

Through two lenses: A cultural–developmental approach to moral psychology

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Abstract

This paper proposes a cultural–developmental approach to moral psychology. The approach builds on and synthesizes findings from different research traditions, including the cognitive-developmental, domain, two orientations, three ethics, and moral identity traditions. The paper introduces a conception termed a *cultural–developmental template*. The template charts developmental patterns across the life course for moral reasoning in terms of the three Ethics of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity. The template, however, is not one-size-fits-all. Its general developmental patterns accommodate to the different constellations of Ethics held by culturally diverse peoples. From the present theoretical proposal follows a set of specific research expectations as well as a set of broader research implications for how to conduct research on morality from the vantage points of both culture and development. These expectations and implications include consideration of moral emotions, definitions of morality, and cultural variation in the life course itself.

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Introduction

At a time when people increasingly grow up and live in a globalized and multicultural world, we are challenged as psychologists to conduct research that captures both the devel-

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opmental and cultural sides of people's lives (Arnett, 2002; Hermans & Kempen, 1998; Jensen, 2003; Larson, 2002; Phinney, 2000; Valsiner, 2007). Across diverse research areas, psychologists more and more recognize culture as a crucial context in which development takes place (e.g., Cole, 1996; French, Schneider, & Chen, 2006; Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999; Miller, 1999; Rogoff, 2003; Shweder et al., 1998; Sternberg, 2004). The aim here is to propose a new theoretical approach that takes both culture and development into account with respect to moral psychology.

The present paper introduces a new conception termed a *cultural–developmental template*. The template charts developmental patterns across the life course for moral reasoning in terms of the three Ethics of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity (e.g., Jensen, 1991; Shweder, 1990). The template, however, is not one-size-fits-all. Its general developmental patterns accommodate to the different constellation of Ethics held by culturally diverse peoples.

While the present paper addresses moral psychology, the cultural–developmental template conceptualization might be useful for other research areas as well. Thus, it provides one way to strike a balance between universalistic, one-size-fits-all approaches and particularistic, one-theory-for-every-culture approaches.

Definitions, foci, and organization

Here, development will be defined as psychological change that occurs in human beings as they age. Developmental change may involve increase or decrease; it may be quantitative or qualitative; and it may be gradual or stage-like. Culture will be defined as “symbolic and behavioral inheritances” (Shweder et al., 1998, p. 867) shared and co-constructed by members of a community. Symbolic inheritances are conceptions of divinity, nature, society and persons, and behavioral inheritances consist of common or habitual familial and social practices. Culture, then, is *not* synonymous with country or ethnicity but rather describes communities whose members share key beliefs and behaviors. Cultural communities include heterogeneity among subgroups and individuals (e.g., Jensen, 1997a; Turiel, 1998, 2002). Variation also exists between cultural communities in their degree of heterogeneity.

The present focus is foremost on research addressing moral reasoning and concepts. Intra- and interpersonal moral reasoning is important in individual and collective moral judgments and actions (Jensen, 1997a; Pizarro & Bloom, 2003). However, consideration of some recent work on moral emotions is also included (e.g., Haidt, 2001; Kagan, 1987). In fact, the present view is that for most moral issues, addressing the relation between moral reasons and emotions will be more useful than drawing sharp distinctions.

In terms of organization, a succinct description of major lines of developmental and cultural research first lays out basic issues as well as findings to take into account in synthesizing developmental and cultural perspectives. Next follows a proposal for an integrative *cultural–developmental approach* to moral reasoning. The approach builds on developmental and cultural findings from a number of traditions while also drawing specifically on work with the three ethics proposed by Shweder and his colleagues (e.g., Jensen, 1991, 1997a; Shweder, 1990; Shweder, Much, Mahapatra, & Park, 1997). Then, there is a discussion of specific expectations as well as broader implications for research that follow from this new approach.

Before proceeding, it is important to emphasize that I hope to encourage constructive dialogue on the challenging question of how to take into account both development and

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