The Social Cognition of Human Rights

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.This study re-analyzes the Philippine data of a 35-country survey re-
search ón the social representations of human rights. In the paper,
acceptance and willingness to do something to ensure the upholding
of the thirty articles of the Universal Human Rights Declaration were
related to various personal experiences. These included political par-
ticipation and involvement, awareness of Philippine social and politi-
cal realities, perceptions of inter-group tensions, and experiences of
personal and social injustice. Differentials among the three respon-
dent categories, social science majors, science majors, and police ca-
dets indicate links between human rights-related social cognitions and
one's personal, social and political experiences.

Human rights (HR) may be viewed as our expectation of our
basic entitlements as members of the category "human." Taro (1991)
elaborated the definition of human rights as:

> those inherent, inalienable rights to man as a human being and
> those which he may legally inherit or acquire by title as neces-
> sary to his life, liberty, dignity and self-development, including
> those that may accrue to'him in the course of his existence, re-
> sulting either from the dynamic, ever-changing complexities of
> modern living, or those bestowed upon him that make him a
> more revered human being of even greater stature than before.

And though the definition would appear to indicate an objective
entity, rights are largely conceptualized and defined by the social
cognizer. It is one more way of making sense of our world. Viewed

this way, it would seem obvious that more social psychological research ought to focus on the social cognition of human rights. Yet, various researchers have pointed out the dearth of work in this area (Diaz-Veizades, Widaman, Little, & Gibbs, 1995; Doise, n.d.).

Conaco (1997) did focus group interviews with various subgroups of the Metro Manila population to look into people's conceptualizations of human rights and demonstrated that, although there appear to be some common prescriptions and expectations, the rights concept is often defined in terms of one's group membership and the salient concerns of such a social identity. For example, women's groups defining human rights had a different emphasis from men's groups and the police and military groups focused on certain issues that were not the main concern of civilian groups.

Doise (n.d.) had a similar perspective when he pointed out that human rights are products of history and institutionally defined although he was open to the idea that some common organizing principles may underlie various historical definitions of human rights. The uncovering of these common organizing principles (collective cognitive maps or social representations) subsequently became the goal of a research program on the social representations of human rights launched by Doise and his colleagues at the University of Geneva and ultimately including 35 countries (Doise, Spini, Jesuino, Ng, & Emler, 1994; Spini & Doise, 1998; Doise, Spini, & Clemence, 1999). The social representations framework was a useful tool and the existence of a shared meaning system concerning the thirty articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was demonstrated across the different countries. Using an individual-level and pan-cultural analysis, the study distinguished four groups of respondents: "advocates (most favorable responses towards human rights), sceptics (less favorable responses), personalists (high personal involvement and scepticism about governmental efficacy) and governmentalists (low personal involvement and strong belief in governmental efficacy)." The Philippine respondents in that study, social science and science majors from the University of the Philippines, were classified as mainly personalists.

It should be noted that most, if not all, of the work mentioned in the western literature on human rights have used the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as the main rights document. The applicability of this document and other international human rights instruments to Asian-Pacific countries has been challenged and questioned (Medina, 1993) and there has been a call for an Asian rights charter that would be more sensitive to the region's needs and sociopolitical context. (In fact, there is an ongoing effort to develop a Philippine human rights document and a first draft has been completed.) Cited as reasons were the "existence of authoritarian governments in the region, the lack of a philosophical basis for human rights in the region, the belief that economic development is more important than human rights protection, and the view that human rights promotion disrupts the maintenance of order in the region."

Ghai (1993) cited three points that should be of particular interest to social psychologists studying human rights: 1) rights discourse is different in Asia compared to the West, 2) human rights consciousness in Asia is very low despite its many violations, and 3) rights violations in Asia are group-based mainly rather than individual-based. These points further strengthen the case for more psychological research into the social cognitions of human rights.

In this study, we attempt to look at the social cognitions of three different groups, social science majors, science majors, and police cadets, and look at their previous social and political experiences that may be linked to their human rights attitude positions. Given the Asian sample, this study certainly has implications for Ghais's contentions with regard to the nature and quality of rights discourse and consciousness in Asia.

METHOD

Participants

Three hundred thirty four (334) volunteer participants responded to the survey questionnaire. Of this number, 166 were social science

majors (psychology, law, social work) and 69 were science majors (pure, as well as, applied sciences) from the University of the Philippines, and 99 were cadets from the Philippine National Police Academy in Canlubang, Laguna. The mean age of the sample was 21.18 years (SD = 2.39).

Questionnaire

The instrument used was the questionnaire developed for the cross-cultural study on human rights as social representations by Doise and his colleagues (see Doise, et al., 1999). This is a lengthy two-part questionnaire that looks into the individual's views on the 30 articles of the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights, their social values, perceptions of social conflicts, and personal experience of injustice.

Measures and Indices

For the purpose of this paper, a few variables were identified or created from the responses to selected questions in the large survey questionnaire. Of relevance were the following variables:

1. Cognitions about the various human rights articles. Two specific cognitive elements were isolated for analysis, agreement with all the aspects of the article and willingness to join the efforts of other concerned people to help ensure that the terms of the article are respected. Each element was measured on a 9-point self-report scale. To facilitate analysis and interpretation of the results, the thirty articles were collapsed into the six categories of Rene Cassin, chairperson of the UDHR drafting commission and chief author of the Declaration (as cited in Doise, et al., 1994).

2. Political participation. This was an index created from the responses to four questions on whether one had recently signed a petition, voted in an election, participated in a demonstration or protest meeting, and/or belonged to a committee of any voluntary, professional or political organization. Index score

ranged from 4 (no participation) to 8 (participation in all the named activities).

3. Perception of tension between social categories. This was based on the totaled score to the item "To what extent do you think conflicts and tensions exist between (thirteen identified social categories including items like race, color, sexes, to name a few, were provided). Please answer according to the following scale: 1= there are no conflicts and tensions; 2= there are few conflicts and tensions; 3= there are some conflicts and tensions; 4= there are frequent conflicts and tensions." Score range was from 13 to 52, with the higher score indicating more perceived intergroup conflicts and tensions.

4. Experience of group-based injustice. This was based on the totaled score to the item "How often, if ever, have you personally been treated in an unjust manner for each of the following reasons (fourteen social category-based reasons were provided). Answer each of the 14 items by circling one of the four numbers on the right, as follows: 1= never, 2= occasionally, 3= frequently, 4= very frequently." Score range was from 14 to 56, with the higher score indicating greater experience of category-based injustice.

5. Experience of situation-specific injustice. This was based on the totaled score to the item "How often, if ever, have you personally been treated in an unjust manner in each of the following situations (22 situations of interpersonal injustice were provided). Answer each of the 22 items by circling one of the four numbers on the right, as follows: 1= never, 2=occasionally, 3= frequently, 4= very frequently." Score range was from 22 to 88, with the higher score indicating greater experience of situation-specific interpersonal injustice.

6. Personal awareness of Philippine social and economic realities, rated on a 5-point scale (1= extremely unaware, 5- extremely well).

7. Personal involvement in the political life in the country, rated on a 5-point scale (1 = extremely uninvolved, 5 = extremely involved).

8. Self-classification of one's political inclinations, from extreme left (1) to extreme right (5).

RESULTS

Analysis focused on the comparison of the three respondent groups: social science majors, science majors, and police cadets. These groups were compared, first, in terms of their agreement with the articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and with their willingness to join efforts to help ensure that the terms of the articles are respected. Then the groups were compared in terms of their degree of political participation, perception of tension between social categories, experience of group-based injustice, experience of situation-based injustice, personal awareness of Philippine social and economic realities, their self-identification of their political leanings, and their personal involvement in the political life in this country. Agreement and willingness to do something to ensure respect for HR were subsequently correlated with the personal experience variables.

Agreement with the articles of the UDHR

A comparison of the three respondent categories shows differential agreement with the articles of the UDHR. Table 1 shows the differential means on the six rights clusters. A one-way analysis of variance showed significant differences on only two of the clusters, however. The three respondent groups differed significantly in their agreement to the articles related to basic rights, $F(2, 328) = 9.99$, p $< .0001$, and to the rights of the individual, $F(2, 316) = 4.77$, p $< .009$. On articles related to basic rights, social science majors showed the highest level of agreement ($M = 8.11$), followed by the science majors ($M = 7.83$) and the police cadets ($M = 7.25$). On articles

TABLE 1

Agreement of the Respondent Groups
with the Various HR articles (as clustered)

	Social Sci. majors			Science majors			Police cadets			Total	
	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	M	SD
Cluster 1	8.11	1.26	165	7.83	1.35	69	7.25	1.92	97	7.80	1.54
Cluster 2	7.95	0.98	162	7.62	1.25	66	7.48	1.53	91	7.75	1.23
Cluster 3	7.70	1.16	160	7.39	1.26	67	7.46	1.67	93	7.56	1.35
Cluster 4	7.74	1.31	163	7.55	1.37	67	7.52	1.68	96	7.64	1.44
Cluster 5	7.87	1.16	162	7.46	1.53	68	7.66	1.65	93	7.72	1.40
Cluster 6	7.34	1.52	164	7.11	1.75	68	7.43	1.84	97	7.32	1.67

Note: Clusters are based on the grouping of articles by Rene Cassin, chairperson of the UDHR drafting commission and chief author of the Declaration (as cited in Doise, et al., 1994)

Cluster 1 — Basic Principles (Articles 1 and 2)
Cluster 2 — Rights of the Individual (Articles 3 to 11)
Cluster 3 — Rights Relative to Interindividual Relations (Articles 12 to 17)
Cluster 4 — Public Rights (Articles 18 to 21)
Cluster 5 — Economic and Social Rights (Articles 22 to 27)
Cluster 6 — Rights Relative to International Law and Order (Articles 28 to 30)

related to individual rights, the social science majors again indicated the strongest agreement (M = 7.95), followed by the science majors (M = 7.62) and the police cadets (M = 7.48). It should be mentioned, however, that despite the differences, the means were all on the side of agreement rather than disagreement.

Willingness to do something to ensure respect for HR

When asked about their willingness to join the efforts of other people and help ensure that the terms of the articles were respected,

the three respondent categories showed different degrees of willingness on all six rights clusters. The one way ANOVAs on the willingness scores showed significant differences among the groups for basic rights, $F(2, 329) = 9.61$, $p < .0001$; on rights of the individual, $F(2, 321) = 15.69$, $p < .0001$; rights relative to interindividual relations, $F(2, 324) = 17.42$, $p < .0001$; public rights, $F(2, 323) = 13.21$, $p < .0001$; economic and social rights, $F(2, 323) = 14.07$, $p < .0001$; and rights relative to international law and order, $F(2, 326) = 19.38$, $p < .0001$. Table 2 shows the differential means. What is noteworthy in this set of means is the similar pattern for the three groups across the six rights clusters. For each one, the police cadets express the highest degree of willingness to join the efforts of other concerned people to ensure respect for the rights articles, followed by the social science majors and last by the science majors.

TABLE 2

Willingness of the Respondent Groups to do Something to Ensure that the Various HR articles (as clustered) are Respected

	Social Sci. majors			Science majors			Police cadets			Total	
	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	M	SD
Cluster 1	7.87	1.30	165	7.10	1.72	69	8.03	1.41	98	7.75	1.47
Cluster 2	7.61	1.15	164	6.75	1.69	66	7.94	1.40	94	7.53	1.41
Cluster 3	7.42	1.20	164	6.71	1.58	68	7.96	1.36	95	7.43	1.40
Cluster 4	7.60	1.20	163	6.98	1.68	67	8.09	1.37	96	7.62	1.41
Cluster 5	7.67	1.21	163	6.92	1.72	68	8.08	1.37	95	7.63	1.43
Cluster 6	7.16	1.42	164	6.47	1.85	68	7.96	1.49	97	7.25	1.62

Differences in personal experiences

The groups were also compared in terms of a variety of personal experiences that may have some impact on their rights cog-

nitions. These included political participation, political involvement, political orientation, awareness of Philippine issues and realities, perception of social category tensions, personal experience of group-based injustice and personal experience of situation-based injustice. The one-way ANOVAs on these variables showed significant differences among the groups in terms of political participation, $F (2, 294) = 10.08$, $p < .0001$; political involvement, $F (2, 331) = 23.09$, $p < .0001$; awareness of Philippine realities, $F (2, 331) = 6.34$, $p < .002$; perception of group tensions, $F (2, 322) = 9.59$, $p < .0001$; and the experience of situation-based injustice, $F (2, 323) = 3.97$, $p < .02$. Table 3 shows the differential means across the three groups for the different personal experience variables. On the political participation, involvement and awareness variables, the police cadets had the highest means followed by the social science majors and last by the science majors. On the perception of group tensions and experience of situation-based injustice, the social science majors had the highest means followed by the science majors and last by the police cadets. . There appeared to be no significant differences among the groups in terms of political orientation and the self-reports of group-based injustice experience.

Links between HR-related attitudes and behaviors and personal experiences

To look into the possible links between human rights cognitions and personal political experiences and cognitions, the dependent measures were tested for correlations. Results of the correlation analysis, as reflected in Table 4, indicate relational links between political participation, awareness of Philippine realities, and political involvement and one's willingness to do something to ensure that the different human rights clusters are respected. The figures indicate that the more participatory one is politically, the more politically involved, and the more aware of Philippine realities, the greater the willingness to join the efforts of other concerned people to help ensure that the terms of the article are respected.

TABLE 3

Exposure of the Respondent Groups
to Various Categories of Personal Experiences

	Social Sci. majors			Science majors			Police cadets			Total	
	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	M	SD
(1)	5.74	1.33	148	4.98	1.26	63	5.89	1.28	86	5.63	1.34
(2)	37.14	4.77	165	35.79	5.97	66	33.84	7.27	94	35.91	5.99
(3)	22.05	5.97	152	21.52	6.12	66	22.77	6.87	96	22.16	6.28
(4)	43.64	8.48	161	42.78	9.44	68	40.42	9.28	97	42.50	9.01
(5)	3.61	1.16	166	3.36	1.14	69	4.00	1.26	99	3.68	1.20
(6)	3.14	1.46	166	3.25	1.37	69	3.44	1.11	99	3.25	1.35
(7)	2.73	1.24	166	2.52	1.21	69	3.67	1.26	99	2.97	1.32

Legend:

(1) = political participation
(2) = perception of tension between social categories
(3) = experience of group-based injustice
(4) = experience of situation-based injustice
(5) = personal awareness of Philippine social and economic realities
(6) = self-classification of one's political orientation
(7) = personal involvement in the political life in this country.

The results also indicate a negative correlation between the experience of situation-specific injustices and agreement with certain clusters of human rights. Thus the greater the experience of such injustices, the less the agreement with rights articles related to basic principles, economic and social rights, and rights relative to international law and order. Other significant relationships were the positive correlation between the perception of group tensions and the willingness to join actions to ensure the respect of basic rights, the positive correlation between awareness of Philippine socio-po-

TABLE 4

Correlation of Agreement and Willingness to do Something
to Ensure that Human Rights are Respected
with Exposure to Various Personal Experiences

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
(1)	0.079	0.027	-0.117*	-0.115*	-0.013	-0.021	-0.058
(2)	0.022	0.070	-0.063	-0.091	0.052	0.055	0.053
(3)	0.074	0.036	-0.061	-0.096	0.030	0.002	0.026
(4)	0.082	0.077	-0.083	-0.097	0.069	0.002	0.057
(5)	0.086	0.083	-0.084	-0.133*	0.111*	0.048	0.118*
(6)	0.068	0.041	-0.027	-0.121*	0.053	0.053	0.085
(7)	0.181**	0.123*	-0.014	-0.013	0.082	0.006	0.120*
(8)	0.204**	0.091	-0.023	-0.030	0.124*	-0.018	0.180**
(9)	0.166**	0.027	0.005	-0.061	0.118*	-0.011	0.174**
(10)	0.187**	0.073	0.016	-0.020	0.133*	-0.004	0.178**
(11)	0.209**	0.106	-.017	-0.025	0.144*	0.005	0.188**
(12)	0.174**	0.044	0.029	-0.047	0.120*	0.031	0.200**

* significant at $p < .05$ ** significant at $p < .01$

Legend: A – political participation
         B – perception of tension between social categories
         C – experience of group-based injustice
         D – experience of situation-based injustice
         E – personal awareness of Philippine social and economic realities
         F – self-classification of one's political orientation
         G – personal involvement in the political life in this country

(1) – agreement with cluster 1   (7) – willingness to ensure cluster 1
(2) – agreement with cluster 2   (8) – willingness to ensure cluster 2
(3) – agreement with cluster 3   (9) – willingness to ensure cluster 3
(4) – agreement with cluster 4   (10) – willingness to ensure cluster 4
(5) – agreement with cluster 5   (11) – willingness to ensure cluster 5
(6) – agreement with cluster 6   (12) – willingness to ensure cluster 6

litical realities and agreement with the articles on economic and social rights, the positive correlation between political involvement and agreement with articles on economic and social rights, and the inverse relation between experience of group-based injustice and agreement with basic rights articles.

DISCUSSION

This paper makes a viable case for the contribution of one's category membership to the shaping of one's cognitions of certain issues. Human rights and our perceptions, attributions, beliefs, attitudes, motivations, and behavioral intentions towards it are influenced by our membership in our social groups and the unique experiences we may undergo as part of the group and as individuals interacting with other individuals both within and outside the group. This is sufficiently supported by the data from this study where we saw how the three respondent categories, social science and science majors at the state university and police academy cadets, thought and felt differently about human rights. These cognitions are correlated to their differential experiences in terms of political participation, orientation, involvement, awareness, perceptions of group tensions and experience of injustice, both at the group as well as individual/situation-specific levels. What this study highlights is the utility of a psychological study of human rights, more specifically, a social cognitive approach, for understanding the structures and processes that underpin our views of concepts like human rights.

On a more applied level, this study also brings to light some interesting differentials in rights cognitions among our Filipino student populations. Traditionally, state university students have been stereotyped as militant and radical in their political thinking whereas police cadets would probably be seen as more conservative and right wing in their politics. The descriptive data obtained here do not fully support stereotypic expectancies and may indicate possible shifts in the perspectives and opinions of these groups. The university students are still highly sensitive to perceptions of

group tensions and experiences of situation-specific injustices, particularly the social science majors, but seem less inclined to act on their beliefs.

That science majors indicated the lowest levels of political participation and political involvement and the least willingness to do something to ensure that human rights are respected is hardly surprising. Given their academic and general interests and their typically heavy coursework load, it is only to be expected that rights and other social issues are not particularly salient in the world of science majors. And because of the significant role of stimulus salience in attention, recall, judgment and subsequent behavior (Fiske and Taylor, 1991), it is to be further expected that non-salient stimuli have less impact on one's actions, thus explaining the behavior of the science majors in our sample.

The behavior of the social science majors is less easily explained, however. Social issues, after all, are at the core of what these majors study. One possible explanation is the high experience of situation-based injustice among the social science majors. Compared to the science majors and the police cadets, social science majors reported the highest mean experience of situation-based injustice. As in the learned helplessness condition, perhaps people who repeatedly experience injustice ultimately lose their sense of efficacy and learn to be passive in the face of subsequent injustice. This diminished sense of efficacy and learned passivity may be behind the decreased willingness to act on their beliefs among social science majors in our sample.

As far as behaviors are concerned, the police cadets reported more positive political activity − political participation, involvement, awareness, and greater willingness to join efforts to support human rights. They are either more adept at providing the socially desirable responses or their responses are indicative of a successful socialization to the role of future guardians of societal peace and order. The latter situation would definitely be a desirable development in our police institution. This is particularly encouraging given the results of a recent study that seemed to indicate the

greater willingness among police officers to violate rights and to consider acts of summary executions, torture, and verbal threats as warranted "in their zest to be more effective and efficient in the practice of their profession; and faced with a justice system that they perceive as pro-criminal" (Pattugalan and Puyat, 1998, as cited in Puyat, 2000).

AUTHOR NOTE

The data for this paper came from a larger survey on the social representations of human rights, a 35-country study coordinated by Prof. Willem Doise of the University of Geneva. Only data from the social science and science majors from the University of the Philippines were included in the cross-cultural study, however. The Philippine National Police Academy cadets' data were additionally collected by the author as part of her continuing interest in the issue of rights and the police/ military institution.

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