated in at least two training sessions and two rounds of practice coding prior to coding the actual data. Two different pairs of coders were used to limit potential confounding assessments between the two types of construal by the coders. See appendix 2 for the list of model examples of each code that coders were provided.

Results and discussion

A two-way ANOVA showed that there was a significant interaction between severity and self-distance on loyalty decisions, $F(3, 246) = 4.67, p = .03, \eta^2 = .02$. There was a significant difference between participants’ loyalty decisions in the self-immersed ($M = 2.78, SD = 1.48$) and self-distanced ($M = 3.30, SD = 1.52; t[126] = 1.96, p = .02$) conditions when reasoning about a seriously severe ethical violation. However, there wasn’t a difference between participants’ loyalty decisions in the self-immersed ($M = 1.88, SD = 1.07$) and self-distanced ($M = 1.70, SD = .93; t[120] = -.97, p = .44$) conditions when reasoning about a mildly severe ethical violation. Furthermore, only when participants reasoned about a close relationship committing a

seriously severe ethical violation from a self-distanced perspective did they, on average, lean toward making the honest vs. loyal (3.3 [3.14, 3.46]). This replicates the result from Study 3 and further demonstrates that self-distance mitigates the dampening effect of relational distance on severity in loyalty dilemmas involving close relationships and serious ethical violations (see Figure 15).

Next, I tested the effect of the proposed mediator on loyalty decisions. As predicted ethical-relational construals did predict loyalty ($\beta = -.37, p < .001$). I then tested the effect of the interaction between the two manipulated variables (severity and self-distance) on the ethical-relational construal variable. A two-way ANOVA showed that there was a significant interaction between severity and self-distance on ethical-relational construals, $F(3, 246) = 5.75, p = .017, \eta^2 = .023$. There was a significant difference between participants' loyalty decisions in the self-immersed ($M = -.25, SD = .54$) and self-distanced ($M = .11, SD = .49; t[126] = 4, p < .001$) conditions when reasoning about a seriously severe ethical violation. However, there wasn't a difference between participants' loyalty decisions in the self-immersed ($M = -.59, SD = .5$) and self-distanced ($M = -.54, SD = .51; t[120] = -.58, p = .57$) conditions when reasoning about a mildly severe ethical violation. Furthermore, only when participants reasoned about a close relationship committing a seriously severe ethical violation from a self-distanced perspective did they, on average, construe the situation in more abstract-ethical terms (.11 [.18, .01]; see Figure 16).

Having found evidence that the interaction between severity and self-distance influenced ethical-relational construals and that ethical-relational construals influence loyalty I conducted a mediated moderation analysis (Muller, Judd, & Yzerbyt, 2005) using the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013) in SPSS testing whether participants in the serious / self-distanced condition made

less loyal (i.e., more honest) decisions than the participants in the serious / self-immersed condition because they construed the situation in more ethical and less relational terms. Entering the two experimental condition variables (severity and self-distance) and the ethical-relational construal variable simultaneously as predictors of loyalty in a regression analysis revealed that ethical-relational construal remained a significant predictor, whereas the interaction between the severity and self-distance manipulations was no longer significant (Figure 17). A bootstrap analysis (Preacher & Hayes, 2004) revealed that the 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect did not include 0, [.03, .38], indicating that ethical construals significantly mediated the negative effect of serious severity by self-distance on loyalty.

Figures

Figure 14. The modified version of the Perceived Interpersonal Closeness Scale (PICS; Popovic et al., 2003)

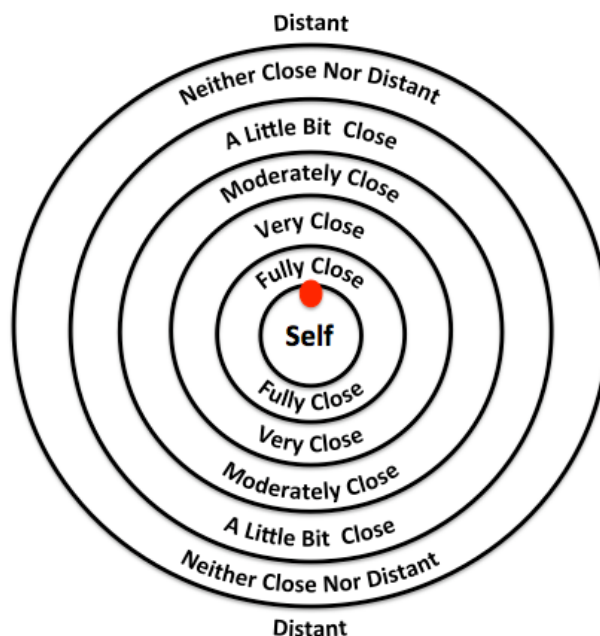


Figure 15. The moderated effect of severity and self-distance on moral decision-making

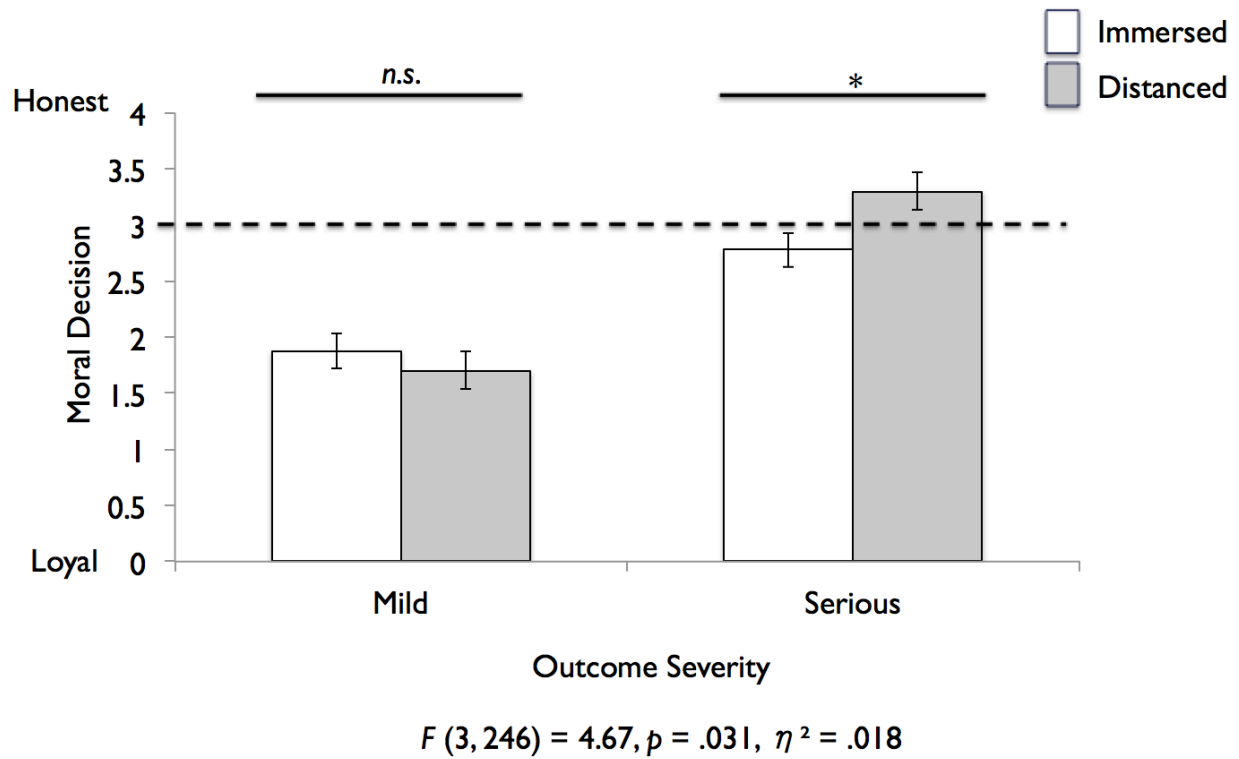


Figure 16. The moderated effect of severity and self-distance on ethical-relational construals

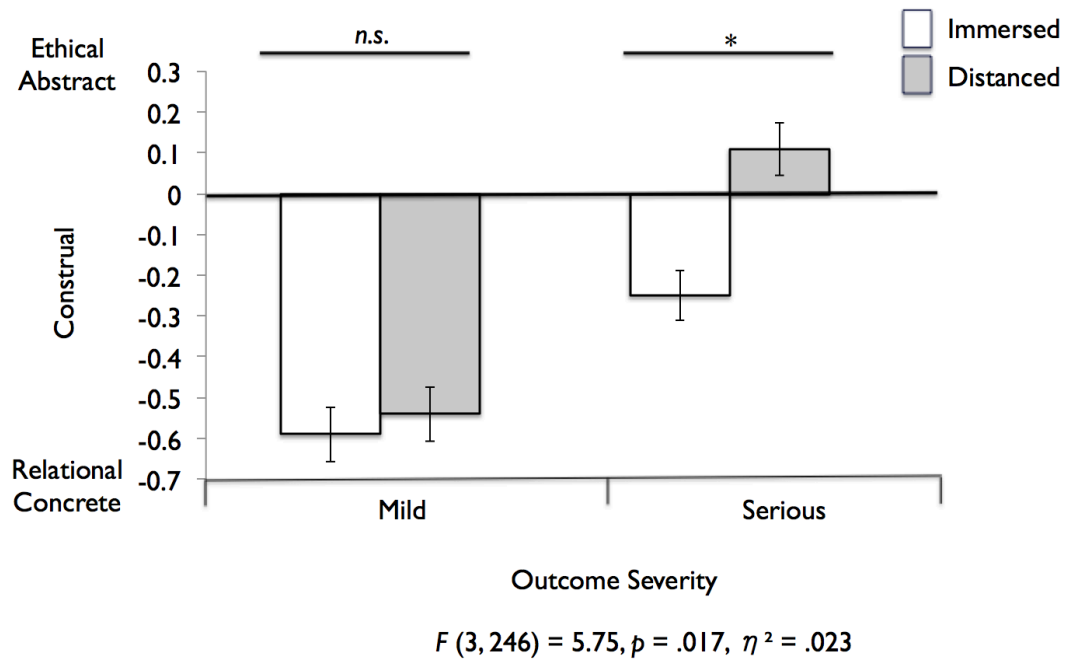
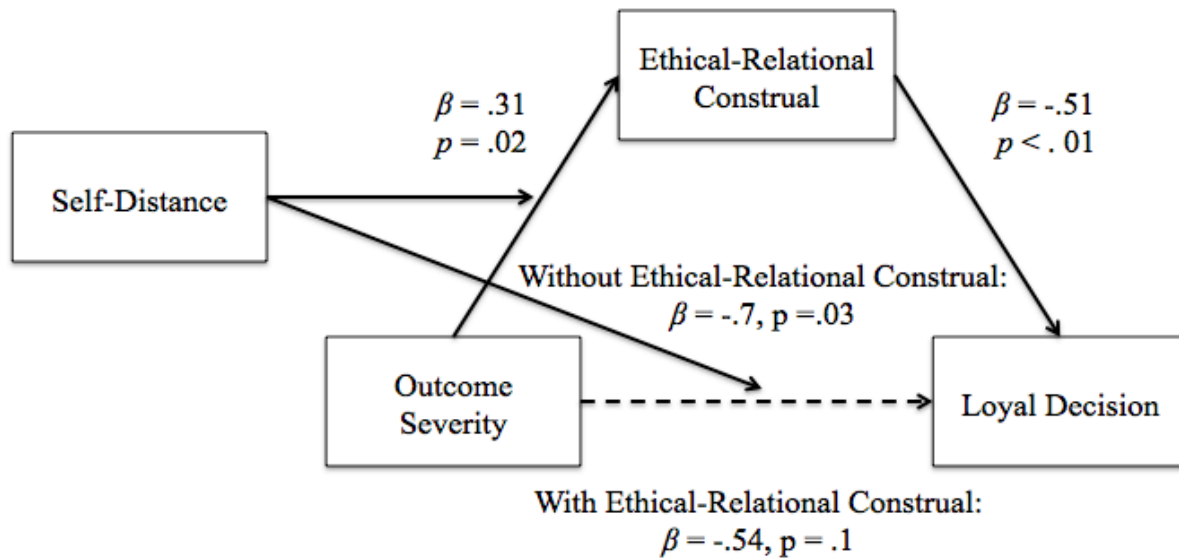


Figure 17. The mediating effect of abstract-ethical construals on the relationship between self-distance and moral decision making in loyalty dilemmas involving close relational construals and seriously severe ethical infractions



Tables

Table 7: Examples of abstract-ethical responses

Degree of focus on abstract-ethical concepts	Example
There is no mention of the ethicality of the situation	I am very close with Anthony and I don't want him to be in trouble with the law or be mad at me. I know what he was doing was wrong and that it is my legal obligation to tell the officer but I don't know Anthony's intentions or the real story behind what he was doing. What if he was buying something for a friend who sent him their credit card information because they could not get to a computer? I am unsure of all the facts but because I am suspicious I feel the need to tell the officer.
The ethicality of the situation is a minor theme	I really value my friendship with Emma. I know that while she illegally downloads music it may not be the legally correct thing to do but I know a lot of other people illegally download music as well. I didn't even know there were officers who could focus on internet crime. I value my relationship with Emma over reporting her for some petty crime to a random police officer that approached me when I was having quality time with Emma.
The ethicality of the situation is a prominent theme	I am feeling conflicted about telling the officer the truth or telling him a lie. I feel as a law-abiding citizen that I should tell him the truth, but I also do not want to lose the friend I have.

The ethicality of the situation is the major theme	I firmly believe that no one is above the law. My values are unmovable and I wouldn't hesitate to turn anyone into law enforcement. No one, not even close friends, are above the law.
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Table 8: Examples of concrete-relational responses

Degree of focus on concrete-relational concepts	Example
There is no mention of the agent, or the judge's relationship with the agent	I am nervous and do not know how to respond. I may start to feel pressure from the men with badges but will say I am not sure. By doing so, I eliminate myself from the pressure in hopes the men with badges will leave me alone.
The agent, or the judge's relationship with the agent is a minor theme	I am feeling conflicted about telling the officer the truth or telling him a lie. I feel as a law abiding citizen that I should tell him the truth, but I also do not want to lose the friend I have
The agent, or the judge's relationship with the agent is a prominent theme	As I think about the situation, I factor in what the consequences would be for both Sarah and me. If I told the officer exactly what I saw, it would put me in a very difficult position with my best friend. She would know that I told on her for downloading illegal music, and it could possibly harm my relationship with her. If I lied to the officer, I would be protecting my friend, but it would put me in a bad spot in regards to law enforcement. I would say no and walk away.

<p>The agent, or the judge's relationship with the agent is the major theme</p>	<p>I have to consider how important Sheldon's trust is to me. I also have to consider that I have gotten in trouble for illegal downloading before. I did not like that situation. I also have to consider how important he is to me, considering that the possible consequences for illegal downloading are a hefty fine. With this in mind, I know exactly how I would respond.</p>
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CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

These studies support my thesis that relational distance influences moral reasoning, that close relational construals negatively affect relationally impartial utilitarian judgment and decision-making, and that the effect of close relational construals on moral decision-making is mitigated by the activation of abstract-ethical construals during self-distanced introspection. In addition to finding evidence that supports my thesis, I also accomplished my three main goals. The first goal was to address the lack of research on intrarelational moral reasoning. The second goal was to develop an experimental paradigm – the loyalty dilemma – that capitalizes on the usefulness of the artificial moral dilemma while recognizing the importance of relationship context in moral decision-making. The third goal was to test the self-talk paradigm as an intervention strategy for promoting fair and impartial utilitarian moral decision-making in loyalty dilemmas. I believe that the research reported here makes several contributions to the literature and motivates future inquiry that will help move the field towards more ecologically valid models of moral cognition and behavior.

Relational distance and moral judgment

It can be argued that one of the more interesting and popular questions that underlies contemporary moral psychological and behavior ethical research is: why do people to behave morally (e.g., sacrifice resources for strangers; Batson, 2014; Cialdini et al., 1997; Fehr & Fischbacher, 2003) and immorally (e.g., knowingly participate in ethically dubious acts while striving to maintain a moral self-image; Bazerman & Gino, 2012; Mazar, Amir, & Ariely, 2008; Tenbrunsel & Messick, 2004)? I set out hoping to contribute to this general line of inquiry by

asking the basic question: does relationship context influence how people morally judge the behavior of others?

This question is important for a few reasons. First, it has been said that, “interpersonal relationships are the foundation and theme of human life and that most human behavior takes place in the context of the individual’s relationship with others” (Reis, Collins, and Berscheid, 2000, p. 844). Second, research has demonstrated that psychological closeness (broadly defined)¹⁴ vicariously motivates people to justify and reenact another’s ethical/unethical behavior (Gino & Galinsky, 2012). Combining these two ideas lead to the logic that we judge the people we have an interpersonal relationship with more often than strangers and that these judgments shape our behavior depending on degree of closeness. Coupling this logic with the idea that we all are at the center of our own large social network that includes all of our interpersonal dyadic relationships and that each relationship in our social network differs by degree of closeness, I hypothesized that both immoral and moral behavior would be judged differently if the person committing the act was construed as a close relationship as opposed to an acquaintance or a stranger.

The results of Study 1 confirmed that relational distance influenced the moral judgment of unethical (i.e., selfish), but not ethical (i.e., collaborative) behavior. At first blush this result was surprising, considering that past research has demonstrated that closeness (broadly conceptualized), influences both moral and immoral behavior judgments (Gino & Galinsky, 2012). However, under further review, the results from the current research fit well with an

¹⁴ This conceptualization of closeness is broader than how I’ve presented it in conjunction with relational distance. Closeness here encompasses social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982) and the idea that closeness is induced even when minimal, superficial connections are created (e.g., similar name; Pelham, Carvallo, & Jones, 2005; shared birthday; Cialdini & DeNichols, 1989). Although this conceptualization of closeness is important, it falls outside the scope of relational distance and construal, which is the focus of my thesis.

evolutionary perspective of moral psychology (Buss, 2005; Krebs, 2008). When judging a stranger it is adaptive, from an evolutionary perspective, to judge selfish behavior as immoral (you want resources shared so that your chances of benefiting from them are increased), however, this changes once the context is construed as a close relationship. Here it is adaptive, to judge the agent's selfish behavior as moral (the more resources your close relationships have the more likely you are to benefit from them as well). This intuition is not as strong when judging collaborative behavior. Reasons for this are unclear. However, one explanation might be that the positive feelings one feels when witnessing a relational partner collaborate may wash out any negative arousal that is created by experiencing the relational partner's less-than-economically rational (i.e., selfish) decision. Although this explanation has some theoretical proof (e.g., Clark & Mills, 1993, 2012), this is purely speculative, and this question should be empirically examined in future research. Although, in the current research, I remained focused on investigating the relationship between relational distance and judgments of antisocial (immoral) behavior, I plan on expanding my investigation to judgments of prosocial (virtuous) behavior in the near future.

Another explanation for this result may be related to how nuanced differences in experimental methodology and the boundaries between the different dimensions of psychological distance (relational included) interact with intrarelational moral judgment. In their study, Gino & Galinsky (2012, Study 1 & 4) asked participants to judge an agent's behavior while taking a socially distanced (another person's) perspective. Although, past research has demonstrated that psychological distance influences the judgment of moral and immoral behavior (Ayal, Liberman, & Trope, 2008; Lammers, 2012) the results have been inconclusive and at times contradictory (see Zezelj & Jokic, 2104b for a review). One explanation for the discrepancies in the results

between the different studies in this genre is the interaction between the varying methods used to induce abstract / concrete construals / manipulate psychological distance / closeness and the unique properties of moral judgment as compared to judgment and decision-making in other domains (e.g., financial, health, and social).

In a series of replications on the effect of procedural priming of construal level on moral judgment (Eyal, Liberman, & Trope, 2008), Eyal and colleagues (Eyal, Liberman, & Trope, 2014; Gong & Medin, 2012; Zvezelj & Jokic, 2014a) found inconsistencies in how activating high level construals influenced moral judgments across the dimensions of psychological distance as well as between moral (prosocial) and immoral (antisocial) behaviors. This group of researchers concluded that these irregularities could be partially explained by the unique properties that moral judgment and decision-making have from other non-moral domains of judgment and decision-making (Skitka, Bauman, & Sargis, 2005). These methodological and conceptual differences may explain the broad differences between social and relational distance as well as the specific results from the current research that demonstrate an effect for relational distance on judgments of selfish, but not cooperative behavior. However, again this is an empirical question that I'll address in my future research.

Finally, it may be that the conceptualization of morality in this experimental paradigm is too narrow. Research in moral psychology has found that morality may be a very broad concept that sprouts from an equally broad spectrum of cognitive influences (Graham et al., 2012; Haidt, 2001; Hume, 1960/1777; Smith, 2002/1759). This spectrum of moral influence forms the foundation of our diverse moral intuitions and has recently been organized into five general categories (Haidt and Joseph, 2004; Haidt & Graham, 2007). These categories: care / aversion to harm (e.g., Cushman et al., 2012; Gray, Young, & Waytz, 2012), fairness / justice (e.g.,

Baumard, Andre, & Sperber, 2013), ingroup loyalty / resistance to betrayal (e.g., Finkel et al., 2002; Fitness, 2001; Jones & Burdette, 1994; Rusbult, Johnson, & Morrow, 1986), respect of authority / hierarchy (e.g., Nisbett & Cohen, 1996), and sensitivity to purity (e.g., Inbar, Pizarro, Knobe, & Bloom, 2009; Rozin, Haidt, & McCauley, 2008; Schnall et al., 2008) represent the foundation of moral judgment. In my first study, by using the Prisoner's Dilemma as the experimental stimuli, I limited the judgments to the dimensions of harm, fairness, and interpersonal loyalty (for the relationship conditions). Restricting the research to this narrow set of moral intuitions renders an incomplete investigation into the domain of human morality (Graham, Haidt, Koleva, Motyl, Iyer, Wojcik, & Ditto, 2013). To fully understand the interaction between moral / immoral person perception and relational distance future research should investigate this question across the moral foundations.

Relational distance and intrarelational moral decision-making

Research has demonstrated that when people face a moral dilemma, it is rarely construed as a difficult, much less an intractable, tradeoff decision (Ariely, 2012; Bazerman & Gino, 2012). In fact, moral dilemmas are frequently clouded by how decision makers construe the situation. For example, people may not experience an unethical behavior as unethical if they construe it as socially acceptable (Tenbrunsel & Messick, 2004), normative (i.e., Bandura, 1999; Reynolds, 2006), or believe it to be benevolent (Levine & Schweitzer, 2014). In my second study, I set out to develop an experimental paradigm that built on the results from the first study and allow me to systematically test if (and understand how) relational construals *cloud* moral decision-making.

Early on in my investigation I began to believe that in the context of close relationships relational construals would become more concrete and salient, and *crowd out* important, non-relationship related information that would otherwise be incorporated into the decision-making

calculus. To test this intuition, I created an experimental paradigm where participants would make a series of joint moral tradeoff decisions between honesty and loyalty about people from across their social network that varied by relational distance (a *person-centered* variable) committing a universally recognized unethical behavior (stealing) that varied by outcome severity (an *act-centered* variable). I believed that this method would allow me to examine how the evaluations of both acts and people distinctively and interactively drove moral judgments and decisions in an ecologically sound, morally dilemmatic experimental paradigm. Utilizing experimental methods that tease apart habitually intertwined, but importantly distinct antecedents to moral judgment (i.e., emotional vs. rational, deontological vs. utilitarian, person-centered vs. act centered) has recently been proven necessary in discerning how and when particular psychosocial mechanisms influence moral cognition and behavior Conway & Gawronski, 2013; Lee & Gino, 2015; Uhlmann, Pizarro, & Diermeier, 2015).

In Study 2, I used this paradigm – the loyalty dilemma – to test the hypotheses that both factors (relational distance and outcome severity) would negatively influence relationally impartial, utilitarian (and positively influence relationally partial, parochial) decisions and that in the context of close relationships, the effect of severity on moral decision-making would be severely diminished. The results from Study 2 supported all three hypotheses. The effect for severity in the context of close relationships was one-third the size (14.2%; OR = 2.2) of what it was in casual (30.5%; OR = 3.8) and distant relationships (32.4%; 4.23). Furthermore, the difference between the effects for severity was statistically different between close and casual relationships, close and distant relationships, and not significantly different between casual and distant relationships. These findings support the idea that our social networks are bifurcated into two types of relationships: close and distant (i.e., strong and weak ties). This dichotomous split

between close and non-close relationships mirrors the common categorization of relationships found in the multidisciplinary study of interpersonal relationships and social networks (e.g., Argyle & Henderson, 1984; Aron et al., 1991; Berscheid et al., 1989; DePaulo & Kashy, 1998; Granovetter, 1973; Krackhardt, 1992; Maxwell, 1985; Mills, Clark, Ford, & Johnson, 2004; Parks & Floyd, 1996). More importantly, these results provide strong evidence to support the claim that in the context of close relationships the moral severity of the act is far less important than it is in non-close relationships.

With the creation of the loyalty dilemma, the current research expands the efficacy of the artificial moral dilemma paradigm into the domain of relationship science. The novel combination of the forced choice dependent variable and the joint decision (i.e., within-subjects, repeated measures) design allowed me to maintain the essence of conflicted sacrifice found in the moral dilemma while simultaneously incorporating relational distance and outcome severity into the examination of the moral decision-making process. By maintaining the structural integrity of the artificial moral dilemma paradigm, while modifying it to take into account variation in interpersonal relationships, this study adds relational distance and close relational construals to the list of phenomena that moral psychologists should consider when attempting to understand the antecedents and correlates of moral reasoning. Going forward, the loyalty dilemma experimental paradigm can be used by researchers to test the relationship between other variables related to interpersonal relationships (e.g., attachment; Bowlby, 1982; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2012; affection; e.g., Fredrickson, 2013; Sternberg, 1986; intimacy; Laurenceau, Rivera, Schaffer, & Pietromonaco, 2004; interdependence; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959; affiliation; Hogg & Williams, 2000; and relational models; A.P. Fiske, 1991), moral cognition (e.g., moral emotionality; Haidt, 2003; rationalization; e.g., Tsang, 2002; intuition; Haidt, 2001; Graham et

al., 2011; Hauser, 2006; dyadic morality; Gray, Young, & Waytz, 2012; and social-environmental context; Dorris, 2005), and other non-relational or moral constructs. In my future research I plan on validating these claims by incorporating these other types of variables into the loyalty dilemma paradigm.

Self-distance, abstract-ethical construals and loyalty dilemmas

One of the more robust findings from the field of behavioral ethics is that people are prone to behaving unethically when their ability to recognize the moral qualities of a situation wane, and or are restricted (Bazerman & Tenbrunsel, 2011). Psychological reasons as to why people become morally unaware range from processes related to motivation (e.g., moral hypocrisy; Batson et al., 1999; moral licensing; Zhong et al., 2009), affect (e.g., guilt and shame proneness; Cohen, Panter, & Turan, 2012; emotional spillover; Pizarro, Inbar, & Helion, 2011), and cognition (e.g., bounded ethicality; Kern & Chugh, 2009; ethical fading; Gino & Bazerman, 2009). Building on the proposition that moral awareness is one of the lynchpins to ethical decision-making (Rest, 1986; Sheldon & Fishbach, 2015) and my interpretation of the results from the first two experiments: that the effect of close relational construals on moral judgment and decision making might be caused by the level at which the situation is construed (high, abstract vs. low, concrete), I next wanted to a) confirm that construal level was indeed the psychological mechanism that was driving this effect, and b) see if there was a way to regulate the negative effect of close relational construals on utilitarian decision making by manipulating psychological distance. To do this I drew from two disparate, (Macintyre, 1984) but converging (Tiberius, 2015), domains of inquiry: the scientific intersection of psychological distance and self-control (Baumeister & Exline, 1999; Finkel et al., 2013; Fujita, Trope, Liberman, & Levin-

Sagi, 2006; Kross & Ayduk, 2011; Mischel & Baker, 1975) and the philosophy of virtue (Aristotle, 1999; Foot, 2002; Cameron & Winn, 2012; Singer, 2011; Smith, 1976/1790).

From a psychological perspective, morality can be thought of as a “suite of psychological processes that help us solve the problem of selfishness (i.e. the “*me vs. we*” cooperation problem). However, just as these psychological processes have evolved to help us solve problem of selfishness, it has also evolved to make us parochial, which perpetuates the other, more modern problem of groupishness cooperation problem (i.e., the “*us vs. them*” cooperation problem; Greene, 2013). This account of human morality aligns with the wide body of literature from psychology, cultural anthropology, evolutionary biology, and behavioral economics that posits that morality manifests psychologically as a suite of cooperative, socially oriented, intuitions (i.e., emotions, sentiments, passions, implicit cognitions; Haidt, 2001) that serve to counterbalance the more evolutionarily selfish intuitions like desire, personal prosperity and self-comfort (e.g., Bloom, 2013; Dawkins, 1976; DeSteno, 2014; de Waal, 1996; Frank, 1988; Haidt & Joseph, 2004; Hamilton, 1964; Joyce, 2006; Krebs, 2008; Ridley, 1996; Shweder et al., 1997; Trivers, 1971; Wright, 1994).

As stated earlier, research has demonstrated that these moral intuitions span the full spectrum of the moral domain and manifest as an aversion to harm, injustice, disrespect, impurity, and betrayal. This last type of moral intuition - the sensitivity to betrayal - helps explain, at the psychological level, how human morality has developed to solve the problem of selfishness but perpetuate the problem of groupishness.

Like the other moral intuitions - sensitivity to care, justice, respect and purity - loyalty is a moral intuition that motivates cooperation and discourages selfishness. However, along with motivating cooperation, the intuition of loyalty also serves as the *governor* of the other moral

intuitions. Similar to how an engine governor is installed to regulate the speed of a machine through its interaction with the other mechanical mechanisms of the engine; the intuition of loyalty has evolved to regulate an individual's scope of cooperation through its interaction with the other psychological mechanisms of the mind.

This conceptualization of loyalty fits with the emerging view that there exists a set of moral intuitions (e.g., empathy) that regulate one's morality around the boundaries of human sociality (Buffone & Poulin, 2014; Decety & Cowell, 2014; Prinz, 2011; Bloom, 2013; Rai & A.P. Fiske, 2011). These intuitions motivate moral (i.e., cooperative, helpful) cognitions, judgments, & behavior in regards to relationally close others as well as immoral (i.e., selfish, harmful) cognitions, judgments, & behavior about relationally distant others (see the related concepts of in-group *love* & out-group *hate* from the intergroup literature; e.g., Balliet et al., 2014; Brewer, 1999; Halevy, Bornstein, Sagiv, 2008; Bornstein, 2003; Yzerbyt & Demoulin, 2010). It is loyalty's dual nature that helps explain why its value and virtue has been historically debated by philosophers and perplexing to lay people (e.g., Felten, 2011; Fletcher, 1993; Kant, 1785/1993; Keller, 2007; Royce, 1908).

Aristotle believed that our fundamental social practices constantly demanded choices (e.g., when to be loyal to a friend, how to be fair, how to confront risk, etc.), and that ethics was not about establishing moral rules and following them, but rather about performing a particular social practice well (e.g., being a good friend, parent, professor, soldier, & citizen). He believed that the virtue of *Phronesis* (i.e., practical wisdom; doing the right thing in a particular circumstance, with a particular person, at a particular time) was the master virtue that unlocked all of the other virtues (e.g., veracity, loyalty, self-control, courage). He believed that in order to achieve *Phronesis* we must first be able to perceive the situation properly and then, and only

then, can we have the appropriate feelings or desires about the situation, deliberate about what is appropriate in that particular circumstance, and act accordingly (Aristotle, 1999; Schwartz & Sharpe, 2010).

The idea of *Phronesis* fits well with the findings from behavioral ethics that show how social psychological biases *obscure* the morality form moral dilemmas. From a behavioral ethical perspective, *Phronesis* is short circuited when psychological biases make moral dilemmas opaque. This, along with the proposition that the intuition of loyalty could also mask a moral dilemma by modulating the other moral intuitions (e.g., care, fairness, respect, and sanctity), and that these inclinations could possibly be regulated by changes in level of construal through psychological distance, made me wonder if there is a way to manipulate construal level through an intervention that altered the psychological distance between close relational partners.

This question is not new, over 200 years ago, the economist/philosopher, Adam Smith, developed a hypothesis arising from a similar question. Smith postulated that in order for a person to develop a moral self they would need to examine their feelings and behavior from a self-distanced perspective (Smith, 1976/1790). Smith believed that self-distancing promoted moral judgment and decision-making by allowing people to regulate their intuitions and place more weight on the rights and interests of others (broadly construed). Smith's claim was that a self-distanced perspective would allow a person to transcend their own egocentric perspective, assume a less biased stance, and make more morally inclined judgments and decisions. Reading into this claim through the lens of behavioral ethics, I began to think that psychological self-distancing (Kross & Ayduk 2011) could negate the *clouding* effect of psychological biases on moral dilemmas. I then stretched this logic one step further by thinking that, self-distancing would mitigate the effect of close relational construals in loyalty dilemmas by neutralizing their

negative effect on relationally impartial, utilitarian decisions, and thus move the decision maker one step closer to achieving *Phronesis*.

The results from the final two studies in the current research provide evidence to support this proposition. The results from both experiments show that self-distancing counteracts the effect of close relational construals on relationally impartial, utilitarian decisions by mitigating the dampening effect of closeness on severity. Self-distancing seems to be putting the moral back into the loyalty dilemma by *unmasking* the effect of severity. It also must be noted that although the mitigating effects for self-distancing on close relational construals in loyalty dilemmas are small to medium (Study 3: Cohen's $d = .22$; Study 4: Cohen's $d = .35$; Cohen, 1988), the impact of the effect is significant (in both statistical and non-statistical terms; Prentice & Miller, 1992). In Study 3, there is a 9% decrease in loyal decisions in the distanced condition compared to the immersed condition in loyalty dilemmas involving close relational construals and seriously severe behaviors. This is the largest difference in any direction (utilitarian or parochial), in any of the 9 experimental conditions (relational distance by severity). In Study 4, although when judging close relationships committing a seriously severe violation the difference between the self-distanced conditions is slight (.52 on a 6 point scale), on average, the participants in the self-distanced condition made the honest (utilitarian) decision (3.30, with 3 being the midpoint of the scale) while participants in the self-immersed condition, on average, made the loyal (parochial) decision (2.78).

Implications

This dissertation makes important contributions to the study of moral reasoning, interpersonal relationships, and social psychology. By focusing on the influence that close relational construals play in moral judgment and decision-making, this study opens the door to

understanding how one of the more important aspects of our lives – our interpersonal relationships – influence how we evaluate our social world. The research reported here begins a long overdue investigation into intrarelatinal moral cognition and behavior. The findings from this series of experiments add to the growing body of evidence that our sociality and morality are indivisible (Bloom, 2011; Brass, Butterfield, & Skaggs, 1998; Greenwood, 2011; Moore & Gino, 2013; Rai & A.P. Fiske, 2012).

The implications of this research are widespread. This research could help to explain how interpersonal aggression (e.g., domestic abuse; Daly & Wilson, 1996; bullying; Olweus, 1993; incivility and sexual harassment; Cortina, Magley, & Williams, 2001; Russell, 1984) goes unreported in the context of social relationships (both dyadic and group), provide a fresh perspective to the field of behavioral ethics (Trevino et al., 2014), and add to long standing social psychological theories such as groupthink (Janis, 1972), diffusion of responsibility (Darley & Latane, 1968), and the free rider problem (Hardin, 1971).

This *bringing together* of two growing, but rarely intersecting, fields of study - moral cognition and interpersonal relationships- has also yielded a novel way in which the inclusion of the other in the self conceptualization of closeness can be used to account for variance in social cognition and behavior. Although, the inclusion of the other in the self has been used in numerous ways, most notably as a way to either examine the differences in perceived interconnectedness between dyadic partners (e.g., Mattingly & Lewandowski, 2014), or as a way to compare people in close relationships to those who are not (e.g., Frost & Eliason, 2014), to my knowledge, it has not been used as a way to distinguish between the different relationships within a person's social network. This application of the inclusion in the other in the self-concept transcends the field of moral cognition and could theoretically open up new ways of examining

preexisting research paradigms that have not yet incorporated the relational dimension of judgment and decision making into their theoretical frameworks.

Limitations

Although there are significant contributions made by this research there are limitations of this study that should be considered when designing future research. Future research should explore these relationships further in the lab (using different procedures and populations than I did here), in the field (in everyday contexts like workgroups, sports teams, and families), and c) in the brain / body (how are these effects mediated by / related to neuro / biological mechanisms that have been implicated in cognition and behavior related to introspection & metalizing; Spunt, Meyer, & Liberman, 2015; moral judgment and decision-making; Crockett, 2010; Greene, 2014; Young & Dungan, 2012; Zak, 2011; and self-regulation; Heatherton, 2011; Kross & Ochsner, 2010; Ochsner, Silvers, & Buhle, 2012).

Previous research has developed procedures for manipulating closeness (Aron, Melinat, Aron, Vallone, & Bator, 1997) and moral severity (McMahon & Harvey, 2007). These procedures should be used to compare the influence of close and distant relationships and serious and mild immoral (or moral) acts on relationship-based moral judgment to further substantiate the hypothesized causal relationship between closeness, severity, and intrarelational moral cognition and behavior. In order to generalize these findings beyond stealing, relational distance will need to be tested with other types of (im)moral behavior such as lying, cheating, harming, and helping (or failure to help).

Previous research has shown that there may be an individual difference component to self-distancing (Ayduk & Kross, 2010; White et al., 2015). In other words some people spontaneously self-distance at different rates. The current research did not measure, nor control

for, spontaneous self-distancing. Future research that explores the relationship between self-distance and intrarelational moral judgment should consider incorporating this into the design. Finally, it will be necessary to expand the results from this study on moral judgment to moral action. In the current study, subjects were asked about a hypothetical situation. Future studies should examine actual behavior.

Conclusions

The current research makes several contributions to the moral, and social, psychological literature. First, it adds to the growing body of literature on the influence of relational construals on moral cognition and behavior. Second, it provides evidence that relational distance is a mechanism of moral cognition. Third, it introduces a novel experimental paradigm – the loyalty dilemma – that can be useful for exploring the influence of relational distance on both moral and non-moral phenomenon. Fourth, it employs self-talk as an easy to implement, self administered, intervention strategy for expanding moral awareness in the context of close interpersonal relationships. Fifth, it adds to the growing body of research on self-distancing that demonstrates that psychological distance activates high-level construals (e.g., abstract, utilitarian ethical precepts) while deactivating low-level construals (e.g., concrete, relationship specific information). Finally, it motivates research that crosses the morality and relationship sciences, which will help move the field of moral psychology towards a more ecologically valid model of moral cognition and behavior that takes into account the intrarelational dimension of morality.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

The eighteen stealing behaviors used in the pilot study to operationalize severity (the bolded behaviors are the ones that were selected to be used in the current study)

- Taking a person's money by threatening them with a weapon (robbery)
- **Blackmailing a person for money by threatening to post an unflattering picture of them on-line (blackmail)**
- **Breaking into someone's home and stealing a TV (burglary)**
- **Shoplifting merchandise from a department store (shoplift)**
- Pickpocketing someone's wallet while in a crowd of people (pickpocket)
- Stealing an unattended laptop from a coffee shop (taking a stranger's belongings)
- Copying and selling DVDs (bootleg)
- Passing off someone else's written work as original without permission or acknowledgement (plagiarism)
- Hacking into a neighbor's wireless router and using their Wi-Fi without their permission (hacking Wi-Fi)
- **Illegal downloading of music over the internet (illegal download)**
- **Using someone else's credit card to purchase something without their authorization (credit card fraud)**

- Writing a check knowing it will bounce (check bouncing)
- Kidnapping a person (kidnap)
- Illegally entering in an event without authorization (e.g., entering a concert without paying) (trespass)
- **Keeping a package that was mistakenly delivered to one's residence and not returning it to its rightful owner (keeping merchandise)**
- **Leaving a restaurant without paying the check (dine & dash)**
- **Eating a piece of fruit while shopping at the supermarket and not paying for it when you leave (eating merchandise)**
- **Lying about how something broke when returning it to the store so you can get a new one (lying on return)**

Appendix 2

Examples of model responses for the qualitative codes

Ethical construals – To what degree does the participant focus on the ethicality of the situation to describe his/her thoughts and feelings.

Code 0 – if there is no mention of the ethicality of the situation

Code 1 – if the ethicality of the situation is a minor theme, less than 25% of the response focuses on the ethicality of the situation, but it is not a prominent theme

Code 2 – if the ethicality of the situation is a moderate theme, between 25% and 50% of the response focuses on the ethicality of the situation, but it is not the predominant theme

Code 3 – if the ethicality of the situation is the major theme

Examples:

Code 0

I am contemplating any way in which I can avoid trouble for myself as well as for Sylvia. I'm also thinking about how this incident could affect my future.

I would feel unsure about what to do. I would pretend nothing happened.

My initial thoughts would be to tell the officer because any officer asking a specific question like that could mean that there is a specific investigation going on. However, the more I think about it, the more hesitant I become.

Code 1

I am feeling pretty confused to this situation. I have no idea what I should say in this situation when approached by the officer, because I don't want to give up my friend's name and get him in trouble. My friend and me are really good friends and our friendship would be over if I told on him.

I think that this is a horrible situation and am unsure how I would respond to the officer. I did not get a chance to talk to my friend before she left about it but I am thinking about calling her as soon as I can.

I don't want to get Andrew in trouble. I feel as though there might be a bigger reason as to why he did what he did. I would want to talk to him and confront him about what I saw him do.

Code 2

Frank would never do anything like that. But if he did, I would tell the police. It would be difficult, but my morals are to be honest and uphold the law.

I have known Gabe all my life and I don't think I could so easily report him. I do however feel like it's my responsibility to tell the truth because I did see an illegal action being taken. I'm not sure what I would do.

I am conflicted. Considering this is the first time I have witnessed this act, I will act as if I saw nothing. Then I will confront Josh soon after.

Code 3

I am extremely upset that Sarah would behave in such a manor. I would have said something to Sarah while she was using the card and confronted her that it was illegal. I am disappointed that my friend could act in such a negative manor I wish that my friend would make better choices. I do not approve of stealing from others and wish that no one committed these types of acts.

Reluctantly, I would tell the officer what had happened. Even though I am extremely close to Shawn and feel immense regret, I know that in the long run that telling the truth would serve its purpose. I would fully accept any bad-harbored feelings Shawn may feel for me, but I will have a reassurance that telling the officer was the right thing to do for everyone.

I am thinking that I put my loyalty to my friends above the law. I do not want to see my best friend get in trouble legally and be the cause of her life being ruined. Rather, I am thinking about not giving the officer full details or a direct answer until I confront Kavita and speak to her personally about the matter.

Relational construals – To what degree does the participant focus on the agent or their relationship with the agent when describing their thoughts and feelings about the situation.

Code 0 – if there is no mention of the agent, or the participant's relationship with the agent

Code 1 – if the agent, or the participant's relationship with agent is a minor theme, less than 25% of the response focuses on the agent, or the participant's relationship with the agent, but it is not a prominent theme

Code 2 – if the agent, or the participant's relationship with agent is a moderate theme, between 25% and 50% of the response focuses on the agent, or the participant's relationship with the agent, but it is not the predominant theme

Code 3 – if the agent, or the participant's relationship with agent is the major theme

Examples:

Code 0

I feel confused, anxious, and mixed-up, like the truth isn't right. I am not sure what to say to the cop, but I feel like I have no choice but to be just.

I would feel unsure about what to do. I would pretend nothing happened.

My initial thoughts would be to tell the officer because any officer asking a specific question like that could mean that there is a specific investigation going on. However, the more I think about it, the more hesitant I become.

Code 1

I am contemplating any way in which I can avoid trouble for myself as well as for Sylvia. I'm also thinking about how this incident could affect my future.

I am conflicted. Considering this is the first time I have witnessed this act, I will act as if I saw nothing. Then I will confront Josh soon after.

I don't want to get Andrew in trouble. I feel as though there might be a bigger reason as to why he did what he did. I would want to talk to him and confront him about what I saw him do.

Code 2

Can we still have a good relationship if I tell the truth? Will she be mad at me? Will I get in trouble if I lie? Could I morally feel good about myself if I lie?

I am feeling as though I do not want Breonndra to get in trouble with law enforcement. We have been best friends since we were three years old and I would hate to know I was the person who led to Breonndra being thrown in jail. I am so worried about what would happen to me if I were to lie to the Police Officer. I have a lot going for myself and do not want to throw my future away just because I want to be a good friend. I am also thinking about whether or not the police would know if I was lying or not. I am thinking that if they were to find out that I did not tell them about what Breonndra was doing would that get me in trouble.

I am conflicted. Considering this is the first time I have witnessed this act, I will act as if I saw nothing. Then I will confront Josh soon after.

Code 3

I am so nervous. Caitlyn is my best friend and also my cousin and I want to protect her. I know that Caitlyn did something wrong but people illegally download music all of the time. It's no big deal...right?

Mackensie is my number one girl, would she turn me in? If she goes to jail who will I have? Is that selfish to wonder about that? I'm not going to turn her in, she wouldn't turn me in.

Mackensie and I will just talk about it later. I will tell her what happened and that I really don't want her or me to get into trouble with the law like that. I will tell her that I am worried for how long she has been doing this and that she doesn't need to.

I am thinking that I put my loyalty to my friends above the law. I do not want to see my best friend get in trouble legally and be the cause of her life being ruined. Rather, I am thinking about not giving the officer full details or a direct answer until I confront Kavita and speak to her personally about the matter.

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