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The Moderating Effect of Religiosity on the Relation Between Moral Intensity and Moral Awareness

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The ethical decision making model proposed by Rest (1986), includes recognition or awareness of moral content in a situation, judgment as to appropriate moral response, establishment of behavioral intentions, and implementation of moral behavior. This model has been further developed over the years by many researchers who have added details to help explain individual differences in outcomes of the process (see Jones, 1991). One refinement to Rest's model is the addition to one aspect of the moral issue itself, that of moral intensity. Moral intensity is proposed to influence each step in the ethical decision making process (Jones, 1991). The individual confronted with a moral decision is referred to as the moral agent. Characteristics of the moral agent have also been considered in the moral decision making process (O'Fallon & Butterfield, 2005). This study focuses on one aspect of moral intensity, harm to others, and the moderating influence of one moral agent characteristic, religiosity, on moral awareness – the first step in the ethical decision making process (see Figure 1). Using social cognition theory as a basis, we argue that greater religiosity would be expected to influence the vividness, salience, and accessibility of the moral content in a situation, both from a focus on social norms, and in the sensitivity towards negative outcomes impacting others.

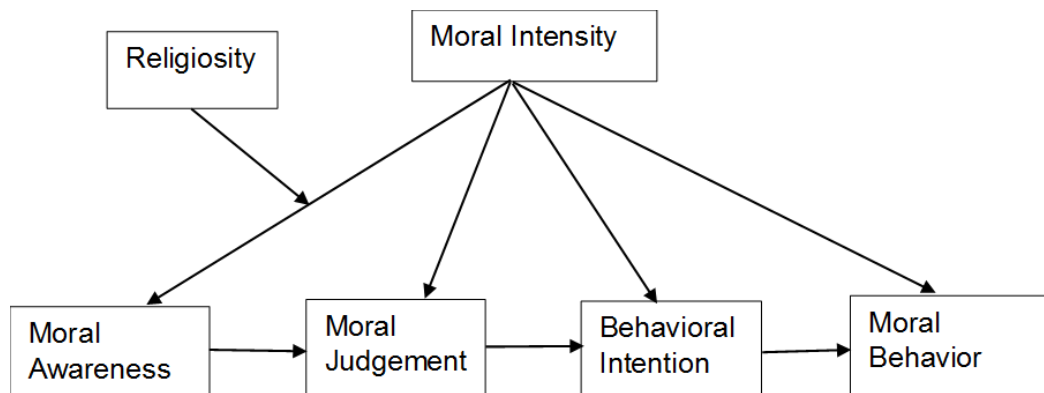


Figure 1. Proposed model of the moderating effect of religiosity on the relation between moral intensity and moral awareness

Although there is a growing acceptance of the influence of religiosity on attitudes and behaviors (Byrne, Morton, & Dahling, 2011), the role of religiosity on the moral awareness of the moral agent has not been fully studied. Hence, this study attempts to better explain the importance of religiosity in the initial stages of the moral decision making process. By studying a single moral agent characteristic,

we may gain a deeper insight into the role of religiosity as a possible ethical predisposition in the moral decision making process. Additionally, since research suggests that religiosity is multifaceted (Tsang & McCullough, 2003), we respond by studying different categories and degrees of religiosity. We propose that individual differences in religiosity moderate the relation between moral intensity and moral awareness, such that, depending upon individual differences in religiosity, moral awareness is triggered at lower levels of moral intensity (see Figure 1). The results of this study add to the understanding of how characteristics of the moral issue interact with characteristics of the moral agent to impact moral awareness.

Moral Awareness

Moral awareness is the initial step in most multistage moral decision making models, Rest's model included, in establishing the basis for use of subsequent steps in the process. Moral awareness includes the recognition of moral content in an issue or situation (Butterfield, Trevino, & Weaver, 2000; Jones, 1991; Reynolds, 2006). Social cognition theory has been used as a theoretical basis for moral awareness (Butterfield et al., 2000). In the initial step of the social-cognitive process, the attention of the perceiver focuses on external information for encoding. Attention is a selective process; not all external information goes through the encoding process. That is, some information will receive more attention from the moral agent than others. Qualities of information that influence attention are vividness, salience, and accessibility. Information that is stimulating, unique, or relevant to the perceiver is more likely to receive attention. Information that fits into frequently or recently stimulated categories of the perceiver is also more likely to receive attention. The moral content in an issue can be considered information that is more or less likely to gain the attention of the one confronted with a moral issue. Differences in attention are based on individual characteristics and experiences and the characteristics of the issue itself (Butterfield et al., 2000; Reynolds, 2006). Thus, moral awareness may be triggered more readily in some individuals depending on the situation and their individual characteristics and/or experiences. The term moral sensitivity has been used to describe the ability of the individual to achieve moral awareness (Reynolds, 2008). Thus, moral awareness is an outcome of the ability to be morally sensitive (Sparks, 2015).

Moral Intensity

The term moral intensity is used to describe the moral issue itself. Characteristics of the intensity of a moral issue include six dimensions: 1) extent of harm caused, 2) the strength of the social norm violated, 3) likelihood that an outcome might be

realized, 4) the time frame associated with the moral issue, 5) proximity or nearness of the issue to the individual, and 6) the concentration of the potential effect (Jones, 1991). Greater levels of harm and/or violation of social norms would be perceived as enhancements to vividness and salience (components of social cognition theory) of the moral content of an issue. The perception of increased moral intensity would, in turn, increase the potential for moral awareness (Butterfield et al., 2000; Reynolds, 2006). As such, a moral issue that causes severe and immediate harm to someone close to us would be considered as having higher moral intensity when compared to a moral issue that causes minor harm sometime in the future to some distant individual we do not know. Likewise, a moral issue with only potential harm has a lower moral intensity than one that causes definite harm. Jones (1991) proposed that the intensity of the moral issue itself could influence the individual at each step in the decision making process. Hence, moral issues with higher levels of moral intensity are more likely to be recognized and judged as having moral content (i.e. moral awareness), and these judgments are more likely to lead to moral behavioral intent and actual moral behavior. In support of this theory are the findings from Sparks (2015) who found that respondents displayed greater levels of moral sensitivity (a component of moral awareness) with high moral intensity scenarios. In addition, Church, Gaa, Nainar, and Shehata (2005) found that the moral intensity of the ethical issue was a significant factor in the moral behavior of subjects.

Although Jones (1991) postulated six facets of moral intensity, research has not consistently supported the importance of all six independent dimensions of intensity (Reynolds, 2006; Tsalikis, Seaton, & Shepherd, 2008). Tsalikis et al. (2008) manipulated all six dimensions of intensity, but found that probability, harm, and time accounted for 75% of the variance in moral intensity. The remaining three dimensions combined only accounting for the remaining 25%. Similarly, Harrington (1997) varied seriousness of consequences and found that social consensus followed. Harrington (1997) suggests that seriousness of consequences and social consensus may be so highly related that it may not be possible to study each in isolation of the other.

Though there are mixed views of the exact facets of moral intensity, research and theory does support the notion that moral awareness is greater at higher levels of moral intensity. To confirm these findings and provide a foundation for hypotheses to come, we propose the following hypothesis.

H1: Moral awareness will be greater for those issues with higher levels of moral intensity.

Reynolds (2006) suggested that individual differences might be a factor in the recognition or awareness of a moral issue. Thus, depending upon the individual

characteristics of the moral agent, he/she may be more or less likely to recognize a moral issue, i.e. have moral awareness when facing an ethical issue. Among characteristics of the moral agent influencing moral awareness are the aspects representing personal moral philosophies (Singhapakdi, Vitell, & Franke, 1999), ethical predispositions (Reynolds, 2006), or related categories, including value systems, belief systems, and religion (Smith, DeBode, & Walker, 2013). In this study, we focus only on the religious characteristics of the moral agent. By studying religiosity in isolation, it is our hope that we will be able to gain a deeper insight into the role of religiosity in both moral awareness and ultimately in the moral decision making process.

Religiosity

Morality is often deeply rooted in religious beliefs (Jackall, 1988). Standards of right and wrong are codified from sources considered authoritative by religious groups, such as scriptures or religious leaders, providing a framework for behavioral norms. One example is *The Golden Rule*, which is the general belief that we should treat others the way we would want to be treated. In cultures where a particular religion has been historically dominant, religious influences are integrated throughout society, becoming a basis for secular laws and ethical standards. This is seen with the influence of the Bible and Judeo-Christian traditions in the US and other western civilizations (Allport, 1960; Parboteeah, Hoegl, & Cullen, 2008).

Symbolic interactionism has been used as a theoretical basis for looking at the relation between religion, specifically religious self-identity, and ethical/moral judgment of the moral agent. Symbolic interactionism proposes that the development of self-identity is significantly influenced by the relationship roles assumed by individuals, with corresponding internalized expectations and norms (Walker, Smither, & DeBode, 2012; Weaver & Agle, 2002). From the symbolic interactionism perspective, individuals placing priority on religious self-identity would be more inclined to internalize the social norms/expectations from their religious affiliations and groups of fellow believers with whom they are associated (see Hardy, Walker, Rackham, & Olsen, 2012). A priority on religious self-identity is expected to influence behavior (Wilkes, Burnett, & Howell, 1986). For example, higher degrees of religiosity have been tied to higher ethical attitudes (Conroy & Emerson, 2004; see also Hardy, Zhang, Skalski, Melling, & Brinton, 2014). O'Fallon and Butterfield's (2005) review of ethical decision-making studies from business journals generally found religiosity to be positively related to moral awareness, moral judgment, and moral intentions. In a review of several studies, McDaniel and Burnett (1990) identified behavioral and attitudinal differences in people based on differing levels of religious commitment, in that stronger levels of

religious commitment were related to stronger ethical intentions. However, they also found that other empirical studies have shown mixed results in the relation between religiosity and moral decision-making, some finding a significant relation and others not. Methodology and conceptualization may account for much of this variation (Parboteeah, et al., 2008; Weaver & Agle, 2002), which furthers the need for continued study. One purpose of this study is to explore the importance of religiosity as a possible ethical predisposition in the moral decision making process. It could also be that the relation is more complex and that the impact of religiosity may come earlier in the moral decision making model than considered by prior study. We suggest that religiosity may be an important factor in the relation between moral intensity and moral awareness. It may be that high levels of religiosity strengthen one's sensitivity to moral issues, thus increasing the cognizance that the situation contains moral content. This is consistent with social cognition theory that postulates that information that fits into frequently stimulated categories of the perceiver is also more likely to receive attention (Butterfield et al., 2000). It is our intention to add to the understanding of how moral intensity characteristics of the moral issue interact with religious characteristics of the moral agent to impact moral awareness.

Definitions of religiosity have varied in social scientific study, but attempts at comprehensive definitions generally include cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components. A religiosity dimension incorporates the extent of belief in, and commitment to, a transcendent power, as expressed in attitudes, actions, and affiliations (Barnett, Bass, & Brown, 1996). Perhaps the most commonly used categorization in studies of religiosity includes two categories of religious orientation: extrinsic and intrinsic religiosity. Allport and Ross (1967) summarized these categories by asserting that those whose religious orientation is extrinsic can be said to *use* their religion, in contrast to the intrinsically oriented who *live* their religion. In subsequent studies, the extrinsic category was further subdivided into personally oriented extrinsic and socially oriented extrinsic (Gorsuch & McPherson, 1989). Extrinsic religiosity identifies those who see religion as a means to pursue other personal interests, such as status, socialization, or who view religion as a means to ease stress or burdens. For example, gathering and socializing with friends before, during, or after religious services is very important for individuals scoring high on extrinsic religiosity. Intrinsic religiosity identifies those for whom religion is their ultimate end, providing overall purpose and guidance for their lives (Tsang & McCullough, 2003).

In deciding to use intrinsic religious orientation as their indicator of religiosity, Schneider, Krieger, and Bayraktar (2011) pointed to evidence that suggested ethical conviction is positively related to intrinsic religious orientation in consumers, but does not show a significant relation to extrinsic religious orientation. This is consistent with Wiebe and Fleck (1980), whose findings

suggested that the intrinsically religious tended to exhibit more concern for standards of morality when compared to those who are nonreligious or who are extrinsically religious. Butterfield et al. (2000) argue that the social norms component may also reflect characteristics of the moral agent who may adapt to specific social expectations. Those with a religious self-identity could be expected to have a higher frequency of stimulation of moral categories. This would increase the accessibility of moral standards, resulting in higher moral awareness when facing issues with moral content. This is also consistent with social cognition theory that contends that the perceiver is more likely to focus on highly relevant information. Given religion as an ethical predisposition for the self-identity significantly influenced by religious association, and evidence that such individuals may be more perceptive of moral issues than individuals who are less religious (O'Fallon & Butterfield, 2005; Reynolds, 2006; Wiebe & Fleck, 1980), we suggest that those individuals with stronger levels of intrinsic religiosity would recognize moral issues at lower levels of intensity. That is, a highly intrinsic religious individual is more likely to recognize the moral content of a situation that may be considered minor – minimal harm, future, or distant. Intrinsic religiosity views religion as providing overall purpose and life guidance. Part of the impact of intrinsic religiosity includes strong moral norms which are likely evoked frequently, a necessary condition for social cognition theory. This differs from the impact of extrinsic religiosity. As defined, high levels of extrinsic religiosity are tied to the personal social or emotional benefit of religion. As such, we do not expect that extrinsic religiosity would impact the relation between moral intensity and moral awareness. The differentiation of categories and degrees of religiosity may help account for some of the unexplained variance in the relation between religiosity and moral behavior previously reported in the literature. It may not be religiosity in general that is an important individual characteristic impacting the ethical decision making model. Instead, we suggest the degree of intrinsic religiosity may prime the individual to more readily recognize the moral aspect of a situation, even one at low levels of moral intensity. This is consistent with social cognition theory that postulates that information that fits into frequently stimulated categories of the perceiver is also more likely to receive attention, or in this case, awareness – moral awareness (Butterfield et al., 2000). In addition, while prior research suggests that religiosity is significantly related to moral behavior, we propose that the impact of religiosity may come much earlier in Rest's moral decision making model, the moral awareness stage. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed.

H2: The relation between moral intensity and moral awareness is moderated by intrinsic religiosity, such that the relation is stronger for individuals with higher intrinsic religiosity than for individuals with lower intrinsic religiosity.

H3: The relation between moral intensity and moral awareness is not moderated by extrinsic religiosity.

Methodology

Respondents and Procedures

In the United States, the dominant religion is Christianity, with 78% of the population reporting that they are Christian (51% Protestant, 24% Catholic, and 3% other Christian; <http://religions.pewforum.org/reports>). With this in mind, respondents were primarily associated with one of two sampling pools, located in separate, large metropolitan areas in Florida, US. Respondents were either parents whose children attended a private Catholic grade school or adult members of a Protestant church. Potential respondents were contacted via email or as a general appeal on associated organizational web pages. Those who agreed to participate in the electronic survey were provided with the survey link. Participation was both voluntary and anonymous. Study approval was granted by the Institutional Review Board Human Subjects committee.

Solicitations to those affiliated with the Catholic grade school involved emails to approximately 650 parents. Solicitations to those affiliated with the Protestant church involved emails to approximately 830 individual accounts registered with the church social networking site, along with general church website postings, and direct appeals with handouts directing the respondent to the internet survey link. Because the solicitations were sent by the organizations on our behalf, it is not possible to account for incorrect or outdated email addresses. A reminder email was sent approximately 2 weeks after the initial request. Surveys were begun by 429 and completed by 372 adult respondents, approximately half from each sampling pool. Respondents were 45% male, on average 47 years old ($SD = 11.6$), with nearly 25 years of work experience ($SD = 11.8$).

Research Design

Design. We used a random block, mixed quasi-experimental design, with both within subjects and between-subjects components. Each respondent was presented with five scenarios. In every within subject block, the first scenario was the Grocery Store check-out item (a common courtesy situation). This first item was a filler and designed to mask the moral nature of the remaining scenarios. The remaining four items were randomly ordered and presented in one of four sets to reduce potential order effect. Each set included two scenarios with a low (L) moral intensity condition and two scenarios with a high (H) moral intensity condition

(ordered: LLHH, LHHL, HLLH, HHLL). Scenarios are displayed in the appendix in both the low moral intensity (underlined) and high moral intensity (within parentheses) conditions. The between subject component of the study permitted the analysis of individual difference characteristics of the moral agent (i.e. religiosity) which may influence moral awareness.

Framing. We attempted to reduce the likelihood that respondents would be primed for being presented with an ethical issue using a number of techniques. The description of the survey in the email messages and on the internet pages referred to the study as a social issues survey. The first page of the survey started with general questions about non-work activities (i.e. How often do you spend time on sports, chores, etc.) and general values. In addition, the first of the five scenarios displayed (beginning on the second page) was presented as a common courtesy situation (allowing another customer to go ahead of you in the grocery check-out line).

Manipulation check. Students enrolled in 3 undergraduate and 2 graduate business courses over two semesters were offered 1 extra credit point to complete an electronic survey. Completed surveys were received from 136 students (51% female) with a mean age of 29.5 ($SD = 8.1$) and 10 years of work experience. Students first completed a general values survey and were then randomly presented with one of four sets of the five scenarios as described above for the study respondents. Students were asked to rate the extent of harm to others on a 3 point scale (1 *minimal or no harm to others*, 2 *moderate harm to others*, 3 *high harm to others*). As a manipulation check, the average harm to others was calculated for the low ($M = 2.24$; $SD = 0.65$) and high ($M = 2.45$; $SD = 0.76$) moral intensity versions for all four test scenarios. The reported average *harm to others* ratings was significantly lower ($F = 6.00$; $df = 1, 270$; $p < .05$) for the four low harm conditions, an indication that the scenarios presented did adequately manipulate the *harm to others* condition. In addition, ANOVA results indicate no significant order effects for moral intensity. The Grocery Store item did not manipulate the harm to others condition (rather the manipulation was inconvenience to self). Nevertheless, a t-test of two means was calculated to compare the harm to others rating for the two versions of the story. No significant differences were found ($M_1 = 1.22$, $SD_1 = 0.35$; $M_2 = 1.14$, $SD_2 = .045$; $t = 0.26$; $p > .05$).

Measures

Extrinsic religiosity. Extrinsic religiosity identifies those who see religion as a means to pursue other personal interests, such as status or socialization. Items are measured on a five-point scale from 1 *Strongly Disagree* to 5 *Strongly Agree*,

so that higher scores are an indication of increased extrinsic religiosity (see Gorsuch & McPherson, 1989). Factor analysis has identified two sub-scales for extrinsic religiosity, each composed of three items: personally extrinsic religiosity and socially extrinsic religiosity. Personal Extrinsic items include *I pray mainly to gain relief and protection*, and Social Extrinsic items include *I go to church mostly to spend time with my friends*. For this sample, the Personal Extrinsic Religiosity scale produced a Cronbach's alpha of .76 and the Social Extrinsic Religiosity scale produced a Cronbach's alpha of .72. These values are consistent with those reported by Gorsuch and McPherson (1989).

Intrinsic religiosity. Intrinsic religiosity identifies those for whom religion is their ultimate end, providing overall purpose and guidance for their lives. Intrinsic religiosity was measured as the average of 9 items measured on a five-point scale from 1 *Strongly Disagree* to 5 *Strongly Agree*, so that higher scores are an indication of increased intrinsic religiosity (see Gorsuch & McPherson, 1989). Some items are reverse scored. Sample items include *It is important to me to spend time in private thought and prayer* and *I try hard to live all my life according to my religious beliefs*. For this sample, the Intrinsic Religiosity scale produced a Cronbach's alpha of .88. This is consistent with previous research which reports an internal reliability coefficient of .83 (Gorsuch & McPherson, 1989).

Moral awareness. Respondents were presented with an open-ended question, *When it comes to deciding what to do, what are the relevant issues in this story?* No limit was placed on the length of response. Three coders scored all of the responses independently with a yes (1) or no (0) judgment as to whether each response reflected moral awareness, using a basis analogous to the previously cited definition from Reynolds (2006), which asserted that moral awareness is the recognition that a situation is valid to view from a moral perspective because of its moral content. Certain key attitudes, intentions, or terms were scored as reflecting moral awareness. These included terms such as *ethical, moral, fairness, responsibility, respect, honesty, doing what is right*, or indications by the respondents that *things needed to change to make things right* or that respondents were *prepared to leave their position* if things didn't change to make things right. Responses coded as not reflecting moral awareness include comments such as: *what my mood is, it isn't my decision to make, nothing, how much I need my job, I don't like confrontation, and I do not understand what is wrong with this*. In addition, no response was also coded as zero. Scoring from the three coders was compared in order to reconcile differences. The resulting reconciled score reflected that a participant did (1) or did not (0) indicate moral awareness for each of the four scenarios (coding was not performed for the Grocery store filler scenario). The respondents' summed score for moral awareness ranged from 0 to 2 for low moral

intensity scenarios and 0 to 2 for high moral intensity scenarios, based on two low and two high moral intensity scenarios evaluated by each respondent.

Moral intensity. Moral intensity was based on the relative degree of harm to, or negative impact on, others presented in four scenarios. In each scenario, the *others* were members of unknown/unrelated groups who received negative consequences (e.g. unfair treatment in a workplace) or failed to receive benefits (e.g. misspent charity funds not available for free clinic medicine) as a result of scenario circumstances. Low levels of moral intensity were suggested by low impact consequences, such as small (\$200) amounts of misspent money or inconvenience for a client. High levels moral intensity was represented as higher impact consequences, such as unfair termination, illness, or large (\$5,000) amounts of misspent money. Two low and two high moral intensity scenarios were presented to each respondent. ANOVA results indicate no significant order effects for moral intensity.

Results

Correlations and descriptive statistics are displayed in Table 1 for all study variables. Harrington (1997) suggested that prior experience in facing ethical issues may also impact the decisions individuals make. As a proxy for potential prior experience facing ethical issues, all regression tests included age as a control variable.

Table 1
Correlations and Descriptive Statistics

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5
1. Personal Extrinsic Religiosity	2.99	0.85					
2. Social Extrinsic Religiosity	2.04	0.71	.21**				
3. Intrinsic Religiosity	3.99	0.68	-.10*	.06			
4. Moral Awareness – Low Intensity Issues	1.31	0.69	-.02	.10	.20**		
5. Moral Awareness – High Intensity Issues	1.42	0.69	.02	.03	.15*	.17**	
6. Age	47.13	11.61	-.16**	-.01	.19**	.15**	.10

Because of missing data, *n* ranges from 263 to 372; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

Hypothesis 1, a within-subjects proposition, proposed that moral awareness would be greater for those issues with higher levels of moral intensity. Each respondent was presented with two high intensity and two low intensity scenarios. The sum of moral awareness for the high intensity items was compared with the sum of moral awareness for the low intensity items using a one-tailed paired t-test of two means. Matched pairs were available for 303 respondents. The results indicate that total awareness for the high intensity conditions ($M = 1.44$, $SD = 0.68$) was significantly greater than total awareness for low intensity conditions ($M = 1.31$, $SD = 0.69$; $t = 2.67$, $df = 303$, $p < .01$). Thus, hypothesis 1 is supported; moral awareness is greater for issues with higher levels of moral intensity. This finding also supports the significance of the main effect of moral intensity on moral awareness.

To test hypothesis 2, a between-subjects proposition, a regression analysis was calculated for intrinsic religiosity on moral awareness for both low and high levels of moral intensity (See Table 2). The results of each regression indicate that intrinsic religiosity was a significant factor in the level of moral awareness for both low and high intensity conditions. To determine if intrinsic religiosity moderated the relation between moral intensity and moral awareness, the Chow test was used to determine the equivalency of the regression lines (Chow, 1960). The results indicate ($F = 34.38$, $df = 3$, 503 , $p < .01$) that individuals with higher levels of intrinsic religiosity have significantly higher levels of moral awareness at lower levels of moral intensity. As such, hypothesis 2 is accepted; intrinsic religiosity is a significant moderator in the relation between moral intensity and moral awareness. Figure 2 displays the plotted simple slope between intrinsic religiosity and moral awareness for both low and high intensity conditions.

Table 2
Regression Results - Intrinsic Religiosity on Moral Awareness

Variable	Low Moral Intensity				High Moral Intensity			
	B	SE	Beta	<i>t</i>	B	SE	Beta	<i>t</i>
Age	.01	.00	.09	1.48	.00	.00	.05	0.88
Intrinsic Religiosity	.21	.06	.20	3.29**	.14	.06	.14	2.39*
Adj R ²	.04				.01			
<i>F</i>	7.43**				3.62			
<i>df</i>	2, 277				2, 282			

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

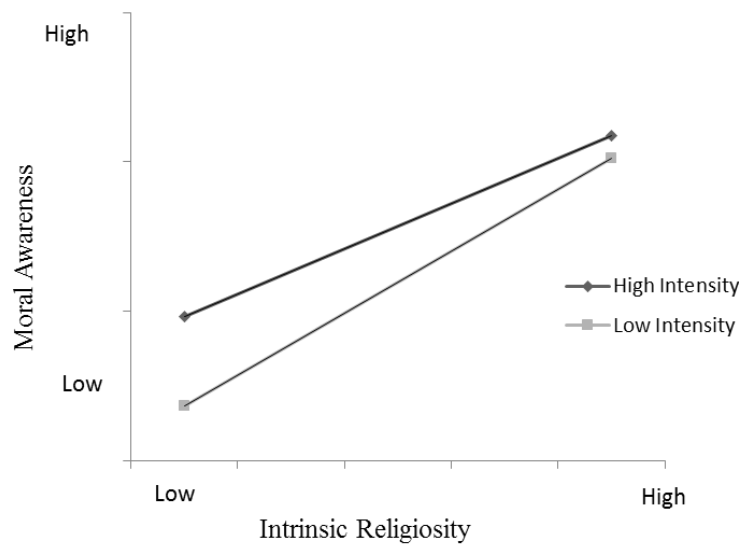


Figure 2. Simple Slope Analysis: The relation between intrinsic religiosity, moral intensity, and moral awareness.

To test hypothesis 3, a between-subjects proposition, a regression analysis was calculated for each form of extrinsic religiosity (personal extrinsic religiosity and social extrinsic religiosity) on moral awareness for both low and high levels of moral intensity. The results of the regression analyses indicate that neither form of extrinsic religiosity serves as a significant factor in the relation between moral intensity and moral awareness. Without a significant relationship between extrinsic religiosity and moral awareness, it is unnecessary to compare the regression lines. See Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3
Regression Results – Personal Extrinsic Religiosity on Moral Awareness

Variable	Low Moral Intensity				High Moral Intensity			
	B	SE	Beta	<i>t</i>	B	SE	Beta	<i>t</i>
Age	.01	.00	.14	2.28*	.01	.00	.11	1.79
Personal Extrinsic Religiosity	-.01	.05	.00	-0.17	.02	.05	.02	0.35
Adj R ²	.01				.01			
<i>F</i>	2.66				1.61			
<i>df</i>	2, 284				2, 290			

**p* < 0.05

Table 4
Regression Results – Social Extrinsic Religiosity on Moral Awareness

Variable	Low Moral Intensity				High Moral Intensity			
	B	SE	Beta	<i>t</i>	B	SE	Beta	<i>t</i>
Age	.01	.00	.13	2.23*	.01	.00	.10	1.73
Social Extrinsic Religiosity	.10	.06	.10	1.80	.04	.06	.04	0.64
Adj R ²	.02				.01			
<i>F</i>	4.15*				1.70			
<i>df</i>	2, 281				2, 287			

**p* < 0.05

Discussion

One aspect of this study focused on the initial phase of the Rest (1986) moral decision-making process, the moral awareness stage. The importance of moral awareness has been highlighted in establishing the basis for implementation of subsequent steps in the process. Even individuals who are committed to acting morally may fail to do so if they do not recognize that they are dealing with a situation that should be viewed from a moral perspective (Butterfield et al., 2000; Reynolds, 2006). The results of this study support the role of moral intensity in the moral awareness process. By manipulating level of harm to others, our research design was able to isolate one aspect of moral intensity (harm to others) to examine its relation to moral awareness. Our findings support the theoretical linkages between moral intensity and moral awareness. When respondents are faced with ethical scenarios that describe increased harm to others, they are more likely to indicate an awareness that the scenario should be viewed from a moral perspective.

In addition, the relation between moral awareness, the moral issue characteristic of moral intensity, and an ethical predisposition of the moral agent represented by religiosity was investigated. The results of this study add to the understanding of how characteristics of the moral issue interact with characteristics of the moral agent to impact moral awareness. While theory and research has suggested a simple relation, that is, increases in moral intensity lead to increases in moral awareness, our findings suggest that this relation may be dependent upon characteristics of the moral agent. This is an interesting finding and may account for some of the prior unexplained variance in the relation between moral intensity and moral awareness reported in the literature.

Specifically, our findings indicate that the relation between moral intensity and moral awareness is moderated by intrinsic religiosity. High levels of intrinsic religiosity are an indication that individuals consider religion as providing overall purpose and guidance for their lives. Our findings demonstrate that individuals with higher levels of intrinsic religious orientation show greater moral awareness at lower levels of moral intensity. This finding is consistent with the use of social cognition as part of the theoretical base for the study. Given the previously referenced close connection between religion and morality, social cognition theory suggested that greater religiosity would be expected to influence the vividness, salience, and accessibility of moral content in a situation, both from a focus on social norms, and in the sensitivity towards negative outcomes impacting others. For the more highly prioritized religious self-identity measured by intrinsic orientation, the higher priority on morality in compliance with social norms/expectations was expected to increase the vividness and salience of moral content in a given situation. This expectation was supported by our findings as those reporting higher levels of intrinsic religiosity recognized the moral aspects of the scenarios presented at lower levels of moral intensity. Likewise, individuals with low reported levels of intrinsic religiosity were less likely to recognize the moral component of a low intensity situation. The findings also suggest that extrinsic religiosity is not a significant moral agent characteristic when considering the relation between moral intensity and moral awareness. That is, it appears that some dimensions of religiosity matter when considering the impact of religiosity on Rest's (1986) moral decision making process and some dimensions may not.

The results of the study must be considered in light of its limitations. The data were collected as self-report measures at a single point in time. Although common method bias is unlikely to be an issue when considering interaction effects (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012), this research design does have the potential for respondent error. To diminish the possible effects of method bias related to respondent bias, we selected well-established measures for religiosity, separated the predictor and criterion measures on the survey, and varied the verbal labels for the measures (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). In addition, although we attempted to mask the moral nature of the study using a number of techniques described in the methodology section, it is possible that some respondents were able to recognize the study's purpose. Our sampling frame of individuals associated with Christian religious institutions is also a potential limitation. While Christianity is the primary religious affiliation in the US, other religious groups are represented in our society. In addition, the majority (84%) of our respondents indicated they attended religious services weekly or more often. This is nearly twice that of the American population (43%; Newport, 2010). We believed it necessary to oversample those regularly attending religious services to ensure variability in the measures of religiosity. Because the solicitations were sent

by the organizations on our behalf, it is not possible to account for incorrect or outdated email addresses. Thus making the exact response rate unknown. The estimated response rate of 25 to 30% is a bit low and it is impossible to calculate any potential non-response bias.

While use of a particular religious orientation to represent an ethical predisposition is noted as a limitation, the scenarios used for the study were from various organizational, non-religious contexts, including what could be considered for-profit, non-profit, volunteer and generic (either for- or non-profit) organizations. Nevertheless, future research is needed to determine if the findings generalize to other populations and other religious groups.

Overall, the findings of this study lend support for the importance of intrinsic religiosity on the relation between moral intensity and moral awareness. This differs from the findings for extrinsic religiosity, which is the use of religion for social or comfort purposes. Our findings suggest that extrinsic religiosity is not a significant individual characteristic in the relation between moral intensity and moral awareness. The differentiation of the dimensions of religiosity may help account for some of the unexplained variance in the relation between religiosity and moral behavior previously reported in the literature. It may not be religiosity in general that is an important individual characteristic impacting the ethical decision making model. Instead, our findings suggest the specific intrinsic component of religiosity may prime the individual to more readily recognize the moral aspect of an issue or situation, even one at low levels of moral intensity.

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Appendix

Scenarios Presented

Scenarios displayed in both the low moral intensity (underlined) and high moral intensity (within parentheses) conditions. The Grocery Store item did not manipulate the harm to others condition, rather the manipulation was inconvenience to self.

Grocery Store

You are in line at the grocery store. You have dozens of items already on the counter. Another shopper comes up behind you with two items. You are not especially pushed for time (very pushed for time) and the cashier has not yet begun your order.

How likely is it that you would: Invite the shopper to go ahead of you in line.

Organizational Practices

In the course of your normal job duties, you have come across some organizational practices which might favor (are discriminatory towards) select groups of employees. It appears that the practices have only recently begun (been going on for as long as the company has been in business and many very loyal and hardworking people have lost their jobs with the company because of these practices). Your company has a very strict management control system, that typically includes lots of yelling and written warnings.

How likely is it that you would: Openly question the practices, going as far as necessary to implement changes.

Shipping Dates

You are responsible for processing client orders. Clients often call you requesting the date the order was shipped which helps somewhat with their own planning. (Correct dates are absolutely necessary, since products can spoil and have the potential for causing illness or significant financial loss). Twice in the last week you have been asked by the sales manager to falsify shipping dates. You managed to avoid giving the incorrect information the first time, because you were out of the office when the client called. You realize that avoidance will not work, since the client phoned and left a message for you to personally return the call. You do not report directly to the sales manager,

but he/she is known for demanding obedience and has a history of charging employees with insubordination.

How likely is it that you would: Call the client providing the correct date.

Committee Work

You are a new member of a volunteer committee that collects money to purchase medicine for use by a free clinic. In reviewing past spending, it seems clear that the volunteer director has overspent \$200 on office supplies (\$5,000 on expensive office supplies). This money should have been used for purchasing additional medicine. For years you have waited for an opening so that you could join this committee and only achieved your seat due to the volunteer director's efforts on your behalf. The director, who places high priority on personal loyalty, could easily replace you in the next membership round.

How likely is it that you would: Talk with the director about spending controls, and if necessary bring the issue before the entire committee to make sure funding goes towards medicine.

Political Candidate

You are the campaign director for a candidate who is in a statistical tie with a well-funded incumbent. Fund raising has been very slow. You find out that the director of a well-known charity offered your candidate \$200 (\$5,000) from the charity's account, which is routinely underfunded. The candidate accepted the contribution. The candidate is temperamental and may be extremely unhappy if you question the check.

How likely is it that you would: Return the check to the charity and explain to the candidate that accepting the charity's funds is inappropriate.