



The psychometric properties of the Socio-Moral Reflection Measure – Short Form and the Moral Theme Inventory for men with and without intellectual disabilities[☆]

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ABSTRACT

Drawing conclusions from the literature regarding the moral development of people with intellectual disabilities (IDs) is difficult because of the use of unstandardised and idiosyncratic measures. In order to address this short-coming, a moral reasoning production measure (the Socio-Moral Reflection Measure – Short Form; SRM-SF) and a recognition measure (the Moral Theme Inventory; MTI) were presented to men with and without IDs who had no known history of engaging in illegal behaviour. The instruments were completed on two occasions, separated by a two-week interval, in order to investigate their basic psychometric properties. The results indicated that there was a strong relationship between the MTI and the SRM-SF, suggesting that the MTI has convergent validity. The internal consistency of the MTI and the SRM-SF ranged from moderate to substantial for both men with and without IDs. However, the test–retest reliability of the MTI was poor for men with IDs, while it was good for men without IDs. The test–retest reliability of the SRM-SF was good for both men with and without IDs. Comparison of the moral reasoning abilities of men with and without IDs suggested that many of the differences between the two groups could be accounted for by general intellectual functioning. The exception was overall score on the SRM-SF and moral reasoning in relation to the law, where men with IDs scored at stage 2(1), when intelligence was controlled. The results were interpreted by suggesting that the relationship between moral reasoning and illegal behaviour may take an inverted U curve shape, moderated by intelligence.

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1. Introduction

Following the early work of Piaget (1932) on the moral development of children, Kohlberg (1969, 1976) revised Piagetian perspectives, to incorporate the moral development that occurs in adolescence and adulthood. He proposed a stage theory of moral development that extended beyond childhood and into adolescence and adulthood. The theory originally comprised

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Table 1
Gibbs' Sociomoral Stage Theory (Gibbs et al., 1992).

Level and stage	Description
Level 1: Immature	
Stage 1: Unilateral and Physicalistic	Moral justifications are based upon unilateral authority and rule based, or related to punitive consequences of the violation of rules.
Stage 2: Exchanging and Instrumental	Moral justifications based upon an understanding that has arisen from social interaction. For example, decisions to help others may be justified because that person may help you in the future. However, justifications remain superficial.
Level 2: Mature	
Stage 3: Mutual and Prosocial	Moral justifications are characterised by further decentration, and are based upon a prosocial understanding of emotional states (e.g. empathy), care and good conduct.
Stage 4: Systemic and Standard	Further maturity is indexed by the development of an understanding of the complex social structures in which we live. Justifications are also based upon constructs such as rights, values and character within society. Other justifications may be based upon social justice and responsibility or conscience.

six stages, spread across three levels, and formed a hierarchical stage model where more complex levels of moral reasoning required successful progression through earlier stages in a more or less linear fashion. The progression in moral reasoning was accompanied by a parallel developmental progression in logical reasoning. However, Kohlbergian moral development theory has been widely criticised (Gilligan, 1982; Schweder, 1982; Sullivan, 1977) and has subsequently been revised into a sociomoral stage theory (Gibbs, 1979, 2003, 2010). Gibbs (1979) removed post-conventional moral reasoning from Kohlbergian theory arguing that such mature levels were “existential”, citing evidence that post-conventional moral reasoning is achieved infrequently across cultures. Gibbs (1979) and Gibbs, Basinger, and Fuller (1992) proposed a sociomoral stage theory (Table 1) regarding the reasons or justifications people give for their behaviour, and these revisions have been shown to have cross-cultural validity (Gibbs, Basinger, Grime, & Snarey, 2007). However, Kohlbergian and Gibbian approaches to moral development are nested within the cognitive developmental domain, and others have adopted alternative theoretical approaches to moral development, nested within the social domain (Semetana, 1999; Turiel, 1983, 2002) or the emotional domain (Eisenberg, Reykowski, & Staub, 1989; Hoffman, 2000).

While there are shared commonalities between differing theoretical approaches to moral development, none has actively considered the moral development of people with intellectual disabilities (IDs). Langdon, Clare, and Murphy (in press-a) reviewed the literature relating to the moral development of people with IDs, and concluded that the moral development of children, adolescents and adults with IDs appears to be similar to that of their typically developing peers, but occurs in a slower manner. However, the differences in the rate of development between people with IDs and typically developing individuals may disappear when cognitive ability is controlled. However, Langdon et al. (in press-a) suggested that any conclusions must be tenuous because, first, existing studies have not considered the impact of language ability and performance on measures of moral reasoning and, secondly, many of the moral reasoning measures used within the studies are idiosyncratic and unstandardised.

Langdon et al. (in press-a) and Langdon, Clare, and Murphy (in press-b) went on to discuss the methods that are traditionally used to measure moral reasoning. Moral reasoning measures are generally classed into two types, (a) recognition, and (b) production instruments. Recognition instruments involve the presentation of a set of moral justifications to people preceded by the presentation of a moral dilemma. Respondents are asked to choose justifications which best match their own moral reasoning about the dilemma. Production instruments are different because participants are asked to verbalise their own reasoning in response to questions which follow the reading of a moral dilemma. Langdon et al. (in press-a) suggested that, since people with IDs may have communication difficulties, recognition instruments may have greater utility with this population, because they may be easier to understand. However, many recognition instruments do not measure the developmentally younger stages of moral reasoning (Rest, 1979; Rest, Narvaez, Thoma, & Bebeau, 1999) and their validity is questionable, because in contrast to production instruments, they often do not discriminate reliably between offender and non-offender participants. (Basinger & Gibbs, 1987; Gavaghan, Arnold, & Gibbs, 1983; Gibbs et al., 1984; Stams et al., 2006).

Considering this measurement problem further, Langdon et al. (in press-a) also suggested that the Socio-Moral Reflection Measure – Short Form (SRM-SF) may be used with people with IDs, but concluded that further research was required. The SRM-SF is a measure that is linked to Gibb's Cognitive-Developmental Model of Sociomoral Reasoning (Gibbs, 2003, 2010). As Langdon et al. (in press-a) point out, this measure has been successfully used with young children (Gibbs et al., 2007), and no reading or writing is required if the instrument is presented as part of an interview. However, as yet there is no evidence that recognition or production instruments can be reliably used to assess the moral reasoning abilities of people with IDs.

As a consequence of the issues raised by Langdon et al. (in press-a) and Langdon, Clare, and Murphy (in press-b), the aims of this study were twofold. First, the study sought to examine the psychometric properties of a production and recognition instrument of moral reasoning in relation to men with and without IDs. Secondly, the study aimed to compare the moral reasoning abilities of men with and without IDs using both forms of measurement, controlling for language ability or intelligence. Men with and without IDs were recruited from the community in the eastern region of the United Kingdom and completed a battery of assessment measures in a single session. Two weeks later, the participants completed the measures of

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