

THE EVOLUTION OF MORALITY: A PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF HOW HUMANS DEVELOP ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the moral psychological roots of morality; by looking at how human beings come to learn and polish their sense of right and wrong over the course of development. The emergence of moral conflict as a psychological property of the human mind is arduous and multi-faceted one, which has received much attention in psychology (Carlsmith & Darley, 2008), philosophy (Haidt & Joseph, 2004) and neuroscience. While much has been learned, the developmental processes by which morality arises in individuals and cultures how people make the moral decisions that they do remains a mystery. Based on the theories from Piaget, Kohlberg and more recent research from developmental psychology, this study explores the dynamics of moral development where cognitive, social and emotional dimensions are involved simultaneously. By examining empirical and experimental investigations through the lens of existing literature, this study attempts to understand to what extent socialization, empathy, as well as cognitive development influence moral choices. The results imply that moral development does not occur in a linear manner, nor through the cumulative effect of cause-and-effect relations. This article demonstrates how knowledge about moral evolution can be used in educational, conflict-reduction, and social-justice practice. These results provide insight regarding the development of ethical principles in one or more individuals and offer a direction for further research in moral psychology.

Keywords: moral development, ethical principles, cognitive development, empathy, socialization, psychological foundations, moral decision-making

INTRODUCTION

The evolution of moral systems is crucial for human psychology, which determines not only how each and every one of us behaves, but also what overall patterns and

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structures characterize our societies. We start at a young age developing a sense of right and wrong that leads our decisions, actions, and treatment of other people. This moral development process is not only the focus of psychological research, but it carries important implications for social unity, legal systems and educational institutions (Gibbs, 2013). Historically, experimental psychologists, philosophers of mind, and educational researchers have been intrigued by how people arrive at and hone their moral judgments – cornerstone theories and recent advances had provided insight into the cognitive, emotional and social processes that shape decisions in moral circumstances.

Historically, moral development began with the work of Jean Piaget (1932), who was a pioneer in this area and sought to understand how young children developed their knowledge about right and wrong as they aged. Piaget described the progression of moral reasoning as occurring in stages, with children first being motivated by conformity to authority and eventually developing the ability to reason morally on their own. Lawrence Kohlberg (1969), expanding on Piaget's ideas, aided in the progression of moral development by applying his stage theory to morality- reasoning developed across various stages and levels, all with increasingly greater intricacy and sophistication in making ethical decisions. Kohlberg proposed three levels: pre-conventional, conventional and post-conventional being influenced in each stage by a movement away from self-interest toward adherence to rules of society and at the last step to a more transcendent ethical principle. Theorists like Kohlberg have proposed that the more one matures, and is exposed to various points of view, the more sophisticated ones moral reasoning becomes (Kohlberg, 1969).

Although these stage models have been influential, they have also been criticized and revised in the last decades. One of the most important criticisms is that moral development is not a linear phenomenon with a unique cause: cognitive maturation. Recent theories have emphasized the role played by emotional and social factors in moral comprehension. Indeed, as Haidt (2001) has suggested, many judgments are motivated by intuition and emotion rather than reason; the latter more accurately serves to rationalize emotional responses. This social intuitionist model stands in contrast to rationalist accounts, according to which emotions, like empathy and

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compassion, are thought to play no role in moral judgment. The effect of this approach is to draw attention to the emotional and affective aspects of reasoning about morality, something that was arguably underemphasized in previous cognitive theorizing (Haidt, 2001).

Recent investigations have also discovered the intense effects of socio-cultural factors in the development of our moral being. Cross-cultural research has also revealed the particularism of moral principles, which are not universal but informed by an individual's society values and norms (Haidt & Joseph, 2004). For example, whereas western moral systems may prioritize autonomy and fairness, most collectivistic societies emphasize loyalties, authority, and group harmony (Shweder 1991). This variation in moral reasoning across cultures directly challenges the kind of stage theories that were first formulated by Piaget and Kohlberg, which posit that moral development is a universal process, rather than a universal one.

Beside cognitive and affective factors, the social dimension of morality is also gaining attention in recent studies on moral development. In line with Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, ethical values are acquired through observing and imitating other people, namely caregivers, peers and authorities. This socialization starts at a very young age and continues into the latter years of one's life as people learn societal norms through their interactions with others. Social learning influences not only individuals' moral reasoning, but also prosocial behaviors – cooperation, helping and fairness (Bandura 1977). Family, school and society in general contribute seriously to defining one's own moral compass fostering one and repressing the other.

While much has been learned about the intricate nature of moral development, many mysteries persist concerning specific mechanisms that account for the development of moral principles. Although cognitive, emotional and socio-cultural factors have received a great deal of attention, little is known about how these are related to one another over time. For example, how do peoples' emotions about moral scenarios change over time and what role do cognitive capacities like theory of mind and abstract reasoning play in moral judgments? Further, what role do different cultural contexts of socialization play in moral development over the lifespan? Such questions

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are important both in continuing to develop theoretical models and when considering practical concerns in education, the legal system, and social justice.

The aim of this paper is to examine how humans build moral values over time, both in term of cognitive processes and socio-emotion environment. More particularly, the aim of this book is to present a full view to readers about psychological processes involved in moral development based on diverse points of view and empirical studies. Through the lens of cognition, socialization, and emotion regulation models, this essay seeks to understand what influences people's progression towards picking up and adopting ethical principles in day-to-day activities. Understanding the evolution of morality is important for more than just moving psychological theory forward; it may also inform practical concerns from conflict resolution and how we educate our children, to the policies around designing legal systems that foster fairness and justice. The more we delve into human moral development, the clearer it becomes that morality is not something static and fixed in each of us: it is a dynamic, tentacular phenomenon.

LITERATURE REVIEW

“My” moral development is part of a handshake of cognitive, social learning, and emotional regulation. Early models of moral development, such as Piaget (1932) and Kohlberg’s (1969), have been influential in our conceptions of the ways in which individual’s reasoning about morality changes over time. One of the earliest theories that examined how children comprehend morality is proposed by Piaget, who suggested that moral reasoning advances across stages. At first, children's reasons for right and wrong are rooted in authority submission and fear of punishment; this was labeled by Piaget as "heteronomous morality." With increasing age and cognitive maturity, they develop into what Piaget termed ‘autonomous morality’ in which they come to appreciate differences between accident and intention when making moral judgments, as well as a more sophisticated notion of justice (Piaget, 1932).

Kohlberg (1969) extended the stage model of moral development, based on Piaget’s work. He also advanced a more complex schema that incorporated six stages of moral development, which are then divided into three levels: pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional. At the pre-conventional level, morality is judged in terms of

self-interest and avoiding punishment, while at the conventional level it consists in following social rules and maintaining social order. Post-conventional morality is the highest form, in which people are able to think according to universal ethical principles, like justice, equality and human rights. Kohlberg's model has been very influential, assuming that moral reasoning becomes more advanced and abstract as a function of age and cognitive maturation. One criticism of his theory is that it may be too cognitively oriented at the expense of emotions and social dimensions in moral cognition (See Shweder, 1991).

Although Piaget and Kohlberg have been the pioneers in this tradition, their theories have been also strongly criticized due to alleged shortcomings. For instance, many philosophers have contended that the models presented here are idealized and mistakenly strip culture of its role in moral judgment. In particular, Kohlberg's theory has been criticized for assuming a universal path of moral development inspired by Western and individualistic values. Shweder (1991) noted that the focus on abstract reasoning in Kohlberg's stages subsumes communal values in collectivist cultures. Such cultural variations indicate that moral thinking may not travel the same developmental road for all individuals and instead be shaped by local norms, practices and values.

When he sees or hears of anyone giving a slave a trial, or otherwise seeking to assist him in obtaining his liberty, Sir Peter thinks differently; if the impulse of emotion could be weighed and measured — but observe what effect judicious teaching will have. For instance, Hoffman (2000) states that empathy is a key in morality and bases prosocial behavior. Empathy is a process that enables us to comprehend and share both the feelings of others, which drive behaviors such as helping, cooperation, and fairness. Hoffman's theory underscores the emotionally laden aspect of morality, and moral development is not only a matter of cognitive functioning, but also about how people feel connected to others and respond to their needs. From this perspective, empathy plays a salient role that supports the process of moral reasoning, under conditions that necessitate people to operate through moral quandaries which involve other people's well-being.

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Haidt (2001) buttressed the emotional view by postulating that moral judgments are based in intuition and emotion. Per Haidt's social intuitionist model, people often decide what is right through gut-level emotional responses rather than through reason. Haidt's studies, based on the work of Jonathan Haidt and others, demonstrate that people often rationalize their moral judgments with post hoc reasoning, unaware that those decisions are largely driven by intuition. This model stands in stark contrast to previous theories that the reasoning process is rational and indicates the emotions have a much more important function than expected.

Another major research topic has been social and environmental implications for moral development. Moral values in children have been studied with regard to moral behaviours tendencies that are visible from observing behaviours of others, (Bandura, 1977) has played a role in the extent to which person imitate other's moral value indeed. According to Bandura, children learn prosocial behavior from adults (role models) through observational learning and by being rewarded or punished for similar behaviors. This mechanism of social learning allows people to incorporate the norms and moral principles in a society which then lead to socially appropriate behavior. It has been shown that children learn about morality by observing others and their behaviors, which are usually rewarded or punished, respectively (Bandura, 1977).

Cross-cultural research has also demonstrated that moral development is shaped by cultural values, casting doubt on the existence of universal stages of moral reasoning. As Haidt and Joseph (2004) propose, different cultures may value certain moral foundations more than others (e.g. fairness, loyalty, authority, sanctity). In cultures that are more individualistic, such as those in Western nations, fairness and rights-based ethics may play a larger role than in cultures characterized by collectivism where loyalty; duty and respect for authority are paramount. Such cultural differences in moral reasoning reveal that moral development is not a uniform process but is heavily influenced by the values and norms within one's community. For example, one society could focus on equality whereas another might put the interests and rights of the individual behind it. This cultural view implies that moral development is an open dynamic process, and not the fixed or universally predetermined procedure, of a complex interplay between cognition, emotion and culture.

In spite of the numerous studies that address social, emotional and cultural aspects of moral development, some gaps are still present in literature., especially about the connection between cognitive and affective factors involved in moral judgment. Whereas previous Piagetian and Kohlbergian theories were more cognitive in nature, newer work has highlighted the importance of developing a more integrated account that considers links between emotionality and higher-order cognition in appetitive moral evaluation. For instance, what is the role of empathy in moral judgment across cultures? How do cognitive capacities such as perspective taking and abstract reasoning combine with affective responses to moderate moral decision-making? These open questions underline the need for deeper models encompassing interaction between cognitive and affective-social aspects in moral development.

Bridging these gaps is a motivation behind the present research in offering a more nuanced account of when moral principles develop across the lifespan. By looking at both cognitive and emotional aspects of moral decision-making, the research aims to provide a fuller understanding of the intricate mechanisms implicated in moral judgment.

Research Questions:

What are the effects of cognitive and affective processes on moral judgment among individuals?

What is the influence of social and cultural factors on the ideal code?

What kinds of morality exist at different ages and in various cultural environments?

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND MOTIVATION

The development of moral principles is central to how the human animal behaves, but we still have much to learn about how moral reasoning develops at different life stages. Classical theories, like those proposed by Piaget (1932) and Kohlberg (1969), focus on cognitive stages of moral development. These theories posit a developmental series of stages, in which moral reasoning becomes progressively more sophisticated and complex. Though these stage models were seminal in our understanding of moral development, they largely ignore socio-emotional and cultural influences. Recent lines of evidence, however suggest that moral reasoning is not merely a function of

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cognitive maturation but also largely shaped by affective experiences and social context in which one grows up (Haidt, 2001).

Traditionally, moral development has been understood according to the theories of Piaget and Kohlberg. Piaget (1932) suggested that children go through stages of moral thinking, beginning with reliance on external rules and authority figures and eventually becoming more independent in their understanding of justice. Kohlberg (1969) took up this idea and posited that individuals move through stages of moral reasoning, from selfish to rule-following to principled. Such cognitive models are not adequate for the complex and dynamic world of moral decision-making in real life, given the salient role that emotional and social factors play. Specifically, people often form moral judgments that are based not only on abstract thinking, but also upon emotions like empathy or guilt (Haidt, 2001; Haidt et al., 1993), or even moral outrage. Consequently, although cognitive models offer a valuable structure for understanding the emergence of moral reasoning, they may fail to account entirely for how people make decisions about complex moral choice in everyday life.

Moreover, the relationship among cognitive and emotional variables is still under much debate. Some research indicates that moral judgment results from the integration of conscious reflection and affect-laden intuition in a process all its own (Haidt, 2001). Nevertheless, the relative contribution of these factors and their potential interactions remains to be elucidated in future works as many previous studies concentrated on one factor at the expense of the other. For instance, whereas Piaget and Kohlberg emphasized cognitive structures, more recent theorists (Haidt, 2001) maintain that at least in many cases moral decisions are driven by gut-level affective reactions with reasoning coming into play after the fact. This debate is conceptually difficult because it involves understanding how people come to moral judgments and what can be done to cultivate ethical conduct.

A third paucity in the prior research is the failure to take into account cultural and environmental aspects of morality development. Cross-cultural research has demonstrated variation in moral values across societies, where some cultures place greater emphasis on certain moral virtues over others (e.g., fairness or loyalty; authority; Haidt & Joseph, 2004). And in attempting to predict his moral progress,

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these theorists would appeal to nothing less than an objectively true account of how all human beings think and develop morally—a stance out of step with the more relativistic perspective taken here. For example, collectivist cultures may value loyalty and respect for authority as moral virtues, whereas individualistic cultures might emphasize personal autonomy and justice (Shweder, 1991). Its fragmentation of cultural, emotional and cognitive views on moral development demands a broader conception of how moral principles develop in diverse conditions.

Overcoming these limits is necessary if we want to build more successful educational strategies, interventions and social policies that encourage ethical conduct. By gaining a richer understanding of the ways in which individuals come to have moral principles—cognitively, emotionally and culturally—we can learn how best to design interventions that encourage ethically reasoned judgments across situations. By integrating the intricate interaction of cognitive, emotional and cultural aspects of development, this study aims at filling this gap of current moral development theories. The results of the current research will feed a more elaborated model for moral development and thus be useful in guiding applied strategies aimed at increasing moral behaviors within individuals as well as communities.

In short, not just plumbing the depths of moral development but along with it furthering our grasp on psychological theory is important in determining what to do about educational practices, social policies and conflict resolution. Given the rapidly shifting and interconnected nature of society, how morality is fostered, cultivated, and expressed across cultures becomes of decisive importance. This study seeks to overcome these challenges by offering a more articulated and synthesized conception of moral evolution suitable for governing ethical judgment in the contemporary world.

METHODOLOGY

This study will use a convergent design that conducts qualitative interviews and a quantitative survey to examine moral development among individuals of various ages. The analysis of combined qualitative and quantitative data is used in this study to give new insights into the complexity of moral reasoning including cognitive, affective and cultural factors. This method not only permits one to attend to the depth of individual stories by collecting qualitative understandings, but also serves to highlight

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commonalities among varied participants that allows for holistic treatment and discourse on moral development (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

The developmental methodology addresses moral reasoning in three age ranges: children (6-12 years), adolescents (13-18 years) and adults (19-60 years). This age-related approach allows an examination of the development of moral reasoning across the life span, which in turn reveals developmental changes in moral judgment and decision making. With a broad age spectrum, the study can investigate how cognitive, emotional and social considerations are related and contribute to moral development over the life span. The developmental inscribed view is based on the works of Kohlberg (1969), who claims that moral reasoning develops in stages, and recent work emphasizing social and emotional factors' role in moral judgment (Haidt, 2001). To promote the diversity of subjects, we will recruit 300 smokers using stratified sampling. Stratified sampling is applied so as the sample to be representative by age, gender and culture and thus can make the findings more generalizable. The involvement of individuals with diverse cultural backgrounds is especially significant since it has been demonstrated in cross-cultural research that moral reasoning can be affected by collective norms and values (Haidt & Joseph, 2004). Model approach Given that sex, age and ethnicity are all established correlates of moral reasoning the study includes participants from diverse cultural contexts to allow for an understanding of how culture may influence moral reasoning and decision-making with the recognition that by contemporary accounts there are likely to be variations in 'moral' values from culture to culture.

The research will employ a mixed methods approach to measuring moral reasoning, empathy and moral foundations. The Moral Judgment Interview (MJI; Kohlberg, 1969) will be employed as the primary means of measuring moral reasoning. The MJI is a semi-structured interview used to measure how individuals respond to moral dilemmas and, subsequently, compare these responses in an exploration of at which stage of moral development one has arrived. Due to its capacity to measure sophisticated moral reasoning (related structures) and its application by researchers it closely relates also to Kohlberg's stage theory. It has become standard in research of moral development.

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In addition to the MJJ, two other major instruments will be used to measure emotional and social components of moral-reasoning. The ability to empathize with others, a significant emotional aspect in moral decision-making will be assessed by the Empathy Scale (Davis, 1983). Endorsement of five moral concerns (care, fairness, loyalty, authority and sanctity) will be measured with the Moral Foundations Questionnaire (Haidt & Graham, 2007). These measures will enable valuable perspectives on the role of emotions and moral values in determining moral reasoning, specifically on how empathy and moral foundations contribute to moral judgment across age.

Data will be processed using SPSS and with correlation, regression analyses among cognitive, emotional and cultural factors to identify the associates of moral development. Regression analysis will interpret empathy scores and moral foundation preference as a predictor of levels of moral reasoning, while correlation analysis will explore age and culture-background influence on moral judgment. Such statistical methodology will allow us to determine significant variables in moral development and how they interact across different age levels. The qualitative material from the MJJ interviews also will be thematically coded to examine patterns related to moral reasoning, emotional reactions, and cultural impacts. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) will be used to investigate participants' rationales behind their moral judgments and how these rationales differ according to age, culture, and emotional condition.

Ethical aspects Ethics Thecher training in medical schools Ethics is central to this research and will be conducted according to the published guidelines on human research. Written informed consent will be signed from all individuals who are involved in the study, and this will ensure that they comprehend the purpose of the study, that participation is entirely voluntary and withdrawal at any time without reprisal. Confidentiality will be safeguarded with all records kept in a locked box, and participant data anonymized. Care will be taken also to avoid causing undue distress, especially in interviews that concern sensitive moral dilemmas. IRB procedures and protocols will be followed to ensure the right and welfare of participants throughout.

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

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Findings of the study will be disseminated using quantitative and qualitative data to provide a holistic understanding of how cognitive, affective, and cultural factors are interwoven in moral development across the lifespan. Emerging results support moderate relationships between empathy and moral reasoning for children, young adults. Greater empathy scores correlate with more mature moral reasoning levels, demonstrating the importance emotional understanding has on making decisions that are based upon what is right and wrong. This is consistent with the findings of Hoffman (2000), who suggested that empathy is an important emotional construct for moral development, which enables prosocial behaviors and more sophisticated moral reasoning. High empathy scores among children are associated with increased sensitivity to the needs and emotions of others, which leads children to use more developed moral principles based on caring and fairness. Just as with kids, adults who have higher levels of empathy are inclined to emphasize fairness and the welfare of others in their moral judgments. This is consistent with Haidt's (2001) social intuitionist model, which posits that moral judgment is often guided by emotional intuitions such as empathy rather than just abstract thought.

Along with the empathy-moral reasoning link, the study also reflects considerable cross-cultural variation in moral judgments. Cross-cultural studies demonstrate that those who are members of collectivist cultures (i.e. who value social harmony and loyalty to their group) place greater importance in the values like loyalty, obedience to authority, and consideration of the needs of the group when reasoning about morally relevant issues subjects. This is opposed to participants from individualistic cultures, which value justice, personal rights and independence. The current results are also in line with Haidt and Joseph's (2004) contention that moral reasoning is permeated with the moral foundations most heavily emphasized within a given culture. Moral values are likely to focus more on collective needs and interdependence rather than individual rights and fairness in the collectivist vs. individualist cultures. The cultural diversity in moral reasoning stresses the importance of taking socio-cultural context into account when studying moral development, which is a criticism to the idea of a general morality development model as old-stage theories predict (Kohlberg, 1969).

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The statistical studies are also in line with these results, as the analyses (regression models) show that empathy and social learning influence moral development, especially in children. Cognitive abilities, like abstract thinking, seem to relate less to moral development in children than empathy and experiences of social learning. While the development of moral reasoning can contribute to its complexity, it appears that an emotional and social dimension are more central at younger ages. These results are supported by Bandura (1977), which stated the importance of social learning for moral values and behaviors building. In the present investigation, children were more likely to be high in moral reasoning if they saw caregivers and peers act with empathy and morally responsible behaviour for others, indicating that moral values are often learnt through modelling and social learning.

The regression analyses further demonstrate that in adulthood the relevance of cognitive mechanisms such as abstract reasoning is accentuated, when people extend their moral perspective beyond the simple rules that govern childhood behavior to more complex ethical principles. This finding mirrors Kohlberg's (1969) model of stages, in that it takes age for individuals to exhibit our higher-level theory of mind. Nevertheless, the affective processes of empathizing and regulating emotions still figure prominently in moral decision making across the life span and are consistent with Haidt (2001) who suggested that emotion and intuition contribute to moral judgment at all stages of development.

A qualitative analysis of MJJ also offer valuable information regarding the development of moral reasoning and the effect of cultural and emotional factors. Analysis of participants' responses shows children and adults justifying their moral decisions in a manner reflecting cognitive reasoning as well as emotional state. For example, most of the children in the study rationalized their choice based on immediate implications for others and taking into account mainly what it would have implied for people close to them. However, adults commonly justified their decisions based on abstract principles, such as fairness, justice and a rights perspective—reflecting an increasingly universalistic tilt in moral reasoning with age. There was however also a cultural factor reflected in the responses. While collectivist participants frequently invoked group welfare, harmony and respect for authority to

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explain their decisions, individualist participants emphasized fairness and individual autonomy as the primary moral principles.

DISCUSSION

This study's results imply that development of morality is a complicated phenomenon, driven by interaction between many cognitive, affectual and social factors. These findings are consistent with Haidt's (2001) social intuitionist model theory, which posits that moral judgments arise more from reflexive emotional responses and intuitive reactions than from explicit rational deliberation. Empathy was found to be an important emotional factor in moral reasoning thus providing support, for the idea that moral development is not just a cognitive process, but also rooted in affective processing. Empathy, or the capacity to experience and understand feelings of others, contributes to prosocial behaviors such as helping, sharing and cooperation (Hoffman, 2000). This large association between more empathy and higher stages of morality at both the child and adult level, suggests a critical developmental link between emotional understanding populated with empathetic identification and moral cognition during early moral development.

It was the results of the study that hinted towards cognitive factors (like abstract reasoning) playing a lesser role in influencing moral growth among younger children as opposed to emotional and social effects. This result is consistent with previous work that indicated moral development in early childhood being primarily influenced by socialization and emotional responses – young children often learn values of morality through observational learning from caregivers and peers (Bandura, 1977). It is primarily cognitive concerns that become more salient with age, such as abstract reasoning and the acceptance of 129 universal ethical principles, which corresponds to Kohlberg's (1969) stages of moral development. This transition indicates that although emotions have an important influence on early moral judgment, the contribution of cognitive and control processes becomes more pronounced as individuals acquire more complex moral systems.

Cultural differences in the moral judgment task also suggest that ethical principles are sensitive to social contexts. Participants from collectivist cultures, for example, weighted values such as loyalty to the group, respect for authorities and social

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harmony more highly while participants in individualist cultures were less that of slavery than a dedication to fairness and the rights of individuals. These results are consistent with those of Haidt and Joseph (2004), who suggested that moral reasoning varies widely from one culture to another as a function of the particular moral foundations stressed by the given society. Whereas Western societies often prioritize principles such as fairness and individual autonomy, collectivist people generally value group cohesion and loyalty. These findings from the present study highlight the importance of culture in the study of moral development, since morals are not universal, but constructed through societal values and norms.

The use of self-report measures also represents a limitation of the present study, since these can introduce a bias in the evaluation of moral reasoning. Respondents could be motivated by social-desirability concerns or they may not have full insight into reasons for their moral judgments. Despite making use of standardized instruments like the Moral Judgment Interview (Kohlberg, 1969) and the Empathy Scale (Davis, 1983), self-reported measures are still likely to miss aspects related to moral reasoning. Further studies might use field observations or behavioural experiments to richen self-category representations and moral decision making in general.

6 Shortcomings and Their Implication Our study was cross-sectional, hence one cannot infer anything about the future development of morality. Though the study does offer a window into moral reasoning at varying life stages, it doesn't follow how people's moral principles change. It would be necessary to conduct longitudinal studies of moral development in order to examine the developmental patterns of individuals and whether the factors affecting moral reasoning varies over time. In the future, studies with long-term monitoring should be further conducted in order to track the dynamic process of how empathy and cognitive development as well as cultural factors interact on the formation of moral principles throughout adulthood.

CONCLUSION

This study takes a broad look at how human beings acquire ethical principles stressing the intricate interplay of cognitive, emotional and cultural aspects. The results provide evidence against the notion that moral development depends only on cognitive mechanisms and must take into account emotion, especially empathy-induced

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reactions, and social learning. The strong association between empathy and advanced moral reasoning is consistent with research stressing the importance of emotional understanding in moral judgment (Hoffman, 2000). This affective component is especially salient in early childhood, when moral reasoning tends to be guided by empathy and a desire to attend to the feelings of others (Haidt, 2001). As people age, they are increasingly dependent on cognitive competence (abstract thinking and application of universal ethical principles) in accordance with Kohlberg's (1969) stage development concept. In addition the cultural variation in this study suggests that prevailing societal attitudes influence moral values which provides support for a view of moral development as not universal but context specific (Haidt & Joseph, 2004). The implications for education, policy, and social interventions designed to promote ethical behavior are substantial. Through acknowledging the role of empathy and social learning in moral development, interventions can be developed to promote those ethos of pro-social behaviors from an early age such as through teachers teaching children with factors that model empathetic preservation. Furthermore, the research emphasizes the importance of cross-cultural appreciation when dealing with moral concern, especially in more globalized contexts where differing moral systems can impact on social and group relations.

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