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Moral Judgments of Differing Transgressions & the Influence of Willingness to Seek Counseling & Religiosity

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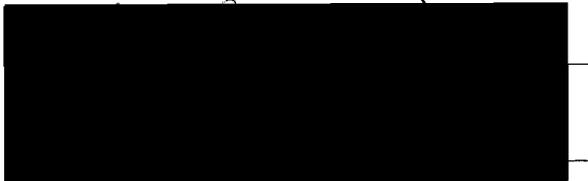
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MORAL JUDGMENTS OF DIFFERING TRANSGRESSIONS &
THE INFLUENCE OF WILLINGNESS TO SEEK COUNSELING & RELIGIOSITY

BY

MARNI NALEWAY

THESIS

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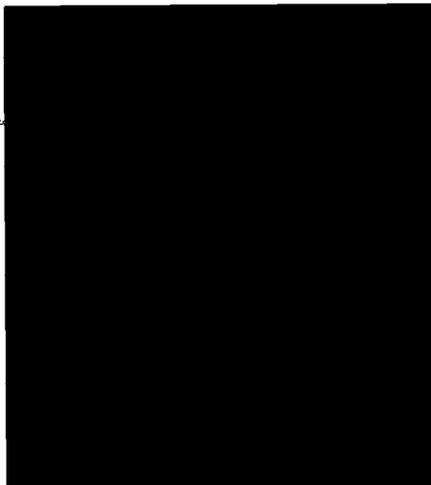
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2015

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine how moral judgments differ towards substance abusers and unfaithful spouses. Furthermore, the study compared judgments regarding the gender of the transgressor, the transgressor's willingness to go to counseling, and the participant's level of religiosity. Participants in the study were provided with a scenario describing a substance abuse transgression or an infidelity transgression followed by a survey of questions inquiring about their judgments towards the transgressor. Results indicated individuals judge a transgressor more harshly in an infidelity transgression compared to a substance abuse transgression. Results also indicated a gender bias between transgressions as participants judged the female transgressor more harshly for committing infidelity and the male transgressor more harshly for the substance abuse. As predicted, participants viewed infidelity more harshly than substance abuse. There was also an interaction of transgression type and gender: Participants judged a female transgressor more harshly than a male for infidelity, but they judged the male more harshly than the female for substance abuse. Willingness to go to counseling did not affect judgments of the transgressors. A scale was created for the current study to measure religiosity. Results showed that religiosity did not affect participant's judgments.

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Individuals seek counseling in order to receive professional guidance for various personal concerns. Research on counseling clearly shows that counseling is effective in relation to no-treatment and placebo control conditions (Atkins, Marin, Lo, Klann & Halweg, 2010; Lipsey, & Wilson, 1993). But what if society does not accept counseling as an appropriate or successful solution to our problems? Does public opinion influence an individual's success in counseling? If an individual is able to heal through counseling when society does not accept counseling as a healing process, then society does not accept that the individual has healed. Therefore, society may still hold this individual responsible for problems or concerns which have been resolved.

For example, in one case known to the author, a male sex-offender participated in weekly individual therapy sessions for three years. He also participated in a sex-offender therapy group two times each week and has met multiple treatment goals. He has expressed remorse for his offense, as well as implemented healthy habits in his life such as going to church and working. This individual has not committed any offenses since beginning therapy. However, this man lives in a small town where everyone knows everyone's business. Despite his lengthy participation in therapy and completion of treatment goals, he is constantly spit on, cussed at, and discriminated in public.

These acts suggest society does not accept that this man has made improvements throughout his process in therapy. It is possible that moral judgment has persuaded society to reject this individual due to the acts he had participated in. Some acts may be condemned as morally wrong with no lee way to being forgiven in the public eye, despite one's participation in therapy or treatment. If this is true, it is concerning because this may hinder individuals from initiating or continuing therapy or treatment. Also, therapeutic outcomes may be affected; individuals may feel that therapy is not working due to the lack of recognition in society.

Likewise, individuals may experience more distress due to experiencing rejection from society despite their efforts.

There is a lack of research measuring society's reactions to individuals' willingness to attend counseling, as well as a lack of understanding of the perceived impact counseling can have on an individual. However, much research has suggested that individuals feel and believe there is a public stigma towards receiving counseling (Corrigan, 2004; Le Surf & Lynch, 1999; Turner & Quinn, 1999; Vogel, Wade, & Hackler 2007). This perceived stigma influences individuals' personal beliefs about counseling as well as their willingness to seek counseling (Vogel, Wade, & Hackler 2007). If there is a stigma, it should affect the moral judgments made about individuals who have undergone therapy or are willing to undergo therapy. However, there has yet to be evidence as to whether or not moral judgments are affected by participating in counseling or willingness to undergo counseling.

HYPOTHESES

Why would society reject an individual's improvements after they have participated in therapy or treatment? If we can understand the nature of these rejections, we may be able to adapt various approaches, styles, and techniques in order to address these issues. These rejections may occur because society's judgments towards certain acts and circumstances may be an overruling factor when presented with an individual's success in counseling.

The current study will compare society's judgments of those who are willing to attend counseling for issues of infidelity and substance abuse. I hypothesize that when people are presented with one of two transgressions, infidelity and substance abuse, people will have harsher judgments towards infidelity than substance abuse. Also, I hypothesize that people's judgments of a transgressor who is willing to go to counseling will significantly improve for the

substance abuse transgression, but not for the infidelity. Lastly, I hypothesize that religiosity will act as a moderator between perceiver's judgments of infidelity and substance abuse; perceivers who score higher on a religiosity scale will judge more harshly towards the infidelity transgression than non-religious perceivers, but there will be no difference between religious and non-religious perceivers in their judgments of the substance abuse transgression.

These hypotheses are based on three over-arching factors pertaining to the differences between judgments of infidelity and substance abuse; (1) the emotion elicited by each transgression; (2) the amount of blame associated with the transgressor; and (3) how much people condemn each act as being sinful.

EMOTION

Moral judgment is determined by humans, and humans are beings of emotion. Brain scans have shown that emotions arise when people respond to morally significant issues (Prinz, 2006). Haidt (2001) asked participants if it was right or wrong for a brother and sister to have intercourse if they use protection. The majority of participants stated the act was wrong. When asked to elaborate, participants struggled. Considering the participants could not explain their rationale, something beyond a conscious cognitive process must have been influencing their judgments.

However, emotions differ when the presence of a victim is a factor. Research shows all human cultures have a flash of feeling linked to moral judgments when they perceive certain events in their social worlds (Haidt & Joseph, 2004). What separates humans from primates is that for primates, these emotions occur only to the one being harmed, where as humans experience these emotions for others as well (Haidt & Joseph, 2004). Humans experience empathy; "the hallmark of human morality is third-party concern: person A can get angry at

person B for what they did to person C. In fact, people love to exercise their third-party moral intuitions so much that they pay money to see and hear stories about fictional strangers who do bad things to each other” (Haidt & Joseph, 2004, p. 56).

Haidt and Baron (2006) found that participants presented with a description of an individual intentionally causing harm to someone else for selfish reasons, judged the transgressor more harshly if he or she had a personal relationship with the victim than if they did not know the victim. The study suggests that the emotion of empathy is increased when someone has inflicted harm on someone they were connected with. Likewise, the study suggests that when empathy is increased, the judgment placed on the transgressor is harsher.

Using a substance does not directly cause harm to another; however, participation in infidelity does directly harm the other in the relationship. Utilizing the information above, the hypothesis of judging individuals more harshly for the transgression of infidelity over substance abuse can be supported. Individuals are likely to experience empathy for the victim involved with the infidelity. According to Shweder et al. (1997) and Prinz (2006), individuals should feel anger towards the transgression of infidelity; something immoral has been done to another person. They should feel disgust when presented with substance abuse; something immoral has been done. The strengths of these emotions can also influence the amount of condemnation placed on the transgressor; anger may be a more intense emotion than disgust.

BLAME

The presence of a victim also affects attributions of blame. Shaver (1985) proposed a model for the attribution of blame. A perceiver determines the extent to which a given event resulting in negative consequences is caused by a transgressor’s actions; the perceiver also makes attributions of moral responsibility and blameworthiness. In order to make these

conclusions, the perceiver uses information including the transgressor's knowledge of the consequences of their actions, appreciation of the moral wrongfulness of their actions, and intent to produce the negative outcome. Bell (1989) tested Shaver's theory. Participants were provided scenarios of negligent acts. In one scenario, an individual parked a car on a hill without using the parking break. The car rolled down the hill, went through a building, and resulted in thousands of dollars worth of damage. In the other scenario, an individual forgot his briefcase containing a handgun in an airport. The handgun was later stolen and used to shoot someone. Results of the study showed that participants held the individual in the handgun scenario more morally responsible and more blameworthy than the individual in the parked car scenario. Bell (1989) suggests the difference in judgment is due to the presence of a victim in the scenario with the handgun; participants react more strongly to another person being directly affected compared to an inanimate building.

Personal control is another factor that contributes to the attribution of blame. The message of blame not only states that what has been done is wrong, but also that we are able to identify a specific cause which is at fault for the transgression. Pink (2009) suggests blame is only a possibility when an individual has been in a position to decide for themselves whether the wrongful act would occur. Pink (2009) goes on to suggest that anyone who is blameworthy has been in a position of power over the given transgression; they possessed power over what they are being blamed for.

Ogletree & Archer (2011) provided participants with vignettes involving two different men; one was homeless, the other an alcoholic. Various scenarios were created; some providing detailed background information in attempts to relieve blame from each man. Results indicated that participants only decreased blame for the homeless man, no matter the scenario. This study

demonstrates that there are differences between people's judgments depending on the type of transgression. This study compares alcohol abuse with homelessness. The current study will compare substance abuse with infidelity.

Levy (2005) identifies a distinction between "the bad" and "the blameworthy". Levy goes on to say that if an individual with paranoid schizophrenia attacks someone, the event was bad, but is not blameworthy. Levy explains the reason we would not blame the individual with paranoid schizophrenia is because this act cannot reflect the individual's moral judgments, the individual is not morally responsible, so requesting a justification or reason for the act would be meaningless.

Given the research on blameworthiness, the hypothesis that the transgression of infidelity will be judged harsher than substance abuse is supported. There is a direct victim present in the scenario of infidelity, the spouse. The victim is less direct in the scenario of substance abuse; some may view the spouse as a victim, others may view the substance abuser as a victim. Also, the transgressor of infidelity can be held more responsible than the transgressor of substance abuse. The transgressor of the infidelity was aware that the infidelity would result in negative consequences; the transgressor of the substance abuse may not have realized things could get out of control. In addition, the transgressor of the substance abuse may have blame alleviated due to the presence of a biological predisposition. The 12-step program suggests that individuals with substance abuse are powerless over their addiction. Also, the disease concept of addiction suggests that addiction is a disease rather than a personal choice. If this view is recognized in the public eye, the transgressor of the substance abuse may be considered less responsible for their actions when compared with the transgressor of the infidelity.

RELIGION/SIN

Religion plays a large role in the development of morality among individuals and society (Dahl, 2010; Graham & Haidt, 2010). Religious teachings on the importance of being compassionate, treating others fairly, being sexually pure, and avoiding lust suggest infidelity is especially condemnable or sinful. Individuals may be prone to judge infidelity harsher than substance abuse because of the religious teachings they have been exposed to. The use of substances is discussed as being sinful or condemnable in some religious texts; however, in religions, drinking wine during many religious events is seen as following tradition and practicing sanctity. With knowledge that the act of infidelity is condemned as sinful in the eyes of God in many religious teachings, the fact that a transgressor has attended counseling may not alleviate the condemnation related with this sin. Because teachings suggests condemnations are instilled in religious individuals throughout their life. It is important to measure the level of religiosity in participants in order to see if they affect judgments of the transgressions.

SUMMARY

The current study will measure how willingness to seek counseling will affect judgments towards substance abusers and unfaithful spouses. The hypotheses are as follows: 1) people will have harsher judgments towards infidelity, 2) if the transgressor is willing to go to counseling, I expect a relatively large benefit for improvements in judgments for the substance abuse transgressor but not as large of a benefit for the infidelity transgressor, and 3) Religion will act as a moderator between the perceiver's judgments and the type of transgression. For individuals lower in religiosity, willingness to seek counseling will have a small effect on judgment for the unfaithful spouse. However, for those higher in religiosity, willingness to seek counseling will have little to no effect on judgment for the unfaithful spouse.

METHODS

PARTICIPANTS

Two hundred and six Eastern Illinois University undergraduate students enrolled in Introductory Psychology participated in the study for credit towards their course research requirement. An additional 30 participants began the study, but did not complete it and were therefore removed from the data. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the eight conditions of a 2x2x2 design where the type of transgression (substance abuse or infidelity), gender of transgressor, and willingness to seek counseling vary for each scenario.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Of the 206 valid participants in the study, 151 (73%) were female and 55 (27%) were male. One hundred and thirty one (64%) participants identified as Christian, 6 (3%) participants identified as Jewish, 3 (1.5%) participants identified as Islam, 3 (1.5%) participants identified as Buddhist, and 63 (30%) participants reported their religion as Other. One hundred and thirty-five of the participants (65%) were Caucasian, 35 (17%) African American, 11 (5%) Asian, 15 (7%) Hispanic, 1 (.05%) identified as Native American, and 13 (6%) reported Other as their ethnicity.

MATERIALS

SCENARIO

8 versions of a scenario were developed for the study. The scenario describes a married couple with involvement in one of two transgressions: infidelity or substance abuse.

An example of one of the infidelity transgression scenarios is as follows:

Dan and Liz have been married ten years. Dan works as a contractor and is talented at what he does. Liz is a high school teacher and enjoys her job. Dan and Liz live in the suburbs and are both involved in the community. Recently, Liz has been working late and acting strange. Dan

heard from a friend that Liz had been seen around town with another man. Dan confronted Liz about her behavior and what his friend had said; he asked “are you having an affair?” Liz admitted that it was true. She had been sleeping with another man. Liz said she wanted to work things out and go to marriage counseling.

In the substance abuse transgression scenario, the final part of the scenario was changed to read as follows:

“Dan heard from a friend that Liz had gotten involved with Meth. Dan confronted Liz about her behavior and what his friend had said; he asked “are you doing drugs?” Liz admitted that it was true. She had been using Methamphetamine. Liz said she wanted to work things out and go to rehab.”

Willingness to seek counseling was manipulated by omitting the last sentence from the scenario pertaining to attending marriage counseling or attending rehab. The gender of the transgressor was also manipulated by making Dan rather than Liz the transgressor (all scenarios are provided in the appendix).

SURVEY

An online survey was developed to record participants responses to the scenario as well as to collect demographics. The survey questions and response formats are as follows: If any, what religion do you identify with? (Drop down menu with following options: Christian, Jewish, Islam, Buddhist, Other), Participants were asked to indicate their gender, age, and ethnicity from a drop down menu as well (ethnicity drop down menu with the following options: Caucasian, African American, Asian, Hispanic, Native American, Other). Indicate on the 7 point likert scale your opinions on the following: Do you think Dan and Liz will work through their problem?, How angry do you feel towards Dan (Liz)?, How much contempt to you feel towards Dan (Liz)?, How much disgust to you feel towards Dan (Liz)?, Would you forgive Dan (Liz)?, How much do you blame Dan (Liz)?, How much compassion do you feel towards Dan (Liz)?. In the same section, participants were also asked if they have had any personal experience with the given transgression and asked to provide a brief explanation in a response box.

RELIGIOSITY SCALE

Participants were asked to fill out the Intrinsic Religious Motivation Scale (Hoge, 1972) supplemented by a selection of items from the Fetzer Resources for Multidimensional Measurement of Religiousness/Spirituality for Use in Health Research (1999) as a measure of their level of religiosity. The scale included questions pertaining to several areas of religiosity. Questions were chosen in attempts to address how religion can be represented in a multitude of ways. The religiosity scale in its entirety can be found in the appendix.

PROCEDURE

Participation in the study occurred solely online. Participants were asked to electronically sign an informed consent form for the study. Participants were then randomly exposed to 1 of the 8 scenarios. Participants were instructed to read the scenario and then to respond to questions in relation to the scenario provided. Upon completion of the survey, participants received a debriefing form. Participation in the study took approximately 10-15 minutes.

RESULTS

A maximum-likelihood factor analysis was conducted on Anger, Disgust, Contempt, Blame, Compassion, and Sympathy items. The scree plot showed inflexions that would justify retaining 2 factors (Figure 1). The items that cluster on the same components suggest that Factor I represents a Sympathy Factor and Factor II represents a Blame Factor towards the victim. (See Table 1).

Figure 1
Scree Plot from Maximum-Likelihood Factor Analysis of Moral Judgment Variables

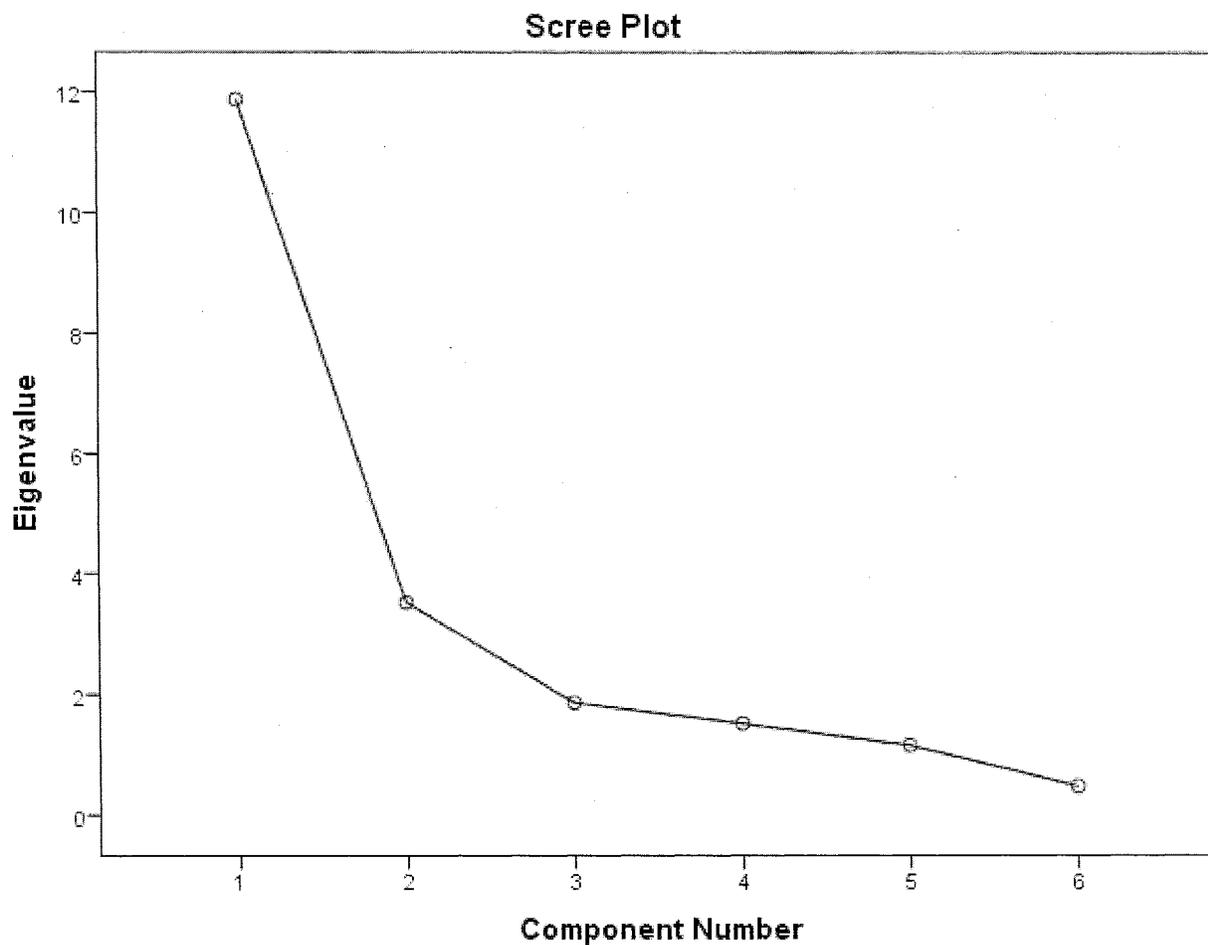


Table 1.
Pattern Matrix

Emotion	Factor 1	Factor 2
Sympathy	1.013	
Compassion	.795	
Disgust		.832
Anger		.782
Contempt		.745
Blame		.725

NOTE: Factor loadings below .250 are not shown in the table.

Two composite variables were created reflecting these two components. The Anger, Blame, Disgust, and Contempt variables were averaged to create a Culpability variable ($\alpha = .86$). The Sympathy and Compassion variables were also averaged to create a Caring variable ($\alpha = .89$). The correlation between the Culpability and Caring variables was also measured ($r = .41$).

A 2X2X2 between subjects ANOVA was conducted on the Culpability Variable to compare the effects of willingness to go to counseling on participant's judgments towards the transgressor in the infidelity and substance abuse conditions as well as transgressor's gender. There was a significant main effect of transgression type ($F(1, 201) = 34.05, p \leq .001$). As predicted, participants judged the infidelity transgression ($M = 4.8$) more harshly than the substance abuse transgression ($M = 3.6$). There was a significant two-way interaction between the transgressor's gender and the type of transgression ($F(1, 201) = 4.50, p < .05$). For the infidelity transgression, participants judged the female transgressor (Liz) more harshly ($M = 5.0, SD = 1.26$) than Dan ($M = 4.68, SD = 1.47; t(87) = 5.51, p < .01$). In the substance abuse transgression, they judged Liz less harshly ($M = 3.30, SD = 1.60$) compared with Dan ($M = 3.88, SD = 1.67; t(118) = 2.80, p = .01$). None of the other effects were significant. However, the main effect of willingness to go to counseling was marginally significant ($F(1, 201) = 2.85, p = .09$;

for those willing to go to counseling $M = 4.11$, $SD = 1.63$; for those not willing to go to counseling $M = 4.39$, $SD = 1.62$).

Likewise, a 2x2x2 between subjects ANOVA was also conducted on the Caring Variable. There were no significant main effects or interactions to report ($M = 4.39$, $SD = 1.62$; all F 's < 0.01).

RELIGIOSITY

A reliability test was performed to determine the internal consistency for the religiosity variable from utilizing the relevant items from the Fetzer Resources for Multidimensional Measurement of Religiousness/Spirituality for Use in Health Research (1999). The test reported a Cronbach's Alpha of .89 showing "excellent" internal consistency. Nevertheless, 2 items appeared to detract from the reliability. These two items had low item-to-total correlations. In retrospect, the wording of these 2 items ("Although I am a religious person, I refuse to let religious considerations influence my everyday life." (item-total correlation of -.05), and "Although I believe in my religion, I feel that there are many more important things in life." (item-total correlation of .15) seems somewhat confusing. The items have the participant acknowledge their religiosity as well as admit to a non-religious act, a contradictory statement that may have confused participants. With these items deleted, the Cronbach's Alpha rose to .90. These 2 items were removed in all subsequent analyses. Although the religiosity items were drawn from scales designed to measure multiple aspects of religious participation, a Principal Component Analysis suggested that the compilation of items chosen only measured one component. This accounted for 63.98% of the variance.

Some items on the religiosity scale were dichotomous and others were on a 7-Point likert-scales. All likert-scale items were converted to dichotomous items with a median split in order to

provide participants with a score of 1 or 2 for all questions, with a score of 1 meaning non-religious and a score of 2 meaning religious (responses on the median were randomly assigned). Items were combined to provide each participant with a religiosity score that ranged from 19 to 38 ($M = 28.72$, $SD = 2.13$).

A stepwise regression analysis was run in order to discover if there was a significant interaction between participants' religiosity score and their judgments on transgression type for both the Culpability and Caring variables. In Model I we entered the main effects, Model II added religiosity and Model III added possible interactions of the main effects with religiosity. Results of the regression indicated that religiosity score did not predict increased judgment on either of the transgressions. Results of the stepwise regression indicate that the singular significant predictor is transgression type, consistent with the results of the ANOVA. Adding other variables did not improve the prediction significantly (See Table 2 and Table 3).

Table 2.
Results of the Stepwise Regression for Culpability Variable

Predictors	Model I		Model II		Model III	
	β	T	β	T	β	T
Transgression Type (TT)	-.376	-5.504*	-.373	-5.457*	-.327	-.347
Willingess (W)	.093	1.365	.101	1.459	.107	.114
Gender (G)	.005	.068	.014	.208	-1.029	-1.056
Religiosity (R)			.057	.821	.068	.226
R X TT					-.047	-.049
R X W					-.006	-.007
F	15.905*		10.809*		6.415*	
R ²	.148		.151		.151	
Change in R ²	.148		N/A		.000	

* - $p < .05$

Table 3.
Results of the Stepwise Regression for Caring Variable

Predictors	Model I		Model II		Model III	
	β	T	β	T	β	t
Transgression Type (TT)	-.104	-1.408	-.105	-1.410	-.627	-.595
Willingess (W)	-.015	-.207	-.017	-.224	.042	.041
Gender (G)	.107	1.452	.108	1.403	-1.033	-.982
Religiosity (R)			-.011	-.147	-.363	-1.006
R X TT					.518	.485
R X W					-.061	-.060
F	1.345		1.009		.819	
R ²	.022		.022		.032	
Change in R ²	.022	N/A	.000		.010	

* - $p < .05$

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine how moral judgments differ depending on transgression type. Furthermore, the study compared results regarding the gender of the transgressor and the transgressor's willingness to go to counseling. Of the 3 hypotheses prior to the study, one was supported by our data. According to our study, individuals judge a transgressor more harshly in an infidelity transgression compared to a substance abuse transgression.

There are several possible factors that may explain this difference in judgments. As discussed in the introduction, participants may recognize the presence of a victim in the infidelity transgression more than in the substance abuse transgression. The spouse is clearly a victim because the spouse is being cheated on in the infidelity transgression. In the substance abuse transgression participants may see both individuals as victims; one who has a substance abuse problem and the other who is affected by it. Over the past several decades, groups like Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, and other educational resources have identified Substance Abuse and Substance Dependence as a disease. If this concept resonates with participants, it may serve as an explanation as to why the judgments are not as harsh.

Likewise, participants may be able to place blame more easily on the infidelity transgressor. Infidelity may be seen as an act of harm that has been done directly *to* a person as opposed to the substance abuse transgression. Thoughts like "I've been cheated on" or "they cheated on me", these can be seen as personal attacks and betrayals. It is hard to compare substance abuse in the same way, the thoughts are not totally comparable, a spouse does not perform substance abuse to someone, it is an act done to oneself.

The emotions elicited by the participants may also play a factor in their judgments. The emotions related to being caring compared with anger may offset the harshness of judgments. It is important to recognize that although we tried to make our transgressions comparable, it could be that somehow we made our infidelity transgression a worse case of infidelity than our substance abuse transgression. For example, results may vary if the infidelity transgression was about a couple that was not married. It would be extremely beneficial to have follow-up research conducted to examine this possibility along with many others.

Our study has only begun to touch on the subject of comparing moral judgments. The results of this study pose several questions. It would be interesting to compare infidelity and substance abuse with additional transgressions. Some examples could include physical abuse and theft. It would also be interesting to see responses to a couple that was simply in a relationship and not married. What other factors exist that may alleviate or contribute to the harshness of our judgments? If the transgressor has committed previous acts that the spouse was informed of, would we judge them just as harshly or put some personal responsibility on the spouse? Judgments have been used as a tool for thousands of years to protect ourselves and attempt to learn information (Ogletree & Archer, 2011). Examining these same transgressions in different cultures would be a fascinating comparison that may highlight which of these judgments are learned and which, if any may be innate.

Results of the study also reveal a possible gender bias between transgressions. Participants judged Liz more harshly for committing infidelity over Dan; however, they judged Dan more harshly than Liz when it came to Substance Abuse. This difference in judgments from gender raises many questions. Why does the gender influence our judgments? There are several cultural double standards that may be taking precedence. For example, men are meant to be

“strong” and it is possible that substance abuse may be seen as a weakness. Likewise, the concept of a man “spreading the seed” may make it easier for individuals to resonate with an affair when compared to women. How do other social factors play a role in these judgments? Further examination in all these areas would provide greater insight as to how we think and act.

The sample used in the current study was strictly undergraduate students. The age of the typical participant may be a factor as to why the results turned out the way they did. It is safe to infer that the majority of the participants are not married. It would be interesting to collect data from a sample of participants that are older, more mature, or have had experiences with marriage.

The current study also measured additional hypothesis that did not have a significant outcome. Individual’s judgments did not vary significantly whether or not the transgressor was willing to seek counseling. Referring back to the experience of the sex-offender discussed in the introduction, this result is consistent with what he has experienced in his home town. Likewise, perceiver’s level of religiosity did not have a noteworthy connection to the amount of judgment placed on the transgressors. Although these hypotheses were not supported, they still provide useful information. It is interesting to see that willingness to seek counseling as well as religiosity do not appear to play a substantial role in our judgments. These facts raise more questions as to what factors do influence our judgments. It is possible that the willingness to seek counseling aspect of the vignette was easily glanced over by participants while reading from a vignette. A future study could have participants recall the fact that the transgressor was willing to seek counseling. Further research should be conducted in attempts to discover what factors influence our judgments.

An additional side benefit to the study was the creation of a measurement for religiosity.

By combining several different religiosity scales, (Fetzer, 1999) we were able to measure one single factor, religiosity. There have been several scales developed to measure various aspects of religion, but not religiosity itself as a single factor that we were able to find. Some examples of existing scales measure the levels of private religious practice, public religious practice, prayer, spiritual experiences, and so on. Cutting & Walsh (2008) wrote a paper recognizing this issue. They examined a compilation of 177 scales that measure religiosity and found that those scales all look at a variety of different aspects related to religiosity. Our Factor Analysis of the scale used in this study shows that the religiosity scale measured one factor and it was internally consistent. This is interesting because items had been taken from an array of different religious domains.

Our study has limitations due to the fact that our present research utilized a vignette study. It is difficult for us to know if people's reactions to fictional characters ring true to how they would react to real life people, or people that they know. As research shows that marriages succeed despite the presence of infidelity, individuals can clearly move past the judgment when it is in their own life (Atkins, et al., 2010). It would be interesting to perform further research measuring how judgments differ in real life situations.

The fact that there our moral judgments vary depending on the transgression committed can create many implications in our society. What does it mean that we judge infidelity more harshly than substance abuse; is one act really "worse" than the other act? Does it really benefit us to judge infidelity more harshly? Also, how do our judgments of others compare with how we judge our own actions?

In regards to the success of maintaining a marriage after infidelity, the outcome looks good for couples that receive therapy. Research by Atkins et al., assessed 145 couples receiving

therapy for infidelity and compared them with 385 couples receiving therapy for other concerns. Initially the couples dealing with infidelity reported more distress and depressive symptoms. However, for the follow-up assessment, post therapy, infidelity couples were not significantly distinguishable from non-infidelity couples. So if our moral judgments are in place to protect us or to help us know the difference between right and wrong, why is it that couples who receive counseling for infidelity can be so successful that you do not even notice differences between a couple who has not been confronted with an infidelity situation? If our judgments are accurate, why did they not change significantly when the spouse was willing to receive counseling? Are our moral judgments misleading us? If so, research like this can help spread knowledge and eliminate stigma against couples that are trying to better their relationship.

For the reasons discussed above, the present research provides informative data for counselors, psychologists, and couples. Data like this provided in the current study can be utilized to address common problems in couples counseling and to have a greater understanding of the reality of our world as opposed to using judgments as truths.

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APPENDICES

SCENARIOS

1) Dan and Liz have been married ten years. Dan works as a contractor and is talented at what he does. Liz is a high school teacher and enjoys her job. Dan and Liz live in the suburbs and are both involved in the community. Recently, Liz has been working late and acting strange. Dan heard from a friend that Liz had been seen around town with another man. Dan confronted Liz about her behavior and what his friend had said; he asked "Are you having an affair?" Liz admitted that it was true. She had been sleeping with another man. Liz said she wanted to work things out and go to counseling. Liz had already made phone calls and a list of options to present to Dan.

2) Dan and Liz have been married ten years. Dan works as a contractor and is talented at what he does. Liz is a high school teacher and enjoys her job. Dan and Liz live in the suburbs and are both involved in the community. Recently, Liz has been working late and acting strange. Dan heard from a friend that Liz had been seen around town with another man. Dan confronted Liz about her behavior and what his friend had said; he asked "Are you having an affair?" Liz admitted that it was true. She had been sleeping with another man.

3) Dan and Liz have been married ten years. Dan works as a contractor and is talented at what he does. Liz is a high school teacher and enjoys her job. Dan and Liz live in the suburbs and are both involved in the community. Recently, Liz has been working late and acting strange. Dan heard from a friend that Liz had gotten involved with Meth. Dan confronted Liz about her behavior and what his friend had said; he asked "Are you doing drugs?" Liz admitted that it was

true. She had been using Methamphetamine. Liz said she wanted to work things out go to counseling. Liz had already made phone calls and a list of options to present to Dan.

4) Dan and Liz have been married ten years. Dan works as a contractor and is talented at what he does. Liz is a high school teacher and enjoys her job. Dan and Liz live in the suburbs and are both involved in the community. Recently, Liz has been working late and acting strange. Dan heard from a friend that Liz had gotten involved with Meth. Dan confronted Liz about her behavior and what his friend had said; he asked “Are you doing drugs?” Liz admitted that it was true. She had been using Methamphetamine.

5) Dan and Liz have been married ten years. Dan works as a contractor and is talented at what he does. Liz is a high school teacher and enjoys her job. Dan and Liz live in the suburbs and are both involved in the community. Recently, Dan has been working late and acting strange. Liz heard from a friend that Dan had been seen around town with another woman. Liz confronted Dan about his behavior and what her friend had said; she asked “Are you having an affair?” Dan admitted that it was true. He had been sleeping with another woman. Dan said he wanted to work things out and go to counseling. Dan had already made phone calls and a list of options to present to Liz.

6) Dan and Liz have been married ten years. Dan works as a contractor and is talented at what he does. Liz is a high school teacher and enjoys her job. Dan and Liz live in the suburbs and are both involved in the community. Recently, Dan has been working late and acting strange. Liz heard from a friend that Dan had been seen around town with another woman. Liz confronted Dan about his behavior and what her friend had said; she asked “Are you having an affair?” Dan admitted that it was true. He had been sleeping with another woman.

7) Dan and Liz have been married ten years. Dan works as a contractor and is talented at what he does. Liz is a high school teacher and enjoys her job. Dan and Liz live in the suburbs and are both involved in the community. Recently, Dan has been working late and acting strange. Liz heard from a friend that Dan had gotten involved with Meth. Liz confronted Dan about his behavior and what her friend had said; she asked “Are you doing drugs?” Dan admitted that it was true. He had been using Methamphetamine. Dan said he wanted to work things out go to counseling. Dan had already made phone calls and a list of options to present to Liz.

8) Dan and Liz have been married ten years. Dan works as a contractor and is talented at what he does. Liz is a high school teacher and enjoys her job. Dan and Liz live in the suburbs and are both involved in the community. Recently, Dan has been working late and acting strange. Liz heard from a friend that Dan had gotten involved with Meth. Liz confronted Dan about his behavior and what her friend had said; she asked “Are you doing drugs?” Dan admitted that it was true. He had been using Methamphetamine.

INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMATION SUMMARY

Judging Marital Conflict

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Marni Naleway and faculty advisor Dr. Steven Scher, from the Psychology Department at Eastern Illinois University.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to gain a greater understanding of how people react to conflicts between an husband and a wife.

PROCEDURES

Participants will read a story about a married couple. After reading the scenario, participants will be asked to fill out a survey telling us how they feel about the two people. Upon completion of the survey, participants will be requested to fill out a 21-item religiosity scale. The entire study is conducted online. It will take approximately 20 minutes to complete the study.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

The risks to this study are minimal. You will be reading a story about people you don't know.

Your reactions to this story should not be any different than it would be to something you read in the newspaper.

INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATION

Participation in this study is voluntary. You will receive ½ hour of credit toward your research participation requirement.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Your participation is completely anonymous. Your name or other identifying information will not be connected to your answers in any way.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Participation in this research study is voluntary and not a requirement or a condition for being the recipient of benefits or services from Eastern Illinois University or any other organization sponsoring the research project. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits or services to which you are otherwise entitled.

There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact:

Dr. Steven Scher

Department of Psychology

Eastern Illinois University

Charleston, IL 61920

(217) 581 7269

sjscher@eiu.edu

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

If you have any questions or concerns about the treatment of human participants in this study, you may call or write:

Institutional Review Board

Eastern Illinois University

600 Lincoln Ave.

Charleston, IL 61920

Telephone: (217) 581-8576

E-mail: eiuirb@www.eiu.edu

You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with EIU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

- [Click here to participate](#)
- [Click here if you do not wish to participate](#)

SURVEY EXAMPLE

Please read the scenario below and answer the following questions.

Dan and Liz have been married ten years. Dan works as a contractor and is talented at what he does. Liz is a high school teacher and enjoys her job. Dan and Liz live in the suburbs and are both involved in the community. Recently, Liz has been working late and acting strange. Dan heard from a friend that Liz had been seen around town with another man. Dan confronted Liz about her behavior and what his friend had said; he asked “Are you having an affair?” Liz admitted that it was true. She had been sleeping with another man. Liz said she wanted to work things out and go to counseling. Liz had already made phone calls and a list of options to present to Dan.

Indicate on the scales below how you feel towards Liz:

	Not At All 1	2	3	4	5	6	Extremely 7
Anger	<input type="radio"/>						
Disgust	<input type="radio"/>						
Contempt	<input type="radio"/>						
Blame	<input type="radio"/>						

Indicate on the scales below how you feel towards Dan:

	Not At All 1	2	3	4	5	6	Extremely 7
Compassion	<input type="radio"/>						
Sympathy	<input type="radio"/>						

Answer the following questions using the scales below. (please note that in the questions below, Dan and Liz’s names were switched as needed pertaining to who was the transgressor in the scenario for the participants).

	Not at All 1	2	3	4	5	6	Absolutely 7
Do you think Dan and Liz will work through their problem?	<input type="radio"/>						
If you were Dan, would you try and work things out with Liz?	<input type="radio"/>						
Is Liz willing to address their problems and try to work things out?	<input type="radio"/>						
Do you think Liz will go to counseling for her problem?	<input type="radio"/>						

please note that in the questions below, Dan and Liz's names were switched as needed pertaining to who was the If you have had any personal experience with infidelity, please provide a brief description below.

Please Indicate Your Gender (drop down menu; Male, Female)

Please Indicate Your Age

Please Indicate Your Religion (drop down menu; Christian, Jewish, Islam, Hindu, Buddhist, Other)

Please Indicate Your Ehtnicity (drop down menu; Caucasian, African American, Native American, Asian, Indian, Hispanic, Other)

RELIGIOSITY QUESTIONNAIRE

How often do you pray privately in places

other than at church or synagogue?

- 1 - Several times a day
- 2 - Once a day
- 3 - A few times a week
- 4 - Once a week
- 5 - A few times a month
- 6 - Once a month
- 7 - Less than once a month
- 8 - Never

How often do you watch or listen to

religious programs on TV or radio?

- 1 - Several times a day
- 2 - Once a day
- 3 - A few times a week
- 4 - Once a week
- 5 - A few times a month
- 6 - Once a month
- 7 - Less than once a month
- 8 - Never

How often do you read the Bible or other religious literature?

- 1 - Several times a day
- 2 - Once a day
- 3 - A few times a week
- 4 - Once a week
- 5 - A few times a month
- 6 - Once a month
- 7 - Less than once a month
- 8 - Never

How often are prayers or grace said before or after meals in your home?

- At all meals.
- Once a day.
- At least once a week.
- Only on special occasions.
- Never.

My faith involves all of my life.

- True
- False

One should seek God's guidance when making every important decision.

- True
- False

In my life I experience the presence of
the Divine.

- True
- False

My faith sometimes restricts my actions.

- True
- False

Nothing is as important to me as serving
God as best I know how.

- True
- False

I try hard to carry my religion over into
all my other dealings in life.

- True
- False

My religious beliefs are what really lie
behind my whole approach to life.

- True
- False

It doesn't matter so much what I believe
as long as I lead a moral life.

- True
- False

Although I am a religious person, I refuse
to let religious considerations influence
my everyday affairs.

- True
- False

Although I believe in my religion, I feel
that there are many more important
things in life.

- True
- False

My faith shapes how I think and act each
and every day.

- True
- False

My faith helps me know right from
wrong.

- True
- False
-

I talk with other people about my faith.

- True
- False

How often do you attend religious services?

- Never
- Less than once a year
- About once or twice a year
- Several times a year
- About once a month
- 2-3 times a month
- Nearly every week
- Every week
- Several times a week

Besides religious services, how often do
you take part in other activities at a place
of worship?

- Never
- Less than once a year
- About once or twice a year
- Several times a year
- About once a month
- 2-3 times a month
- Nearly every week
- Every week
- Several times a week

To what extent do you consider yourself a

religious person?

- Very religious
- Moderately religious
- Slightly religious
- Not religious at all
-

To what extent do you consider yourself a

spiritual person?

- Very spiritual
- Moderately spiritual
- Slightly spiritual
- Not spiritual at all

DEBRIEFING

Thank you very much for participating in this study. The purpose of this study was to gain a greater understanding of how we judge others, particularly in relation to substance abuse and infidelity. Participants are randomly assigned to receive a story about a married couple that either involves substance abuse or infidelity. Gender, religiosity, and willingness to seek counseling were also variables in the study.

We expect that people will view the transgressor more positively if he or she is willing to go to counseling especially when the transgression was about substance abuse. We expect that people who are more religious will be especially more critical of the unfaithful spouse. We will also test to see if gender plays a role in our judgments. Your responses to the questions in this study will be very useful in understanding how our judgments are influenced. Responses will be kept confidential.

Again, we would like to thank you for participating in the study. Please do not discuss this study with anyone who has not yet participated in the study. If you were disturbed by the material in the study, we recommend you to contact Eastern Illinois University's counseling center:

Phone: 217-581- 3413

Website: <http://www.eiu.edu/~counsctr/>.

If you have any questions, or would like to know more about the study, please feel free to contact Marni Naleway, student researcher via email mahussey@eiu.edu or Dr. Steven Scher, Department of Psychology, Eastern Illinois University sjscher@eiu.edu.