

The Effect of In-Group and Outgroup Labels on the Evaluations of People's Behavior: A Survey Experiment Using 12 Morally Ambiguous Situations

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Abstract—Preference for the in-group has been a trait of human societies since the dawn of time as a function to human survival. During the hunting-gathering societies, people tend to be cautious of outsiders out of suspicion that these are invaders, thieves, or rivals in their source of sustenance. With the rise of a global society with increasingly diverse melting-pots of cultures, wariness towards outgroups is expected to diminish. This study attempted to determine if the labels associated to a person will have an influence on how his/her behaviours are evaluated by others. A survey experiment was administered to the subjects in several repetitions. Twelve morally ambiguous vignettes are presented to the subjects during each stage. Subjects are asked to rate in a 6-point scale whether the character in the vignette “did the right thing” or not - with 1 indicating that the character is wrong and 6 indicating that the character did the right thing. During each stage of administration, similar vignettes are presented but the sequence of presentation, name of character, and labels associated with the character are changed. The goal is to see whether or not the subjects shall evaluate the character in the vignette differently when the label associated with them is changed. The four labels used are “Filipino” and “Christian” for the in-group labels, and “American” and “Atheist” for the outgroup labels.

Evidence from the study shows that characters associated with labels indicating in-group affiliation have been evaluated more positively by the subjects. However, the difference between the scores given by subjects to perceived in-group and outgroup characters are small. Findings reveal that religious labels has a greater effect on evaluation than nationality label. Results of correlational tests suggest that personal self-esteem has no significant influence in the evaluation of members of the in-group and outgroup. Instead, collective self-esteem, especially the private collective self-esteem, has a significant influence in how the subjects evaluated characters with in-group and outgroup labels. These results show that biases, be they explicitly or implicitly held, still exists in favor of people considered to be members of one's “tribe” – especially in terms of religious belief.

Keywords— Evaluation Bias, In-group, Morality, Identity.

I. INTRODUCTION

Our actions in society will undoubtedly elicit a reaction from other members of society. They will judge it as right or wrong, good or bad, desirable or undesirable. However, the situations we find ourselves in will not always be easily fitted in a dichotomous 'black and white' paradigm – what is right and what is wrong is not always easy to define. This study

argues that the perceived desirability or undesirability of an act is relative to the actor's degree of difference with the other members of society. In other words, the acceptability of an act is based on how much the actor is considered by the society who serves as audience to the act as a member of their in-group.

However, the situations we find ourselves in will not always be easily fitted in a dichotomous 'black and white' paradigm – what is right and what is wrong is not always easy to define. In his discussion of deviance in society in his book, *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*, the Howard Becker [1] described the “deviant” as such:

“Social groups create deviance by making rules whose infraction constitutes deviance, and by applying those rules to particular people and labelling them as outsiders. From this point of view, deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to the 'offender'. The deviant is one to whom the label has successfully been applied; deviant behaviour is behaviour that people so label.”

This appreciation of how deviance is created in society suggests that our conceptualization of what is undesirable is not dependent on the behaviour itself. Instead, there is no behaviour that is inherently deviant. An act only becomes deviant when others perceive and define it as such – the label of “deviant” is only a consequence of the responses of others to a person's act. The challenge, then, is not to identify what acts are deviant but rather to identify which groups of individuals have their behaviours are labelled as deviant by society.

Following Becker's assumption that deviance is the product of a transaction that takes place between a social group and one who is viewed by that group as a rule-breaker, this study argues that the perceived desirability or undesirability of an act is relative to the actor's degree of difference with the other members of society. In other words, the acceptability of an act is based on how much the actor is considered by the society who serves as audience to the act as a member of their in-group.

Preference for the in-group has been a trait of human societies since the dawn of time as a function to human survival. During the hunting-gathering societies, people tend to be cautious of outsiders out of suspicion that these are invaders, thieves, or rivals in their source of sustenance. With the rise of a global society with increasingly diverse melting-

pots of cultures, wariness towards outgroups is expected to diminish. In this study, I attempted to determine whether two people who have done the same act would be evaluated by society differently if one person is labeled as a member of the in-group while the other is labeled as an outsider.

This research operates is guided by William Graham Sumner's [2] concept of in-group favoritism or in-group bias. According to Franzoi [3], this pertains to the tendency to evaluate members of one's in-group more positively than those who are perceived as out-group members. This in-group favoritism is further exacerbated by the concept of social identity. According to the Social identity theory [4], people who wish to increase their self-esteem may do so by associating themselves with specific social groups and evaluating these social groups as being better than other groups.

This study is conducted with two particular research questions in mind:

1. *How will a label associated with a person influence other's evaluation of that person's behaviour during morally ambiguous situations?*

Perdue, Dovidio, Gurtman, and Tyler [5] suggests that mere association with ingroup-designating pronouns such as 'we', 'us', and 'ours' can have a positive influence on evaluation whereas mere association with outgroup-designating pronouns can have the opposite effect. Tajfel and Turner [4] agrees with this. According to them, even ingroup-outgroup distinctions based on trivial criteria is enough to influence people to treat members of the ingroup more positively than members of the out-group. Therefore, this study hypothesizes that the actions of people in morally ambiguous situations will be evaluated more positively if the person is associated with an in-group label than when the person is associated with out-group labels.

2. *What are the factors that influence how people will evaluate the actions of the members of in-groups and out-groups in morally ambiguous situations?*

The Social Identity theory suggests that the degree to which individuals will manifest in-group favoritism is also influenced by how important the in-group affiliation is to their identity. Therefore, this study also hypothesizes that those who consider their group affiliation as important to their self-esteem would exhibit greater in-group bias. Those with greater in-group bias will consequently evaluations of perceived in-groups more positively.

II. RESEARCH DESIGN

Philosophy students from a small sectarian college in Laguna, Philippines were engaged as subjects of the study. This group is comprised of a total of 37 college students, 24 of which are female and 13 are male. All of the subjects are Filipinos in nationality and Christian in terms of religious affiliation. A survey experiment was administered to the subjects in several repetitions following a within-subject repeated measures design. Twelve morally ambiguous vignettes are presented to the subjects during each stage.

There is an interval of one week per stage to avoid the possibility of students remembering the scores they gave to the vignettes and to blur their memory of the vignettes themselves. Subjects were asked to rate in a 6-point scale whether the character in the vignette "did the right thing" or not - with 1 indicating that the character is wrong and 6 indicating that the character did the right thing. During each stage of administration, similar vignettes are presented but the sequence of presentation, name of character, and labels associated with the character are changed. An example of the vignettes used for the study is provided below:

"[NAME], a [GROUP], lives with his family in a squatter's area. Where he lives, there is a great scarcity of jobs and his family is severely starving. One day, when he was trying to find food for his family among the trash, a truck delivering sacks of rice passed by. As it sped on the road, it hit a bump and a sack of rice fell to the ground. Still, the driver of the truck didn't notice and sped on. [NAME] is now left with a sack of rice. He knows that the sack of rice is not rightfully his, and that the driver would be penalized by his employer once they found out that a sack of rice is missing. Furthermore, [NAME] knows that taking the sack of rice would qualify as stealing. Still, he took the sack of rice home and fed his family with it for several weeks, saving them from weeks of starvation. Did [NAME] do the right thing?"

The goal is to see whether the subjects shall evaluate the character in the vignette differently when the label associated with them is changed. The four labels used are "Filipino" and "Christian" for the in-group, and "American" and "Atheist" for the outgroup. The subjects were also administered with a survey questionnaire that includes the Rosenberg Self-esteem scale [6], the Collective Self-esteem scale [7], the Direct Bias scale [8], and the Indirect Bias scale [9].

The Rosenberg Self-esteem scale is a 10-item Likert scale with items answered on a four point scale - from strongly agree to strongly disagree. It is used to measure an individual's evaluation of his or her own self-concept. People with low self-esteem could be more prone to bias possibly because the act of denigrating or seeing others in a negative light makes us feel better about ourselves [10]. However, Aberson, Healy, and Romero [11] stated that high self-esteem has a positive relationship with intergroup bias

The Collective Self-esteem scale is a 16-item measure on a 7-point Likert-type scale used to measure an individual's self-esteem relative to his social group affiliations. It can be used to measure a person's self-esteem as related to specific social groups (ie. Religion, ethnicity, race, etc.). Because it is the collective self-esteem that is related to group membership, it is the collective self-esteem that is related to intergroup bias rather than the personal self-esteem [7]. This instrument has four dimensions:

a. Membership esteem. Individual's judgments of how worthy they are as members of their social groups. Aberson and Howanski [9] has found that people with low membership esteem tends to be more prone to ingroup bias because individuals lower in membership self-esteem tended

to enhance their association with positively valued groups as a means of basking in the reflected glory of the in-group.

b. Public collective esteem. Assesses one’s perceptions of how positively other people evaluate one’s social groups. This is correlated positively with in-group bias [12].

c. Private collective esteem. Measures personal judgments of how good one’s social groups are. Because this is directly related to social identity, it is positively correlated with in-group bias [8].

d. Importance to identity. Assesses the importance of one’s social groups memberships to one’s self-concept. People who see their social group affiliations as a central component of their self-concept are more likely to engage in in-group favoritism than those who do not [13].

The Direct Bias Scale is a 16-item adjective rating scale including eight positive items and eight negative items. Participants rated how descriptive each item was for each target group. Responses can range from (1) does not describe to (7) describes completely.

It is expected that subjects will attribute positive adjectives to in-groups to a higher degree while generally attributing negative attitudes to out-groups to a higher degree.

The Indirect Bias Scale, on the other hand, focuses on perceived similarity between the participant and members of the in-group and out-group. Participants indicated the extent that they shared common interests, common experiences, and their overall similarity with the group.

For each of the scales, except for the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale, subjects were asked to answer relative to their nationality and their religious affiliation. Mean scores obtained by the character with respective labels on each vignette were obtained and compared. Pearson’s Correlational analyses were conducted to determine the relationship between self-esteem, collective self-esteem, direct bias and indirect bias with the way subjects evaluate the characters in the vignette.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Different combinations of labels were compared for each vignette in the study. Table 1 summarizes the results of each vignette comparison.

TABLE 1. SUMMARY OF RESULTS OF THE SURVEY EXPERIMENT.

	Vignette 1	Vignette 2	Vignette 3	Vignette 4	Vignette 5	Vignette 6	Vignette 7	Vignette 8	Vignette 9	Vignette 10	Vignette 11	Vignette 12
Control Group	3.12	4.15	3.59	2.56	2.56	3.67	2.88	3.67	3.19	3.26	2.81	3.41
Filipino	3.52		3.63		2.93		3					
American	3			2.78		3.26	3					
Christian		4.22	3.74	2.81			3.22					
Atheist		3.81			2.26	2.89	2.67					
Filipino Christian								3.85			3	3.85
Filipino Atheist									2.93	2.81		2.96
American Christian								3.69		3.38		3.72
American Atheist									2.89		2.33	2.93

Vignette 1 would show that the character, when given the label of “Filipino”, was evaluated more positively than when it is labeled with an out-group label and when there is no label at all. Vignette 2 followed this trend, with the Christian being evaluated more positively than the Atheist counterpart. Vignette 3 attempted to compare the two in-group labels and the results showed that the religion-based in-group label has a greater positive influence than the nationality-based label, though both are evaluated more positively than the control group. The same trend was observed in the comparison of out-groups done in Vignette 6. Vignettes 4 and 5 attempted to compare a religion-based label with a nationality-based label, and results for both vignettes showed that the in-group label had more positive scores. The pattern found in Vignettes 4 and 5 are corroborated in the results of Vignette 7 where the Christian label garnered the highest evaluation while the Atheist label got the lowest evaluation.

Vignette 8 and 9 showed that when the religion-based label is held constant, the in-group nationality-based label is still influential. Vignettes 10 further corroborates the results

of Vignettes 4,5, and 7. And finally, Vignettes 11 and 12 showed that those who are similar to the audience in two levels (nationality and religion) are evaluated more positively than those who are different in two levels. Those who are different one on one level, on the other hand, were evaluated somewhere within the range of the two extremes, with the one who is similar in religious affiliation being rated more positively than the one who is similar in nationality. A summary of the average evaluation scores of the various labels is provided in Table 2.

TABLE 2. MEAN EVALUATION SCORES OF THE DIFFERENT LABELS USED IN THE 12 VIGNETTES

CATEGORY	MEAN EVALUATION
Control	3.24
Filipino	3.27
American	3.01
Christian	3.5
Atheist	2.91
Filipino Christian	3.57
Filipino Atheist	2.9
American Christian	3.6
American Atheist	2.72

The results of the 12 vignettes as shown in Table 1, and the mean scores of the different labels as shown in Table 2, support the first hypothesis of this study. However, it is important to note that the difference in the scores obtained by the characters with the in-group and out-group labels are small. In no instance among the 12 vignettes used in the study is the difference in the scores of the in-group and the out-group labeled characters amounting to a value of 1. This suggests that while the labels suggesting in-group and out-group have an influence, the impact of these labels on the evaluation of an actor's behavior is limited.

The study also tried to determine the factors associated with the more positive evaluation of perceived in-groups. Correlation coefficients were used to check for significant associations.

The following results were obtained from the correlational analyses of the study: Using Luhtanen and Crocker's Direct Bias scale, it was found that direct bias in favor of Filipinos is positively correlated with evaluating the behavior of characters with 'Filipino' (.248), 'Christian' (.128), and 'Filipino Christian' (.188) labels more positively. However, all three correlations are weak. Direct bias in favor of Christians is positively correlated with evaluating the behavior of characters with 'Filipino' (.081), 'Christian' (.223), and 'Filipino Christian' (.195) labels more positively. Conversely, it is negatively correlated with the evaluation of characters with 'Atheist' (-.113) and 'Filipino Atheist' (-.107) labels. However, all correlations are weak. Direct bias in favor of Atheists is positively but weakly correlated with evaluating the behavior of characters with 'Atheist' (-.134) labels positively.

Using Aberson and Howanski's Indirect Bias scale, it was found that indirect bias favoring Filipinos is negatively correlated with the evaluation of behavior of characters with 'American' (-.429) and 'Filipino Atheist' (-.241) labels. However, it is positively but weakly correlated with the evaluation of behavior of characters with 'Filipino Christian' labels (.177). Indirect bias favoring Christians is positively but weakly correlated with a more positive evaluation of characters with 'Christian' (.153) and 'Filipino Christian' (.247) labels. However, it is positively but weakly correlated with the evaluation of the behavior of characters with 'Atheist' label (-.254). Indirect bias favoring Atheists has a

weak but positive relationship with evaluating behavior of characters with 'Atheist' label (.296) more positively.

Using Luhtanen and Crocker's Collective Self-esteem scale, it was found that nationality-specific private collective self-esteem has a weak positive correlation with the evaluation of the behavior of characters with 'Filipino' label (.211) and it also has a moderate positive correlation with the evaluation of the behavior of characters with 'Christian' (.462) and 'Filipino Christian' (.517) labels. Nationality-specific public collective self-esteem has a moderate positive relationship with the evaluation of the behavior of characters with 'Filipino' label (.503). Importance of Nationality to self-identity has a moderate positive relationship with the evaluation of the behavior of characters with 'Filipino' (.371) and 'Filipino Christian' (.342) labels. Religion-specific private collective self-esteem has a moderate positive correlation with the evaluation of behaviors of characters with 'Christian' (.386) and 'Filipino Christian' (.300) labels but has a weak negative correlation with 'Atheist' (-.107) and 'American Atheist' (-.119) labels and a moderate negative correlation with 'Filipino Atheist' label (-.312).

On the other hand, it was also found in the correlational analyses of the Collective self-esteem scale that religion-specific public collective self-esteem has a weak positive correlation with evaluation of characters with 'Christian' label (.128). Importance of Religion to identity is moderately and positively correlated with evaluation of characters with 'Filipino Christian' label (.309).

IV. CONCLUSION

Evidence from the study shows that characters associated with labels indicating in-group affiliation have been evaluated more positively by the subjects. However, the gap between the scores given by subjects to perceived in-group and out-group characters are quite small. Future studies are advised to explore the influence of other in-group and out-group labels, or other bases for in-group and out-group classifications. Judging from the data, it was also observed that the labels with relation to religious affiliation has a greater effect on evaluation than the nationality label. This may be an indicator of our tendency to attribute great importance to religious beliefs and our continuous subscription to the belief that morality and religiosity are mutually inclusive and there, the lack of religious beliefs also equates to a lack of morals. The relative weakness of the nationality label as compared to the religious label may also be indicative of our regionalistic mentality, where we identify ourselves more with being Tagalogs or Manilenos, Cebuanos, Davaoenos, etc. rather than being a collective Filipino nation. The fact that the religious label has more importance to our social cognition rather than a collective Filipino identity bodes negatively for our future prospects in areas such as Mindanao where attitudes towards the state's attempts towards reconciliation armed groups can be influenced by differences in religious ideologies.

Results of the correlational tests suggests that personal self-esteem has no significant influence in the evaluation of

members of the in-group and out-group. Instead, it is the collective self-esteem, especially the private collective self-esteem, and an individual's direct and indirect biases which has a significant influence in how the subjects evaluated characters with in-group

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