THE EFFECT OF CONSTRUAL LEVEL ON CONSUMERS' ANTICIPATED (UN)ETHICAL BEHAVIOR: HYPOTHESIS AND OBSERVED EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

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The Effect of Construal Level on
Consumers' Anticipated (Un)Ethical Behavior

ABSTRACT

Despite the many lapses in ethical behavior that have attracted widespread attention in recent years, little is known about the cognitive processes that shape people's (un)ethical behavior and expectations of when it will occur. This lack of understanding exists despite substantial research on this topic within marketing. One factor that has contributed to this state of affairs is that most of the relevant investigations have focused simply on the practical implications and applications of ethics in marketing. Limited attention has focused on theory-driven inquiry.

This research offers an initial attempt to fill this void. I do so by drawing on a corpus of work concerning both psychological distance and construal level theory (Liberman and Trope 2008). Psychological distance refers to the gap that often exists in time, space, familiarity, or likelihood that separates an event or object from the direct and personally experienced reality of the here and now. Moreover, variations in psychological distance have been found to affect people's construal level, which refers to the level of abstraction at which people think about and mentally represent an event in memory (Trope, Liberman and Wakslak 2007). Increases in an event's psychological distance (e.g., an event will happen in the more distant future or to a person other than oneself) prompts individuals to think about an event in a more abstract, less detailed manner, while decreases in psychological distance (e.g., an event occurs right now or to the self) elicit thoughts about the event in a more

concrete or specific manner. Social distance, a variable that I examine and one that captures the familiarity dimension of psychological distance, would seem to be of importance in ethical situations for at least two reasons. First, ethical issues generally emerge in social contexts (i.e., ones involving people), making it likely that variation in social distance could be germane in ethical situations. Second, and more critically, because psychological distance regards the self in the here and now as its lowest endpoint or anchor, assessing one's own (as opposed to any other person's) behavior should stimulate an exceptionally concrete representation of the situation.

Importantly, investigations into the effects produced by variations in psychological distance have demonstrated that adoption of a high construal level (i.e., thinking about an event more abstractly) prompts people to place greater priority on the *desirability of pertinent end-states or goals*. In contrast, adoption of a low construal level (i.e., thinking about an event more concretely) leads people to place higher priority on the *feasibility and means used to achieve the end-state or goal*. I found these observations about the effect of construal level on people's priorities striking when applied to ethical contexts because in such contexts people aspire to achieve a desirable end-state or higher level goal by employing a means that is unethical. The theory that underlies my hypotheses integrates the preceding two notions, namely, (a) a high (low) construal level increases the relative importance assigned to desirability (feasibility) aspects of ethics-related situations, and (b) a focus on desirability aspects encourages unethical behavior by fostering a desire to attain end-states/goals irrespective of ethical considerations, yet a focus on

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feasibility/means promotes more ethical behavior by heightening the salience of unethical actions. Combining the aforementioned premises and using extant knowledge of factors that influence psychological distance, I derived the following hypotheses. When individuals consider the behavior of an unknown (distal) person and thereby adopt a relatively high construal level, they should anticipate that this person will engage in unethical behavior when the event's psychological distance is greater (i.e., because this further encourages reliance on a higher construal level). But when individuals consider the behavior of the self -- an individual that fosters adoption of an extremely low construal level -- they may anticipate that the self will largely eschew unethical behavior, irrespective of other less potent factors that alter construal level by varying the psychological distance of the event.

The first two experiments found support for this hypothesis in nine different ethical scenarios that varied construal level in a number of ways. In both experiments, construal level was manipulated by altering the focal actor (i.e., social distance: the self or an unknown other). In experiment 1, it was also manipulated through the temporal distance (i.e., close vs. far distance) of the event; in experiment 2 changes in temporal distance were replaced by a fluency manipulation that varied a novel dimension of psychological distance (see Alter and Oppenheimer 2008). In both experiments a significant two-way interaction revealed that for an unknown other, a higher construal level (i.e., more temporal distance or reduced reading fluency) increased the expectation of unethical behavior, but expectations that the self

would behave unethically were low regardless of variation in the event's temporal distance or fluency.

Importantly, a number of measures were included in the first two studies that addressed a potential rival explanation for my findings. Specifically, participants who were asked to anticipate their own behavior may have reported that they would behave quite ethically not because the self invoked a very low construal level as I predicted, but instead because consideration of the self stimulated their desire to present themselves favorably either to themselves or other people. In other words, self presentation concerns might have produced the outcomes that were observed in the self as actor condition. I investigated such possible self presentation concerns in assorted ways. However, analyses of these self presentation variables failed to reduce the significance of the interaction of the two instantiations of construal level (i.e., social distance and either temporal or metacognitive distance) that I observed in my studies. Thus, there was little support for the view that my findings could be explained by self presentation concerns.

Experiment 3 sought evidence of the mechanisms that underlie the preceding effects. Consistent with my theorizing, analyses of mediated moderation and mediation found that together, desirability and feasibility related thoughts accounted for the effects of the social distance and construal level on participants' expectations of unethical behavior. In particular, while variation in construal level significantly influenced the number of desirability related thoughts that participants produced when they considered the behavior that an unknown other person would enact, this

relationship was absent when participants anticipated how they themselves would behave. However, when participants considered how they themselves would behave, feasibility related thoughts were significantly elevated, especially when individuals relied on a low construal level. This increase in feasibility related thoughts mitigated the influence of desirability related thoughts. As a result, the heightened feasibility related thoughts prompted participants to anticipate that, irrespective of their construal level, they would behave ethically in response to the dilemma.

The final two experiments addressed an important issue by extending my research into an investigation of real (i.e., not hypothetical) behavior. Specifically, these final two studies established that a key factor that distinguishes between hypothetical situations (like those used in my initial three studies) and real ones (like those employed in studies 4 and 5) is whether individuals explicitly envision and attend to themselves as the actor, or instead their thoughts about the self as actor fade into the periphery as other more pressing considerations command more attention (i.e., considerations such as comprehension of the task, the stimuli that are present, their goals, etc.). When the self is highly salient and thus people direct explicit attention to oneself (i.e., an individual considers a hypothetical scenario with the self as the actor, or the salience of the self is otherwise heightened as in study 5), psychological distance is greatly diminished, and thoughts about feasibility related matters magnify substantially. In situations of this sort, variation in construal level is apt to be overpowered, rendering it too weak to exert an appreciable influence; instead individuals are likely to dwell on feasibility considerations, which motivate

them to behave quite honestly. In contrast, when attentiveness to the self is low, the imbalance just described should be absent. Hence, in situations of this type, the impact of construal level is likely to be felt. Indeed, study 5 bore out the preceding logic, revealing that variation in construal level predictably affected how honorably individuals behaved when the salience of the self was low, but it had no effect when salience of the self was high.

Together, the results from all five studies I report provide converging support for the effects of construal level on ethical behavior. In addition, they shed light on the mediating roles that the desirability and feasibility of events play in producing this effect.

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The last few decades have spawned a great deal of attention to the issue of

business ethics. At least in part, this interest has been generated by a myriad of events

that have led to the greatest economic recession in history. Recent corporate

transgressions such as the Enron scandal, the subprime mortgage crises, and the

fallout from the BP oil spill have highlighted the dire consequences that unethical

decisions and behaviors can have on the economy as a whole as well as on individual

citizens. Importantly, corporate transgressions such as these and others are the result

of the actions of individuals or groups of individuals -- people who may be inclined to

place greater priority on desirable broader goals or end-states (e.g., increasing profits)

than on the feasible yet ethically questionable means often used to achieve such goals.

In 2003, a survey found that approximately 25% of U.S. adults approved of

overstating the value of claims to insurance companies, and more than 10% condoned

submitting claims for items that were not lost or damaged or services that were not

provided (Accenture 2006). In a similar spirit, a study by Von Lohmann (2004)

revealed that 88% of children between the ages of 8 and 18 understood that peer-to-

peer music downloading was illegal, yet 56% of these children admitted to engaging

in this practice. Despite the prevalence and wide-spread consequences of these and

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other unethical decisions and actions, little is known about the factors that impact ethical decision-making at the individual level.

This gap in our knowledge has prompted a recent increase in academic research on this topic (e.g., Argo and Shiv 2012; Zhong, Bohns and Gino 2010; Mazar, Amir and Ariely 2008). Although this increased attention to ethics has touched many business-related disciplines, it appears that within the various business school disciplines, the majority of research on this topic has occurred in marketing. This may be due to several factors. For example, marketing is the field most closely related to actions that entail interacting with and influencing consumers, and these practices can invite many ethical dilemmas. Further, marketing managers encounter some of the most troublesome ethical quagmires in business (Mazar, et al., 2008). Indeed, Baumhart (1968), who surveyed executives across functional areas, found that five of the eight most important ethical problems that were cited concerned marketing activities.

1.2 ETHICS AND MORALITY

What is ethics? A review of various fields in the literature (e.g., marketing, psychology, philosophy) reveals no clear definition of ethics. Although philosophers have posited three main paradigms that seek to explain what makes a behavior (un)ethical (i.e., deontology, teleology or consequentialism, and virtue ethics) there is little agreement about how ethics or morality should be defined. The term "ethics" is typically used to refer to a set of rules, principles, or ways of thinking that guide or

are used to justify actions. Yet, in most articles on this topic, a definition at best is only implicitly suggested through a discussion of moral philosophies or through the researchers' choice of survey questions or experimental stimuli. Further, a nagging problem that remains is that what is deemed ethical by one person may not be so by another. A related issue that similarly is unclear concerns the distinction between ethics and morality. The two terms are frequently used interchangeably. Nevertheless, there appears to be the sense that morality suggests a stern set of duties that require people to subordinate their natural desires so as to obey "moral law." And failure to fulfill such duty often brings with it a heavy sense of guilt. For example, one is more likely to say that it is immoral to kill a helpless animal, but it is unethical to tell a lie. Morality also is often assumed to have a religious basis. The connotations of morality generally reflect particular conceptions of ethics that are linked to Jewish and Christian traditions as opposed to any clearly articulated ethical system. In contrast, ethics lacks such a connection with a particular religion or with religion in general (Singer 1994).

A review of the marketing and psychology literature demonstrates that researchers in both fields refrain from taking any philosophical position in their studies. For example, although Piaget (1932) and Kohlberg's (1958, 1969) models of moral development are founded on a deontological approach, this foundation is merely implied. Recent research in both marketing and psychology continues to avoid taking any philosophical position (e.g., Haidt 2001; Mazar and Aggarwal 2011, Argo et al., 2012). Thus, in the present research, I simply view ethical dilemmas as

ones that are likely to be judged by most individuals as more or less acceptable

depending on the circumstances of the situation.

1.3 ETHICS IN MARKETING

A substantial body of work that is related to ethics has emerged within

marketing. Indeed, Murphy and Laczniak (1981) listed nearly 100 articles dealing

with this subject. More recently, Nill and Schibrowsky (2007) presented a review of

the literature in this area and found that in the 20 years that followed the Murphy and

Laczniak review, there were over 400 articles dealing with ethics in marketing. The

next two subsections briefly overview some of this work.

Most of the investigations on this topic have focused on the practical

implications and applications of ethics in marketing. As such, they generally have

been devoid of any theory-driven inquiry. For the most part, emphasis has centered

on three broad foci. The first involves non-empirical work that endeavors to provide

descriptive models of ethical decision-making for marketing practitioners (e.g.,

Ferrell and Gresham 1985) or work that underscores the relevance of individual

ideologies to marketing decisions and actions (e.g., Forsyth and Pope 1984). In

addition, two other streams of research have investigated pertinent influencers of

ethical behavior: situational or environmental factors (e.g., Ford and Richardson

1994; Murphy, Smith and Daley 1992) and the role played by individual differences

(e.g., Hegarty and Sims 1978; Mazar et al., 2011). In the next two sections, I briefly

review the latter two bodies of work, which have generally relied on survey data and correlational analyses.

Situational or Environmental Factors

Two situational factors that have been studied in the ethics literature are reward and punishment (Hegarty et al., 1978) and organizational size (Ford et al., 1994). Along these lines, by measuring the number of kickbacks that participants agreed to accept, Hegarty et al., (1978) found that people behaved less ethically under conditions of extrinsic reward, but they behaved more ethically under the threat of punishment. Somewhat related work by Mazar et al., (2008) showed that increasing the accessibility of rules or standards before individuals confronted an ethical dilemma (i.e., recalling the Ten Commandments) elevated individuals' ethical behavior.

The influence of organizational size also has been investigated. Murphy et al., (1992) found that with the exception of individuals' attitudes, company size exhibited the most significant correlation with ethical behavior. In this work, the researchers found that six of the nine significant coefficients that were observed concerned marketing issues. Findings suggest that smaller rather than larger firms tended to demonstrate more ethical behavior. In fact, in a review of the empirical literature on ethics, Ford et al., (1994) noted a consistent relationship between organization size and stage of moral reasoning. As the size of an organization increases, individuals' ethical beliefs, decision making, and behaviors decrease. In a somewhat related vein,

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research has shown that a person's position in an organization's hierarchy affects their perceptions of ethical behavior. A lower versus higher hierarchical position renders people more cognizant of ethical problems within the firm (Chonko and Hunt 1985; Delaney and Sockell 1992).

Individual Difference Factors

Much attention in the marketing literature has been paid to individual differences that impact ethical decision making and behavior. A number of studies found that compared to females, males are more likely to act unethically (Betz, O'Connell, and Shepherd 1989). Also, using both correlational and experimental methods, Mazar et al., (2011) observed that collectivists versus individualists are more prone to offer bribes. These authors further found that this effect was mediated by individuals' sense of responsibility for their actions. Individuals in collectivistic versus individualist cultures tend to hold more favorable attitudes toward sharing of responsibilities (Hui 1988), see others as providing a 'cushion' for their risky actions (Hsee and Weber 1999) and possess a weaker sense that they themselves determine who they are (Triandis 2001).

Other research has revealed additional individual difference factors that can influence ethical decision making and behavior. Along these lines, locus of control, economic and political value orientation, and Machiavellianism have all been identified as covariates that can affect unethical behavior (Hegarty et al., 1978). Some work by Hing, Bobocel, Zanna and McBride (2007) found that social dominance

orientation (SDO) and right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) exert important effects on such behavior. Specifically, leaders high versus low in SDO who were partnered with agreeable followers made decisions that were more unethical. Further, followers who were high rather than low in RWA were more acquiescent to and supportive of an unethical leader.

Based on the preceding bodies of work, some notable insights have been made in understanding practical factors that can influence ethical behavior. Nevertheless, what is missing is research that is rich and theoretically grounded that can shed more far-reaching light on this topic. In part, the dearth of such work may stem from the nature of the topic. Ethics holds clear and important implications for the day to day activities of marketers. As a result, ethics related inquiry in business and marketing has focused on applications (e.g., Smith, Cooper-Martin 1997) such as those that involve sales force management and behavior (e.g., Bellizzi and Hite 1989; McClaren 2000) or researchers' responsibilities to respondents (Tybout and Zaltman 1974). The upshot is that, as Randall and Gibson (1990) noted, "there is surprisingly limited effort directed toward theory testing" in the ethics literature.

The present research represents an initial attempt to fill this gap. I do so by drawing on a corpus of work in the areas of construal level theory and psychological distance (Liberman and Trope 2008), which I review in some detail at the beginning of the third chapter. But first, I shall begin by providing a more comprehensive overview of research that has been conducted on the topics of ethics and morality in chapter 2.

Chapter Two

REVIEW OF LITERATURES

2.1 OVERVIEW OF CLASSICAL LITERATURES

> "Abstract, concrete, and in between, the questions about ethics abound. What constitutes moral progress? What criteria should we use to evaluate conduct? Can I morally justify my actions? Should I do the so-called right thing if it is against my self-interest? What is the right thing anyhow? … What is ethics?" – *Gordon Marino, Ethics: The Essential Writings, 2010*

The preceding questions posed by Gordon Marino in his recently published anthology of ethics and morality have been pondered by some of the greatest minds for thousands of years. Despite this, there remains very little agreement about the answers to any of these questions. Indeed, while this chapter reviews academic literature from the fields of philosophy, psychology, and marketing, it will become apparent that any consensus on these issues is as elusive today as it ever was.

Only one issue has been constant over the past several thousand years of writing on the issue of morality and ethics – the existence of three paradigms: deontology, teleology (often referred to as consequentialism), and virtue ethics. Although each of these will be explained in more detail in the coming pages, it is useful to briefly outline the three paradigms at this stage so as to better understand the philosophical positions of both the original thinkers on morality and ethics and the more current research that is underway in the areas reviewed later in this chapter, namely psychology, business, and marketing.

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The first two philosophies, deontology and consequentialism, are action based. They focus entirely on the actions that a person performs. Specifically, deontological philosophies are based on the belief that the consequences of one's action are outside of the actor's control; therefore, they are irrelevant to moral judgment. A deontological philosophical approach is rules-based, and as a result, it relies heavily on the actor's motive and free-will in determining the morality of the action (e.g., did the actor intend to lie). In contrast, consequentialism, which is a teleological or ends-focused philosophy, emphasizes the final outcome of an act. As a result, moral judgments are based on the consequences of an action. An important distinction between these two philosophical positions (i.e., consequentialism and deontology) involves the weight that is given to internal and external factors in determining morality of actions. Deontologists place greater weight on the actor's *internal* motivation to follow the rules that distinguish right from wrong. For consequentialists, however, judging morality is based more on the direct and peripheral results of an action. Finally, a third philosophy, virtue ethics, places less emphasis on the rules that individuals follow or on the consequences of their actions. Instead it focuses on an individual's character – an actor's traits, such as his or her honesty and kindness.

To illustrate the differences among these three paradigms, take the example of a child who takes and throws another child's toy. A deontological perspective would judge the morality of the child's action based only on the fact that the toy was thrown: Throwing the toy was bad (lacking in morality) because one should not take another

person's things without permission and one should not throw things. In contrast, a consequentialist's perspective would judge the morality of the child's action differently depending on the consequences of the action. If the other child cries or a bystander is injured, then judgment of the act will be harsher; yet, if the other child reacts with indifference and/or if no one else is injured by the thrown toy, then the action may not be judged as immoral at all. Finally, if a virtue ethicist was to assess the action, judgments would be based on the perceived underlying motivation of the actor – was the act playful or malicious? The accuracy of such a judgment would depend on the knowledge of the actor's past behavior and other illustrations of his or her character.

Much of the research that has been conducted in psychology and marketing over the last century is based on these three types of moral philosophies. As such, possessing a more enriched account that captures the progressive development of these moral positions is useful for understanding the current literature in ethics and morality. Therefore this review will begin by providing such an account of these fundamental moral philosophies. Also, when appropriate, the relevance of these philosophies to present-day research in psychology and marketing will be illustrated by providing examples of their role in current research.

Three Key Paradigms: Deontology, Consequentialism (Teleology), and Virtue-Ethics

As is the case with a number of aspects of Western thought (e.g., law and politics), a discussion of moral philosophy should begin with Socrates, who based much of his thinking in all areas of philosophy on the primacy of rationality and intelligence. Socrates based a great deal of his view of morality on the belief that people need direction in an unstable and unpredictable world and that this direction should come from within – from the self. As a result, he equated morality with intelligence and believed that by gaining intelligence a person could live a more moral life. Socrates believed so strongly in this proposition that he suggested that this goal was to be sought above even one's own happiness.

Plato, Socrates' student, moderated this position by suggesting that morality did not need to come at the expense of happiness because intelligence and goodness go hand in hand. As a result, a more moral life would itself foster a happier life. In his view, wrong decisions were the result of ignorance, and for this reason, the development of the mind would lead to a happier and more moral individual.

Like both Socrates and Plato, Aristotle, who was a student of Plato, also emphasized the importance of intelligence for determining the best course of conduct in life. However, Aristotle offered a significantly different view of morality, which is still popular today (Beauchamp, Bowie and Arnold 2008). He introduced the paradigm of virtue-ethics. Virtue-ethics does not focus on the consequences of an action or even its function as a duty. Rather it emphasizes the stable character of the actor. While Aristotle believed that there are two types of virtue –intellectual and

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moral– he emphasized the importance of moderation in order to attain such virtue. This was explicated through his famous doctrine of "the golden mean."

The golden mean emphasized that *any* quality will constitute a virtue when it is present in the right amount. Even a trait like honesty will be a vice if it is present in either a minimal or an excessive amount. Importantly, given his dependence on rationality, Aristotle believed that the right amount must always be determined by reason rather than by feelings, and it must be calculated with reference to the proper development of the personality as a whole. This view plays an important role in several current philosophies in psychological research because it leads to the introduction of social norms in the realm of morality. For example, when a friend asks how he or she looks in a garment, the ethical response is not always the most honest response. The ethical response to that question depends on factors such as the cultural norms of the situation, the relationship of the two individuals involved in the interaction, and the respondent's perceptions of the reason that such a question was asked. Virtue-ethicists believe that the right or ethical thing to do is highly contingent on the person's ability to intelligently assess and integrate all of these issues while also being of the right moral character (i.e., having the right amount of honesty, empathy, etc.) and then to act on this in an appropriate manner.

Whereas Socrates and Plato were deontologists and Aristotle was a virtue-ethicist, a handful of British philosophers and political activists crystallized the paradigm of consequentialism in the 18th century. Largely as a result of the economic and political changes that were occurring during this period, the theory of

utilitarianism was formed – a theory based strictly on the philosophy of consequentialism. Although this theory was first articulated by Jeremy Bentham, a political radical and philosopher of law, it has become most closely associated with British economist and philosopher, John Stuart Mill. At the heart of this philosophy is the belief that one should always proceed in accordance with whatever action will promote the greatest good for the greatest number of people. In current psychological and marketing literature, the work of John Stuart Mill is one of the two most often cited and relied upon; the other is the work of Immanuel Kant, which will be discussed shortly.

Essentially, Mill believed that any moral problem should be addressed by asking the question, "What will make everyone happiest?" It is clear that this philosophy was influenced by Plato and Aristotle's teachings about the relationship between morality and happiness. However, the focus in utilitarianism is not only on the happiness of the actor or decision-maker but that of all the parties who are directly or indirectly affected. This is important because the manner in which Mill diverged most significantly from his predecessors concerned his view of happiness. Like Bentham, Mill believed that the aim of ethics was happiness and that happiness equaled pleasure; it was from this belief that the implied relationship between doing good and increasing happiness was borne. Where the two philosophers differed, however, was the definition of happiness. For Bentham, all pleasures were of equal importance. Mill, however, distinguished between the lower pleasures of the body (i.e., those of senses) and the higher pleasures, namely those that engage our minds.

He believed that people who have experienced both tend to prefer the higher pleasures and that the simple lower pleasures tend to be preferred by people who have no experience with deeper, more cognitively elevated indulgences, such as high art, and are therefore not in a proper position to judge.

Although utilitarianism is often implicated in the current research on morality and ethics in the psychology and marketing literatures, the definitions that are used have changed considerably and have become more malleable as a result of researchers' interpretations of the concept utility. For example, in a recent review of the literature in psychology on moral judgment, Kalis (2010) noted that although different researchers have agreed that utilitarianism regards acts as morally right if they maximize utility (e.g., Brandt 1979; Singer 1993), this still necessitates agreement on what constitutes utility. As Kalis notes, "Is it pleasure, happiness, welfare, or something else? Different versions of *utilitarianism* constitute different answers to this question." (Kalis 2010, p. 101). In the marketing literature, Chonko and Hunt (1985) go so far as to suggest that because full satisfaction of the expectations of all parties would constitute the *most* ethical behavior, an *optimally* ethical decision is impossible because "expectations are often contradictory and sometimes exceed social sanction" (Chonko et al., 1985, p. 340).

Kantian Ethics: The Importance of Principles and Free Will

As noted earlier, in marketing and psychology, most of the research over the last century has relied on the work of two philosophers, John Stuart Mill and

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Immanuel Kant. I now turn to the moral philosophy of Kant, the most influential

deontologist, whose philosophy is referred to as "Kantianism."

Like Plato, a fellow idealist, Kant believed that the outside world was

secondary to mental activity, and this idealism played an important role in his moral

philosophy. My review of the literature in psychology and marketing shows that

Kantian moral philosophy is mentioned most often; it was an important influence of

the seminal and highly influential work of developmental psychologists such as Jean

Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg.

Kantian deontological philosophy differs significantly from utilitarianism in a

number of respects. What is significant about utilitarianism is that it derives its moral

principle from a value that is in itself not moral, namely the neutral value of utility.

On the other hand, deontological theories all claim that their justifying principles are

based on values that are themselves *moral* values.

Kant, the most influential deontologist, argued that morality cannot involve

any tendencies of the actor. That is, an act cannot be judged as moral if the actor

wanted to perform the act. Kant went so far as to suggest that an action is not moral

unless it is done "from duty" rather than "in accord" with duty. An important aspect

of Kant's philosophy is that it strongly implicates the role of free will – a point that

has recently been addressed in the literature in psychology. For example, in a study

of the manner in which people judge the ethical behavior of others, Pizarro, Uhlmann

and Salovey (2003) found that judgments of moral blame and praise of actors

depicted in various vignettes varied depending on whether or not the actions were

described as having been enacted deliberately or impulsively. Specifically, those in the study discounted the negativity of bad moral acts when they were a result of impulsive actions because it was assumed that the actors weren't behaving of their own free will. In another study, Vohs and Schooler (2008) investigated the impact of free will on actual ethical behavior. These authors found that people who read statements that suggested a deterministic worldview cheated by rewarding themselves with cash payments significantly more than those who were exposed to messages about free will or even neutral messages.

The role of free will makes temptation an important component of Kantian morality. Kant suggests that in the grips of temptation, a person should rely on a rule that was formed during a previous similar experience. If no such rule exists, then a person should take the proposed course of action and formulate it as a maxim or rule. Kant proposes that this rule will be tested by asking if one would vote for this rule if it were being written as legislation for all of mankind.

Arguably, the most important aspect of Kantian moral philosophy is the position that humanity holds. Kant argues that because human beings possess a moral dignity, they should not be treated as a means to an end as one might treat machinery or capital (Beauchamp et al., 2008). He contends that using another human being as a means to an end or, more generally, treating a person as though (s)he is not an independent agent, fails to respect the moral position of humanity. Beauchamp et al., illustrate this with an example in advertising: "Manipulative advertising that attempts

to make sales by interfering with the potential buyer's reflective choice violates the principle of respect for persons" (2008, p. 24).

Hume: The Importance of Emotions

Any review of the literature in morality and ethics, particularly with respect to psychology and marketing, should also address the influence of David Hume, an 18th century philosopher and economist. Recently, there has been a great deal of focus on automaticity in general in the fields of psychology and marketing (Bargh and Chartrand 1999; Dijksterhuis et. al. 2006; Tordesillas and Chaiken 1999). As a result, there has been renewed interest in the work of David Hume, whose work drew attention to elements (e.g., feelings, heuristics) that often seem to occur automatically. Although Hume was the first to introduce the importance of utility to the philosophy of morality and it has also been suggested that he influenced Charles Darwin in his theory of evolution (Huntley, 1972), his work has received relatively little attention until recently. This is due in large part to the significant departure of Hume's philosophies from the more traditional theories of Aristotle, Mill, and Kant, particularly with respect to their positions on the role of cognitions.

Hume's greatest divergence from the previous philosophies of morality and ethics was with respect to the paramount importance he placed on the role of emotion in morality. Unlike Kant, who once remarked that Hume had awakened him from his dogmatic slumbers (Marino 2010, p. 151), Hume believed that "reason is, and ought only to be, the slave of the passions and can never pretend to any other office than to

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serve and obey them." (Hume 1739, p. 462). This viewpoint differed greatly from the Greek philosophers who emphasized the role of intelligence and rational deliberation in morality. Specifically, Hume believed that reason can tell us what an appropriate means toward a certain end is, but that it cannot tell us whether a particular end is good or bad; only feeling or sentiment had the power to do that.

Hume agreed with some of the utilitarian doctrine with respect to the role of the happiness of all members of a society as a measure of moral behavior, but he did not agree that it is the only thing that is good. His position is that human beings are complex organisms, and their total welfare includes more than the satisfaction of the one need for happiness.

In general, however, the greatest impact that Hume has had on the recent work in psychology has been in research that relies on evolutionary theory and affect-based heuristic moral behavior. Hume viewed moral judgments as being based largely on feelings rather than cognition, because an awareness of facts alone is powerless to cause a person to act. His work relied on the position that people act as a result of their feelings and desires. Because all moral behaviors are manifested in some overt act, whether it is physical or verbal, emotion is a vital requirement. Although Hume's work preceded Darwin's, Hume also viewed mankind as a creature of desire. Hume's moral philosophy depended largely on the assumption that people act according to their desires. As a result, he concluded that when intellect (i.e., reason) and emotion do not concur, reason gives way to desire.

2.2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE IN PSYCHOLOGY

Like philosophers, researchers in psychology make no clear distinction between that which is moral and that which is ethical. Nevertheless, the preceding review of alternative moral philosophies highlights why it is difficult to attain consensus on what is moral or ethical. Depending on whether an individual approaches an ethical dilemma as a deontologist (e.g., Kant), a consequentialist (e.g., Bentham), or a virtue-ethicist, judgments of morality will vary significantly. Beyond these philosophical principles, recent literature also has underscored the importance of a more heuristic and affect-based Humean judgment of moral transgressions, which needs to be incorporated.

For the most part, philosophers and psychologists adopt very different foci in their inquiry into moral judgment. Philosophers strive to define morality and identify the criteria that should be used to determine whether a person's judgments or actions are moral. In contrast, psychologists as well as marketers rarely endorse any single philosophical position concerning this matter, offer no clear definition of what is moral or ethical, and largely skirt this entire issue. Instead, their interest lies in understanding the development of moral judgment and shedding light on the psychological processes that prompt people to render judgments or behave in a manner that is assumed to signify appropriate moral or ethical conduct.

The findings that have been generated in psychology and marketing shed light on why identifying a well-defined definition of morality and ethics remains elusive .

For example, in an investigation into the role of mindfulness[1] on ethical decision making, Ruedy and Schweitzer (2011) uncovered a malleable individual difference that impacts the moral philosophy that one uses. These authors measured participants' reliance on deontological (principled) and consequentialist (teleological) approaches to ethical judgments and found that people who scored higher on mindfulness relied more on deontological judgments and they also cheated less. Importantly, mindfulness can be manipulated and people can increase mindfulness through meditational practice (Baer 2003), suggesting that a person's reliance on a deontological or consequential philosophy is not fixed. Other studies provide further evidence against the mutual exclusivity of deontological- and consequential-based thinking. Lammers and Stapel (2009) investigated the impact of power on the type of moral thinking in which people engage. They found that the determination of the ethics of an act was based on how powerful a person was. By manipulating power in a lab, the researchers found that people in higher positions of power relied more on deontological, rule-based thinking, while those in lower positions of power relied more on outcome-based (consequentialist) thinking. Such research suggests that the uses of deontological and consequential moral thinking are not mutually exclusive; rather these approaches to moral thinking are highly malleable.

Together, these two sets of studies illustrate some of the messiness that is inherent in adopting a single philosophical position about moral judgment. Such

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[1] Mindfulness refers to an individual's awareness of both internal (awareness of their own thoughts) and external (awareness of what is happening in their environment) factors.

work also sheds some light on why psychologists, marketing researchers, and business academicians frequently avoid taking any philosophical position at all. In the next section I turn to the work of Piaget and Kohlberg, two of the most influential 20th century psychological researchers who have studied morality and ethics. After discussing the work by Kohlberg and others who investigated cognitive moral development, a brief review of a relatively new area in the literature will be provided, one that concerns cultural psychology. This body of work provides some evidence that what is considered moral may not be as universal as most early philosophers assumed. Finally, my review of the research in psychology will end with a discussion of a very recent and exciting look at moral judgment that is closely associated with the work of Hume. This nascent area draws heavily on work in evolutionary psychology and is concerned with the impact of affect and automatic processes on moral judgment.

Review of the Cognitive Moral Development Literature

In psychology, the chief investigators of the study of cognitive moral development are Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg (Piaget 1932; Kohlberg 1958). These researchers were heavily influenced by Kant. This is evident given the unique position that human beings are believed to hold. That is, Piaget and Kohlberg posited that, unlike other animals, humans possess a unique ability to develop morally because of their ability to improve the cognitive skills required to assess morally complex issues.

Piaget's classic study, *The Moral Judgment of the Child* (1932), has provided the basis for much research on moral judgment by offering a conceptual framework for the study of the development of moral thought. Piaget's research introduced a two-stage theory. Younger children (i.e., age 11 or lower) think about rules in fixed and absolute terms. They believe that rules are handed down by adults or God and thus they can not be changed. Further, they are consequentialists, drawing moral inferences from the consequences of actions. On the other hand, older children begin to make judgments based less on the consequences of an action and more on the intentions of the actor (i.e., they become more Kantian or deontological). Echoing a classic example, when a young child hears about a boy who broke 15 cups trying to help his mother and about another boy who broke only one cup trying to steal cookies, the younger child views the first boy's offense as worse or less moral, while the older child regards the second child as having committed a more immoral offense.

In his dissertation, Kohlberg expanded on the work of Piaget primarily by delineating in greater detail the stages of moral development. This resulted in an expansion of the framework from two to six stages of moral development. Kohlberg's first stage is similar to that of Piaget, while Kohlberg's second and third stages overlap with Piaget's second stage. The fourth through the sixth stages of moral development reflected entirely new conceptualizations of levels of moral development. The following briefly explains the most important aspects of each stage of Kohlberg's theory of moral development.

The first two stages are egocentric in nature. Stage one judgments are based on an assessment of the direct consequences of the person's actions for him or herself. The cue most often used at this stage is punishment: the worse the punishment (e.g., the length of the child's "time-out"), the more immoral the act is judged to have been. Stage two judgments are made based on the question, "What's in it for me?" In this stage, the presumed "right" action is whichever activity is in the individual's best interest.

The third and fourth stages are characterized by a shift in attention to the individual's social groups. In stage three, moral judgments are influenced by the need to balance the requirements of mutual social roles (e.g., the need to be a good student and a good son or daughter). In stage four, the influence of the self is further reduced as the implications of action for the broader society become more important. In this stage, judgments are made based on the need to uphold societal institutions. This results in people becoming more concerned with obeying laws and respecting authority in order to ensure that social order is maintained.

The final two stages signify Kohlberg's highest levels of moral reasoning. At stage five, the individual makes judgments with the concept of a better society in mind. This means that moral decisions are made with the recognition that different social groups within a society have different values and that the consideration of these values is necessary for making the best judgments. Hence, at this stage, people recognize a need to protect individual rights and settle disputes democratically. Democracy, however, does not always result in just outcomes. At stage six,

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individuals recognize a higher order of moral laws that define the principles by which a society can achieve justice -- a justice that calls for sacrifice of status, power, and/or wealth. Although some people may achieve this level of moral reasoning (e.g., Mahatma Ghandi and Mother Teresa), stage five is typically viewed as the highest level that anyone can attain (Crain 1985). For this reason, Kohlberg later adjusted his model by dropping stage six from his scoring manual and calling it a theoretical stage (Colby, Kohlberg, Gibbs and Lieberman 1983).

The influence of Kohlberg's model in moral psychology remains evident in the current literature (Trevino 1986; Jones 1991; Goolsby and Hunt 1992; Krebs and Denton 2006), despite the difficulty of administering Kohlberg's tool for assessing his vision of moral judgment (Colby and Kohlberg 1987). In the decades that followed, a great deal of empirical evidence has accumulated – some in support of, and some in opposition of various aspects of the model. For example, Kohlberg focused on moral judgment more than moral behavior. However, the underlying belief was that people should make moral judgments about actual everyday moral issues in the same way that they judge hypothetical dilemmas (Krebs and Denton 2005). Research has generally failed to confirm this position (e.g., Wark and Krebs 1996). This is not surprising given the insights learned from decades of research on the relationship between attitudes and behaviors, which finds that general attitudes rarely predict specific behaviors (e.g., Fishbein and Ajzen 1975).

Of greater importance to Kohlberg's model is his position that people progress through each stage of the model in the order specified and do not skip a stage or

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regress to a lower stage once a higher stage has been achieved. Support for this

position is weak (Kurtines and Greif 1974). For example, in an investigation of a

cross-cultural sample, Holstein (1972) found that while this tenet was generally

upheld, exceptions are not uncommon. In addition, an updated model of moral

cognitive development provided by Harre (1983) is based on the notion that different

aspects of our social worlds are guided by different rule systems and roles, which

impact what one may deem as appropriate behavior. Harre offers an example that

draws on Kohlberg's stages of moral development: "The business world is guided by

a Stage 2 moral order based on instrumental exchange; marriage is guided by a Stage

3 moral order based on the fulfillment of mutual role expectations; and the legal

system is guided by a Stage 4 moral order based on maintaining the institutions of

society" (Krebs and Denton 2005, pg. 633). These observations suggest that because

of the different roles and expectations inherent in each situation, people move in and

out of moral orders – not stages of moral development. This conceptualization is

inconsistent with the notion that moral cognitive development progressively

improves, for the ability to be flexible and apply the most appropriate moral thinking

in a given situation is an indication of moral maturity.

   A review of cognitive approaches to moral thinking would not be complete

without a brief summary of the work done by Forsyth and his colleagues (e.g.,

Forsyth and Pope 1984; Forsyth 1980). Although Forsyth's taxonomy of ethical

ideologies has received far less attention than Kohlberg's model, Forsyth's work has

been influential for two reasons. First, Forsyth introduced cognitive individual

differences that influence moral judgment; in contrast, deontological and utilitarian philosophies hypothesize that the basis of moral judgment is unvarying. Second, Forsyth provided evidence that ethical ideologies impact moral judgments as a result of the emphasis that people with different ideologies place on various factors.

Consistent with the latter premise, Forsyth (1980) introduced a scale called the EPQ (Ethics Position Questionnaire) that classifies individuals according to their ethical ideology. In contrast to Kohlberg's model, the EPQ does not classify ethical ideologies solely on the basis of their reliance on principles and therefore it serves as a more general typology. The EPQ classifies people based on the extent to which they make judgments in accordance with the theories of idealism or relativism. As a result, the EPQ has been used in empirical investigations that explore more practical implications of these two theories (e.g., Aleassa, Pearson and McClurg 2010; Al-Khatib, Malshe, Sailors and Clark 2011).

As just noted, the EPQ scale is based on two broad ways of construing moral dilemmas: idealism and relativism. These two approaches are orthogonal such that a person can be either high in both idealism and relativism, low in both, or represent any combination of the two. Idealism is based on a consequentialist (teleological) moral philosophy, while relativism is based on a person's "principledness," which makes it relatively deontological.

According to Forsyth and his colleagues, idealists assume that good consequences can always be obtained, while less idealistic individuals hold that bad consequences are often mixed with good ones. Relativists believe that universal

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moral principles are of little value when making moral judgments because every situation requires the assessment of a completely different set of factors, whereas less relativistic individuals rely on important fundamental principles. Forysth's scale identifies four combinations of high and low levels of each of these two factors that result in four ethical ideologies. A brief description of each follows.

Situationists are high in both idealism and relativism. As a result, they advocate a contextual analysis of morally questionable actions. Absolutists, on the other hand, are also idealistic, but they are not relativistic and thus they use inviolate universal moral principles to formulate moral judgments. Subjectivists, like situationists, are relativistic and are therefore skeptical of moral principles. However, they are less idealistic, which leads to a greater expectation of negative consequences, such that they prefer to rely on their own personal values when making judgments. Finally, exceptionists are neither relativistic nor idealistic. Although they adhere to moral principles, these individuals admit that exceptions must sometimes be made to moral absolutes.

In this way, the preceding typology provides a systematic way to measure the impact that these individual ideologies have on important issues (e.g., ethical views in social psychology research, Forsyth and Pope 1984). This typology also accommodates findings which suggest that people's moral philosophical ideologies are fluid and subject to change.

Evidence of the Malleability of Morality – The Role of Culture

Empirical research on morality and ethics has relied greatly on the use of vignettes

that depict morally ambiguous dilemmas (e.g., Kohlberg 1958, 1969). The

underlying assumption in such studies has been that people generally agree on what is

moral or ethical and what is not—a view that contrasts with many findings. Recently,

research in cultural psychology (e.g., Miller, Bersoff and Harwood 1990; Shweder,

Mahapatra, and Miller 1987; Shweder and Sullivan 1993) has investigated the

validity and implications of this assumption. Note that the notion that culture impacts

judgments of morality is not new. In the 5th century BC, the Greek historian

Herodotus wrote: "Everyone without exception believes his own native customs, and

the religion he was brought up in, to be the best; and that being so, it is unlikely that

anyone but a madman would mock at such things. There is abundant evidence that

this is the universal feeling about the ancient customs of one's country." Only in the

last few decades, however, has this assertion been studied empirically and in a

systematic manner within the domain of morality and ethics.

Culture can be defined in many ways. The preponderance of the research

reviewed, however, investigates culture with respect to shared practices and norms.[2]

For example, Mazar and Aggarwal (2011) used correlational data to study the

propensity to offer bribes in 26 different countries. Their analysis revealed a

significant negative correlation between a country's position on the collectivism-

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[2] In cultural psychology the term "culture" is implicitly defined as a set of meanings, ideas, and practices that are largely shared among individuals within some definable population (Chiu and Hong, 2006; Chiu, Leung, and Hong, 2010).

individualism continuum and the countries' explicit acceptance of the practice of bribery; more collectivistic cultures were more receptive to the acceptance of bribes as acceptable business practice. In a second study, experimental evidence affirmed the results of these correlational data: individuals who were primed with a collectivistic rather than an individualistic mindset were more likely to engage in bribery. Further, differences in people's perceived sense of responsibility mediated the relationship.

While most research in morality and ethics has focused on acts that are negative, that is, immoral or unethical behavior (Janoff-Bulman, Sheikh and Hepp 2009), some work has examined the impact of culture on *positive* morality. Positive morality is behavior that is evaluated as ethical or moral rather than neutral or negative. Specifically, Miller, et al., (1990) investigated people's perceptions of helping others both within a South Asian (Indian) and a North American population. These researchers found that while North Americans perceived the decision to help friends and strangers in various situations as a matter of personal choice, almost all individuals sampled in India perceived that offering such help constituted a moral obligation.

An issue that has received scant attention in the literature involves harmless, yet offensive moral violations. Relevant to this, a series of studies by Eyal, Liberman and Trope (2008) examined the impact of psychological distance (i.e., temporal or social distance) on people's judgments of immoral acts. While they evaluated a number of transgressions (e.g., incest, eating the family pet), one of the moral

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offenses was viewed as harmless albeit culturally repugnant: using a nation's flag as a

cleaning cloth. In an investigation of Israeli undergraduates, the authors found that

greater psychological distance (i.e., using an Israeli flag as a cleaning cloth in a year

from now, as opposed to tomorrow) resulted in harsher judgments of the immorality

of the act. These researchers hypothesized that this occurred because participants

relied more greatly on moral principles in evaluating distant events than near ones.

Haidt, Koller and Dias (1993) also explored these types of moral violations (i.e.,

cultural) and investigated the impact of affect on moral judgments, another relatively

neglected topic. The role of culture was examined by focusing on individuals of

relatively high and low socio-economic status (SES) within Brazil and the United

States. The results of this research indicated that the domain of morality varies cross-

culturally and that even social classes can elicit differences in perceptions of morality.

Specifically, the authors found that high SES Philadelphians exhibited a harm-based

morality that was limited to the ethics of autonomy (i.e., disgusting and disrespectful

actions were not moralized or viewed as belonging in the domain of morality) as

long as these actions were perceived to have no harmful *interpersonal* consequences).

But for lower SES Philadelphians (and especially Brazilians), morality appeared to be

conceptualized more broadly. For these individuals, stories that involved disgust and

disrespect were moralized, even when they were perceived to be harmless.

Research that explores culture differences in issues involving morality raises

the broader question of whether goodness exists independently of the norms of a

particular culture or society. That is, most people would agree that what people

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perceive to be right or wrong should be independent of one's culture. When we condemn slavery or torture, we do not do so simply because the conventions of our culture no longer condone such practices. The conventional view is that there is something more profound at stake when we refer to issues of morality. Although academic research rarely studies the universality of certain views given that doing so amounts to trying to prove the null hypothesis, some research speaks to this issue. Lysonski and Gaidis (1991), who investigated people's reactions to ethical dilemmas in the United States, Denmark, and New Zealand found that regardless of whether the dilemmas concerned issues of coercion and control, conflicts of interest, the physical environment, paternalism, or personal integrity, respondents' reactions toward them tended to be similar, regardless of individuals' country of origin.

While the preceding work seems to imply that our barometer of moral behavior may be relatively insensitive to external factors such as one's culture or the particulars of the social situation--a view that generally concurs with older models of moral thinking espoused by Kohlberg (1958) and Piaget (1965), much other research calls this thesis into question. Along these lines, some social scientists (e.g., Van den Berghe 1981; Nettle and Dunbar 1997) suggest that cultural markers (e.g., social norms of moral behavior) serve a useful evolutionary purpose. Designations of cultural membership can play a vital role in facilitating altruistic and cooperative behavior toward in-group members. For example, drawing on a mathematical model as evidence, McElreath, Boyd and Richerson (2003, p. 123) contend that social behavior in groups is regulated by norms such that interactions among those sharing

common versus discordant beliefs about appropriate behavior yield higher payoffs. This seems to suggest that many moral judgments not only may be based on these norms, but they may be rendered in an automatic or heuristic manner. This has advanced a recent Humean perspective of morality, one asserting that moral intuitions are anchored primarily on emotions not reason. Evolutionary psychologists have been at the forefront of this characterization of moral judgment (e.g., Greene and Haidt 2002; Haidt, 2001; Rozin et al., 1999). I examine this line of thinking in the next and last section of this review of the literature from the field of psychology.

Automaticity and the Emerging Literature from Evolutionary Psychology

In "The Descent of Man" (1871), Darwin introduced evolutionary biology to the domain of morality. Darwin's thesis centered on the role of sympathy as a social instinct (DeScioli and Kurzban 2009). He argued that sympathy evolved into morality as a result of group selection; groups that displayed morality had an advantage over those that did not because group success ensues from the cooperation that is spawned by agreed-upon (i.e., moral) behavior. Recently, this view of morality has surfaced in psychology, with proponents arguing that the study of morality needs to account for both cooperation as well as the rivalry between those who cheat versus those who aim to catch and punish cheaters (Alexander 1987). As a result of such thinking, much of the research in evolutionary psychology that concerns morality associates morality with pro-social attitudes (e.g., De Waal 2009; Moll et al., 2006). To

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paraphrase Richards (1987, p. 623-624), evolution constructed human beings to act for the common good, and to do so is what it means to be moral.

The implications of such evolutionary influences on morality are significant. They help to explain why many moral judgments appear to be made in a very automatic fashion – namely they are rendered using limited or no discernible cognitive effort. In an influential model of moral judgment, Rest (1983) relegated cognitive processes involved in rendering moral judgment to a limited role, for he proposed that evolutionary forces encourage human beings' tendency to cooperate. As such, morality involves "the equilibrium of individuals in society . . . each reciprocating with other individuals according to rules that balance the benefits and burdens of cooperation" (Rest 1983, p. 572-573). Rest further posited that much of this process occurs quite automatically, with very little need for deliberation. A recent study using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) supports this view about the automaticity of some moral decisions and also bolsters evidence that evolutionary forces play an important role. Specifically, Greene and his colleagues (Greene et al., 2001) asked people to make a series of life or death decisions that involved the popular trolley car scenario.[3] By demonstrating differences in the

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[3] A runaway trolley is headed for five people who will be killed if it proceeds on its present course. The only way to save them is to hit a switch that will turn the trolley onto an alternate set of tracks where it will kill one person instead of five. Should you to switch the trolley to the other tracks to save five people at the expense of one? Most people say yes. Now consider a similar problem, the footbridge dilemma. As before, a trolley threatens to kill five people. You are standing next to a large stranger on a footbridge that spans the tracks, in between the oncoming trolley and the five people in its way. In this scenario, the only way to save the five people is to push this stranger off the bridge and onto the tracks below. The stranger will die if you do this, but his body will stop the trolley from reaching the others. Should you to save the five others by pushing this stranger to his death? Most people say no.

activation of brain regions that correlate with emotional engagement and cognitive

reasoning, their research demonstrated that the extent to which a person was involved

in a moral dilemma influenced the engagement of emotions during their judgment.

For example, participants' decisions to sacrifice one person in order to save five

others was more difficult if the single sacrificed person was a family member versus a

stranger. Results also indicated that women were more affected by this emotion-

laden factor than were men. That is, they were less likely than men to throw a switch

and kill only their brother rather than to not throw the switch and thereby kill five

people.

Perhaps the most influential and controversial research in this area has come

from the work of Jonathan Haidt and his colleagues (e.g., Greene and Haidt 2002;

Haidt and Bjorklund 2008; Schnall, Haidt, Clore, and Jordan 2008). Over the past

decade, Haidt's "Social Intuitionist Model" has generated dozens of articles that

examine the role of affect and automatic/ heuristic processes in moral judgment. The

model is based on the contention that moral judgments and actions are the product of

an evolutionary process in which decisions are based on simple and basic processes

that are more akin to perception than to higher order cognition (Haidt 2004). Indeed,

Haidt claims that the way people make distinctions between what is right and wrong

is very similar to the way they decide what is beautiful.

Borrowing from the relatively more recent research in cultural psychology

(e.g., Miller et al., 1990; Shweder, et al., 1998) and in direct opposition to Kohlberg's

view of moral reasoning, Haidt suggests that people do not reach a moral judgment as a result of private moral reasoning. Instead, they rely on some gut feeling, which quickly and automatically delivers a moral decision. Moreover, he holds that these judgments are often influenced by contextual cues, such as social or cultural circumstances (Haidt 2004). Although the model recognizes that reasoning can affect judgments, it contends that such reasoning plays an extremely limited role. Rather, reasoning is thought to be used as a tool to provide a post-hoc justification of decisions. Hence Haidt notes that "moral reasoning is an effortful [or "controlled"] process, engaged in after a moral judgment is made, in which a person searches for arguments that will support an already-made judgment" (Haidt 2001, p. 822).

This is an important point because it suggests that the reasons people give to explain or support their moral judgments may not accurately reflect the mental processes used to derive their choices. This concurs with other research in psychology, which suggests that people have difficulties articulating their own internal feelings, thoughts, and reflections (e.g., Nisbett and Wilson 1977). Hence, given that ethical judgments tend to be inherently complex, that individuals' ability to articulate their internal thought processes is learned and not innate, and that individuals differ in their ability to engage in such articulation, Haidt advocates caution in interpreting evidence for or against his claim concerning people's post hoc justification of their moral decisions.

Recall that a key distinction between the work of Hume and his predecessors concerns the role that emotion plays in rendering moral judgments. Much of Haidt's

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theory is founded on this notion that emotion or desire can supersede reason in moral judgment and action and thereby may result in immoral action. Several of Haidt's studies have sought support for this position (e.g., Haidt et al., 1993; Schnall et al., 2008). However, the role of affect in making moral judgments is not yet fully understood or accepted. For example, Fine (2006) criticized this position, and Kennett and Fine (2009) offered evidence to support such criticism by looking at a context wherein the automatic moral judgment was itself morally objectionable. In these studies, when reading scenarios involving negatively stereotyped individuals, people were able to successfully override their negative automatic moral judgments through moral reasoning despite the negative affect that automatically resulted from reading the scenarios. Thus, counter to Haidt, Kennett and Fine would argue that even the additional weight of emotion seems to be insufficient to eliminate the element of reasoning in all moral judgment.

Summary of Psychological Literature on Morality and Ethics

The current review of the psychological literature on the topic of morality offers an overview of the approaches adopted by social scientists in their investigations of morality and ethics. In general, this review illustrates that moral action has been viewed either as the result of deliberate moral reasoning (e.g., deontological or Kohlbergian research), or as the immediate result of automatic action tendencies (e.g., evolutionary psychology research), both of which may be mediated

by the moral definitions and beliefs embedded in an actor's social environment (e.g., prevailing norms, the actor's social class, or his/her culture).

The Kohlbergian, or deontological, view of moral reasoning, which emphasizes the underlying role of cognitive deliberation, has been supported by a line of psychological investigation with a great history of research. Based on this perspective, moral functioning is rational and it is based on the need to understand the fundamental goals of human beings and the means they use to pursue them. The crucial elements of this line of thought are rules and principles for human behavior and attention to the predicted or observed consequences of moral behavior.

In another view of moral action, behavior is the result of action tendencies. This position has been supported by significantly less empirical research and, in large part, has emerged from the recent application of evolutionary theory in psychology. This research generally emphasizes the role of cooperation and pro-social attitudes as an adaptation to one's physical and social environment. As a result, evolutionary psychologists view the function of moral tendencies as serving the singular purpose of the species' survival. This line of research suggests the existence of an innate mechanism in which cognitive deliberation is used to the extent that it produces post-hoc justifications of morally relevant behavior. Hence, from this point of view, moral action is essentially irrational; it is based on "moral emotions and moral intuitions that are not anchored in reason" (Kahneman and Sustein 2005). This logic suggests that moral action is different from morally neutral action only in terms of specific content categories. Action is moral because of its "good" content (e.g., helping) or

because of the social function that is served (e.g., enhancing social cohesion; Hogan 1973); it differs from morally neutral action that offers neither. What is clear from these two viewpoints as well as the other literature reviewed in this chapter (e.g., cultural psychology) is that we are still far from identifying a definitive answer to the question of what is the most accurate representation of the moral judgments and activities in everyday life.

One factor that may be contributing to the elusive nature of research in moral behavior is that the study of morality and ethics in psychology has been limited by its almost complete reliance on self-reported predictions of behavior and assessments of third party dilemmas. Although few would limit the study of moral issues to objectively observable behavior, there is a real need to assess and evaluate actual behavior. Fortunately, some recent progress has been made in addressing this issue (e.g., Zhong and Liljenquist 2006; Vohs and Schooler 2008; Mazar et al., 2008). Still, the nature of moral action makes real life investigation challenging, and this has contributed to this significant gap in the literature. Moral action is complex as it is accompanied by a variety of feelings, questions, doubts, assessments, and decisions, and all are imbedded within a cultural context that can further influence assessments of the morality of any issue. These sources of complexity make the empirical investigation of real moral behavior challenging because it is nearly impossible to account for (i.e., control or vary) all of these influences. Presumably this explains the heavy reliance on normative models and atheoretical research that is evident in the marketing literature, which I will review in the last section of this chapter.

As alluded to earlier, the goal of most marketing researchers is simply to understand the actual behavior of consumers and marketing professionals in real-world settings by investigating practical factors (e.g., organizational size, corporate norms, etc.) that impact these behaviors. As a result, like psychologists, such researchers do not endorse any particular philosophical position in their research (i.e., deontological versus consequentialist). The benefit of this approach is that many of marketers' models incorporate both deliberative and automatic processes in moral thinking. Still, this approach has come at a cost because it is often atheoretical. As a result, it provides little evidence about the underlying sources of the relationships identified between predictive variables and behavior. The review that follows provides an overview of both the models of moral judgment offered by researchers in marketing, and it identifies several important individual and environmental factors that can affect moral decision-making.

2.3 REVIEW OF LITERATURE IN MARKETING

As is the case in the psychology literature, research in marketing uses the terms morals and ethics quite interchangeably, making little attempt to distinguish the two. For example, four models discussed in this section (those by Ferrell and Gresham 1985; Trevino 1986; Hunt and Vitell 1986; and Dubinsky and Loken 1989) offer no definitions of the terms. This treatment of the two topics appears to stem from a lack of consensus about what distinguishes the two (for discussions of this, see

Cavanagh, Moberg, and Velasquez 1981, Beauchamp and Bowie 1979, or Jones 1980).

Regardless of how one defines the two terms, morality and ethics are typically viewed as particularly relevant to marketing. Several researchers have speculated about a unique role that ethics plays in marketing. Miles (1980) suggested that marketers assume boundary-spanning responsibilities, which necessitates assimilating the needs of multiple parties with competing interests. Environments of this sort may be particularly conducive to unethical behavior. Others argue that marketing practitioners are more visible to persons external to the organization they represent, making them more susceptible to criticism (Ferrell and Gresham 1985). Still others contend that marketing simply attracts individuals who have questionable ethics (Cox, Goodman, and Fichlander 1965). This last point led Goolsby and Hunt (1992) to compare the cognitive moral development of managers in marketing to those of other social groups. Contrary to the charge, these researchers found that marketing practitioners compared favorably with the other groups.

Given the prevailing view that morality and ethics is of considerable relevance to marketing, it is not surprising that a fair amount of research on this topic has been reported by researchers in marketing. Indeed, Murphy and Laczniak (1981) listed nearly 100 articles in marketing that dealt with morals and ethics. Most of these investigations focused on the practical implications and applications of ethics in marketing. Although such inquiry can be of value, there appears to be a clear dearth of research that is either theory driven or empirical. Indeed, a computerized search I

conducted on the topic of morality and ethics that included the major consumer and marketing journals over the last 40 years uncovered the following. *Journal of Consumer Research* published a total of five such articles and only two were empirical, *Journal of Consumer Psychology* offered three papers on this topic and two of these were empirical, *Journal of Marketing Research* published two papers on this subject matter where one was empirical and the other descriptive (i.e., survey based), and *Journal of Marketing* reported nine such articles although only four were empirical and the rest were either descriptive or they involved normative models. The relative dearth of theory driven or empirical research on this topic suggests that our understanding of morals or ethics related issues in marketing remains quite shallow, offering little insight into important "why" or "how" questions and into the underlying mechanisms.

For the most part, the research in marketing has emphasized one of three broad foci. The first involves non-empirical work that endeavors to provide descriptive or prescriptive models of ethical decision-making for marketing practitioners (e.g., Ferrell and Gresham 1985). I begin my review of the marketing literature by providing a brief assessment of each of these models. In addition, two other streams of research have investigated pertinent factors that can influence ethical behavior: situational or environmental factors (e.g., Ford and Richardson 1994; Murphy, Smith, and Daley 1992), and the role played by individual differences (e.g., Hegarty and Sims 1978; Mazar and Aggarwal 2011). I conclude this section with a brief review of these areas of inquiry.

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Although there is very little research in marketing that investigates the ethical decision-making of consumers per se -- a topic that my dissertation will explore, I shall review the relevant consumer behavior research that exists within the various sections of this review (i.e., individual differences and environmental factors). I begin now, however, with a brief description of the more influential models that have been offered in the marketing literature.

Influential Models of Ethical Behavior in the Marketing Literature

A review of the literature in marketing reveals five influential models of ethical behavior. Each of these draws or builds on models originally developed by scholars in psychology (e.g., Kohlberg 1958; Fishbein et al., 1975). The first model (Trevino 1986) is a general theoretical model. Three others focus either explicitly on marketing ethics (Ferrell and Gresham 1985; Hunt and Vitell 1986) or on individual decision-making within the specific context of marketing ethics (Dubinsky and Loken 1989). A final model by Jones (1991) represents a conceptualization of individual decision-making of ethical issues, yet this model uniquely takes into account the intensity of the ethical issue.

Trevino's model (1986) is a person-situation interactionist model. It begins with the realization that an ethical dilemma is present. The individual then deliberates on the "best" course of action. Deliberation is dependent on an individual's level of cognitive moral development (Kohlberg 1958). A moral

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judgment is made in the cognitive stage, and it is moderated by individual and situational factors, which leads directly an appropriate response (i.e., behavior).

Three other models focus specifically on marketing ethics. Ferrell and Gresham's model (1985) provides a contingency framework for ethical decision making in marketing. In this model, the contingency factors that affect the decision maker concern the individual (i.e., the person's knowledge, values, attitudes, and intentions) and ones that relate to the organization (i.e., significant others and opportunity). Like Trevino's model, the decision subsequently results in an appropriate action on the part of the decision-maker.

Hunt and Vitell's model (1986) is more elaborate than the former and relies on both deontological and teleological thinking. This model consists of several stages. In the first stage, personal experiences and environmental factors (i.e., cultural, industrial, and organizational) influence the individual's ability to identify the existence of an ethical problem, alternative responses to it, and the consequences of the alternative responses. In turn, resulting perceptions together with deontological norms and an evaluation of the potential consequences lead to both deontological and consequentialist evaluations, wherein the potential consequences of the moral decision are evaluated and moral intent is established. Finally, the authors do not suggest any consequences of this stage on *future* ethical activities; that is, there is no feed-back loop in their model in which *actual* consequences impact future evaluations.

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The last in the set of the three marketing ethics models is a conceptualization offered by Dubinsky and Loken (1989). This model is unique for two reasons. First, it is the only model that is theory driven, in that it is based on the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein et al., 1975). Second, it is the only model that has been empirically validated (using a survey of field sales personnel). The Dubinsky and Loken model begins with an assessment of the variables that affect attitudes towards ethical or unethical behavior: behavioral beliefs and outcome evaluations (i.e., deontological and consequentialist considerations). The model then assesses the two variables that affect subjective norms regarding ethical or unethical behavior, namely normative beliefs and a motivation to comply. Finally, attitude and subjective norms contribute to intentions to engage in ethical or unethical behavior, which in turn affect actual behavior.

Finally, Jones (1991) offered a model of individual ethical behavior that is unique, for it emphasizes the role of the actual moral issue in the decision-making process. Jones' Issue Contingent Model (ICM) posits that moral issues vary in their moral intensity; in contrast to the previous models of ethical decision making, the ICM explicitly recognizes characteristics of the moral issue itself as either an independent variable or a moderating variable. The ICM identifies six components that determine the moral intensity of an issue: magnitude of consequences, social consensus, probability of effect, temporal immediacy, proximity, and concentration of effect.

To summarize, in all models except that of Ferrell and Gresham (1985), some form of moral judgment stage exists. In Trevino's (1986) model, Kohlberg's model of the stages of cognitive moral development is the critical element in the judgment phase. Hunt and Vitell (1986) and Dubinsky and Loken (1989) rely on consequentialist and deontological evaluations in their models. Also, the models differ in their transitions from moral judgment to behavior. Ferrell and Gresham (1985) and Trevino (1986) suggested that the judgment phase leads directly to behavior, while the other three models include a step in which the individual establishes moral intent before engaging in any behavior (Rest 1986; Dubinsky and Loken 1989; and Hunt and Vitell 1986). Finally, Jones' model (1991) makes a unique contribution by delineating the role that a moral issue can itself play in the decision-making process. Jones' model identifies multiple elements that determine the moral intensity of an issue and the impact that each of these has on a person's intention to act. Importantly, only Dubinsky and Loken (1989) provide empirical evidence for the validity of their model.

Individual Differences in Marketing Ethics

The marketing literature has uncovered a number of individual differences that can impact the ethical judgments or actions of consumers and marketing practitioners. For example, McNichols and Zimmerman (1985) found that the strength of a person's religious beliefs is positively related to the strength of their ethical standards. In an investigation of the effect of extrinsic rewards on graduate

students' unethical behavior, Hegarty and Sims (1978) found that providing such incentives for unethical behavior increased cheating. In addition, these researchers also measured a number of individual difference variables. They found that locus of control, economic and political value orientation, and Machiavellianism were all significant covariates of the unethical behaviors spawned by the incentives.

Individual social factors also have been found to affect ethics in marketing. Along these lines, Chonko and Hunt (1985) observed that higher level managers were less likely to perceive ethical problems, while similar research by Delaney and Sockell (1992) found that lower level managers were more pessimistic about the ethical character of the organization. Adding to this, a review by Ford and Richardson reported that, in general, as an employee's level in the organization increases, his or her ethical beliefs and decisions decrease.

Research also has identified three important individual differences from social psychology that can impact ethical behavior in marketing contexts – self-monitoring, social dominance orientation, and right-wing authoritarianism. Miller, deTurck, and Kalbfleisch (1983) found that high versus low self-monitors were more successful at deceiving others. To explain this, they conjecture that because unlike high self-monitors, low self-monitors are guided primarily by internal cues, they possess little experience deceiving others. More recently, Hing, Bobocel, Zanna and McBride (2007) observed that leaders high, versus low, in social dominance orientation who partnered with agreeable followers made decisions that were more unethical. They

also found that followers high rather than low in right-wing authoritarianism were more acquiescent and supportive of an unethical leader.

Blasi (1984) proposed that being a moral person could be an important part of a person's self-definition. Building on this, Aquino and Reed (2002) posited that the idea of being a good person – that is, possessing a moral identity – could occupy different levels of centrality in people's self-concepts. Hence, they identified a scale that measures a person's moral identity. Further, they predicted and found that moral identity was related to the frequency with which people engage in activities that benefit others, and people higher in moral identity report a stronger sense of freely choosing to engage in these activities (Aquino, McFerran and Laven 2011).

Finally, more than any other variable, sex differences in ethical issues have been reported (Ford et al., 1994). For example, Betz, O-Connell, and Shepard (1989) found that male business school students were more than twice as likely as female students to engage in actions regarded as unethical. Further, a literature review reported by Ford et al., (1994) found that half of the studies they examined revealed that females acted more ethically than males, while the other half reported no sex differences. Finally, although not in marketing, psychologist Gilligan (1982) observed sex differences in children and suggested that boys and girls interpret moral dilemmas differently. Females conceptualize such dilemmas more complexly, viewing them as problems involving interwoven tradeoffs or contingencies that invite empathy and compassion. On the other hand, males view moral dilemmas more baldly and perceive them as basic problems that involve right versus wrong.

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Environmental Factors in Marketing Ethics

Another major stream of inquiry in marketing within the moral domain has investigated situational and environmental variables. In general, the research in this area has focused on one of three factors: social factors (e.g., peer beliefs/behaviors), organizational factors (e.g., company size), and reward-punishment mechanisms (e.g., the existence of corporate codes of conduct).

In the area of social factors, Zey-Ferrell, Weaver and Ferrell (1979) found that respondents' perceptions or beliefs about their peers' ethical behavior was the best predictor of their own ethical actions. In a review of the literature, Ford et al., (1994) found that not only did the behavior of supervisors and one's peers significantly influence individual ethical behavior, but so did one's industry's ethical climate. Specifically, people who were employed in industries with higher ethical norms tended to behave more ethically.

Substantial evidence also points to the role of organizational size on ethical behavior. Using data from a survey of 149 companies in a major U.S. service industry, Murphy, Smith and Daley (1992) found that, other than attitudes, company size exhibited the strongest effect on predictions of ethical behavior. Specifically, smaller firms tended to demonstrate more ethical behavior in marketing issues. More broadly, Ford et al., (1994, p.217) reported that "as the size of an organization increases, individual ethical beliefs and decision making behavior decreases."

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A third area that has received much attention in marketing literature involves the influence of punishment and reward mechanisms. In general, standards, policies, or rules have been demonstrated to curb unethical behavior in a number of settings and through a variety of methods. For example, in a study mentioned earlier, Hegarty et al., (1978) found that classroom cheating increased when incentives to do so were greater. And while a literature review by Ford et al., (1994) led to the conclusion that formal company policy does influence ethical behavior (p. 216), a survey administered by Chonko et al., (1985) to over 400 marketing managers confirmed that this also appeared to be true for individuals involved in marketing.

Recently, evidence has been provided to suggest that some level of cognitive awareness must be attained before the aforementioned types of policies can influence ethical behavior. Mazar, Amir and Ariely (2008) investigated the role that attention to rules or standards has on self-concept maintenance, and they examined *actual* ethical behavior. In one study, individuals were asked to recall either the Ten Commandments or ten books that they had read in high school. Compared to people who recalled high school books, those who recalled the Ten Commandments cheated significantly less. In another study, the authors manipulated whether the opportunity for dishonest behavior occurred in terms of money or in terms of an intermediary form of exchange (i.e., tokens). They posited that introducing an intermediary medium would offer participants more room for interpretation of their actions, making the moral implications of dishonesty less accessible and thus making participants more prone to cheat when currency magnitudes are higher. Consistent

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with this prediction, introducing tokens as the medium of exchange further increased the magnitude of dishonesty. This final study is noteworthy as it is one of a small group of empirical investigations in this domain that employ theory to investigate ethical issues in marketing. While it is clear that there is a dearth of theory-driven research, some recent inquiries suggest that this may be changing (e.g., Mazar et al., 2008; Zhong and Liljenquist 2006).

The nascent work in psychology examined in this section that explores the role of affect and evolutionary processes in the domain of morality and ethics may represent a fertile substantive area of inquiry for researchers in marketing. Also, while we possess considerable knowledge about the environmental factors and individual differences that affect ethical behavior, more rigorously developed theory-guided research in the area of marketing ethics is needed. My own research begins to address this gap and does so by drawing on research concerning psychological distance and construal level theory (Liberman et al., 2008). I shall begin by briefly discussing such theories and work and in so doing develop my own hypothesis about the effects of changes in construal level.

Chapter Three

HYPOTHESIS AND OBSERVED EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

3.1 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: CONSTRUAL LEVEL THEORY

Construal Level Theory (CLT; Liberman, Trope and Stephan 2007; Liberman et al., 2008) contends that the meaning people attach to events and actions changes as a function of whether these items are mentally represented at a high or low level of construal. High level construals are representations that are more abstract and frequently address the "why" of the situation; that is, high level construal retains the central or most important features of a situation, yet it omits those that are incidental or pertain to the particulars. In contrast, low level construals are concrete and more specific in nature, often dwelling on the "how" of the situation; they emphasize concrete details that contextualize the situation (Carver and Scheier 1981, 1990, 1999; Vallacher and Wegner 1987). To exemplify, consider a consumer who is thinking about purchasing a large recreational play set for the backyard. If the consumer construes this purchase at a high, abstract construal level, (s)he is apt to contemplate the central issue of *why* the play set may be of value. This high level construal is likely to lead the consumer to view the product in terms of its desirability and regard it as, say, convenient exercise equipment for children. Alternatively, if the consumer construes the backyard play set at a low, more concrete level, thoughts might focus on *how* one might obtain the outdoor play set. This low level construal might lead the consumer to view the play set in terms of its feasibility and, as a result,

consider the time it might require to assemble the particular swings, slide, and monkey bars.

A sizable stream of research has focused on identifying factors that can influence people's construal level. One especially crucial factor is psychological distance; as psychological distance increases, people's construal level heightens. This relationship between construal level and psychological distance has been illustrated along several different dimensions of psychological distance. Psychological distance refers to the subjective gap (i.e., in time, space, familiarity, or likelihood) that separates an event or object from the direct, personally experienced, and well known reality of the here and now. Some of the more commonly used inductions used to operationalize psychological distance are temporal distance (Liberman and Trope 1998), spatial distance (Fujita et al., 2006), social distance (Small and Simonsohn 2006) and probabilistic likelihood (Todorov, Goren and Trope 2007; Wakslak, Trope, Liberman and Alony 2006). Yet, importantly, regardless of the dimension in which it may operate, the gap that embodies psychological distance always takes as its reference point the self's personal or egocentric reality of the here and now (Liberman and Forster 2009; Trope and Liberman 2010). As such, it follows that explicit consideration of the self and thoughts about the self are likely to be concrete, richly detailed, and invite an exceptionally low construal level.

A key and highly consequential premise surrounding psychological distance is that a crucial relationship exists between it and construal level. Entities that are more distal or remote from the personal and direct experience of the self are construed at a

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higher or more abstract level. In contrast, those that are grounded in the personal experience of the self are construed at a very concrete low level (Liberman et al., 2007; Liberman et al., 2008). This relationship presumably emerges because people generally possess not only less but less detailed knowledge about entities that are more distant. Hence, this lack of specific knowledge about people, places, events or alternatives that are more remote effectively requires that individuals represent them in a more abstract and less contextualized (i.e., less detailed) manner.

A growing stream of research has firmly demonstrated that variations in psychological distance can alter people's construal level (e.g., Liberman and Forster 2009; Stapel and Semin 2007). A remote (near) psychological distance prompts people to adopt a high (low) construal level. Of particular importance, however, is evidence which shows that by altering construal level, psychological distance can prompt people to differentially attend to, emphasize, and make dominant use of alternative aspects of goal derived behavior (Eyal, Sagristano, Trope, Liberman, and Chaiken 2009). The aspects of interest concern the behavior's *desirability* versus its *feasibility*. The desirability of behavior represents a high construal level feature for it refers to the general or overarching value of a behavior's end-state (i.e., the value of the overall objective that one wishes to attain). An example of this was illustrated earlier in the discussion of how a consumer who adopts a high construal level would focus on a play set's value and hence might represent the backyard play set as convenient exercise equipment. On the other hand, feasibility centers on the particular means that are used to reach the end-state, and for this reason it represents a

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lower level feature in that it dwells on the particular method used to accomplish the objective. This too was exemplified in the backyard play set illustration where a consumer who adopts a low construal level might consider the set's feasibility and hence the time required to assemble the play set's specific products (i.e., the swings, slide, and monkey bar).

Given the established thesis that a more remote (near) psychological distance prompts people to use a high (low) construal level, it makes sense that individuals are apt to attach greater importance to, and/or will be more influenced by the desirability (feasibility) aspects of a situation as psychological distance increases (decreases). Indeed, findings that affirm this outcome have been reported by a number of researchers. Along such lines, Liberman and Trope (1998) found that people's preference for an easy (feasible) but uninteresting (undesirable) assignment decreased over time, whereas their preference for a hard (low feasibility) but interesting (desirable) assignment increased over time. Similarly, Freitas, Salovey and Liberman (2001) observed that informative but unflattering feedback was preferred for the distant future, whereas uninformative but flattering feedback was preferred for the near future. Thus, the crucial thesis evident in these papers is that emphasis on desirability concerns grows over time, while feasibility concerns become less prominent in the more distant future.

3.2 DEVELOPMENT OF HYPOTHESIS

The preceding observations are not only intriguing, but they seem to suggest a theoretical basis for anticipating how people are likely to respond to situations that involve ethically questionable behavior. The research on construal level suggests that temporal and social distance represent two useful ways of altering psychological distance and thus people's construal level. In particular, events that occur at a more temporally remote time (i.e., they will take place in a month vs. next weekend) or that involve actors other than the self (i.e., someone else vs. you) should be perceived at a higher and more abstract construal level. Importantly too, when people engage in unethical goal directed behavior, they generally do so because their behaviors enable them to achieve a *desirable* higher level end-state or goal, even though the particular means used to make *feasible* that end-state are unethical. Given research which attests that people's assessments about goal derived behavior are likely to be particularly sensitive to and guided by desirability concerns (i.e., the favorableness of the overarching end-state) when they construe an event at a high level, whereas they are likely to be driven by feasibility concerns (i.e., the means used to make the end-state possible) when people construe the event at a low level (Liberman and Trope 1998, 2003), I reasoned that people's responses to goal related situations that entail unethical behavior should vary as a function of the psychological distance of the situation. Specifically, when individuals anticipate how an unknown and thus socially distal person will react, they should adopt a relatively high construal level. And because such a construal should prompt them to focus on a goal's desirability -- not

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on the feasibility of means used to attain the goal, they should anticipate that even more unethical actions are likely to occur when the event will take place at a more distal versus near moment in time. This follows because the more distal timing further magnifies the use of a high construal level. On the other hand, when individuals indicate how they themselves will respond to such situations, they should focus quite firmly on the highly familiar and concrete here and now (low psychological distance) and adopt a very low construal level. This follows because here the actor is the self, who actually represents the low construal reference point from which psychological distance is gauged. As such, relatively minor variations in the temporal distance of the situation are likely to exert either a small or no significant impact on individuals' very low construal level. Hence, when individuals indicate how they themselves will respond to ethically questionable situations, I expect that they will engage in low construal level thinking regardless of variations in temporal distance. As a result, they should anticipate that the self will engage in a low degree of unethical action owing to their guiding attention to means and feasibility concerns (i.e., the unethical means used to accomplish the objective).

In the preceding discussion, I cast my predictions in a way that was particular to situations where temporal distance is varied. I did this because temporal distance is one of the inductions I use to operationalize psychological distance in my studies. However, in my later studies, I will manipulate psychological distance and construal level in other ways. For this reason, I now reframe my logic more broadly to encompass factors other than temporal distance that may moderate people's

anticipation about the potentially (un)ethical behaviors performed by others or the self. To this end, I hypothesize that individuals' construal of an ethically questionable situation should alter their anticipations by influencing the importance ascribed to the desirability versus the feasibility of the event. When individuals consider the behavior of an unknown (distal) person, which fosters the use of a relatively high construal level, I propose that they will anticipate that this person will engage in a higher degree of unethical behavior when their perception of the event's psychological (e.g., temporal or experiential) distance is greater. But when individuals consider the behavior of the self—an entity that fosters adoption of a very low construal level, they should anticipate that the self will largely eschew unethical behavior, irrespective of variation in perceived psychological (e.g., temporal or experiential) distance of the event.

3.3 EXPERIMENT 1

Study 1 was designed to provide a preliminary test of my theorizing. More specifically, it investigated whether individuals' expectations of goal directed behavior that involves unethical actions will differ as a function of their construal level. To assess this, nine scenarios were created and presented to participants (see appendix A). A few of these scenarios were taken from prior research (Fullerton, Kerch and Dodge 1996; Lysonski and Gaidia 1991), but most were developed expressly for this investigation. Care was taken in creating the scenarios to ensure that none of the unethical behaviors was either extremely deplorable (i.e., clearly wrong)

nor highly acceptable (i.e., devoid of any ethical dilemma). In addition, attempts were made to employ scenarios to which the student participants could relate (e.g., scenarios involving business decisions by high level managers were not used). In each, a focal individual wished to achieve a desired goal but s/he contemplated doing so by engaging in ethically questionable means or actions. I predicted that participants who adopted a higher (lower) construal level would be more sensitive to the desirability of the end state (the means of goal achievement and feasibility); in turn, this should prompt these participants to expect that the focal individual will engage in a heightened (lower) degree of unethical behavior.

In each scenario, participants' construal level was altered by employing two different psychological distance manipulations. The first manipulation entailed altering the social distance (i.e., familiarity or knowledge) of the protagonist: the focal individual was either the self or an unknown other. The protagonist in the unknown other condition was referred to by employing gender neutral first names (e.g., Chris, Jessie). Because the self is extremely familiar and serves as the here and now low construal level reference point when determining psychological distance (Trope et al., 2010), it should stimulate a strong and potent low construal level. However, an unknown person who is unfamiliar and distal from the self should induce a relatively high construal level. The second manipulation used to alter construal level was the temporal distance of the event that was described. The events were said to take place either next weekend (inducing a low construal level) or next month (inducing a high construal level). Hence, the design of study 1 was a 2 (social

distance: self or unknown other) by 2 (temporal distance: this weekend or next month) between subjects factorial.

Study 1 was conducted in a computer lab where 114 students completed the study in groups ranging from 4 to 8 people. Participants were seated at computers and directed to a URL, which randomly assigned them to treatments. The treatments were defined by the study's 2 (social distance: self vs. unknown other) by 2 (temporal distance: this weekend vs. next month) factorial design. Participants read the nine scenarios and for each, they assessed the likelihood that the focal individual would behave in an unethical manner. Responses were obtained using 9-point scales anchored by 1=definitely would not and 9=definitely would engage in the behavior. Hence, higher scores reflect the expectation of less ethical behavior. After responding to the nine scenarios, participants were asked to evaluate each of the same nine scenarios again, but "this time to make a judgment about the behavior." Specifically, participants were asked to "decide how right or wrong it would be" to behave in the manner described on a nine-point scale anchored by 1=absolutely fine and 9=absolutely wrong. Hence, a higher number represented a more negative (i.e., unethical) evaluation of the behavior. The manipulations employed in the scenarios presented for this task corresponded with those that participants responded to previously.

After completing this task, participants responded to three scales that sought to shed light on the role that self-presentation concerns may have played on participants' predictions of ethical behavior. More specifically, in the self condition, it

is possible that individuals may eschew unethical behavior, not because the self

invokes a very low construal level as I predicted, but instead because reference to the

self elevates participants' desire to present themselves favorably to either oneself or

other people.

The first scale investigated the potential role of an individual's motivation to

make him or herself "look better." Paulhus (1984) has established a measure of this

systematic response bias, called the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding

(BIDR; Paulhus 1984). The BIDR is composed of two distinct aspects of desirability

responding: social desirability and impression management. These two aspects are

assessed using separate subscales; the social desirability subscale consists of 20 items

that assess an individual's dispositional tendency to think of him or herself in a

favorable light (appendix B). Participants who score high on this scale have been

found to claim more familiarity with bogus products, over-confidence in memory-

based judgments, and exhibit a greater illusion of control (Paulhus and Reid 1991;

Paulhus 1988). The second component of desirability responding is impression

management (appendix C). This subscale also contains 20 items, and it measures

people's deliberate attempt to distort responses in order to present a more favorable

image to other people. This component reflects a more conscious motivation to obtain

social approval.

After completing the BIDR, participants responded to another scale, a 13-item

self-monitoring scale (Lennox and Wolfe 1984; Appendix D). I reasoned that this

scale also could shed light on self-presentation concerns. Self-monitoring pertains to

the extent that individuals are concerned with how others perceive them in social settings (Snyder 1974). High self-monitors are more concerned with impressing others and receiving social approval. As a result, they often change their behavior in different situations. Low self-monitors are less concerned about how others perceive them and instead are more guided by their own internal beliefs, attitudes and dispositions. Thus, while high self-monitors often view an adjustment of their own behavior as appropriate and necessary, low self-monitors consider self-presentations that are inconsistent from their internal states as inauthentic and undesirable (Snyder and Gangestad 2000).

The third and final scale measured individual differences in social-interest. This scale was included because of the potentially important role that participants' concern with the interests and welfare of others could play in contexts that involve ethics. Social interest was evaluated by requiring participants to make choices between pairs of self-descriptive terms (Crandall 1991; Appendix E). For each pair, participants were asked, for example, if they "would rather be… helpful or imaginative." Each pair included one item that was closely related to social interest (i.e., helpful) and another that was somewhat less relevant (i.e., imaginative). Social interest was evaluated by analyzing the responses to 15 item pairs; in addition, 9 buffer or filler pairs were also included to obscure the scale's focus. Participants saw all three scales in the order that I have discussed them, but the items comprising each scale were presented randomly.

Results

I first examined participants' judgments of how right or wrong they felt each behavior described in the scenarios was (i.e., how ethical it was). Their mean judgments about these behaviors ranged from 4.14 (i.e., taking markers from work for a school project) to 7.57 (i.e., releasing pollution into the air at night; see table 1), suggesting that the scenario behaviors were viewed as moderately but not excessively unethical. These judgments were negatively correlated with the key dependent variable, participants' predictions of unethical behavior (all p's < .01). In other words, as would be expected, participants predicted less ethical behavior when the behavior was judged as being more acceptable. In addition, a MANOVA investigated whether the two construal level manipulations (social distance and temporal distance) affected participants' judgments of each behavior's acceptability. Results showed that neither of these factors nor their interaction influenced these judgments (ps > .30).

Next, a MANOVA investigated the key dependent measure, participants' predictions about their own or others' ethical behavior in the scenarios. Results revealed a main effect of both focal individual (F(1, 102) = 3.90, p < .01) and temporal distance (F(1, 102) = 4.06, p < .01), as well as a significant interaction of these two factors (F(1, 102) = 1.91, p = .058; see Figure 1). This interaction was significant or approached significance for six of the nine scenarios (ps ranged from .01 to .14). Follow-up analysis of the overall two-way interaction revealed that when construal level was relatively high because the focal person was an unknown distal other, participants anticipated that they would engage in less ethical behavior when

temporal distance was far rather than close (which prompted the use of an even higher

construal level; $M_{Far} = 6.16$ vs. $M_{Close} = 4.53$, $p < .01$). However, when the focal

person was the highly familiar self, which should activate the use of a very low

construal level, participants anticipated low levels of unethical behavior , irrespective

of variations in temporal distance ($M_{Far} = 4.47$ vs. $M_{Close} = 4.36$, $p > .50$). These

results conform with my hypotheses.

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Insert Figure 1 About Here

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I then examined whether self presentation concerns could potentially account

for participants' predictions about how (un)ethically the target person in the scenarios

would behave. I began by analyzing the possible relationship between the measure of

social interest as well as the three scales I administered that concerned self-

presentation and the two manipulated factors that I found affected participants'

predictions about ethical behavior. This analysis was conducted in two steps. First,

four mixed linear regressions evaluated the relationship between each scale as well as

the associated interaction terms with social distance and temporal distance. These

models revealed no significant results. That is, none of the main effects (ps > .10) or

the interactions (ps > .10) were significant. In the second step, the effects of each

individual scale were evaluated (i.e., self-monitoring, social interest, and both BIDR

sub-scales, where the latter two subscales are called impression management and

social desirability) by simultaneously including all four in a MANCOVA. This analysis revealed only a single significant main effect of impression management ($F(1,97) = 1.94$, $p < .05$). The relationship between this factor and predicted ethical behavior was investigated by performing a spotlight analysis at plus and minus one standard deviation from the mean of impression management responses. Planned comparisons revealed that participants who evaluated the behavior of others did not differ by levels of impression management ($M_{HighIM} = 5.48$, $p > .50$ vs. $M_{LowIM} = 5.21$). However, when participants anticipated how they themselves would behave, those who were high rather than low in impression management predicted that they would behave more ethically ($M_{HighIM} = 4.00$ vs. $M_{LowIM} = 4.72$, $p < .01$). Including impression management as a covariate in a MANCOVA on predicted ethical behavior, however, did not reduce the significance of the social and temporal distance interaction[4]; in fact, it slightly increased the significance of this interaction ($F(1,101) = 2.08$, $p < .04$). Hence, this analysis suggests that while impression management is significantly correlated with predictions about ones' own ethical behavior, once this relationship has been accounted for, the predicted effects of construal level on ethical behavior are slightly strengthened. Overall, my analysis of several aspects related to self-presentation concerns--including impression management, suggests that they do not account for the key findings I observed on anticipations of ethical behavior.

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[4] ANCOVAs that included each of the other covariates also failed to reduce the significance of the key 2-way interaction between social distance and temporal distance.

Discussion

The results of study 1 suggest that when individuals adopt a higher construal level, concerns about the desirability of their ultimate goal are likely to take priority and guide their responses, even if the means used to achieve that end state involve unethical behavior. On the other hand, when individuals adopt a low construal level, attention is devoted to the specific means used and its feasibility. If these means entail unethical behavior, individuals who employ a low construal level--particularly those whose construal level is low because they themselves are considering engaging in these behaviors, will attend to the unethical aspects of the means and thus they are likely to eschew the unethical actions. Experiment 1 supported this view, showing that when construal level was higher (i.e., the focal individual was a distal unknown other and the event would occur in the far future), participants anticipated greater unethical behavior. Yet, when construal was low and particularly strong (i.e., the event involved the highly familiar self whose particulars are intimately known), participants anticipated low levels of unethical behavior regardless of the event's temporal distance.

The present study also found that self-presentation concerns alone do not appear to account for the predictions that participants rendered about the likelihood of (un)ethical behavior. Although higher levels of concern about self-presentation (specifically impression management) were associated with significantly lower predicted levels of unethical behavior when participants evaluated their own behavior, such self-presentation concerns failed to reduce the significant effect of

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both social and temporal distance that I observed on participants' predictions of ethical behavior. To the contrary, inclusion of this particular measure of self-presentation (i.e., impression management) in a model that tested the effects of social distance and temporal distance on predicted ethical behavior made the significance of the key interaction somewhat stronger.

In the preceding study, participants' construal level was varied using two well established methods for altering psychological distance: social distance and temporal distance. Yet, one weakness of varying these two factors that influence construal level is that doing so requires altering the descriptive content of the messages -- in the present case, the content in the scenarios. It would be constructive to show that the predicted findings replicate when such alterations in the descriptive content, and any potential confounds associated with those alterations, are essentially eliminated. Pertinent to this, recent research suggests that changes in construal level may be induced in a manner that is independent of the scenario-embedded descriptive content. Indeed, some findings by Alter and Oppenheimer (2008) suggest that manipulating psychological distance metacognitively could accomplish this. Thus, study 2 used this approach. More specifically, I reasoned that manipulating how fluently participants read and apprehended the scenarios that described the unethical behavior (i.e., the material's perceptual fluency) could itself alter the magnitude of the distance these individuals metacognitively experienced the described event in relation to themselves. I expected that the increased (decreased) perceptual fluency a reader experiences when apprehending such messages would lessen (enhance) that

individual's perceived psychological distance from the described event and thereby prompt him or her to use a low (high) construal level. In turn, this variation in individuals' construal level should produce responses toward ethically questionable events that conceptually replicate those observed in the previous study.

The purpose of experiment 2 was to investigate this notion that perceptual fluency can alter construal level and when this factor is combined with another that alters construal level (i.e., social distance), these two factors will elicit outcomes that replicate those observed in study 1. In particular, study 2 varied the perceptual fluency of the material in each scenario as well as the same social distance factor (i.e., focal individual: self vs. unknown other) that was manipulated in study 1. The temporal distance manipulation was dropped. Further, except for the social distance manipulation, which identified the focal individual as either the self or an unknown person, the descriptive content presented in the scenarios was constant across conditions.

Study 2 also replaced the self-presentation scales used previously with a Public and Private Self-Consciousness Scale (Fenigstein, Scheier and Buss 1975). I included this new scale to further explore the role that participants' self-presentation concerns may have had on their predictions of ethical behavior. This scale contains items that measure two aspects of self awareness, private and public self-consciousness, where each gauges different self-presentation concerns. For individuals who are high in *private* self-consciousness, heightened awareness of the self and one's internal thoughts and feelings can result in a denial of objective

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assessments of his or her own ethical behavior because of how these assessments impact self-image. On the other hand, for individuals who are high in *public* self-consciousness, a chronic concern for the way others view the self could prompt very low predictions of unethical behavior. Thus, these latter individuals' chronic concern with public self-presentation may result in a habitual need to present oneself in a positive light. To summarize, while the underlying motivation may differ for participants who are high in either private- or public-self consciousness, the predicted effects are the same. Participants who are high in either aspect of self-presentation concerns may report that they (i.e., the self) would engage in more ethical behavior.

3.4 EXPERIMENT 2

Experiment 2 was similar to the previous study except for two important modifications. First, the perceptual fluency of the scenario materials was altered by varying the size, style, and resolution of the typeface that was employed. All stimulus materials were viewed on computer screens that had a white background. However, in the high perceptual fluency condition, the scenarios were presented using a black, 14-point Tahoma typeface, while in the low fluency condition they were presented employing a 50% gray scale, 10-point italicized Comic Sans typeface, which was harder to read (Alter et al., 2008). Second, after responding to the nine scenarios, participants completed the Public and Private Self-Consciousness scale (see Appendix F).

Study 2 was conducted in a computer lab where 112 students completed the

study in groups ranging from 8 to 20 people. Participants were seated at computers

and directed to a URL, which randomly assigned them to treatments. The treatments

were defined by the study's 2 (focal individual: self vs. unknown other) by 2

(perceptual fluency: high vs. low) between subjects factorial design. The procedure

was the same as study 1. Participants read the same nine scenarios and assessed the

likelihood that the focal individual would behave in an unethical manner. The same

assessment scales from the previous study were employed.

Results

A MANOVA on anticipated ethical behavior revealed a significant main

effect of focal individual ($F(1,108) = 32.42$, $p < .001$) and a significant two-way

interaction of focal individual by perceptual fluency ($F(1,108) = 4.17$, $p < .05$) (see

figure 2). For eight of the nine scenarios, the pattern of means on anticipated

(un)ethical behavior directionally mimicked the same one that obtained in study 1.

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Insert Figure 2 About Here

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The key contrasts of this interaction supported the predictions. Specifically,

when the focal individual was an unknown distal other (prompting use of a high

construal level), participants anticipated greater unethical behavior when a low rather

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than high level of perceptual fluency fostered a sense of greater psychological distance (i.e., use of a higher construal level; $M_{LowFluency} = 6.59$ vs. $M_{HighFluency} = 5.92$, $p < .05$). But when the focal individual was the extremely familiar self and thereby stimulated the use of a strong and extreme low construal level, the perceived likelihood of unethical behavior was low and constant, regardless of variation in perceptual fluency ($p > .50$).

The effect of self-consciousness on predictions of unethical behavior also was investigated by regressing predicted unethical behavior onto each of the two scores derived from the self-consciousness scale responses (public and private self-consciousness) as well as the two manipulated factors. No significant effects emerged for either private or public self-consciousness (both $ps > .50$). Further, inclusion of these two types of self-consciousness as covariates in a MANCOVA that tested the effects of the focal individual and psychological distance on predicted ethical behavior revealed a significant interaction effect of these factors ($p < .05$), but neither covariate was significant (both $ps > .15$). Thus, these findings cast further doubt on the view that self-presentation concerns played an essential role in producing the key outcomes on predictions of (un)ethical behavior.

Discussion

The results of study 2 offer further support for the thesis that construal level can influence people's ethical evaluations. When construal level was heightened—in this study by means of a meta-cognitive experience that increased psychological

distance (i.e., perceptual fluency), assessments of unethical behavior replicated those observed in study 1. Specifically, changes in perceptual fluency significantly altered predictions of other people's ethical behaviors, but such changes had no not effect on participants' predictions of their own behavior. Apparently when individuals assessed the behavior of others, the increased psychological distance in the low fluency condition increased thoughts about the desirability of the described end state; in contrast, the high fluency manipulation prompted use of a low construal level (i.e., relatively concrete thinking), which increased attention to the specific means used and their feasibility. This resulted in predictions of lower levels of unethical actions. Yet, as observed in study 1, an important qualification occurred when the goal directed behavior involved the actions of the self. When this was the case (i.e., individuals thought about themselves as the actor in each scenario), a lower construal level ensued and thus feasibility aspects of the behavior played a greater role in participants' predictions of (un)ethical behavior. Here, participants predicted relatively more ethical behavior regardless of the fluency with which the scenarios were presented. Notably additional investigation into the effect of the two types of self-consciousness (i.e., private and public) that were examined indicated that neither played a significant role in producing the preceding effects.

In each of the studies reported thus far, the degree to which participants actually attended to desirability and feasibility aspects of the scenarios was merely inferred from the outcomes that were reported; in other words, consideration of these aspects was never measured. Study 3 seeks to address this weakness by obtaining

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evidence of the actual process that underlies the outcomes predicted by my hypothesis. Specifically, study 3 aims to demonstrate the mediating role of individuals' consideration of desirability and feasibility aspects of ethical dilemmas on the relationship between construal level and assessments of unethical behavior.

3.5 EXPERIMENT 3

My theorizing contends that variation in construal level affects the roles that desirability and feasibility related thoughts exert on predictions of ethical behavior. Moreover, while psychological distance represents one way of influencing construal level, the outcomes on anticipated ethical behavior that I predict based on construal level theory should hold for any manipulation of construal level. Thus, in study 3, in addition to using the same social distance (construal level) manipulation employed in the previous two studies (i.e., the focal person in each scenario was identified as either the self or an unknown person), I replaced the perceptual fluency manipulation with a construal level priming task patterned after one developed by Fujita, et al., (2006). Participants completed this construal level priming task prior to responding to three ethical scenarios that were taken from studies 1 and 2. Hence, the design of experiment 3 was a 2 (construal level priming task: low vs. high) by 2 (focal person: self or unknown other) between subjects factorial.

A second important modification made in study 3 was that after participants reported their responses about the focal individual's anticipated behavior in each of the three scenarios, they were asked to report all thoughts they had as they considered

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that scenario. These thoughts were coded for whether they concerned either desirability or feasibility aspects of the scenarios, thereby serving as indicators of the importance participants assigned to each of these factors as they evaluated the scenarios.

Participants consisted of 276 undergraduates who completed the study in exchange for course credit. All took part in the study in small groups of up to 16 people and were seated at computers where they were directed to a URL that randomly assigned them to treatments. To begin, participants performed a construal level priming task (Fujita et al., 2006) that encouraged them to think at either a high or low construal level. The task entailed presenting individuals with a list of items, and for each, they were asked to identify either a superordinate category that the item exemplified (e.g., chocolate bar – junk food) or a subordinate level instance that exemplified the item (e.g., chocolate bar - Kit Kat). The logic underlying this task is that categorizing items at a superordinate level prompts a high construal level or relatively abstract thinking, whereas exemplifying items at a subordinate level fosters a relatively low level construal or concrete thinking. All participants received the same list of 26 items (e.g., king, singer, painting, soap opera). In the high construal level condition, participants responded to each item by answering the question, "___ is an example of what?" In the low construal level condition, they used the same items to answer the question, "An example of ___ is what?" Two sample items and responses were provided to ensure that participants understood their task.

After responding to the construal level priming task, participants were presented with three ethical scenarios in random order (see Appendix G). In each, the protagonist's social distance from the self was varied, thereby altering construal level in a second way (i.e., the protagonist was either the self or a distal unknown other). Immediately after responding to each scenario, participants completed a thought-listing task in which they recorded all feelings, thoughts and opinions that went through their minds as they reflected on the preceding scenario. Instructions underscored that participants were to avoid reporting any new thoughts that they had not considered earlier (see Appendix H).

Two trained judges who were blind to the conditions coded all thoughts for whether they concerned either desirability or feasibility aspects of the scenario. Thoughts were classified as desirability focused if they discussed either a positive or negative end state that could be attained (e.g., gaining favor with the boss, losing one's job, being promoted, etc.). They were classified as feasibility focused if they discussed the specific actions or behaviors that the protagonist would enact (e.g., he or she would perform the requested actions, but not actually do the unethical deed, would report the unethical request to a supervisor, would only partially comply with the request, etc.). Thought classifications of the two coders were reasonably correlated ($r = .73$) and were averaged to obtain a score for each response type.

Results

A MANOVA on anticipated (un)ethical behavior in response to the three scenarios revealed results that aligned with those of the previous two studies. A main effect of focal individual emerged ($F(1,270) = 44.89$, $p < .001$), but it was qualified by an interaction of construal level prime and focal individual ($F(1,270) = 5.91$, $p < .05$). Planned comparisons supported the predictions. Specifically, when the focal individual was an unknown distal other (inducing a high construal level), participants anticipated greater unethical behavior when a higher, rather than a lower construal level was primed ($M_{HighCL} = 5.54$ vs. $M_{LowCL} = 5.02$; $p < .05$). But when the focal individual was the self, which prompted an extremely low construal level, anticipated unethical behavior was low and constant, regardless of the primed construal level ($p > .25$).

Investigating the Mediating Roles of Desirability and Feasibility

To assess the role that consideration of desirability and feasibility related aspects of the scenarios played in shaping how participants' expected the protagonist (i.e., the self or an unknown other) to behave, mediation analyses were conducted. To perform such analysis, separate indices of participants' desirability and feasibility related thoughts about the scenarios were created by summing the number of cognitions that participants produced of each type. My theorizing contends that desirability (feasibility) concerns should dominate and thereby heighten (reduce) expectations that the protagonist will behave unethically when conditions lead participants to think about the scenarios using predominately higher (lower) construal

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level thinking. Thus, when participants consider the behavior of an unknown person after completing a priming task that fosters a high versus low construal level, they should generate a higher (lower) level of desirability (feasibility) related thoughts. This follows because both the unknown distal target person and the high construal level priming task should incite higher construal level thinking. On the other hand, because contemplation of the self is thought to induce an especially low construal level, thoughts about feasibility related matters should be particularly relevant when the self is the target, and this should occur regardless of the construal level fostered by the priming task.

I expect that desirability related cognitions will have an overall mediating impact on how construal level affects anticipated ethical behavior. This expectation is based on a view expressed in the extant literature, namely that before people consider engaging in any goal directed behavior, they first try to ascertain that the behavior attains some threshold level of desirability. Only after this threshold has been met do feasibility related concerns become germane; I investigate this aspect of my hypothesis below in a series of regression analyses. In addition to the just discussed mediating role of desirability, the preceding discussion about the types of thoughts that people should elicit when they consider the behavior of an unknown person versus the self also suggests that the social distance factor (i.e., whether the protagonist is an unknown distal other or the self) will moderate the mediating impact of desirability cognitions.

To explore this latter thesis, I first conducted a test of mediated moderation. Based on the method outlined by Muller, Judd and Yzerbyt (2005), responses to all three scenarios were averaged to produce a single indicator of anticipated (un)ethical behavior (i.e., the dependent variable). Likewise, the desirability and feasibility indices for the three scenarios were averaged to produce a single mediating indicator for each type of thought. Evidence of mediated moderation was tested using three 5,000 bootstrapped models (Muller et al., 2005). In the first model, anticipated ethical behavior was regressed on construal level, social distance (the moderator in this model) and an interaction of these two terms. Consistent with the MANOVA results reported earlier, the interaction term was significant, indicating that the interaction of construal level prime and social distance significantly predicted anticipated ethical behavior ($\beta = -.77$, $p < .05$). In the second model, construal level, social distance and the interaction term were found to significantly predict the mediator, desirability related thoughts ($\beta = -.86$, $p < .01$). Finally, in a third equation, anticipated ethical behavior was regressed on construal level, social distance, the number of desirability related thoughts, the interaction of construal level and social distance, and the interaction of the mediator (desirability related thoughts) and the moderator (social distance). The results revealed evidence of mediated moderation. Specifically, while the interaction term involving the mediator and moderator was significant ($\beta = .49$, $p < .01$), the interaction term between construal level and social distance was reduced and was no longer significant ($\beta = -.37$, $p > .05$). This last finding provides evidence for the role that is played by the interaction of thoughts of

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desirability and social distance on predictions of ethical behaviors. It also supports the role of social distance (evaluating the self or an unknown other) as a moderating factor on predictions of ethical behavior.

While this evidence of mediated moderation represents an important test of my hypothesis, a second aspect of my hypothesis was that feasibility related thoughts should play a particularly important role when individuals rely on a lower construal level, such as when participants evaluate their own behavior. This contention is based on prior literature. Along these lines, Sagristano, Trope and Liberman (2002) suggest that consideration of feasibility related aspects become important once a desirability threshold is met. These researchers suggest that feasibility concerns are likely to be particularly important when relatively lower construal level thinking prevails; this should occur in the proximate social distance condition (i.e., when the protagonist is the self). Together, these previous findings suggest that after accounting for the effects of desirability related thoughts, feasibility related thoughts should effectively mediate the effects of construal level. To test this thesis, I created a combined indicator of both desirability and feasibility related thoughts by subtracting the number of desirability related thoughts from the number of feasibility related thoughts. This combined measure of both types of thoughts was then subjected to a test of mediation.

Using the bootstrapping technique advocated by Preacher and Hayes (2008; Zhao, Lynch and Chen 2010), the results of a 5,000 bootstrapped sample provided evidence for a significant relationship between the interaction of construal level

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prime, social distance, and the mediator (i.e., the difference between the number of feasibility and desirability related thoughts; $\beta = .847$, $p < .01$). More importantly, the analysis revealed that after controlling for this indirect effect (i.e., the mediator), no additional direct effect of construal level and social distance on predicted ethical behavior remained ($\beta = -.254$, $p > .40$). These results support my thesis that the quantity of feasibility less desirability related thoughts significantly mediates the interaction effect of construal level and social distance on predictions of ethical behavior (95% CI [-.69 to -.23]).

The preceding mediation analyses produced results that support my theorizing. Specifically, the interaction effect of the construal level prime and social distance on anticipated unethical behavior could only be fully mediated when desirability and feasibility related thoughts were both taken into account. To investigate the role of the two types of cognitions (desirability and feasibility) more directly, an ANOVA was conducted on the measure of feasibility less desirability related thoughts (i.e., the relative number of feasibility related thoughts). The results closely resemble those of the key dependent variable, predicted unethical behavior (figure 3). A significant interaction of construal level prime and social distance emerged ($F(1,265) = 12.86$, $p < .01$). Planned comparisons also revealed outcomes that align with my hypothesis. Specifically, while the difference between the number of feasibility and desirability related thoughts did not vary significantly for participants who predicted their own behavior (i.e., the relative magnitude of feasibility thoughts was quite high; $M_{HighCL} = .75$ vs. $M_{LowCL} = .91$, $p > .30$),

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participants who evaluated the behavior of unknown others reported a higher relative magnitude of feasibility related thoughts when their construal level was low versus high ($M_{HighCL} = -.61$ vs. $M_{LowCL} = .40$, $p < .01$).

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Insert Figure 3 About Here

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Discussion

In sum, the results of study 3 significantly add to my prior findings. First, they provide additional support for the pivotal impact of construal level on anticipated ethical behavior, and they do so by using a different manipulation of construal level (i.e., a construal level priming task). Second, the results contribute to the literature by offering compelling evidence for the underlying roles of desirability and feasibility related thoughts on anticipated ethical behavior. While previous studies of construal level theory have suggested that important roles are played by desirability and feasibility related thoughts, such evidence has been based on inferences drawn from findings as opposed to genuine empirical evidence (e.g., Liberman et al., 1988; Freitas et al., 2001; Sagristano et al., (2002) seems to offer an exception, yet their support rests on correlational evidence). Study 3 included actual measurements of the numbers of desirability and feasibility thoughts that people generated following variations in social distance and construal level prime. This enabled me to shed valuable light on the observed roles that these two types of cognitions play in determining unethical behavior. Third, experiment 3 provided the first empirical

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evidence that supports the asymmetric relationship between desirability and feasibility, a phenomenon that has been only proposed by researchers. Specifically, my research revealed that while desirability considerations were important for all participants, regardless of the construal level that was primed or the actor that was evaluated (i.e., the self or an unknown other), feasibility related considerations became very important when a low construal level was elicited through a priming task and when participants considered their own behavior. Evidence for this asymmetric role of desirability and feasibility was provided by two series of regression analyses. In the first of these, a test of mediated moderation by desirability provided initial evidence for the important role that is played by desirability related cognitions and the moderating effect of consideration of the self, as a result of its particularly strong instantiation of low psychological distance. A second series of regressions that evaluated the mediating role of the *relative* number of feasibility and desirability related thoughts provided additional insight into the moderating role of the self. The results of those tests of mediation revealed that feasibility related thoughts were significantly elevated when participants made predictions about their own behavior. In particular, participants who made predictions about their own behavior produced more feasibility related thoughts than desirability related thoughts (Feas - Des = .83); when participants evaluated the behavior of an unknown other, however, desirability related cognitions were more slightly more prominent (Feas – Des = - .10).

Follow-up analyses also investigated the relationship between construal level and, separately, the number of desirability and feasibility related thoughts. The results confirmed that feasibility related thoughts were significantly greater when participants relied on a lower construal level, regardless of whether they were making predictions about their own behavior ($M_{HighCL} = 2.05$ vs. $M_{LowCL} = 2.36$, $p < .05$) or that of an unknown (distal) other ($M_{HighCL} = 0.79$ vs. $M_{LowCL} = 1.38$, $p < .05$). Desirability related thoughts, however, did not differ for participants who made predictions about their own behavior ($p > .20$). Among participants who made predictions about the behavior of others, however, desirability related thoughts were significantly greater when participants relied on a higher construal level ($M_{HighCL} = 1.39$ vs. $M_{LowCL} = 0.98$, $p < .01$).

The three studies I have reported to this point provide strong evidence of how changes in construal level affect anticipated ethical behavior. Yet, these studies are not without certain weaknesses. One is that they always assessed how ethically individuals anticipated that particular actors -- either the self or an unknown other -- would behave in response to situations that were clearly hypothetical and never actually took place. Second, while the studies found that variation in construal level reliably affected how ethically individuals felt that unknown other people would behave, variation in construal level never altered individuals' anticipation about how they themselves would behave. Quite consistently, when asked to anticipate their own behavior, individuals maintained that they would behave ethically. This latter observation seems curious and is hard to reconcile with considerable real world

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evidence, which indicates that individuals frequently behave unethically, especially when the end state goal that spawns the unethical action has highly desirable consequences for the self.

What might explain this apparent anomaly? I suggest that hypothetical scenarios, such as those used in the three studies I have reported to this point, require individuals to engage in concentrated attention to the self as they directly imagine and envision themselves as the actor, and this mental activity prompts them to focus explicitly on the self as a salient object when they assess their own likely behavior. This exercise in focusing on and imagining how the self would behave differs considerably from the phenomenal experience people have in real life situations. In real life contexts where people must decide how they will behave, consideration of the self as the actor is much less salient. Indeed, thoughts about the self tend to fade into the background because people devote their attention to factors ranging from their goal, the behavior(s) they might pursue, and any obstacles that could stand in the way. This distinction between attention paid to the self in hypothetical scenarios versus real life situations is likely to be consequential because the dedicated and explicit attention that people give to the self in hypothetical scenarios reduces psychological distance and thereby magnifies low construal level thinking even more than my theory would propose. In turn, this substantially magnified low construal level thinking prompts and markedly increases the influence of feasibility related thoughts, causing these thoughts to prevail despite manipulations that otherwise would be likely to increase individuals' construal level.

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The next two studies seek to address these weaknesses. In them, individuals are not given hypothetical scenarios nor are they asked to simply imagine and anticipate how either they or an unknown person would behave. Instead, they perform in real time an actual task that provides them an opportunity to engage in dishonorable or unethical behavior; if they engage in such behavior, they can earn and enjoy a higher level of financial compensation than they will if they behave honorably. Importantly, because participants must attend in real time to the matters at hand (i.e., gain an understanding of their task and actually perform it), they are unlikely to focus their attention explicitly on the self. Hence, in this more real life context, I hypothesize that the self will be less salient and thus participants will indeed be sensitive to and affected by a construal level prime that they complete before they perform the target task. Accordingly, I predict that in study 4, participants will behave less ethically on the target task when prior to performing it they receive a high versus low level construal priming task. This should occur because, as I have theorized and as my prior studies found, priming people to use a higher construal level should increase consideration of desirability (yet not feasibility) related thoughts, which encourage less honorable or more unethical behavior.

Finally, while study 5 aims to replicate study 4, it also investigates the logic I have proposed, which is that the impact of construal level on ethical behavior hinges on whether individuals' attention to the self is either peripheral (i.e., minimal) or explicit. In my last study (experiment 5), participants follow the same procedure and respond to the same tasks and measures as they do in study 4, except that half of the

participants are given an additional task that should heighten the salience of and thus prompt individuals to devote explicit attention to the self. Hence, this latter task is expected to induce a phenomenal experience more similar to the one represented in my earlier studies (i.e., those that employed hypothetical scenarios) where individuals were likely to explicitly attend to and focus on the self. I expect that inclusion of this high self salience task should reduce psychological distance and thereby increase the relative importance of feasibility related concerns. As a result, I predict that when participants complete the additional high self salience task and therefore became more explicitly aware of the self, variation in construal level will not significantly influence how honestly or ethically participants behave on the critical perceptual abilities task. On the other hand, when the self is not rendered salient, a high versus low construal level will produce more dishonorable (unethical) behavior on the perceptual task.

3.6 EXPERIMENT 4

In study 4 I examined individuals' real world ethical behavior, investigating whether they would "cheat" and behave dishonorably on a perceptual task that determined their financial compensation. Seventy nine participants were recruited from a pool at a large Midwestern university in return for financial compensation. Participants completed the study in small groups of up to 16 people. Each participant was seated at a computer and informed that (s)he would be participating in two tasks,

first a general knowledge task and then a task designed to assess their perceptual abilities.

The general knowledge task was the same construal level categorization task used in study 3. Half of the participants were given 26 items and randomly assigned to identify appropriate superordinate level responses, which prompted higher construal level thinking; the remaining participants received the same items but were asked to exemplify each of the items at the subordinate level, thereby stimulating the use of lower construal level thinking. After completing this first task, participants were instructed to open a file on their computer labeled "perceptual abilities task." This launched the crucial task that provided participants an opportunity to cheat.

In this perceptual task, participants saw a square in the center of the screen that was divided into two halves by a diagonal line (Figure 4). Twenty dots appeared on either side of or on the line. Participants' task was to quickly assess whether they felt that more of the dots were on either the left or the right side of the diagonal line. Participants were instructed to use the keyboard to indicate their assessment, pressing "m" for the right side or "z" for the left side.

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Insert Figure 4 About Here

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Before beginning this task, participants were given a sample square. They were told that in this study they would see each square of a series for only one second, and they were to indicate as accurately yet as quickly as possible whether

they perceived that more of the dots were on the left or right side of the diagonal line. Next, participants were given the rules that governed their compensation for their task performance, after which they were asked to practice performing the task by responding to 200 trials (the same number as in the actual paid task).

The instructions that explained task performance compensation were adapted from ones used by Gino and Ariely (2010). Participants read that: "because most people can more easily estimate the number of dots on the left side, you will be paid .5 cent (1/2 cent) for each trial where you respond that there are more dots on the left side, and 5 cents for each trial where you respond that there are more dots on the right side." Thus, this payment structure provided participants with an incentive to blindly report that there were more dots on the right side on each trial, particularly on trials where the dot placement made the correct answer rather ambiguous.[5] As such, participants were presented with a conflict between performing the task in the manner actually requested (to base responses on their perceptions of the actual stimuli; a lower construal level, feasibility focused criterion) or to simply indicate that more dots appeared on the right, which would maximize their personal earnings (a higher-level, desirability focused criterion).

After participants received the preceding information and completed the practice trials, they performed 200 actual trials for which they would be compensated. Upon completing these trials, the administrator entered their data into the survey and

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[5] For 100 trials, the correct response was unambiguous, indicating that more dots were on the right in 50 trials and on the left in another 50 trials. For the other 100 trials, the dots were arranged such that the correct response was designed to be relatively ambiguous.

recorded the amount that the participant would be paid a bit later. Next, participants were directed to complete the rest of the study by answering some questions about the task and themselves. These questions included some measures that could serve as potential covariates (e.g., Self Control, Tangney, Baumeister and Boone 2004; Conscientiousness, BFAS subscale; DeYoung, Quilty and Peterson 2007; and two others that explored a possible rival explanation. Specifically, participants may have found it easier to complete the perceptual (i.e., spatial) task when they were induced by the priming task to employ a higher construal level. This follows because processing at a higher construal level incites more abstract or global thinking (e.g., Liberman et al., 2009), which has been equated with the use of a higher construal level (Smith, Wigboldus and Dijksterhuis 2008). Moreover, using such processing is known to enhance performance on rapid response spatial exercises, like this study's perceptual task (Navon 1977). Indeed, if this occurred in this study and the increase in perceived ease was substantial, it could have demotivated these participants from performing the perceptual task accurately. That is, such participants may have resented being required to perform repeated trials of such a easy task, and they may have expressed this sentiment by behaving dishonorably (i.e., unilaterally reporting that more dots appeared on the right side of the diagonals, thereby maximizing their personal compensation). In contrast, participants who received the low construal level prime would not have experienced this sense of ease and its demotivating influence as they performed the perceptual task. So presumably these participants performed the perceptual task largely as intended and consequently behaved more honorably. To

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assess this rival explanation, participants were asked to rate on 7 point scales both how easy (easy, challenging) and how engaging (engaging, interesting, involving, enjoyable, tedious, boring) they found the perceptual task.

Results

      If participants completed the perceptual task in the manner they were instructed (i.e., indicating their honest perceptions) and they responded with perfect accuracy, they would have earned a maximum of $6.50 in compensation. Actual performance data indicated that on average, participants earned more than this amount - a mean sum of $7.31, indicating that they behaved somewhat dishonorably.[6] More critically, however, the construal level manipulation influenced how likely participants were to disregard the instructions, behave dishonorably, and report responses on the task that elevated their earnings. As predicted, participants who received the high versus low construal level priming task prior to performing the perceptual task behaved significantly less honestly (i.e., earned significantly more in compensation; $M_{HiConstrual} = \$8.09$ vs. $M_{LoConstrual} = \$6.41$, $p < .01$).

      Next, I explored the plausibility of the rival explanation discussed earlier by examining participants' ratings of how easy and engaging they found the perceptual task. Principal components factor analysis of the eight rating items revealed a two factor solution. The first factor was comprised of the six items that pertained to how

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[6] Given the imbalanced nature of the compensation structure and the number of trials in this task, participants could have earned a maximum of $10 if they always indicated that there were more dots on the right side of the square.

engaging the task was, and it accounted for 60.67% of the variance (Eigenvalue =

4.85). The second factor consisted of the two items concerning how easy the task

was, which accounted for an additional 16.68% of the variance (Eigenvalue = 1.34).

The items comprising each factor were averaged separately, resulting in a task

engagement ($\alpha = .93$) and a task ease ($r = .70$) index. An ANCOVA that included the

engagement index as a covariate revealed that the index did not significantly affect

perceptual task performance ($p > .50$). The same was true for the task ease index ($p >$

.50). Further, in neither ANCOVA did the covariate reduce the effect of construal

level on payment (both ps $< .01$)[7].

In addition, while a regression showed that Conscientiousness had no

significant effect on task performance ($\beta = 59.18$, $p > .15$), the measure that gauged

Self-Control did exert an influence on task performance ($\beta = 60.55$, $p < .05$). To

investigate this effect, a spotlight analysis was conducted at plus and minus one

standard deviation from the mean level of Self-Control. The results confirmed a

simple main effect of Self -Control. Specifically, participants with higher levels of

Self-Control earned less money than those with a lower level ($M_{LowSC} = \$6.88$ vs.

$M_{HighSC} = \$7.71$, $p < .01$). Inclusion of Self-Control in a one-way ANCOVA however,

did not reduce the significance of the effects of the construal level prime on

participants' level of financial compensation.

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[7] Separate ANOVAs also revealed that construal level had no effect on either perceived task
ease or engagement (both ps $> .10$).

Discussion

The results of study 4 offer some insight into an important apparent inconsistency. Specifically, despite abundant evidence supporting the notion that in real world situations individuals often act dishonestly, in all three of my previous studies that involved hypothetical situations, participants predicted that they themselves would engage in low levels of unethical behavior, and this occurred regardless of their construal level. I posited that this inconsistency between behavior in real life situations and my studies stems from the exceptionally close psychological distance that participants feel when they devote direct and concentrated attention to the self. Participants presumably devoted this directed attention to the self in my first three studies because the hypothetical scenarios that they received in fact invited this strong focus on the self as the actor. As the results of study 3 illustrated, this exceptional reduction in psychological distance magnified low construal level thinking so greatly that feasibility related thoughts prevailed despite the increase in construal level that might result from the priming task that participants completed. In study 4, however, participants faced an actual dilemma. Due to the real life nature of the situation, attention to the self was meager because participants instead devoted most of their attention to a number of task relevant issues (e.g., the instructions, their underlying goals, obstacles, etc.). As a result, the significantly lower salience of the self, which is characteristic of real (i.e., not hypothetical) situations, allowed variation in construal level to have the predicted effect on (un)ethical behavior. Specifically, I proposed that people who were exposed to a high versus a low construal level prime

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would assign greater value to highly desirable personal rewards than to the dishonest means required to achieve those rewards. As a result, I expected individuals who were primed to engage in a higher construal level to act less honorably (i.e., more unethically or dishonestly), prompting behavior that would earn them greater financial compensation. The findings of this study upheld this prediction. This observation is informative not only for what it tells us about when people will act unethically (i.e., their sensitivity to variation in construal level). It is also informative because it reveals outcomes that contrast with those observed in my prior studies, which never assessed people's actual behavior but instead asked them to simply anticipate how they would behave in an ethically challenging hypothetical situation.

Hence, in contrast to the predictions made by participants in the previous three studies, in study 4, a higher (lower) construal level was expected and found to increase (reduce) the use of dishonest behavior among participants themselves. My logic for why this should occur was based on the expectation that a reduction in attention to the self (which occurs when people encounter a real, not hypothetical, ethics-related dilemma) would enable variation in construal level to influence the number of desirability and feasibility related thoughts that participants had with respect to the task at hand. This distinction between attention paid to the self in hypothetical scenarios versus in real life situations is likely to be consequential because the dedicated and explicit attention that people devote to the self in hypothetical scenarios reduces psychological distance and thereby magnifies low construal level thinking even more than my theory would propose. In turn, this

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substantially magnified low construal level thinking prompts and markedly increases the generation and influence of feasibility related thoughts, causing these thoughts to prevail despite manipulations that otherwise would be likely to increase individuals' construal level.

According to this explanation, any activity that increases attention to the self should significantly mitigate the effects of a construal level prime on dishonest behavior, because self focused attentional activity reduces psychological distance and increases the prevalence of lower-construal level, feasibility related thinking. In study 5, I test this proposition by administering to half of the participants a task that increases thought about the self just prior to asking them to perform the same perceptual task used in study 4. This latter task presents participants with an opportunity to behave dishonestly. Based on my theorizing, I expect that among participants for whom the self is *not* made salient, variation in construal level will prompt outcomes that replicate those observed in study 4 -- a higher (lower) construal level will result in more (less) dishonest behavior. However, among participants where the self is made salient (and thus the relative magnitude of feasibility related concerns is greatly heightened), variation in construal level should not affect their behavior; instead, these individuals should consistently behave quite honorably and ethically.

3.7 EXPERIMENT 5

Experiment 5 was similar to the previous study except for one important modification. As before, participants began by completing the same construal level categorization task that required them to identify 26 items at either a superordinate (high construal) or a subordinate (low construal) level. However, prior to performing the critical perceptual task, all participants completed a word search task that has been used in self construal research to vary attention to the self (Davis and Brock 1975; Kuhnen and Oyserman 2002). In one version of this task that represents the self salient condition, participants were asked to circle all pronouns (e.g., words like "I" and "me") that appeared in a short paragraph. In a second version, which comprised the low self salience condition, they circled all articles (e.g., words like "a" and "the") in a paragraph. The latter paragraph contained no pronouns. As explained later, I administered the word search task twice to each participant, each time employing a different paragraph. Care was taken to ensure that the length of the paragraphs in both conditions were comparable (Appendix I). Thus, all participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions of the study's 2 (construal level: high vs. low) by 2 (salience of the self: high vs. low) between subjects factorial design.

Eight-six participants who were part of a subject pool at a large university were recruited in exchange for financial compensation. Each participant was seated at a computer and informed that (s)he would be completing several tasks. The first was the so called general knowledge task employed in study 4 that used item categorization to vary participants' construal level. Next, participants completed the

first word search task, which was described as a "mind refreshing exercise." This task, which involved searching for either all pronouns or articles in a paragraph, varied whether the salience of the self was high or low, respectively. At this point, a file labeled "perceptual abilities task" was launched on participants' computers, and participants read the same instructions for the perceptual task that were used in experiment 4. In brief, they were told that they would be given a series of squares that were divided into halves by a diagonal line, and 20 dots would appear on either side of or on the diagonal line. Their task was to identify and report as quickly and accurately as possible whether they perceived that there were more dots on either the right or left side of the line. Following this, participants were informed how their performance compensation on the task would be determined. Like study 4, it was structured such that participants faced a conflict between completing the task as instructed (i.e., as accurately as possible) or using a strategy that was dishonest but served a self-serving purpose by elevating the amount of money they would earn. Participants then performed a series of practice trials of the task.

After the practice trials, participants were directed to complete the second word search task (again purportedly to refresh their minds) before embarking on the actual perception task trials. This word search task consisted of the same exercise they completed earlier that manipulated the salience of the self, but it was performed on a different paragraph. All participants were assigned to the same self salience condition as they were in the earlier word search task. Following this, participants performed the 200 trials of the actual perception task for which they would be

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compensated. After finishing these trials, the administrator entered participants' data

into the survey and recorded the amount that they earned and would be paid. Finally,

participants answered the same scales assessed in study 4 (i.e., task ease and

enjoyment; Self Control (Tangney et al., 2004), and Conscientiousness (DeYoung et

al., 2007). These served as potential covariates. Participants were then paid and

dismissed.

Results

An ANOVA run on participants' earned financial compensation revealed a

significant main effect of construal level ($F(1,72) = 5.31$, $p < .05$), which was

qualified by a significant two-way interaction of construal level and self salience

($F(1,72) = 7.70$, $p < .01$; Figure 5). The results of this interaction generally aligned

with the predictions. Specifically, planned comparisons revealed that when the

salience of (i.e., attention to) the self was low, the outcomes replicated those of study

4. That is, participants who received a prime that prompted use of a high versus low

construal level behaved less honorably and thereby earned more money on the

perceptual task ($F(1,72) = 12.26$, $p < .001$; $M_{HiConstrual} = \$7.85$ vs. $M_{LoConstrual} = \$5.90$;

$p < .01$). However, when the salience of (i.e., attention to) the self was relatively high,

construal level had no effect on how honestly participants performed the perceptual

task or their earned compensation. Here, compensation sums were moderately low

and constant, implying that when the self was salient, participants performed the task

in a reasonably honest manner (although perhaps not entirely; $F(1,72) = 0.117$, p > .73; $M_{HiConstrual} = \$6.84$ vs. $M_{LoConstrual} = \$7.02$; p > .70).

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Insert Figure 5 About Here

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An investigation of the potential covariates revealed that only Conscientiousness was significantly related to the effects of construal level and self salience. While an ANCOVA that included conscientiousness did not change the significance of the 2-way interaction of construal level and attention to self ($F(1,70) = 7.92$, p < .01), a mixed model regression did reveal a significant 3-way interaction of construal level, self salience, and conscientiousness ($F(1,62) = 6.07$, p < .05) (Figure 6). To investigate this interaction, a spotlight analysis was conducted at plus and minus one standard deviation from the mean level of conscientiousness. The results showed that the performance of only participants who were low in conscientiousness displayed the 2-way interaction of construal level and self salience; participants who were high in conscientiousness exhibited no effect of construal level, self salience, or an interaction (all ps > .23). Although such findings are not relevant to my theorizing, they might be expected given that individuals who are low, but not high, in conscientiousness should be less inclined to perform the perceptual task precisely as they were instructed.

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Insert Figure 6 About Here

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Discussion

Study 5 addressed two important issues. First, employing a context that involved actual (not hypothetical) behavior, this study found that the outcomes observed in experiment 4 replicated. In other words, as is commonly experienced in real world situations where attentiveness to the self fades into the background, when individuals employ a high versus low construal level, they behave more dishonestly. The second and more informative issue that this study addressed involved identifying precisely why the preceding outcome occurred in studies 4 and 5, but it failed to occur in my prior three studies. Study 5 established that a key factor that distinguishes between hypothetical situations (like those used in my initial three studies) and real ones (like those employed in studies 4 and 5) is whether individuals explicitly envision and attend to themselves as the actor, or instead their thoughts about the self as actor fade into the periphery as other more pressing considerations command more attention (i.e., considerations such as comprehension of the task, the stimuli that are present, their goals, etc.). When the self is highly salient and thus people direct explicit attention to oneself (i.e., an individual considers a hypothetical scenario with the self as the actor, or the salience of the self is otherwise heightened as in study 5), psychological distance is greatly diminished and thoughts about feasibility related matters magnify substantially. In situations of this sort, variation in construal level is apt to be overpowered, rendering it too weak to exert an appreciable influence; instead individuals are likely to dwell on feasibility considerations, which motivate them to behave quite honestly and do so reliably. In contrast, when attentiveness to

the self is low, the imbalance just described should be absent. Hence, in situations of this type, the impact of construal level is likely to be felt. Indeed, study 5 bore out the preceding logic, revealing that variation in construal level predictably affected how honorably individuals behaved when the salience of the self was low, but it had no effect when salience of the self was high.

Although the findings of study 5 generally support my hypotheses, one observation did not fully align with expectations. Recall that in my first three studies, when salience of the self was high due to the use of hypothetical scenarios that invoked explicit attention to the self, participants indicated consistently that they would behave in a relatively honorable and ethical manner. Also, when a low construal level was elicited, the predictions participants made about the behavior of unknown others did not differ from the relatively ethical behavior that was predicted of the self. Yet, in study 5 when a low construal level was induced and the self was not salient (i.e., due to completion of the article circling task), participants behaved significantly more honestly than those for whom the self was salient (i.e., those who completed the pronoun circling task). Of course, I can only speculate about why individuals in the low construal level/low self salience condition of study 5 behaved more honorably than participants for whom construal level was low but the self was salient. Nevertheless, I suspect that this unexpected finding occurred because the article circling task that the former individuals performed inadvertently prompted them to use a low construal level, thereby reinforcing or perhaps even doubling the inducement for them to employ such a construal level that the earlier introduced low

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construal level manipulation had already encouraged these individuals to use. This seems plausible because the article circling task required participants to attend to particularly low level details or items (i.e., readily overlooked and seemingly meaningless words such as "the" or "a") in a short paragraph. Relatedly, extant research has shown that attending to such low level, specific features of a stimulus is associated with the use of low construal level thinking (Wakslak, et al., 2006). Hence, the preceding suggests that the article circling task may have reaffirmed or intensified an emphasis on feasibility that already was induced in low self salience participants who previously had received a manipulation that fostered a low construal level. Note that in contrast, for low self salience participants who received a high (versus a low) construal level manipulation before performing the perceptual task, the reduction in construal level presumably prompted by the article circling task exerted no appreciable discernible impact on their attention to feasibility aspects of the task. This may have ensued because these individuals were primed at the onset of the study to employ a high construal level, which presumably took precedence. Undoubtedly, future research is needed to assess the viability of this possible explanation.

Chapter Four

GENERAL DISCUSSION

4.1 SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Together, the results from the five studies I have reported provide converging

evidence for the effects of construal level on ethical behavior. In addition, they shed

light on the mediating roles that the desirability and feasibility of events play in

producing this effect. In the first three studies, such evidence was provided using

hypothetical scenarios where respondents rendered predictions about the behavior of

a person who encountered an ethical dilemma. In the final two studies, participants'

actual dishonest behavior was assessed to offer evidence of whether construal level

can affect ethical behavior in real life situations.

I developed my predictions based on evidence which shows that variation in

construal level can prompt people to differentially attend to, emphasize, and make

dominant use of two aspects of goal-derived behavior -- desirability and feasibility

concerns (Eyal et al., 2009). Specifically, prior research has shown that a high (low)

construal level causes individuals to attach greater importance to and/or be more

influenced by the desirability (feasibility) of a possible action. These aspects of goal-

derived behavior are especially germane to the study of ethical behavior because in

such contexts, people generally aspire to achieve a desirable end-state or higher-level

goal (e.g., save money), but they may employ a feasible means of accomplishing this

by engaging in unethical actions (e.g., lie about a competitor's price to a merchant

who promises to match that competitor's prices). As a result, when consumers adopt a higher construal level and thereby focus primarily on the desirability of the overall goal, they are likely to anticipate that more unethical behavior will occur and in real life situations behave more unethically. However, when they adopt a low construal level and focus on means and their feasibility, the reverse is likely to occur.

In my first three studies, I altered construal level using alternative priming manipulations that included altering different dimensions of psychological distance, namely temporal distance (study 1), perceptual fluency (study 2), and social distance (studies 1, 2 and 3). Psychological distance refers broadly to the subjective gap in dimensions such as time, space, or social closeness that separates an event or object from the direct, personally experienced reality of the self. In study 1, construal level was varied using a temporal distance manipulation where the target event was described as taking place in either the near or distant future. In study 2, it was manipulated metacognitively by presenting the ethics relevant scenarios in text that was either relatively easy or hard to read. The increased (decreased) perceptual fluency that the reader experienced when apprehending the message reduced (enhanced) his or her perceived psychological distance from the described event and thereby induced the reader to adopt a low (high) construal level. Finally, in study 3, construal level was varied via a construal level manipulation. In addition, studies 1, 2, and 3 all included a second construal level manipulation that altered social distance. This was accomplished by describing the focal actor in each scenario as either the participant him or herself or an unknown other person. I expected that the effect of

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social distance as a construal level manipulation--that is, presenting the self as opposed to an unknown other person as the focal actor--would be especially powerful and induce a very low construal level. This follows because the self anchors the low construal level endpoint in any manipulation of psychological distance, making it an extremely potent means of inducing use of a low construal level. Hence, when the self was identified as the actor, I reasoned that the extremely low construal level it fosters may overpower the other more subtle or less direct construal level manipulations I introduced. The results from these first three studies supported such theorizing. They revealed that construing an event at a high versus low level increased participants' expectations that an unknown other person would behave unethically. Yet, when the scenario involved the actions of the self, quite different outcomes emerged. When the self was identified as the actor, participants anticipated that they would behave in an ethical manner, and this outcome was maintained regardless of the other factor that altered their construal level (i.e., a temporal distance, perceptual fluency, or a construal level priming manipulation).

The Mediating Effects of Desirability and Feasibility

The outcomes observed in these three studies can be explained in terms of respondents' construal level and the relative emphasis that such construal leads people to place on the desirability of end-states and the feasibility of means. Recall that when people engage in unethical behaviors, they generally do so because their behaviors allow them to achieve a *desirable* higher level end-state or goal, even

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though the particular means used to make that end-state *feasible* are unethical. This suggests that when other people's behavior is in question, increasing respondents' sensitivity to feasibility (desirability) concerns by inducing a lower (higher) construal level will generally lead these individuals to anticipate that others' behavior will be more ethical (unethical). Yet, importantly, a different outcome should occur when respondents explicitly consider the self and their own behavior. Because direct attention to the self encourages adoption of a particularly potent and very low construal level, other factors that otherwise could alter construal level should be subjugated, prompting all respondents to claim that they themselves would behave ethically.

My first two studies offered support for the outcomes that I predicted would occur on (un)ethical behavior, and I assumed they emerged because a higher (lower) construal level fostered a greater emphasis on desirability (feasibility) concerns. Importantly, however, study 3 sought evidence of the assumed relationships between construal level, concerns about desirability and feasibility, and (un)ethical behavior. Like the preceding studies, study 3 varied construal level in two ways. In addition to altering social distance by varying whether either an unknown individual or the self was the actor, construal level was also manipulated via a priming task that required participants to categorize a number of items at either a superordinate (high construal) or subordinate (low construal) level. Following this task, participants read several scenarios in which either an unknown person or they themselves confronted ethical dilemmas. For each dilemma, they were asked to anticipate how the protagonist

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would behave. Immediately after indicating their response, participants reported all thoughts that they had considered in arriving at their assessment. These thoughts were coded for whether they represented either a desirability or a feasibility related concern. Then, these two types of thoughts were analyzed as potential mediators of the observed interaction of the two construal level factors (i.e., the social distance factor and the construal level prime).

Results of the analyses offered support for the view that both desirability and feasibility related cognitions play important roles in explaining the influence of construal level on (un)ethical behavior. An initial series of regressions revealed that desirability related thoughts mediated the overall effect of construal level on anticipated unethical behavior. Yet, beyond this, whether the self or an unknown person was the actor in each ethical dilemma moderated the mediating role played by desirability related cognitions. More specifically, while variation in construal level significantly influenced the number of desirability related thoughts that participants produced when they considered the behavior that an unknown other person would enact, this relationship was absent when participants anticipated how they themselves would behave. A second series of regressions then explored the role played by feasibility concerns by examining the mediating effect of both types of thoughts, namely the magnitude of feasibility related thoughts less desirability related thoughts. The results of this analysis were consistent with my reasoning that when participants considered how they themselves would behave to the ethical dilemmas, they would adopt a very low construal level, and this exceptionally low construal level would

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greatly elevate the impact of feasibility related thoughts. Hence, when participants anticipated their own behavior to the ethical dilemmas, the increase in feasibility related thoughts that transpired dampened the influence of desirability related thoughts. As a result, the heightened feasibility related thoughts prompted participants to anticipate that they would behave ethically in response to the dilemma, and this was so irrespective of construal level prime.

Investigating the Role of the Self: Self-Presentation and Salience of the Self

The three studies I have discussed thus far found that when individuals were asked to anticipate how they themselves would respond to ethical dilemmas, they consistently maintained that they would behave ethically. Yet, this observation seems curious, given that much real world evidence suggests that people quite frequently engage in unethical actions. What might account for this seeming disparity? One possible explanation is that participants who were asked to anticipate their own behavior reported that they would behave quite ethically not because the self invoked a very low construal level as I predicted, but instead because consideration of the self stimulated their desire to present themselves favorably either to themselves or to other people. In other words, self presentation concerns might have produced the outcomes that were observed in the self as actor condition. I investigated this possibility in several of my studies and probed self presentation in assorted ways. However, analyses of these self presentation variables uncovered only one, impression management, that suggested it had a systematic effect on anticipated ethical behavior.

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Yet importantly, neither this factor, nor any of the other measures of self-presentation ever reduced the significance of the interaction between the two instantiations of construal level (i.e., social distance and either temporal or metacognitive distance) that I observed in my studies. Thus, there seems to be weak, if any, support for the view that my findings can be explained by self presentation concerns.

My final two studies, experiments 4 and 5, investigated a different and more promising explanation for the apparent discrepancy in the outcomes observed in my first three studies (i.e., studies that probed the self's anticipated behavior to hypothetical ethical dilemmas) versus how people are known to often behave in real life dilemmas of this type. This explanation centers on the extent to which the responder (i.e., oneself) who encounters such dilemmas explicitly attends to the self as (s)he considers the ethical dilemmas. Recall that in my first three studies, participants responded to hypothetical ethical scenarios where they were asked how they (i.e., the self) would behave. Given the imaginary context of these studies, participants had to devote resources to mentally envision themself in each scenario in order to make predictions about their behavior. As a result, participants who were required to predict their own behavior devoted direct and explicit attention to the fact that the self was the actor (i.e., the protagonist) in the situation. Further, this explicit salience of the self in all likelihood induced an abnormal spotlight of attention on the self and similarly fostered the adoption of an abnormally strong low construal level. In turn, this abnormally low construal level substantially increased the magnitude of feasibility related thoughts that were generated and thus strongly reduced

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expectations that the responders might behave unethically. However, note that in real life situations where ethics are at issue, individuals' attention to the self is far weaker because such individuals must decide how they will respond in real time when their attention is diverted to highly relevant focal matters, such as the task they must perform, the stimuli they receive and must assess, their prevailing goals, and so on. Indeed, in these sorts of real life situations, individuals who must determine their behavior do not devote explicit, direct, or even high attention to the self because they are preoccupied with more germane matters involving the situation at hand. And because the salience of the self is much weaker in these real world situations, other factors that may exist and affect their construal level are likely to be more influential in affecting their cognitions and behavior than the salience of the self. My final studies, experiments 4 and 5, were designed to assess this possibility.

Both studies 4 and 5 confirmed my expectation that when individuals were confronted with a real (not merely an imaginary hypothetical) opportunity to behave dishonestly, those who employed a high versus low construal level responded in a fairly dishonest, self-serving manner. Particularly informative were the findings of study 5. This study demonstrated that when individuals' explicit attention to the self was manipulated, it in fact moderated the impact of construal level on dishonest behavior. That is, this study replicated the results of study 4, showing that when participants' attentiveness to the self was low, those who employed a high versus low construal level behaved more dishonestly. But when participants engaged in explicit focus on the self prior to responding to a task that allowed for dishonest self serving

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action, variation in their construal level had no effect on their level of dishonesty. Presumably for these individuals who attended explicitly to the self, construal level was significantly reduced, which elevated the relative importance of feasibility related concerns. Apparently the impact of this latter factor counteracted the influence that variation in construal level would otherwise exert on individuals' (un)ethical behavior.

4.2 CONTRIBUTIONS TO THEORY AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Together, the results from all five studies make important contributions to both the study of ethical behavior and construal level theory. While researchers in marketing have already produced a sizable body of research on the topic of ethics (e.g., Nill and Schibrowsky [2007] listed over 400 articles on this subject in marketing journals alone), Randall et al., (1990) noted the "surprisingly limited effort directed toward theory testing" in this area. By drawing on the established theory concerning construal level, my research makes progress in filling this gap. Specifically, it informs researchers and practitioners of the important role that construal level can have on individuals' ethical decision-making. The findings clarify this role by demonstrating that alternative manipulations of construal level (i.e., temporal distance, social distance, perceptual fluency, and a construal level priming task) all exert similar effects, yet a social distance induction that draws explicit attention to the self can invoke the use of a particularly potent low construal level that can override the effects of other manipulations. The present research also makes a

contribution by illuminating the workings of the mechanism that operates and affects ethical decision-making (i.e., thoughts about desirability and feasibility aspects of the situation). Not only does this analysis enhance our understanding of the underlying process, but it adds to construal level theory itself by explicating a consequence that can occur when construal level is varied.

Construal level theory has posited that variation in construal level can alter the emphasis people place on desirability versus feasibility related concerns (see Trope and Liberman 2003 and 2010 for reviews). However, extant evidence of this has consisted largely of outcome-based inferences. That is, researchers typically have established the relationship between construal level and a desirability or feasibility emphasis by identifying outcomes thought to signify high or low desirability or feasibility, pairing these outcomes into options, and then asking individuals which option they preferred in contexts where construal level was manipulated in various ways (e.g., temporally in Liberman et al., 1998 or probabilistically in Sagristano, Trope and Liberman 2002). To date, the strongest evidence of these different emphases has come from correlational data, which have shown a relationship between construal level and desirability or feasibility related attributes (Todorov et al., 2007). Hence, prior research has never actually documented the nature of the cognitions produced by people who employ alternative construal levels, nor has it demonstrated the proposed asymmetry in the emphases of such cognitions (i.e., people do not consider engaging in a behavior until the behavior first attains some threshold level of

desirability; once this threshold has been met, however feasibility related concerns become very important).

In contrast, my research provides a far more rigorous investigation of the proposed linkage between construal level and people's emphasis on desirability or feasibility related concerns. It does this by first demonstrating a reproducible interaction between two factors that vary construal level, where one is a critical social distance factor that alters and identifies the actor of interest as either an unknown other person or the self. I then report a study that replicates this interaction, collects people's thoughts about the situation, and codes these thoughts in terms of whether they concern desirability or feasibility matters. I proceed by conducting formal tests of mediated moderation and full mediation. Tests of mediated moderation for desirability concerns provided initial evidence for the important roles played by both desirability related cognitions and the self. While variation in construal level significantly influenced the number of desirability related thoughts that participants produced when they considered the behavior that an unknown other person would enact, this effect was absent when participants anticipated how they themselves would behave; here the self was always anticipated to behave ethically. The role that feasibility concerns play in accounting for this moderating effect of low social distance (i.e., when the self is the actor) was investigated in a second set of regressions, which tested for full mediation. In these latter regressions, the *relative* magnitude of feasibility and desirability related thoughts was evaluated by creating an index where the number of desirability related thoughts was subtracted from the

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number of feasibility related thoughts. Results here revealed that this latter index that captured the relative magnitude of feasibility related thoughts fully mediated the interaction effect of construal level and social distance. Follow-up analyses offered important insight into the role of both types of thoughts. Feasibility related thoughts were significantly greater when participants anticipated their own behavior, and particularly so when such participants employed a lower construal level. When participants anticipated the behavior of an unknown other, however, desirability related cognitions were more prominent, and this was particularly so when construal level was higher.

These findings support an important assertion made by researchers of construal level theory (Todorov et. al. 2007). Although feasibility concerns are secondary to desirability matters, they play an important role when individuals employ a low construal level. Indeed, this was observed in my research. In particular, the results of my tests of mediation and mediated moderation showed that when individuals considered their own behavior, which prompts the use of a low construal level, they produced a substantial number of feasibility related thoughts that mitigated the impact of fairly subtly induced changes in construal level. However, participants who assessed the behavior of an unknown other displayed higher levels of desirability (feasibility) related thoughts and lower levels of feasibility (desirability) related thoughts when they were prompted to think at a high (low) construal level. Further, full mediation was obtained only when the effects of both types of thoughts were tested simultaneously.

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The results of my research are also noteworthy as they provide the first evidence for the unique role that explicit consideration of the self can play in strongly lowering one's construal level. When participants considered their own behavior and did so in a way that prompted explicit attention to the self (i.e., in a hypothetical context), they elicited such high levels of feasibility related thoughts that other factors which typically alter construal level (i.e., variation in temporal distance, metacognitive distance, or a construal level prime) exerted no effect on predicted self behavior. Although researchers who study construal level theory have previously proposed that feasibility related thoughts can become very important in determining the choices and behaviors of individuals (Freitas et al., 2001; Sagristano et al., 2002), my research provides the clearest empirical evidence of this.

My last two studies contribute to our understanding by examining whether consideration of the self will always exert an invariable and powerful lowering effect on construal level that essentially eliminates the impact of other factors that alter construal level. In these studies, I manipulated not only individuals' construal level using a relatively subtle induction, but I also altered whether or not individuals devoted explicit attention to the self. Importantly, each of these manipulations was introduced just before these individuals received a real-life opportunity (i.e., no longer a hypothetical one) to behave dishonestly. The results are informative. They show that relatively subtle construal level manipulations can in fact influence people's own real world behavior and do so in the manner I predicted earlier: adoption of a higher construal level will prompt less ethical (i.e., less honest)

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behavior. However, whether this will occur depends on the extent to which individuals pay explicit attention to the self. When attention to the self is explicit (which is likely to ensue in hypothetical contexts that artificially render the self salient or if an external prime inflates the salience of the self), consideration of the self will powerfully lower construal level, overpower other weaker manipulations of construal level, and generally stimulate honest or ethical behavior. But when attention to or the salience of the self is weak, as is common in real world contexts where attention is diverted to far more pressing issues, other relatively subtle factors that alter construal level will affect how honestly (i.e., ethically) individuals behave. Here, as seen before when considering others' behavior, adoption of a higher construal level will reduce one's own honesty or ethical behavior.

One reasonable question that might be asked is why prior Construal Level Theory (CLT) research has not found that making choices or judgments for the self prompted such a low construal level such that other changes in construal level (e.g., construal level primes, changes in temporal distance, etc.) were ineffective. At least two possible reasons come to mind.

First, in previous construal level research, participants have not been asked to explicitly imagine or observe themselves making a choice or behaving in a particular manner. Instead, prior research has asked participants to evaluate a product (Trope and Liberman 2000) or a message (e.g., Chandran and Menon 2004) or choose a product (e.g., Borovi, Liberman and Trope 2010) without requiring that they explicitly envision the self as the decision maker. In my research, however, attention

to the self was heightened (i.e., through a pronoun circling task, or by explicitly asking that participants envision themselves acting out the action). Based on CLT, the dedicated and explicit attention that was devoted to the self in my research reduced psychological distance, magnifying low construal level thinking. Note that this impact of explicitly considering the self prior to making a judgment is supported by research in social psychology. Specifically, the importance of the actor-observer distinction, which was first introduced by Jones and Nisbett (1972), has since generated a substantial body of evidence which shows that while actors focus more on the surrounding environment and situational factors, observers focus more on the actor performing a particular behavior (e.g., Hung and Mukhopadhyay 2012; Frank and Gilovich 1989; Jones and Nisbett 1972). This research suggests that prior research in CLT which has asked participants to make a choice or a judgment solicited responses from participants as "actors," which increased participants' focus on situational factors relevant to the choice or judgment at hand. In my research, however, by asking participants to envision (i.e., observe) themselves prior to making a judgment, the salience of the self was significantly heightened for participants by adopting the role of an observer. This increased focus on the self reduced psychological distance, such that additional changes in construal level were effectively mitigated.

A second possible explanation pertains to the nature of the dependent variables in most of the prior research on construal level theory. Of the few experiments that presented participants with hypothetical situations, the choices that

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individuals made were of little personal consequence (e.g., they evaluated skin-lotions and hotels in Kim et al., 2008; a clock radio in Trope et al., 2000; an apartment in Borovoi, et al., 2010). Yet, in real life, many of the choices that consumers face have important personal consequences (i.e., where to go for vacation, which house to buy) -- and this is also often true for choices with ethical implications (e.g., how to acquire the funds to pay for tuition, which job candidate to hire). It seems possible that the extremity of the low construal level that is induced when a social distance manipulation references the self is contingent on how personally consequential the focal item is for the individual. Recall that the gap that embodies psychological distance always takes as its point of reference the self's personal reality of the here and now. As such, it follows that items or issues that are of greater *personal* consequence at that *particular moment* are especially likely to render a particularly low construal level.

Unlike most construal level studies, the target issues in my research would seem to concern matters of immediate personal consequence to individuals if only because of their ethical implications. There is some evidence of this in my first study. In study 1, I found that participants who were more concerned with presenting a favorable image to others (i.e., impression management was high) predicted significantly less unethical behavior of themselves. While the inclusion of this impression management factor did not reduce the significance of the key interaction that I observed, this result seems to suggest that for at least some participants, the predictions they made about their own unethical behavior were of some consequence.

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Finally, this effect of impression management raises the possibility that a combination of two factors may be needed to produce a major reduction in psychological distance such that construal level will be potently low: it may be that salience of the self needs to be heightened, and the issue at hand must also be one of considerable consequence (i.e., such as providing a prediction about their own unethical behavior).

A related issue that merits additional research concerns a particular aspect of the interaction observed in study 5. As I noted before, one outcome here did not fully align with my expectations. In my first three studies I found that the same level of unethical behavior was expected in three of the four conditions; only when participants made predictions about an unknown other while relying on a high construal level did they differ, (i.e., participants predicted significantly less ethical behavior in this condition). In study 5 however, when a low construal level was induced, participants for whom the self was not salient (i.e., those who completed the article circling task) behaved significantly *more* honestly than participants for whom the self was salient (i.e., those who completed the pronoun circling task). The logic I ultimately developed in this research is that the article circling task somewhat strengthened participants' low construal level by requiring them to attend to low-level features of the stimulus (i.e., identifying the articles embedded in the short passage), subsequently reducing the level of dishonorable behavior that those participants engaged in by increasing the importance of feasibility related considerations. Future research should assess the viability of this post hoc explanation for the aberrant

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outcome. This might be done by manipulating salience of the self in another manner -- one that would not require attention to low-levels features of a stimulus.

The observation that construal level can impact and expand our understanding of how ethically people behave suggests that additional research may provide other insights into the relationship between construal level and ethical behavior. For example, variation in construal level might impact how individuals' evaluate their own moral character following a moral transgression, and perhaps this in turn could impact subsequent behavior. This proposition is based on research which has demonstrated that a low (high) construal level increases the relative number of feasibility (desirability) related thoughts. In addition, my research revealed that a relative increase (decrease) in feasibility related thoughts produces greater (reduced) awareness of the dishonest elements of an ethical dilemma, thereby reducing (increasing) the likelihood of unethical behavior. Together, these results suggest that the impact of observing oneself behaving unethically, or receiving feedback about how honestly someone has behaved, might differ systematically depending on one's construal level. For example, by increasing the salience of the unethical aspect of an ethical dilemma, a lower-construal level might increase the extent to which a person feels dishonest or immoral upon receiving feedback indicating that he or she has behaved dishonestly. Importantly, this increased feeling of dishonesty could have predictable effects on subsequent behavior: the subsequent increase in feelings of dishonesty might result in corrective action on a subsequent task in which the individual confronts an opportunity to behave dishonestly. Although admittedly this

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proposed causal chain remains speculative, it illustrates the potential ways in which construal level theory may enable us to better understand whether and when individuals will behave (un)ethically.

A further example of the importance of Construal Level Theory (CLT) to understanding moral behavior has been provided by a recent set of results that appear to conflict with my own. In that research the authors have suggested that because values are abstract representations of ideal end states (e.g., Torelli and Kaikati 2009), a higher construal level, which increases the salience of values, should enhance moral behavior (Torelli et al., 2009; Eyal et al., 2009, Eyal et al., 2008). In this research, participants were presented with actions that were unequivocally immoral (e.g., eating one's dog, incest, using ones national flag as a cleaning rag). The results revealed that a higher construal level increased both admonition of immoral behaviors and the expectation that participants would themselves behave in a more moral manner. These results seem to be in direct opposition to my own findings, which suggest that because a higher construal level increases the importance of desirability related concerns, it should lead participants to predict less ethical behavior of others and actually behave less ethically themselves.

Recently a framework has been introduced by Goodman and Malkoc (2012) that predicts these opposing results. In their research they suggest that CLT can make opposing predictions in certain circumstances and that these opposing predictions are based on two competing hypotheses. The first hypothesis, "the abstraction hypothesis," predicts that a higher construal level causes people to alter how

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information is represented as a result of attending to higher level, more abstract elements of a stimulus. According to this hypothesis, a higher construal level will cause participants to attend to values, a higher level construct, which should reduce immoral behavior. The second hypothesis, however, the "feasibility/desirability hypothesis" predicts that a higher construal level will cause participants to focus more on desirability considerations, and less on feasibility considerations, which will cause participants to behave less ethically. The authors suggest that the context of a decision or behavior can determine which of these two opposing hypotheses will more accurately predict an outcome. Specifically, Goodman and Malkoc suggest that when desirability/feasibility related elements of a behavior or choice are salient, the feasibility/desirability hypothesis will predict outcomes. Otherwise the abstraction hypothesis will provide more accurate predictions.

This theorizing accounts for the apparent inconsistency between my own research and the existing research on CLT and moral behavior. While the prior research has revealed that a high construal level elicits more moral behavior, such work concerned behaviors that appear to be clearly morally wrong (e.g., eating one's pet), which is likely to make the values associated with such immoral acts highly salient. My own research, however, presented more common everyday behaviors where judgments about how right or wrong a behavior is remains open to individuals' idiosyncratic interpretation (e.g., providing confidential information to one's employer). In other words, in the previous research participants were unlikely to automatically consider the trade-off between the desirability (e.g., the sustenance

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provided by eating one's pet) and the feasibility (e.g., killing and preparing the pet for consumption) elements of the behavior in question. Yet, in my research, I relied on ethical dilemmas, which, by definition elicit a trade-off between a beneficial outcome (i.e., desirability consideration) and a dishonorable behavior (i.e., feasibility consideration) (Murphy and Laczniak 2006). It should be noted that this automatic consideration of desirability and feasibility elements is not unique to the domain of ethics. Recently CLT has been used to study the dual role of prices as a signal of either quality (desirability) or sacrifice (feasibility), which supports that this trade-off can be elicited automatically as an integral part of the decision process (Yan and Sengupta 2011; Bornemann and Homburg 2011).

4.3 MANAGERIAL CONTRIBUTIONS AND ADDITIONAL FUTURE RESEARCH

My research shows that consumers who rely on higher level thinking expect others to behave less ethically. This has important implications for marketing practitioners. For example, prior research has found that bad behavior (e.g., a rude customer service agent) is evaluated less harshly when such behavior is expected (Solomon et al., 1985). Recall that my own research reveals that a high construal level can increase the level of unethical behavior that is expected of others. Thus, prior research, together with the results of my work, suggest that corporations that are represented in memory at a higher, more abstract level may be criticized less harshly if they are involved in an ethical transgression because the higher construal level

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elicited by the brand increases the expectation of ethical transgressions (e.g., thinking of Coca Cola as an internationally recognized icon versus as an Atlanta-based company that makes soda may exemplify company representation at a higher construal level; Aggarwal and Law 2005; Monga and Roedder John 2010). Consumers need to be aware of this relationship between construal level and expectations of unethical behavior. Otherwise organizations could take advantage of this relationship by, for example, using more abstract language to communicate with consumers following an ethical indiscretion.

A second area in which my findings would seem to have interesting implications concerns negotiations. Recall that my research revealed that when individuals assessed the ethical behavior of others, a higher construal level significantly increased the expectation of unethical behavior. Now, consider a negotiations context where individuals can address the issues at hand in either a cooperative or adversarial manner. In this situation, the actor must consider simultaneously the actions that the self will take and those that another individual will take. A number of unanswered questions emerge here. Will the construal level of one person involved in the negotiations affect his or her perceptions of how ethically the other person is likely to behave? If so, will these expectations about the latter person's behavior influence how willing the first person is to behave unethically? Suppose that person one involved in a negotiation is given relevant data that is expressed in terms of specific numbers (i.e., a low construal level) versus in either percentages or pie charts (i.e., presumably a higher construal level). Could the

presentation format of the data alter this person's construal level and thereby modify his or her expectations about how the opposing person will behave? Might this expectation influence person one's own behavior?

Currently, I am exploring some of these questions by investigating how construal level induced changes in the anticipated unethical behavior of a rival competitor may affect individuals' own willingness to behave unethically. For example, as part of an in-class activity during the final week of class, students in a sales management course first completed a task that elicited either relatively high or low level thinking. Next, they read about a situation in which they had to decide whether to behave unethically in order to secure a large sale from an important client. Importantly, however, either before or after the students made a prediction about their own behavior, they were asked to predict how likely it was that the rival competitor would behave unethically. I expect that this study will shed light on whether the impact of construal level on predictions about other people's unethical behavior can influence an individual's own willingness to behave unethically.

While the preceding discussion illustrates some practical implications of my research for individuals in dyadic relationships (i.e., the interaction of two individuals), my research also has important implications for ethical behavior more generally. Specifically, my work reveals that an actor's ethical judgments and behaviors vary systematically with changes in construal level. This is an important finding because prior research has revealed that construal level can be influenced by a number of factors that are common elements of the consumer's or marketing

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practitioner's daily life. Indeed, a number of largely atheoretical findings reported in

the extant literature on marketing ethics support the effect of some of these everyday

factors on ethical behavior, which I suspect are at least partly the result of how these

factors influence individuals' construal levels. For example, studies by Chonko et al.,

(1985) and Delaney et al., (1992) found that individuals who held positions that were

low (versus high) in an organization's hierarchy and therefore presumably oversaw

relatively concrete, low construal level matters were more cognizant of ethical

problems within the company. Another study by Schweitzer and Hsee (2002) found

that individuals were less honest in a negotiation when they possessed relatively

uncertain information. Note that degree of certainty alters the probabilistic dimension

of psychological distance, and thus less certainty prompts the use of a higher

construal level (Todorov et al., 2007). Although these and other existing findings are

open to alternative explanations, their consistency with my theorizing is striking.

While many such factors (e.g., position within an organization's hierarchy,

and level of certainty of information in a negotiation) have previously been identified

as having an influence on ethical behavior, it is important to note that virtually all of

these factors are quite fixed; that is, they are not easily controlled by an external agent

like a company or marketer (e.g., organization size, Ford et al., 1994; position within

an organization, Delaney et al., 1992; Machiavellianism, Kelley, Ferrell and Skinner

1990; gender, Betz et al., 1989). In contrast, my research contributes to the study of

ethics by introducing a highly malleable factor (i.e., construal level) that influences

ethical behavior. A great deal of research has established both alternative ways and

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the ease with which construal level can be varied (for reviews see Trope and

Liberman 2003 and 2010). As a result, my research suggests that ethical behavior can

be influenced by changing, say, the temporal framing of the decisions that consumers

or managers face (e.g., highlighting the present as opposed to future aspects of a

choice should reduce unethical decisions; e.g., Chandran and Menon 2004), or the

social distance that the decision-maker perceives (e.g., reducing (increasing)

perceived differences (similarities) between the decisions maker and the other party;

e.g., Liviatan, Trope and Liberman 2008). Similarly, more recent research has

revealed that physical distance (e.g., Henderson 2010) and the language used in

verbal and written communications also can influence construal level (e.g., Stephan,

Liberman and Trope 2010).

The preceding examples clearly illustrate the importance of construal level as

it affects ethical behavior in the real world. For instance, consider the fact that high

level managers are often encouraged to employ higher construal level thinking (i.e.,

to focus on more global or bigger picture considerations) when faced with difficult

decisions (e.g., CNN, August 30, 2012). Presumably high construal level thinking is

deemed appropriate for such managers because the decisions they must make

simultaneously involve multiple actors, multiple issues, and multiple consequences.

My research suggests that this advice to adopt a high construal level may have

negative consequences for society when the decisions that must be made involve an

ethical dilemma. This follows because managers who employ a higher construal level

in their decision-making may be more influenced by the desirable aspects of the

situation (e.g., increasing sales or profits) than the feasibility related unethical actions that may constitute the means employed (e.g., using deceptive advertising). While numerous factors could have contributed to the recent increase in corporate ethical transgressions, my research highlights the potentially important role that high level thinking may have played.

In recent years, marketers and researchers have become more cognizant of why investigating ethics is important and what particular gaps in our knowledge act as critical impediments to enhancing our understanding (Nill et al., 2007). My research not only explores this important area of study, but it also makes crucial headway in tackling some troubling gaps in our knowledge. In particular, my research addresses the dearth of theory-driven inquiry in research that explores (un)ethical behavior. It does this by applying insights offered by construal level theory, and in the process it adds to construal level theory by documenting and embellishing our understanding of the asymmetric nature of desirability and feasibility related concerns. In addition, my work brings to light an important, malleable, and potentially controllable factor that can influence ethical behavior in real-world settings, namely construal level. By being mindful of its impact and the assorted variables that can be used to alter it, consumers and managers can attempt to regulate or manage their environments so as to increase ethical behavior. My hope is that the research I report in this dissertation will provide managers and consumers with a practical tool that will encourage all players in consumption and business contexts to behave more ethically.

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TABLE 1

EXPERIMENT 1:
JUDGMENTS OF ETHICALNESS FOR EACH BEHAVIOR

Judgments of Behavior (1 = Fine, 9 = Wrong)

Scenario	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Dev.
Headset Return	1	9	6.97	1.81
TV Discount	1	9	5.43	2.47
Extra Shirt	1	9	4.26	2.56
Confidential Info	1	9	7.33	1.71
Pollution	1	9	7.57	1.73
Frequent Flier	1	9	5.37	2.46
Taking Markers	1	9	4.14	2.27
Forgot Lunch	1	9	6.38	2.00
Friend's Party	1	9	4.23	2.19

FIGURE 1

**EXPERIMENT 1: EFFECT OF SOCIAL AND TEMPORAL DISTANCE
ON ANTICIPATED UNETHICAL BEHAVIOR**
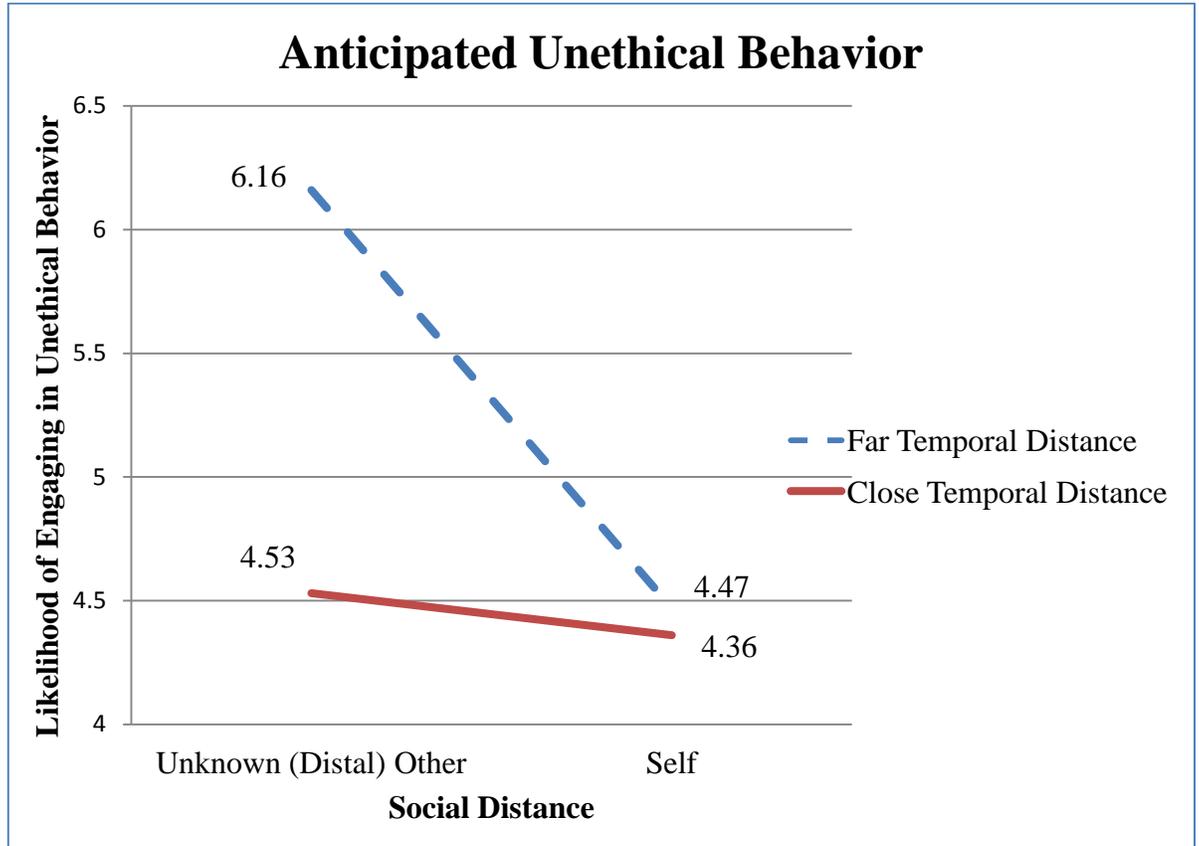
FIGURE 2

EXPERIMENT 2: EFFECT OF SOCIAL DISTANCE AND PERCEPTUAL FLUENCY ON ANTICIPATED UNETHICAL BEHAVIOR

Anticipated Unethical Behavior
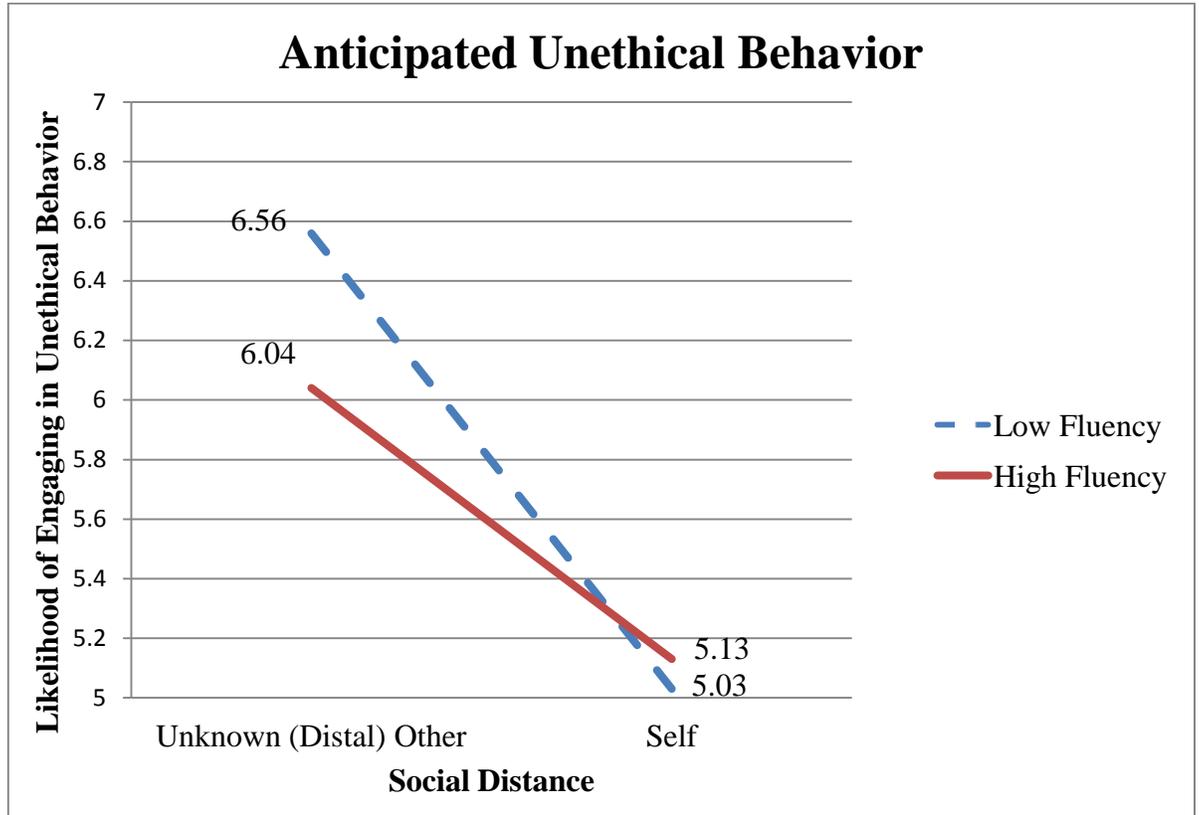
FIGURE 3

**EXPERIMENT 3: EFFECT OF SOCIAL DISTANCE AND CONSTRUAL
LEVEL PRIME ON THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE NUMBERS OF
FEASIBILITY AND DESIRABILITY RELATED THOUGHTS**

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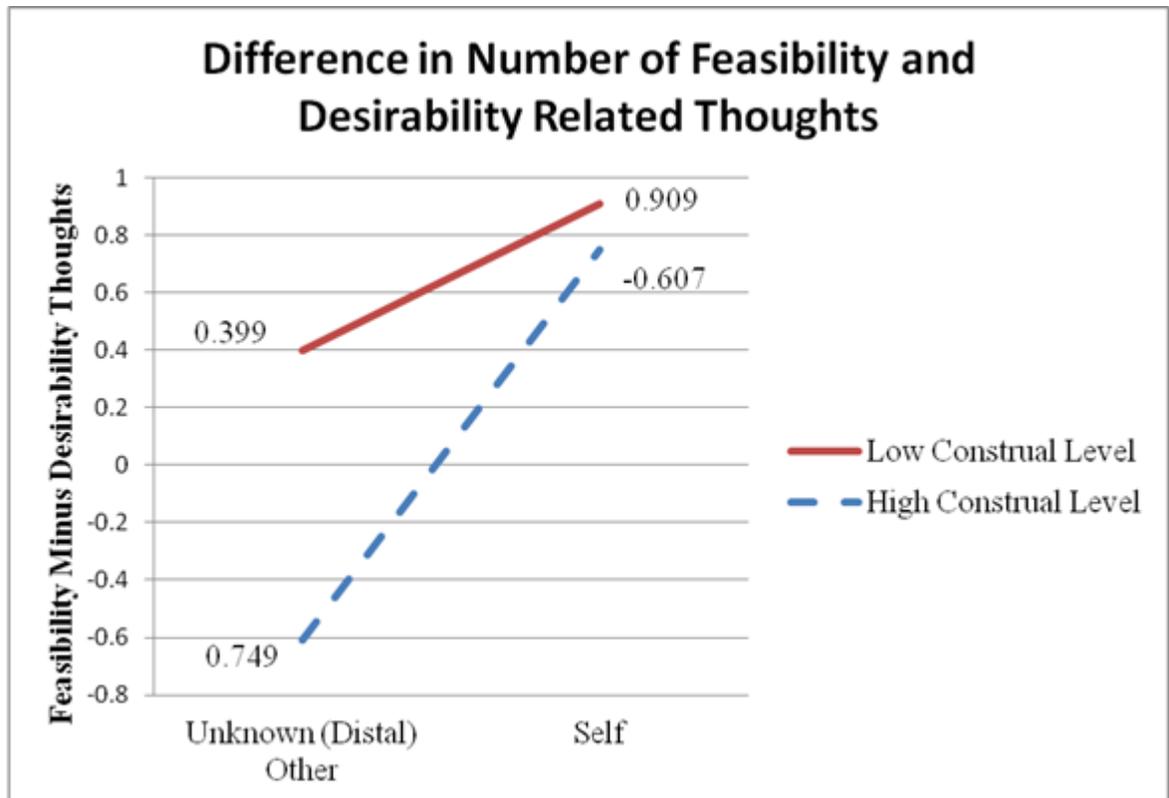
FIGURE 4

EXPERIMENT 4: SAMPLE STIMULUS USED IN PERCEPTUAL TASK
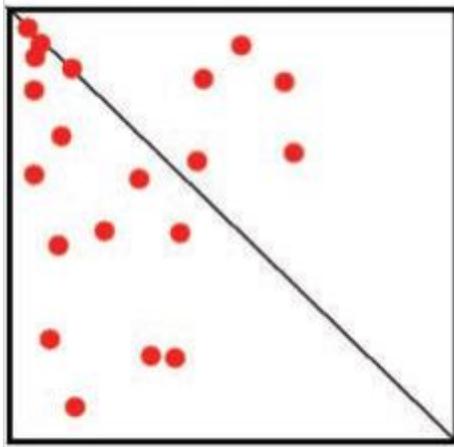
More on left   More on right

FIGURE 5

EXPERIMENT 5: EFFECT OF CONSTRUAL LEVEL AND SALIENCE OF (ATTENTION TO) THE SELF ON DISHONEST BEHAVIOR
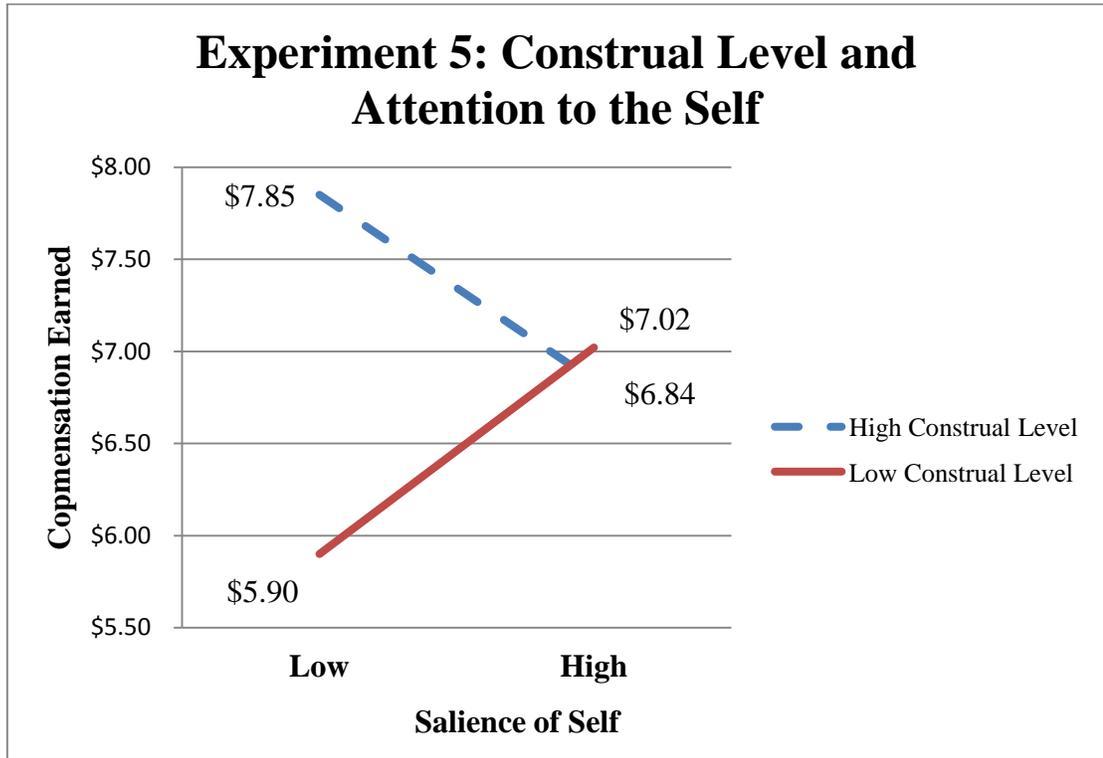
FIGURE 6

EXPERIMENT 5: SPOTLIGHT ANALYSIS OF CONSCIENTIOUSNESS ON CONSTRUAL LEVEL AND SALIENCE OF (ATTENTION TO) THE SELF

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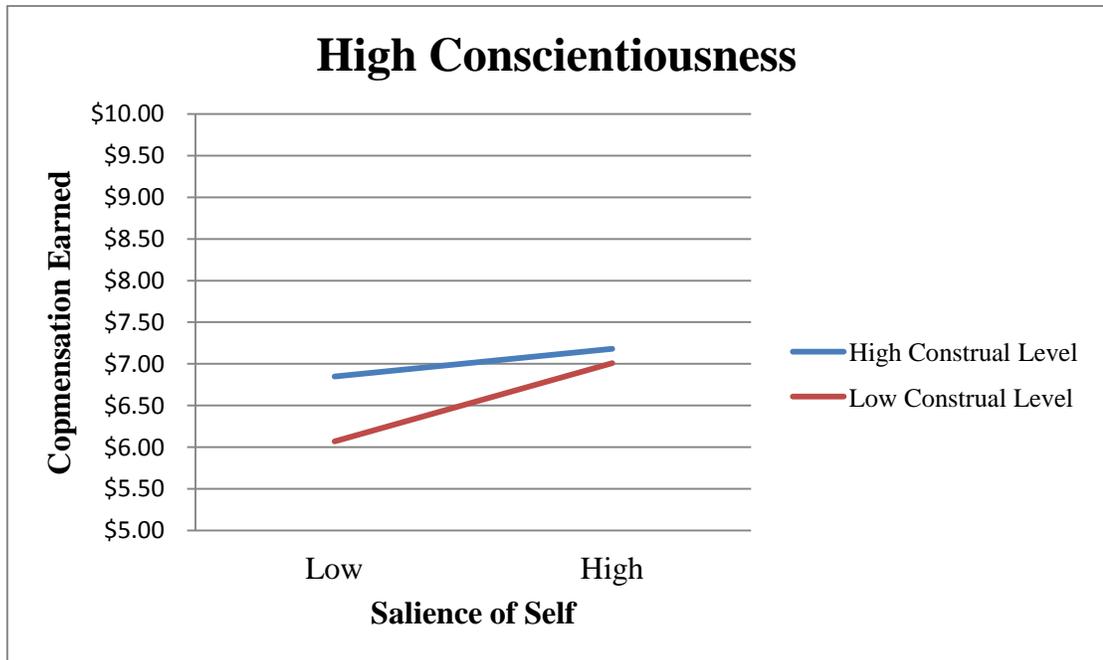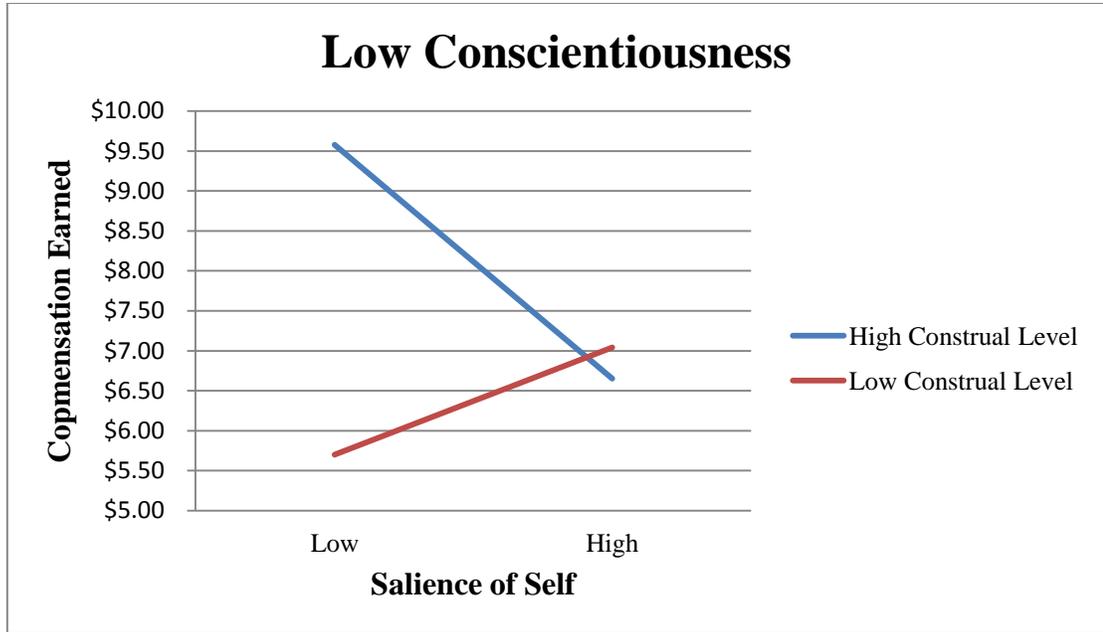
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APPENDIX A

SCENARIOS USED IN STUDY 3

Jeri has / You have a frequent flier ticket that is non-transferable. A friend has offered to buy the ticket from *Jeri* / you for cash. Despite the fact that there is no question that the ticket is non-transferable, how likely is it that *Jeri* / you will sell the ticket?

Some time ago *Chris* / you bought a headset for some new voice-recognition software, but it isn't working. *Chris* / You lost the receipt but *has* / have been told that it's possible to get a refund without a receipt at a small nearby computer store, even though the headset wasn't purchased there. How likely *is Chris* / are you to return the product for a refund at the nearby computer store?

Leslie / You intend*(s)* to purchase a television set. To get a better deal, *Leslie* / you could tell the salesperson that another retailer is selling the same TV at a much cheaper price. In such cases, the word is that the retailer always matches the lower price without ever checking. How likely is it that *Leslie* / you will tell the salesperson that the same television is selling for a cheaper price at another store?

After a meeting, *JD's* / your new boss asked for some confidential information about *JD's* / your previous employer. What are the chances that *JD* / you will provide the boss with this information?

At work, a high ranking manager asked *Sam* / you to leave a vent open that will release smoke pollution in the air late at night when no one can see it. What is the likelihood that *Sam* / you will comply with this request?

Jessie has / You have an important school project that has yet to be completed, but the project requires using a special type of marker. Aware that the supply room at work has some of these markers, how likely is it that *Jessie* / you will go to the supply room and bring the markers home for this purpose?

Dominique was / You were invited to a dinner party at a friend's house. The friend mentioned that his brother, who is intolerable to be around, will be there. The brother's presence will ensure that *Dominique* / you won't enjoy the party. However, *Dominique's* your friend is very fond of his brother, which makes it extremely uncomfortable to tell your friend the truth. Two options seem possible: You could either tell the friend the truth about his brother or lie by claiming to be ill on the night of the party. How likely is it that *Dominique* / you will claim to be ill on the night of the party?

Shelby is / You are hungry but forgot to bring lunch to work. There are no restaurants, vending machines, or other means of getting something to eat in the area. A co-worker has about a week's worth of snacks in the fridge, but she always refuses to share and no doubt will say no if asked for food. So *Shelby is* / you are debating whether or not to simply take a snack and not tell anyone. How likely *is Shelby* / are you to take a snack from the co-worker's stash?

Jami / You discovered that the mailman delivered a package that contains an unordered sweater along with some other items that were ordered. The bill includes no charge for the extra item, which was added by mistake. *Jami* / You tried on the sweater and it was a perfect match—perfect in coloring, style, and fit! *Jami* / You could easily return the sweater since some other items didn't work out and need to be returned anyway. Still the temptation to keep it is high. What is the likelihood that *Jami* / you will say nothing and keep the sweater?

APPENDIX B

BALANCED INVENTORY OF DESIRABLE RESPONDING:
SOCIAL DESIRABILITY SCALE ITEMS

Using the scale below as a guide, write a number beside each statement to indicate how much you agree with it.

1 ---------------2 -------------- 3 -------------- 4 -------------- 5 -------------- 6 --------------7

Not True   Somewhat True   Very True

1. My first impressions of people usually turn out to be right
2. *It would be hard for me to break any of my bad habits
3. I don't care to know what other people really think of me
4. * I have not always been honest with myself
5. I always know why I like things
6. * When my emotions are aroused, it biases my thinking
7. Once I've made up my mind, other people can seldom change my opinion
8. * I am not a safe driver when I exceed the speed limit
9. I am fully in control of my own fate
10. * It's hard for me to shut off a disturbing thought
11. I never regret my decisions
12. * I sometimes lose out on things because I can't make up my mind soon enough
13. The reason I vote is because my vote can make a difference
14. * My parents were not always fair when they punished me
15. I am a completely rationally person
16. * I rarely appreciate criticism
17. I am very confident of my judgments
18. * I have sometimes doubted my ability as a lover
19. It's all right with me if some people happen to dislike me
20. * I don't' always know the reasons why I do the things I do

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APPENDIX C

BALANCED INVENTORY OF DESIRABLE RESPONDING: IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT SCALE ITEMS

Using the scale below as a guide, write a number beside each statement to indicate how much you agree with it.

1 --------------2 -------------- 3 -------------- 4 -------------- 5 -------------- 6 --------------7

Not True   Somewhat True   Very True

1. * I sometimes tell lies if I have to
2. I never cover up my mistakes
3. * There have been occasions when I have taken advantage of someone
4. I never swear
5. * I sometimes try to get even rather than forgive and forget
6. I always obey laws, even if I'm unlikely to get caught
7. * I have said something bad about a friend behind his or her back
8. When I hear people talking privately, I avoid listening
9. * I have received too much change from a salesperson without telling him or her
10. I always declare everything at customs
11. * When I was young I sometimes stole things
12. I have never dropped litter on the street
13. * I sometimes drive faster than the speed limit
14. I never read sexy books or magazines
15. * I have done things that I don't tell other people about
16. I never take things that don't' belong to me
17. * I have taken sick-leave from work or school even though I wasn't really sick
18. I have never damaged a library book or store merchandise without reporting it
19. * I have some pretty awful habits
20. I don't gossip about other people's business

* Items keyed in the "False" (negative direction

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13-ITEM SELF-MONITORING SCALE

This page contains a series of statements that people might use to describe themselves. Please read each statement and assess the degree to which it describes you. Then, using the scale below each item, select the description that best reflects your level of (dis)agreement with the assertion.

Certainly always false	Generally false	Somewhat false, but with exceptions	somewhat true, but with exceptions	Generally true	Certainly always true
1	2	3	4	5	6

1. In social situations, I have the ability to alter my behavior if I feel that something else is called for.
2. I have the ability to control the way I come across to people, depending on the impression I wish to give them.
3. When I feel that the image I am portraying isn't working, I can readily change it to something that does.
4. *I have trouble changing my behavior to suit different people and different situations.
5. I have found that I can adjust my behavior to meet the requirements of any situation I find myself in.
6. *Even when it might be to my advantage, I have difficulty putting up a good front.
7. Once I know what the situation calls for, it's easy for me to regulate my actions accordingly, Sensitivity to expressive behavior of others.
8. I am often able to read people's true emotions correctly through their eyes.
9. In conversations, I am sensitive to even the slightest change in the facial expression of the person I'm conversing with.
10. My powers of intuition are quite good when it conies to understanding others' emotions and motives.
11. I can usually tell when others consider a joke to be in bad taste, even though they may laugh convincingly.
12. I can usually tell when I've said something inappropriate by reading it in the listener's eyes.
13. If someone is lying to me, I usually know it at once from that person's manner of expression.

SOCIAL INTEREST SCALE

Below are a number of pairs of personal characteristics or traits. For each pair, underline the trait which you value more highly. In making each choice, ask yourself which of the traits in that pair you would rather possess as one of your own characteristics. For example, the first pair is "imaginative – rational." If you had to make a choice, which would you rather be? Select your choice in each pair.
Some of the traits will appear twice, but always in combination with a different trait. No pairs will be repeated.

I would rather be…
imaginative – rational
<u>helpful</u> – quick witted
neat – <u>sympathetic</u>
level-headed – efficient
intelligent – <u>considerate</u>
self-reliant – ambitious
<u>respectful</u> – original
creative – sensible
<u>generous</u> – individualistic
responsible – original
capable – <u>tolerant</u>
<u>trustworthy</u> – wise
neat – logical
<u>forgiving</u> – gentle
efficient – <u>respectful</u>
practical – self-confident
capable – independent
alert – <u>cooperative</u>
imaginative – <u>helpful</u>
realistic – <u>moral</u>
<u>considerate</u> – wise
<u>sympathetic</u> – individualistic
ambitious – <u>patient</u>
reasonable – quick-witted

Keyed items are underlined. The social interest score consists of the number of underlined characteristics chosen by the individual.

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS SCALE

Private self-consciousness sub-scale
 I'm always trying to figure myself out

*Generally, I'm not very aware of myself

I reflect about myself a lot

I'm often the subject of my own fantasies

*I never scrutinize myself

I'm generally attentive to my inner feelings

I'm constantly examining my motives

I sometimes have the feeling that I'm off somewhere watching myself

I'm alert to changes in my mood

I'm aware of the way my mind works when I work through a problem

Public self-consciousness sub-scale
I'm concerned about my style of doing things

I'm concerned about the way I present myself

I'm self-conscious about the way I look

I usually worry about making a good impression

One of the last things I do before I leave my house is look in the mirror

I'm concerned about what other people think of me

I'm usually aware of my appearance

item was reversed for scoring.
Each item is rated on a scale of 0 (extremely uncharacteristic) to 4 (extremely characteristic).

SCENARIOS USED IN STUDY 3

After a meeting, JD new boss asked for some confidential information about JD's previous employer. What are the chances that JD will provide the boss with this information?

At work, a high ranking manager asked Sam to leave a vent open that will release smoke pollution in the air late at night when no one can see it. What is the likelihood that Sam will comply with this request?

Jessie has an important school project that has yet to be completed, but the project requires using a special type of marker. Aware that the supply room at work has some of these markers, how likely is it that Jessie will go to the supply room and bring the markers home for this purpose?

APPENDIX H

STUDY 3: OPEN RESPONSE INSTRUCTIONS

We are also interested in all the thoughts that went through your mind as you considered the preceding question about JD's response to the boss's request. In the space below, please write down every thought, consideration, feeling, idea, or opinion that went through your mind as you considered how likely it is that JD would provide the requested information. Note that it is important that you try to *be as complete as possible* in recording your thoughts, even though they may have passed through your mind only momentarily. Of course at the same time, be sure you **do not record new thoughts** that may occur to you now but that you did not truly think of at the time you rendered your response.

STUDY 5: PRONOUN/ARTICLE TASK

High Salience of the Self Condition: Pronoun Task

A PRONOUN is a word that replaces a noun in a sentence. Examples include words like "he," "she," and "I," which make sentences less cumbersome or repetitive. Pronouns can be singular (e.g., he, me, I), possessive (e.g., his, my, mine) or plural (e.g., our, their, them). As you read the following paragraph, please circle all of the PRONOUNS that you find in the paragraph. Please be as thorough as possible.

Paragraph 1

I often go to the city by myself. It surprises me how my mind fully engages once I see the skyscrapers come into view. I peer around street corners, myself breathing in the gritty odors around me. My ears hear faint music filling the air and street. Yet, I miss no sight. I roam crowded markets, and I see myself look at me as I glare at glass buildings. As night falls, I browse chatty sidewalk vendors, my hand touches the wares. When finally I must leave, I check my calendar to set a date when I can return. The city belongs to me.

Paragraph 2

I feel my well-being surge as I mount my bicycle. Me, a veteran biker of parkways, back roads, and trails. I begin by slipping into a tunnel that guides my journey. Soon I speed out the distant opening that gradually enlarges into brilliant sunlight. It causes me to squint and makes my mind come alive. Soon I see myself coming upon a skater. The voice shouting, "passing on left" is mine. I turn and catch the skater looking at me, trying to match my speed. Whizzing by are familiar sights embossed in my memory. I glimpse my mottled shadow mimicking my every move in a nearby stream. A pothole catches me by surprise, and I feel myself wobble. But, nothing fazes me. I quickly regain my balance, reestablish my rhythm, and pick up the daydream I was enjoying right where I left off.

Control Condition: Article Task

An ARTICLE is a part of speech that introduces or identifies a noun. Examples include the words "a," "an," and "the." As you read the following paragraph, please circle all of the ARTICLES (the words: a, an, the) that you find in the paragraph. Please be as thorough as possible.

Paragraph 1

A decade ago, people resisted separating the glasses, the cans, and the paper out of garbage. What a hassle. Today we know that the world's resources are limited. It's time to bring the same consciousness to a growing medical crisis: the loss of antibiotic effectiveness against common bacterial illnesses. A person catches a cold that turns into a sinus infection. The doctor treats him with antibiotics, but the bacteria are resistant to all of them. The infection enters the person's bloodstream– a condition known as septicemia. Or a person can have a bacterial disease, like an ear or a prostate infection. The antibiotics crisis is real.

Paragraph 1

Gardening is a creative and an engaging activity. It absorbs the gardener just as painting absorbs a painter. However, it also offers an assortment of added benefits. It can spur the imagination, keep a body fit, and enliven the mind. Even a child gains stimulation and pleasure from the color, shape, and the smell of a well tended garden. A garden is the home of many a species of butterflies, which lend charm to the atmosphere of the area. Birds too may grace a garden, making it a rainbow of colors or an oasis of relaxation. The melodic songs of a family of birds captivate passers-by, offering them an inviting escape from daily concerns. The garden lover tends to every plant as a child. A gardener fertilizes and waters the growing sprouts, always protecting them from a hot sun or an intruding animal.