

Moral Development Across Lifespan: An Inquiry into Early Beginnings and Later Variations.

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Abstract

Moral development has its roots early in life. Children are found to be born with a primary sense of right and wrong. As they grow and socialize, the experiences train their understanding of expectations, the reward, and punitive outcomes to them and others via their intentions and actions. Several researchers have investigated the onset and emergence of morality during the early years. Theorists vary in their perspectives: those who examine morality range in their explanations from infants being born with no moral sense (social learning and behaviorist theories), to those who believe humans are self-oriented, to those who believe that human reasoning abilities separate us from the rest of creation (cognitive development theories), and finally, to those who believe that humans beings are born with potentialities for moral actions. The current article examines the past literature on morality and its bidirectional influence on childhood and adolescent experiences and behaviors.

Keywords: Moral Development, Lifespan, Childhood, Cognitive, Experiences, Growth

1. Introduction

Since the beginning of human civilization, moral development has been explored by spiritualists, philosophers, theorists, scholars, and scientists, for the common goal of gaining a clearer understanding of fundamental human morality. According to Kalsoom, Behlol, Kayani, and Kayani (2012), morality is a system of beliefs, values, and judgment about the rightness or wrongness of actions. Psychologists often call this conscience, which is an internalized set of moral values. Additionally, moral development encompasses the principles of how individuals treat one another within society (Erdynast & Chen, 2014; Kalsoom et al., 2012). It involves a combination of worthwhile ends, justice-reasoning principles, and supererogatory virtues, resulting in fairness and equal liberty.

Human beings can reflect on and make judgments about their own and other individuals' actions, and as a result, they can make moral choices (Guldborg, 2011). Individuals can also participate in collective cognition and draw on the collective knowledge of humanity. To function morally, an individual must know two concepts: one is to be morally aware, and the second is to perceive the moral dimensions in a context. Mastery of these two skills helps the individual to consider other people's feelings by interpreting their reactions to a situation (Guldborg, 2011). Another concept, according to Guldborg, moral judgment involves the reasoning ability to make the right and best decision in a moment.

When an individual is committed to behaving morally, attention is devoted to the association between moral cognitions and actual moral action (Caravita, Sijtsema, Rambaran, & Gini, 2014). Moral functioning requires that an individual is primarily morally devoted. In other words, it requires that the individual takes responsibility for their judgments. It involves the desire to make and act on one's moral decision. Overall, there is a direct relationship between individual motivation, commitment, integrity, and moral responsibility (Stephens & Wangaard, 2016). The authors emphasized that righteous functioning is incomplete without moral action. In other words, being ethical in thought and verbally must be backed with being moral in behaviors.

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Furthermore, morality involves questions that address ethical requirements consisting of fairness and fidelity, which are specified by issues regarding obligations or essential duties. Typical human duties are of two types, positive and negative. The positive kind includes upholding justice, mutual aid, and respect, while the negative involves non-injuring or harming innocent people (Erdynast & Chen, 2014). Another classification was given by Hardy, Walker, Olsen, Woodbury, and Hickman (2014), who suggested four components critical for moral action; 1) being sensitive to moral situations, 2) being competent at the moral judgment, 3) being motivated to do what is moral, and 4) having the capacity to follow through in doing so. Elaboration on these types is given in the latter part of this article.

1.1 Moral Distinction

Whether or not moral judgment is natural has been an essential topic of discussion. According to Puka (2017), morality grows and develops in human beings. Narvez (2013) also believes that moral development is continuous and not something that happens or is just switched on/off during different life events. He suggested that human curiosity and attention guide our desire and further possible action (Narvez, 2013). The human species develops and evolves a mature moral conscience and character despite any impediments that may slow down the process, for example, war or famine. However, a situation can occur when two individuals may disapprove of an action, for example, racial profiling. Though one individual may judge the act as a moral violation, the other may see it as a breach of etiquette (Narvez, 2013). Psychologists suggest that moral distinction is the ability to distinguish between right and wrong, good and evil, and praiseworthy and blameworthy (Kumar, 2015). Kumar also suggested that moral judgment is natural to human nature as it clarifies the reasoning in several domains and explains cooperative, uncooperative, and punitive behavior.

1.2 Significance

Over the past decade, the United States has witnessed an increase in drug and alcohol abuse and teen parenthood, which led to a rise in morality and moral cognition awareness. Individuals such as parents and teachers want to know how to reward and promote moral behaviors in children. As a result, they turn to moral development theorists to seek answers. Thus, morality remains a trending and active topic in today's society (Daeg de Mott, 2017).

According to Daeg de Mott (2017), there are several approaches to the study of moral development, which can be categorized in various ways. These approaches suggest that humans develop morality through internal and external factors, including environmental, cognitive, and personality (Daeg de Mott, 2017). Theorists who examine morality differ in their explanations: from those who believe infants are born with no moral sense (social learning and behaviorist theories), to those who think humans are self-oriented, to those who believe that human reasoning abilities separate us from the rest of creation (cognitive development theories), and finally, to those who think that humans beings are born with potentialities for moral behaviors.

McNeil and Helwig (2015) suggest that an important issue in society is fostering a sense of social responsibility in citizens. A positively functioning society depends on individuals concerned with the welfare of fellow citizens and individuals who are willing to dedicate their time and resources to the public good. They suggested establishing an effective functioning society where individuals have a sense of social responsibility, and it is essential to have community service programs for youth. Although community service enhances moral behavior for all ages, it has significantly strengthened youth behavior. Community service for everyone is prosocial and is designed to promote the behavior altruistically to help others (Krettenauer & Victor, 2017; McNeil & Helwig, 2015; Recchia, Wainryb, Bourne, & Pasupathi, 2014).

2. Development of Morality During Lifespan

Research has shown that morality emerges during the early ages of life and continues to expand and blossom. One may wonder if morality is innate, genetic, and present at birth or acquired, environmental, and learned behavior over a lifespan. Empirical evidence shows that moral development has its roots early in life. Children are found to be born with a primary sense of right and wrong. As they grow and socialize, their life experiences shape their understanding of expectations, the reward, and the punitive outcomes to them and others via their intentions and actions. Further nuances in these stages are discussed below.

2.1 Moral Reasoning During Childhood

According to Palmer, Rutland, and Cameron (2015), younger children focus on moral concerns when evaluating and observing peer behaviors. However, as children develop and get older, they become more aware of group dynamics. Consequently, their justifications become more multifaceted.

Throughout life, individuals are more likely to focus on additional concerns that might stem from intergroup aggression or psychological dynamics. Caravita, Sijtsema, Rambaran, and Gini (2014) noted that the social environment plays a role in shaping morality and moral standards for children and adolescents. Morality is cultivated and learned through the community, in which individuals develop their social relationships. Because youth learn from and imitate, peers may use morally disengaged justifications for behaviors and thoughts (Caravita, Sijtsema, Rambaran, & Gini, 2014). Adolescents especially will believe that their explanations are acceptable and valid.

Developing an understanding of moral rules and social skills is an important and essential task of early development (Smetana, Rote, Jambon, Tasopoulos-Chan, Villalbos, & Comer, 2012). Congruently, Bian, Wang, & Zhong (2017) suggest that the theory of mind refers to a child's ability to understand others' psychological states, false beliefs, wishes, and emotions. Killen and Rizzo (2014) suggest that the term 'intentionality' refers to a child's concept of intention and ability to evaluate their actions. Bian et al. Further noted that skill and awareness are necessary elements of intentional behavior. Consequently, the understanding of the two variables, awareness and skills, impact moral judgment. The *awareness variable* refers to whether the child realizes what they are doing when making judgments and how it affects the judgment/outcome. The *skill variable* refers to whether the child can accomplish what they want and achieve the expected outcomes.

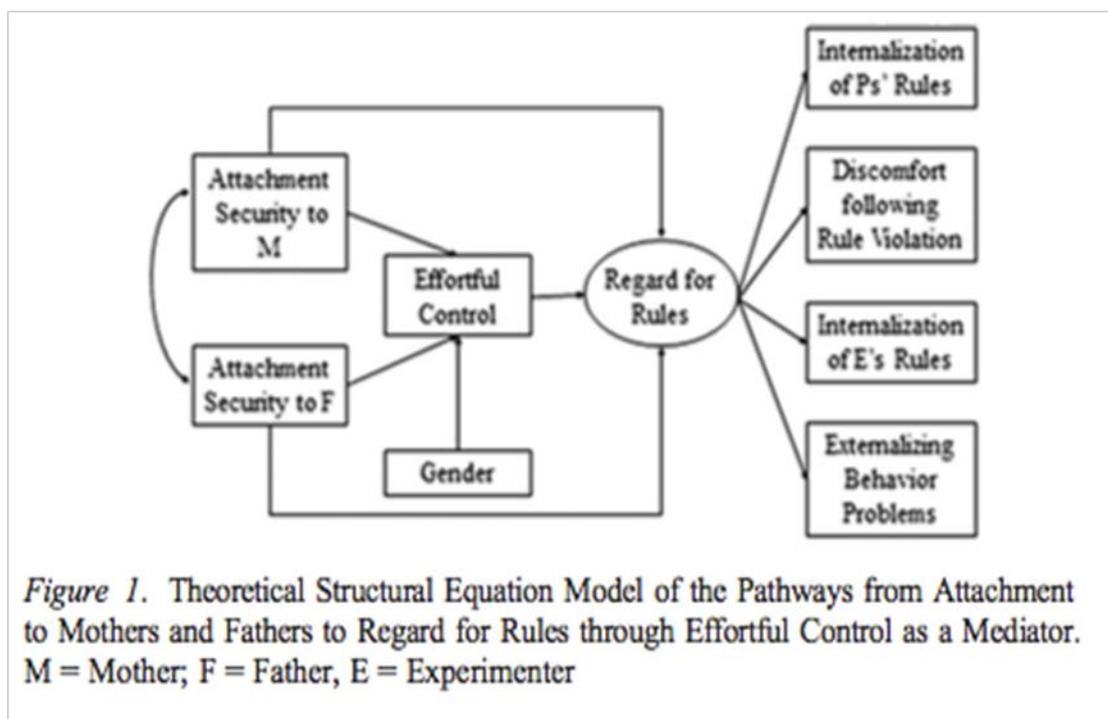
Furthermore, Augustine and Stifter (2015) noted that the role of temperament in morality is an essential topic of discussion in the literature on moral development beyond awareness and skill. Typically, children with more significant avoidance are labeled by psychologists and researchers as being behaviorally inhibited. Notably, children with more significant avoidance are considered punishment sensitive if they behave correctly for fear of being punished. However, researchers suggest that parents discipline children gently, instead of negatively using emotional or power-assertive techniques, to prevent anxiety in the child to promote higher conscience and more morally based decisions in punishment-sensitive children (Augustine & Stifter, 2015). On the contrary, a 2014 study suggested that incurring physical punishment is associated with lower scores on moral development measures as children get older. The discipline employed during childhood contributes to academic integrity as children become older (Qualls, 2014).

Another type of parenting, called supportive parenting and caregiving, on the other hand, is linked with moral development in children (Malti, Eisenberg, Kim, and Buchmann (2013). Supportive parenting consists of encouragement, warmth, affection, love, and providing a positively stimulating environment. Attachment theorists and developmental researchers have stressed that supportive relationships and quality primary caregiving are central in children's moral development (Malti, Eisenberg, Kim, & Buchmann, 2013; Recchia, Wainryb, Bourne, & Pasupathi, 2014). Correspondingly, Nordling, Boldt, O'Bleness, and Kochanska (2016) suggest that quality parent-child relationships are crucial for a child's socialized and rule-compatible conduct.

Similarly, responsive parenting is known to lead to multiple positive child outcomes, including sociomoral development" (Narvaez, Wang, Gleason, Cheng, Lefever, & Deng, 2013). They explored caregiving practices and their impact on sociomoral outcomes during early childhood. They coined a term called evolved developmental niche (EDN) to describe factors such as regular touch, breastfeeding, caregiver responsiveness, multiple adult caregivers, play, and natural childbirth. Mothers were studied for their responses to their child's behavior regulation, empathy, and conscience. After controlling for maternal income and education, the majority of the effects showed significance concerning their responsivity. Narvaez et al. (2013; Narvaez, 2018) found that EDN was significant beyond the responsivity alone for fostering sociomoral development. Theoretically, physiological and psychological support from parents explains the connections between responsive parenting and heightened moral functioning, such as greater empathy (Siegel, 1999) and concern for others (Eisenberg, 2000). Further, it was also evidenced that parental responsivity predicts early conscience development (Kochanska, 1994, 2002).

When the parent-child relationship is positive, children are more likely to please the parents by following rules and complying with requests. They noted that attachment security to father and mother led to effortful control from adults, which in turn led to regard for regulations and internalization of parental rules. Children also developed a sense of discomfort when violating parental rules, portrayed through their externalizing behavior problems.

Gender seems to affect the effortful control, which acted as a mediator of such externalization. Children with a secure attachment to parents are more likely to obey rules, embrace requests, show less resistance, and develop internalized controls. Conversely, children with an insecure attachment to parents and caregivers are more likely to have poor moral reasoning behavior/skills and sometimes portray antisocial behaviors (Nordling, Boldt, O'Bleness, & Kochanska, 2016).



Attachment to Mothers and Fathers: Structural Equation Model of Pathways
[Source: Nordling, Boldt, O'Bleness, and Kochanska, 2016]

2.1.1 Expected Milestones in Children's Moral Development

For young children, especially, it is challenging to understand another person's intention. As children mature, they become better able to use information concerning intention and consider both outcomes and intentions when making moral decisions (Fu et al., 2014). In another relevant study, Fu, Lou, and Kou (2015) indicated that in certain situations, strangers are not merely observers, but, they could exhibit specific behaviors. It is unclear whether a demonstration of moral or hypocritical behavior by a stranger of a different social identity influences people's moral hypocrisy. Moral hypocrisy, according to Fu et al (2015) was the desire to behave morally while seeking opportunities to avoid adopting behaviors that actually result in morally good outcomes. "Prominent research questions include why people take a public stand against crimes they have previously committed and why moral people behave in an immoral manner. Studies have revealed the nature of moral behavior to be hypocrisy; that is, people desire to appear moral to themselves and others without practicing moral behavior" (Batson, Kobrynowicz, Dinnerstein, Kampf & Wilson, 1997)

As children grow and develop, they display a greater reliance on their awareness of their judgment of wrongful acts than their judgment of deserved punishment. The Pennsylvania Early Childhood Mental Health Advisory Committee (2017) further noted that the child's immediate environment could help them become more aware of others in society to enhance their morality and moral judgment. The Pennsylvania Early Childhood Mental Health Advisory Committee (2017) suggests that at 0-12 months, children begin to respond to parents' emotions. At 12-24 months, children want independence but also show concern when the caregiver is unhappy. At 12-36 months, the child becomes aware of hurting other individuals; at 3-4 years, children can share more consistently, and at 4-6 years, children may want to share with less fortunate individuals. Along the same lines, Smetana (1981; 1984; and Smetana et al. (1993; 2012) suggest that children are aware of morality and social rules between the 1st and 2nd years of life. Additionally, Malle, Guglielmo, and Monroe (2014) found that children at four years of age can make a moral judgment.

However, in the 2nd and 3rd years of the child's life, parents, caregivers, and peers provide more verbal feedback in response to their moral transgression regarding unfairness and harm to others (Smetana, 1981; 1984; Smetana et al., 1993; 2012).

As noted previously, in Piaget's and Kohlberg's theory of moral development, morality in children advances from a results-oriented style to an internal motivation orientation. Therefore, intentionality comes a bit later in life. In other words, the results and consequences of behavior dramatically affect a child's moral judgment and development at a very early stage in life (Ma, 2013).

According to Cui, Colasante, Malti, Ribeaud, and Eisner (2016), moral emotions and moral reasoning can emphasize, highlight and the negative consequences of harmful conduct, reduce the possibility of its occurrence, and motivate moral behavior in others. The authors also discovered that children who thought physical aggression was acceptable were more aggressive than children who perceived the conduct as morally wrong. Fundamentally, behavioral outcomes affect moral judgment for children mainly. Past research studies have found that children at three years of age can differentiate intentional behaviors from unintentional behaviors, what should result in punishment and what was not deserving of punishment (Bian et al., 2017; Fu, Xiao, Killen, & Lee, 2014).

2.2 Moral Development During Adolescence

The adolescent stage is characterized by physical, emotional, intellectual, and social changes (Van der Graaff, Branje, Wied, Hawk, Van Lier, & Meeus, 2014). These changes impact the interaction between individuals as well as their environment. The adolescence stage brings new social roles and responsibilities and allows adolescents to have increased decision-making opportunities, especially moral issues with various consequences (Sticca & Perren, 2015; Vera-Estay, Dooley, & Beauchamp, 2015).

One of the critical developmental milestones during adolescence is the heightening of empathy. Van der Graaff, Branje, Wied, Hawk, Van Lier, and Meeus (2014) suggest that the adolescent stage is the most critical time for empathy development. Empathy is fundamental and plays a pivotal role in moral development. As children mature into the teenage stage, they further "develop social skills to create and maintain relationships" (Hawks, Parker, Werner-Wilson, Huff, & Lianekhammy, 2015, p. 142). Adolescents experience cognitive, relational changes that impact their abilities and tendencies to take other individuals' perspectives and further experience feelings of concern (Hawks, Parker, Werner-Wilson, Huff, & Lianekhammy, 2015). The authors also noted that the parent-child relationship is the foundation for the child's emotional intelligence and moral understanding (Hawks et al., 2015; Patrick & Gibbs, 2012).

The parent-child relationship has a significant effect on the development of adolescent and children and their moral development. With the increasing age of the adolescent, both parents and children became less likely to reason about the multifaceted and personal issues as conventional and sort them as contingent on parental authority; they became more likely to differ about and sort them as under the adolescents' jurisdiction (Smetana, 1988). Correspondingly, Patrick and Gibbs (2012) suggest that adolescents who perceive their parents as having an authoritative parenting style are more likely to support and adopt values consistent with their parents' values. The authoritative parenting style, over time, facilitates internalization and promotes moral identity among adolescents. Authoritative parenting is a democratic method of parenting in which one can find the highest form of responsiveness, warmth, and support alongside the highest demandingness and behavior control. Parents utilize the "Let us discuss this" approach rather than the "Because I said so" style. This style is meant to produce successful children with higher self-esteem and self-regulation.

Morelli and Zupanick (2017) also noted that teenagers make moral judgments and decisions daily. During the adolescent period, their peers have a defining impact on their ethical decision-making (Hilliard, Bowers, Greenman, Hershberg, Geldhof, Glickman, Lerner, & Lerner, 2014; Roos, Hodges, & Salmivalli, 2014). Additionally, during the early adolescent stage, teenagers can think abstractly, which enables them to recognize that rules are created by other people (Caskey & Anfara, 2017). During the late adolescent stage, most teenagers are less rebellious, as they are beginning to establish their own identity, belief system, and purpose in the world (Morelli & Zupanick, 2017). Sengsavang and Krettenauer (2015) found that "adolescents' perception of parental support/ involvement serves as a protective function by attenuating the links between risk factors in the school, peer domains, and aggressive situations" (p. 218). Adolescents learn to empathize and communicate with others by observing how their parents and caregivers communicate (Hawks et al., 2015). Overall, past research has found that increases in adolescents' perceptions of parental support predicted a decrease in aggressive behavior.

2.3 Moral Development during Adulthood

Morality and moral reasoning are evident as early as childhood. However, quality and complexity evolve during life course development. The third decade of life is when individuals explore various behaviors to solidify their personality and establish their moral identity. Adulthood is a crucial time in a person's life because it is when the individual considers morality or being a righteous person to be central to their sense of self. Exploration and development begin in adolescence and continue throughout adulthood (Lee, Padilla-Walker, & Nelson, 2015). Collin (2014) states that the highest moral judgment development is likely experienced during emerging adulthood, between 19-21 years when individuals enter college.

Several factors promote moral development and moral judgment throughout the lifespan. According to Lee, Padilla-Walker, and Nelson (2015), some motivations are self-oriented, and others are focused on others' welfare. Often, throughout the adolescence stage and entering the emerging adulthood stage, there is a fear of negative evaluation from others or a tendency for individuals to worry about outside perception (from others). It is especially true as it concerns peer and family perceptions, impacting moral decision-making the most.

3. Moral Perceptions Influenced by Gender

There is adequate evidence that shows the linkage between gender and moral motivation, especially during the adolescent stage (Malin, Tirri, & Liaw, 2015). Females have shown more moral reasons than males, and the content of their moral reasons differs. Girls tend to value community engagement and service, compared to boys, who value political engagement. The findings suggest that gender leads to different moral developmental trajectories throughout the lifespan (Malin et al., 2015). However, this same study noted that there is little gender difference in civic engagement among adolescents. Females are more likely to participate in political activities (be in student government or lead school-based organizations) early in life than males. However, in the adult stage, females become less engaged in political activity and migrate towards community service and local civic organizations. Women are less involved in activities that have the most significant influence over policymaking than adult men; a vivid example of this trend is that the U.S. Congress is 80% male. Also, there has never been a female president or vice president of the U.S. (Malin et al., 2015).

Morality is related to gender for two reasons: according to Caravita, Sijtsema, Rambaran, and Gini (2014). Firstly, gender determines friendship selection in childhood and adolescence. Boys are more susceptible to peer group influences than girls. This distinction in friendship selection is particularly true as it pertains to risk behaviors. Secondly, past research suggests significant gender differences in morality, as boys portray more self-justification of immoral behavior than girls (Caravita et al., 2014). Studies as these and others reiterate the significant differences in emergence and variations of morality among girls and boys.

4. Environmental Factors Affecting Moral Development

As part of the environmental factors, socioeconomic components seemed to play their share of role in shaping moral reasoning and behaviors. Caravita, Giardino, Lenzi, Salvaterra, and Antonietti (2012) examined socioeconomic status (SES) and its effects on moral reasoning. Primary and middle school children living in rural and urban areas were studied, recording their immigrant status and family SES level and using a series of moral and socio-conventional rule dilemmas based on Greene et al.'s (2001) neuroimaging experiment. These environmental variables (Socio-geographic, economic area, immigrant status, and SES) affected evaluations of moral dilemmas but had no impact on the judgment of personal and impersonal dilemmas.

One of the first attempts to identify the neural counterparts of moral judgment is a classic experiment studying brain activity via fMRI. There are two fundamental dilemmas - impersonal dilemma (switch dilemma) and personal (footbridge dilemma). In both contexts, the choice is between letting one person die to save five persons. But, the second one, personal dilemma, engages the emotional aspect and thus triggers neural activity in emotional-related brain areas. In contrast, the cognitive functioning brain areas were activated higher than the personal dilemma when addressing the impersonal dilemma. Green et al. (2001). and other researchers that came after that supported the notion that in moral judgment and behavior, two brain networks are involved, each associated with a distinctive attitude or form of processing: cognitive vs. emotional, reasoning-based vs. intuition-based, and explicit vs. implicit.

Variation in socioeconomic status (SES) levels have been associated with variation in brain serotonergic responsivity. Therefore, it may also be related to differences in the prevalence of diseases and problematic behaviors, including aggression (Manuck et al., 2005). Poverty status is also associated with individual neuro-cognitive performance in language, executive functions, and memory in children and adolescents (as cited in the review, Farah et al., 2007), suggesting that lower SES levels are connected with variation in the activity of some areas of the prefrontal cortex. Similarly, cultural factors, socio-geographic location of living also showed distinct differences in moral decisions and reasoning.

5. Theoretical Foundations of Moral Development

Discussion of developmental concepts is incomplete without exploring the underlying theoretical perspectives. There are several works in moral development, and only a few main ones are discussed here. Overall, the theories on morality can be divided into four categories: 1) feeling or emotion aspect, 2) behavioral aspect, 3) cognitive aspect, and 4) integrated perspectives (Ma, 2013).

Stephens and Wangaard (2016) described four sub-domains of moral development which influence: 1) conceptions of the good, 2) judgments of justice-reasoning (obligations, liberties, and duties), 3) supererogatory acts which a person does for the sake of another's good at considerable cost risk to the self (compassion, magnanimity, and forgiveness), and 4) judgments of moral character and worth.

According to Kohlberg and Piaget, there are three developmental schemas associated with moral thinking: personal interest, maintaining norms, and post-conventional. The first one, the personal interest schema, is standard/expected during childhood and justifies moral choices. The second one, the maintaining norms schema, is expected to happen and emerge during adolescence. This mental image explains moral choices involving social order. Lastly, the post-conventional schema also emerges during adolescence; however, unlike the maintaining norms schema, this schema involves moral choices related to shared ideas (Kohlberg, 1984; Ma, 2013; Stephens & Wangaard, 2016).

5.1 Theory of Moral Reasoning – Jean Piaget

The earliest insights were offered by Jean Piaget, according to whom there are developmental changes in moral thinking; this was based on Piaget's observation of children playing the marbles game (Cam, Cavdar, Seydoogullari, & Cok, 2012; Caravita, Giardino, Lenzi, Salvaterra, & Antonietti, 2012; Caravita, Sijtsema, Rambaran, & Gini, 2014; Kalsoom et al., 2012; Puka, 2017).

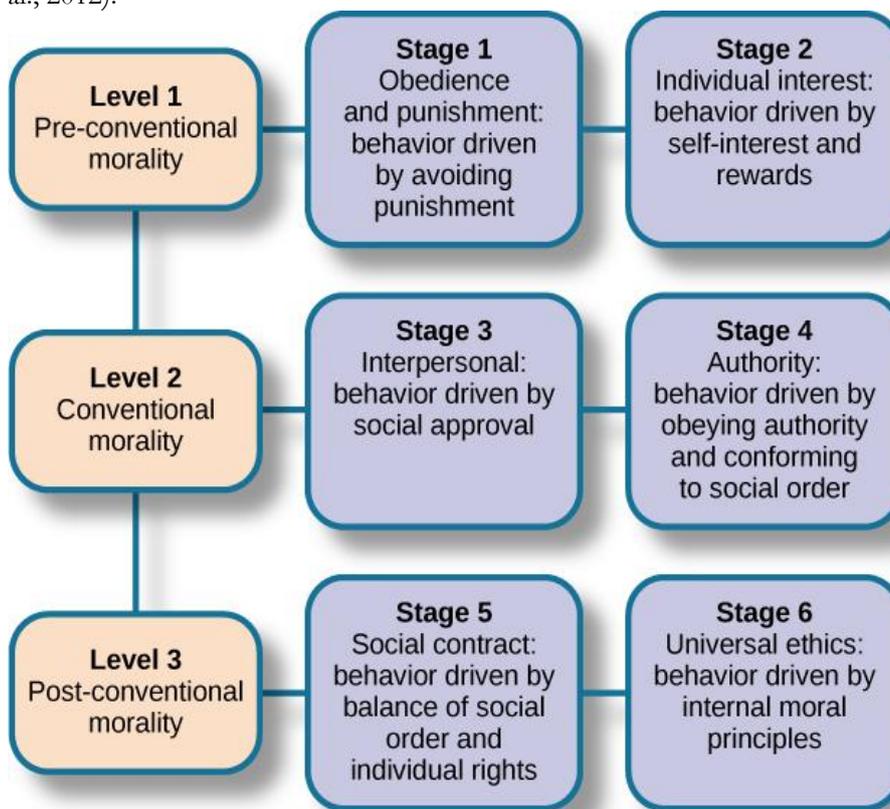
Piaget focused on the importance of guilt, shame, and pride in reinforcing prevailing norms of right and wrong (Puka, 2017). According to Piaget, morality broadly covers two distinct stages – heteronomous and autonomous. Heteronomous morality is the first stage of moral development and lasts from approximately 4-7 years of age and is called Heteronomy – moral realism. During this stage, justice and rules are conceived as unchangeable properties of the world. Autonomous morality is the second stage of Piaget's moral development theory, reaching about ten years of age. This stage is also called Autonomy – the morality of cooperation. During this point in life, the child becomes autonomous morality aware of people's creation of rules and laws and the consequences that follow actions.

Piaget found that moral reasoning changes from early childhood to adolescence and is seemingly predictable, coinciding with developmental changes in thinking. Piaget suggests that all children develop their moral judgment in the first stage (between the ages 7 and 8) and the Autonomy stage. As the child's intelligence develops from pre-operational to operational thinking, the child begins to have a better realization of cooperation (principles of reciprocity, equality, other individual's perspective, etc.) (Oswalt, 2017). Additionally, in Piaget's theory, peers play an essential role during this time in life (Kalsoom et al., 2012). Parents play a less critical role in the child's moral development because they act in an authoritarian way when giving rules and portraying/illustrating power.

5.2 Theory of Conventions – Lawrence Kohlberg

Kohlberg's theory of moral judgment focuses on moral thinking structures regarding interpersonal conflict situations (Kohlberg, 1984; Puka, 2017). He argued that age is not a factor in moral judgment and his model of moral reasoning illustrates six different levels of moral development. The levels consist of a) pre-conventional (stages 1 and 2), b) conventional (stages 3 and 4) and c) post-conventional (stages 5 and 6). According to Kohlberg, moral development is a linear process and proceeds gradually from one stage to the next in an ordered sequence (Beerhuizen & Brugman, 2012; Caravita, Sijtsema, Rambaran, & Gini, 2014; Morelli, 2017; Puka 2017).

At stage one, the obedience and punishment orientation, children make choices for the sake of avoiding punishment and obeying authority (Kalsoomet al., 2012; Ma, 2013). In stage two, innate hedonistic and instrumental (explain) orientation choices are based on self-satisfaction principles. In stage three, the good boy/girl orientation, children make choices that reflect a desire for others' approval. Next, at stage four, the law and authority orientation, the decision demonstrates a sense of duty to obey authority and avoid activities that might undermine the social order. In stage five, social contract orientation, the child's concern is balancing the value of social stability with the individual's rights. Lastly, in stage six, the universal ethical principle orientation, the decisions are dependent on conscience and principles such as justice, reciprocity, human rights, etc. (Kalsoomet al., 2012).



Lawrence Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Conventions
(Source: Kalsoom et al., 2012)

5.3 Theory with Care Approach – Carol Gilligan

Carol Gilligan expands Kohlberg's theory by stating that exploration of moral development should include both the female and male perspectives (Kalsoom et al., 2012). In her theory, Gilligan proved that Kohlberg's, Freud's, and Erickson's theories were based on male-centered perspectives. Proposing a stage theory of moral development for women, Gilligan suggests that males and females are taught different values growing up and argued that males develop differently from females. She viewed women's moral development as progressing in stages: 1) initial selfishness, 2) caring for others, and 3) being concerned for the needs of both self and others, as opposed to men who develop morally through a sense of justice. According to Vikan, Camino, and Biaggio (2005), Gilligan's theory suggests that morality can be differentiated into the morality of justice and care. Contrary to Kohlberg's theory, Gilligan's theory faces criticism that dominant 'justice morality' is gender-specific.

Exploring Gilligan's perspectives further, Muuss (1988) has stated that she poses a challenge to Kohlberg's stance by focusing on the feminist viewpoint of moral development. Gilligan indicates that Kohlberg's rulings show a gender bias toward males; men tend to categorize social relationships in a hierarchical order and support the morality of rights, while women regard interpersonal connectedness, care, sensitivity, and concern to people.

Kohlberg's scoring criteria give the interpersonal care orientations a less ranking than the justice orientation. Gilligan highlighted justice (male) and care (female) directions as two distinct and necessary orientations that must be integrated to develop and realize the full human potential of morality. A continuation of her work is called for to complete her proposed integration.

Supporting Gilligan's viewpoints, Holstein (1976) explored males and females in a longitudinal study. She found that female participants scored at stage 3 of Kohlberg's moral stages (which emphasizes interpersonal relationships and social duty and obligation). In contrast, male participants typically scored at stage 4 (which highlights abstract matters of rights, laws, and social contracts). Per these findings, males were declared as more developed than females. However, Gilligan argued that such classification by Kohlberg's theory (1984) was unfairly biased and was favorable to males. Since Holstein, no other scholars gave much serious thought to examine this gender gap or disparity; and this seriously calls for current scholars for further exploration.

5.4 Hoffman's Moral Reasoning

"Martin Hoffman's theory of moral psychology and development is primarily focused on empathy and empathic distress, but also includes classic conditioning, cognitive reasoning, and principles of caring and justice" (Hoffman, 2001; UVE Archives, 2007). Hoffman's theory emphasizes the occurrence of empathic distress in response to another person's suffering where, 1) empathic distress is associated with helping, 2) empathic distress come first before helping, and 3) finally, individuals feel better following assisting. Hoffman describes mainly five kinds in the development of empathic distress: 1) newborn reactive cry, 2) egocentric empathic distress, 3) quasi-egocentric empathic distress, 4) veridical empathic distress, and 5) empathic distress beyond the situation. As the title says, the first stage is simply that – a reactive cry to another infant's pain/suffering. This might not involve much of empathy, but could be more an imitation of the act (of crying). As the child moves into their second year, this "egocentric empathic distress" changes into quasi-type, in which the child will attempt to assist the other in pain, but still from their own point of view. This include, bring their own toy or blanket or parent to soothe the other child in pain. Although there is a desire to help the others, the child has not yet overcome their own egocentric mindset, which is dependent on their cognitive development. Eventually, as the child grows, the empathic distress develops into empathy toward entire group of people who are oppressed, exploited, or treated unfairly. This can extend to beyond friends and relatives to other racial, ethnic, and other groups. This would account for the advanced stage of empathic distress which can develop during formal operations and/or emerging adulthood and later. But, some individuals may never reach such stage to see suffering other people's eyes, regardless of their age or maturation. According to Hoffman, a person's prosocial moral structure is "a network of empathic effects, cognitive representations, and motives." (Hoffman, 2000, p. 134) The moral structure includes principles, behavioral norms, a sense of right and wrong, and images of harmful or hurtful acts and the associated self-blame and guilt (UVE Archives, 2007).

According to Hoffman (1996), there are five types of moral encounters: (a) Innocent bystander, (b) Transgression, (c) Multiple moral claimants, (d) Caring vs justice, and (e) Virtual transgression. These can be considered as stages of gradual development of empathic behaviors from childhood to adulthood. Empathy, according to Hoffman is defined as "an effective response that is more appropriate to someone else's situation than to one's own situation" (p. 157). The most effective way to strengthen empathic morality and counter empathic bias may be to combine it with broad, relatively abstract moral principles that foster impartiality, namely, caring, and justice. Such principles may help reduce empathic bias since they are cognitive in nature.

Hoffman and Saltzstein (1967) emphasized the role of parenting and home environment in the child's moral development. They coded the discipline techniques into 3 categories: power assertion (in which the parent capitalizes on his power and authority over the child), love withdrawal (direct but nonphysical expressions of anger, disapproval), and induction (consisting of the parent's focusing on the consequences of the child's action for others). When middle- and lower-class children were analyzed controlling for their IQ. It was found that children showed advanced development was associated with infrequent use of power assertion and frequent use of induction. Love withdrawal, did not relate much to children's moral development. Hoffman hypothesized that discipline was important because it gives children the experience, necessary for internalization, of achieving balance between expressing and controlling desires. Hoffman's theory withstands recent challenges, and argues for co-primacy (both empathy and justice) in moral motivation.

5.5 Social Domain Theory – Elliott Turiel

Elliott Turiel specifically focused on connecting social life and morality (Cam, Caydar, Seydoogullari, & Cok, 2012). According to Turiel, children's daily social experiences contribute to the development of moral judgment. Turiel(2015) hypothesized that children move from accepting rules in the social convention domain to rejecting those rules. According to Lahat, Helwig, and Zelazo (2013), the social domain theory suggests that children and adults do not reason similarly about social rules. Furthermore, they distinguish between moral and social conventional violations (Lahat, Helwig, & Zelazo, 2013, p. 955).

According to McNeil and Helwig (2015), researchers working within the social domain theory have found that children distinguish different issues in the personal, moral, and social conventional domains early in life. Also, Palmer, Rutland, and Cameron (2015) noted that the social domain theory states three distinct fields of reasoning: moral, social-conventional, and psychological. However, a fourth domain has also been identified in previous research and refers to self-preservation and self-protection. His focus was on cultural differences and the social hierarchies that consider justice and equality. He examined social opposition and moral resistance to those cultural practices that are perceived as unfair.

While exploring morality among children, adolescents, and adults, he aimed at the impacts of social hierarchy and power structures. Turiel(2015) delineated mainly three facets of ethical evidence: the moral (principles of how one ought to treat the others), the societal (rules designed to promote the uniform functioning of social institutions and groups), and finally, the psychological (that constitutes an understanding of self, others, sense of autonomy and individuality). From the early stages, children develop these three constructs parallel rather than sequentially. This is contrary to the global stage theory, which proposes that children are selfish initially, after which they get oriented to familial and social regulations, eventually developing their morality during adolescence.

Further, Cam et al. (2012) documented that Turiel established two domains in the Social Domain Theory, the social convention domain and the personal/ psychological part. The social convention domain represents the roles that children believe are mandatory, specifically, the rules that provide order for social settings and various occasions. Also, the personal/psychological domain includes the processes of understanding and discovering oneself. This domain comprises the individual's private life. Turiel(2015) took a different approach to moral development than the other theorists mentioned above.

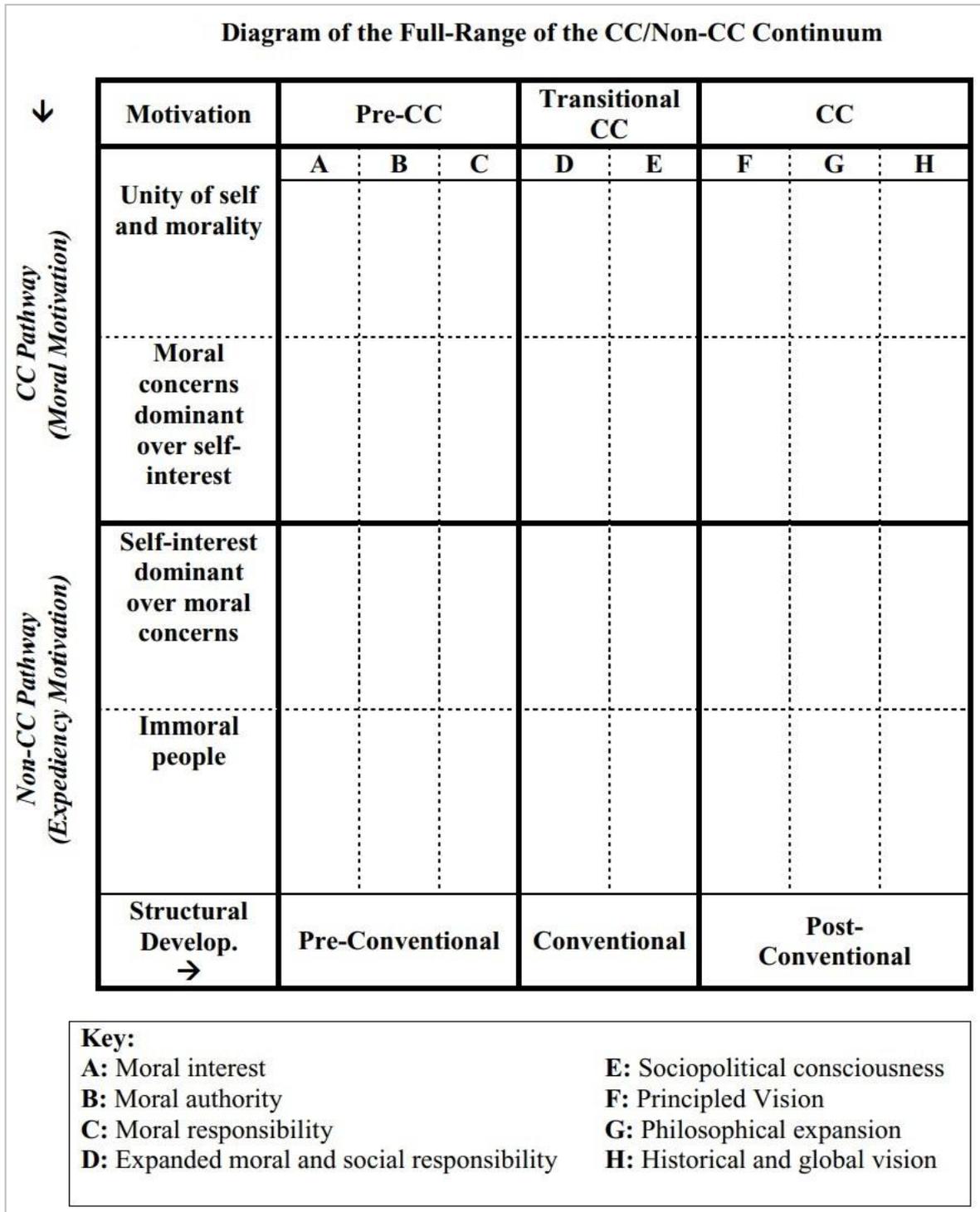
5.6 Spiritual Spin – Mustakova-Possardt

Mustakova-Possardt(1998) is famous for suggesting that moral consciousness is portrayed when a person's moral motivation dominates their expediency motivation. Contrary to Kohlberg's theory that moral motivation derives from the development of moral reasoning, Mustakova-Possardt focuses on the spiritual impulse she observed in children and their attraction to beauty, goodness, and knowledge. Critical moral consciousness theory refers to consciousness characterized by integrating moral motivation and critical discernment (Cotten, 2017). A child's spiritual impulse allows them to recollect a sense of moral code, consciousness, or instinct from an early age. Cotton (2017) described different types of motivation concerning four themes of existence: 1) identity, 2) relationships with external moral authority and the emerging sense of internal moral authority, responsibility, and agency, 3) empathic concerns with others, and with justice and caring, and 4) concerns with the meaning of life.

Further explaining her theory, Mustakova-Possardt (1998) presented a conceptual model of the integrative psychological construct of critical consciousness (CC). She defined CC as a moral awareness that drives persons to disconnect from their cultural, social, and political environment and participate in an accountable critical moral discourse, making intentional efforts to construct their place in social reality and develop internal consistency in their ways of being. She further describes the development of CC as a synergistic interaction between its two main components, structural-developmental and moral motivation. Mustakova-Possardt refers to this developmental pathway as a "CC pathway" of development, in contrast to the "non-CC pathway" of development along which people in whom an expediency motivation is dominant develop (Cotten, 2009, p. 10)

Examining her conceptualization, Cotten (2009) delineates the components further. In her words, "The two pathways, CC and non-CC pathways differ in terms of the kind of motivation that dominates (i.e., expedient or moral) within a person developing on one pathway versus a person developing on the other pathway. The diagram below (Table 1, p. 11), taken from Mustakova-Possardt's (2003) book, *Critical Consciousness: A Study of Morality in Global Historical Perspective*, shows both the continuity and the distinction between these two pathways.

This diagram shows that both CC and non-CC pathways of development share a similar structural (i.e., cognitive) developmental axis. Still, at each stage along this common axis, we also see a person possess a more or less expedient (or a more or less moral) motivation. Thus, at each stage of cognitive development, a person may reside anywhere on the motivational continuum represented by the diagram’s vertical axis. For example, when anywhere from the lowest of the four levels of motivation indicated, one is entirely motivated by expediency, to the completely morally-motivated level represented by the top of the diagram” (p. 11).



Critical Consciousness and Non-Critical Consciousness Pathways/Continuum
 [Source: Cotten, 2009, p. 11]

This is based on their experiences in life, what they have learned, what they have gone through, social interactions, etc. Children typically do not have the same level of morality/moral judgment as an adult. However, as individuals grow to be more mature, they have a more precise understanding of morality and can decipher between right and wrong and good and bad.

Furthermore, prosocial behavior, moral commitment, moral emotion, community involvement, and concern for others are linked to moral development and moral functioning. The ethicalself has been found to predict social competence and adaptive behavior. Lee, Padilla-Walker, and Nelson (2015) noted that community orientation during emerging adulthood is associated with positive moral development outcomes. Individuals desire to look favorable in others' eyes, which often leads to moral identity and development. Another research that examined the viewpoints of adults in response to moral dilemmas and content posted via YouTube (Koh, 2014). When analyzing the responses of viewers of these videos, it was found that Internet served as an open platform to share and discuss moral perspectives and continue the dialogue shared via the video uploaded on the website. In this digital age, using media and Internet to start and expand moral dialogue seems to be appropriate and beneficial.

Community programs and school interventions should be mandatory to promote prosocial action, social responsibility, and helping behavior. The author concludes that based on the theoretical foundations explained in the article, there are interrelationships between moral development, moral identity, and prosocial behavior. Author hence suggests that the youth should have to complete such programs to graduate high school. A concern for others' welfare, empathy, and understanding others' perspectives can be taught early in life but often emerges from life experience. A sense of responsibility towards others is rooted in early life experiences when children learn to be responsive and establish attachment with caregivers.

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