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## Moral decision making in adolescence

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### Abstract

The aim of the study was to investigate the characteristics of moral dilemma solving and to define basic moral dilemma solving strategies. More than 480 subjects aged 13 to 21 years old took part in the study. As a result, it was possible to define six basic moral dilemma solving strategies: the care strategy, the context dependence strategy, the justice strategy, the unstable doubt strategy, the context/paradox strategy and the egoistic strategy. Age and gender were shown to play a role in the preference for specific moral dilemma solving strategies. The influence of the context of communication and interaction on the decision of moral dilemmas was cleared.

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*Keywords:* Moral development; Strategy; Dilemma; Decision making; Communication context

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### 1. Introduction

The relevance and significance of this study is underscored by the role that moral personality development plays in the ongoing transformation of the modern Russian society. Complicated social and economical changes in social consciousness influence moral orientation development in adolescence, a most sensitive period for social interventions. Conditions, factors, and principles of personal moral development in childhood and youth have been investigated by J. Piaget [1], L. Kohlberg [2], J. Rest [3], C. Gilligan [4], E. Turiel [5] and others. Traditional psychology of moral development recognizes two fundamental principles as forming the base for moral orientation: the justice principle, oriented toward the cognitive components of moral consciousness, and the care principle, oriented toward the feelings of caring and empathy toward others. The normative cognitive-

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structural approach declared the justice principle to be the main principle in moral psychology, focusing attention on the cognitive aspects of moral consciousness [2]. The alternative to the cognitive approach is the care concept by C. Gilligan, based on the care principle and empathic orientation toward the needs and feelings of others [4]. J. Rest's approach integrates the findings of contemporary moral psychology [3]. The structure of moral behavior, according to J. Rest, includes four components: moral sensitivity, moral reasoning and moral judgments, moral motivation, and moral character [3]. Research of moral personality development must be based on combined analysis of genetic and functional links of all components of moral behavior [6], [7]. Traditionally, orientation toward care and orientation toward justice have been regarded as polar opposites. But are the ontogenetic principles of moral personality development definable in view of this opposition? How does the priority of care and justice in moral orientation change with age? The goal was to investigate the age peculiarities of decision-making in the process of moral dilemma solving in different communication and interaction contexts.

## 2. Method

We used the following techniques: 1) Care-Justice moral judgments questionnaire [8]. [9]; 2) Moral dilemmas techniques [9]. 483 subjects, including 216 boys (44.6%) and 267 girls (55.4%) participated in the study. Age groups were distributed as follows: 156 subjects in junior adolescence (32%), 235 subjects in senior adolescence (48.7%) and 92 subjects in their youth (19%).

## 3. Results and discussion

### 3.1. Moral dilemma solving strategies

The characteristics of moral dilemma solving in adolescence and youth were investigated by the means of cluster and content analysis, with certain moral dilemma solving patterns emerging as a result. 17 groups of subjects were defined, comprising 72% of the data. Six basic moral dilemma solving strategies were defined (table 1). As a result, six moral dilemma solving strategies were defined:

- Care strategy (care/care – care/care). Subjects using this strategy, whether deciding for themselves or a story character, are oriented toward helping those involved in the situation. Decision for care is made regardless of the interaction context.
- Context dependence strategy (justice/justice – care/care). The decision depends on the interaction context (adolescent/adult or adolescent/peer). When interacting with adults, the subjects make decisions based on the justice principle, while in the situation of peer interaction, they decide based on the care principle. The position (deciding for a story character or for oneself) does not influence moral choice.
- Justice strategy (justice/justice – justice/justice). Subjects are always oriented toward the justice principle regardless of the participants or position in the decision.
- Unstable doubt strategy (care or justice/justice or care – care or justice/care). Subjects exhibiting this strategy don't show stability in any of the moral dilemma solving situations with the exception of deciding for oneself in the adolescent/peer context. It is worth noting that subjects exhibiting this strategy do not make decisions focused on their own interest.
- Context/paradox strategy (care/care-justice/justice). The decision is influenced by context interaction: in the adolescent/adult situation, the decision is oriented toward care; in the adolescent/peer situation the

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