



The association between moral competence, personality factors and demographic characteristics of secondary education students

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Moral development and society

- Moral development has concerned researchers not only as to how it develops on a personal level but also how it is affected by other social factors
 - The environment is really important in moral development (Dewey, 1892)
 - Morality is not inherited by genes but is something we learn (Baldwin, 1899)
 - Moral capacity is affected by the person's socialization (MacDougal, 1918)



Development of moral competence

- Factors such as personality seem to affect moral competence (Lifton, 1985)
- Geographical parameters seem to affect moral competence and how this is expressed through behavior (Hart et al., 1998)

Kohlberg's Theory(1977)

- Studied moral development by utilizing moral dilemmas to which the participants suggested possible solutions
- Levels of moral development
 - Preconventional (1st and 2nd stage)
 - Conventional (3rd and 4th stage)
 - Postconventional (5th and 6th stage)



Dual aspect theory of morality (Lind, 2002)

- Both motivation behind a person's behavior and their character are parts of moral competence
- Affect (moral ideas) and intelligence (moral abilities) are different but undifferentiated aspects of the same behavior
- Created Moral Judgment Test (1978) which assesses moral competence more distinctively

Five Factor Personality Model (Costa & McCrae, 1992)

- Categorized personality in 5 basic factors which were derived from sentence analysis and relevant words in the English language which refer to personality characteristics
- The five basic factors of personality are:
 - Neuroticism
 - Extraversion
 - Openness to Experience
 - Agreeableness
 - Conscientiousness



Background studies

Morality and personality

- The moral orientation of a person is affected mainly by his/her personality and not by the social roles to which the person adheres to (Clover, 2001)
- Moral judgment is affected more by the person's personality than by his age or his/her level of education (Benware, 2002)
- Moral judgment was found to be positively correlated to personality factors as those were assessed by the California Psychological Inventory (Mudrack, 2006)
- Moral development is related to personality characteristics (Lonky, Kaus & Roodin, 1984; Cockroft, 1996; Dollinger & LaMartina, 1998; Walker, 1999; Davis, Mitchell, Hall, Lothert, Snapp & Meyer, 1999, Ang, Ng, Wong, Lee, Oei & Leng, 2004)



Moral development and geographical location

- People who don't participate in society may be characterized by lower stages of moral reasoning (Rest, 1983)
- Young people living in urban settings face more situations where they are called upon making a moral decision (Thorkildsen, 1976)
- Studies have indicated that the development of moral identity is heavily relying on the environment a person lives in (Light, 1970; Nisan & Kohlberg, 1982; Park & Johnson, 1984; McCarthy & Horn, 1996; Hart, Atkins & Ford, 1998; Atkins & Hart, 2003; Hart, Atkins, Markey & Youniss, 2004)



Moral competence and gender

- Gilligan (1977) emphasized the male-centered aspect in Kohlberg's theory. More specifically she suggested that the main characteristic of morality in women is "caring for others" while for men is "justice" and therefore there will bound to be differences in the ethical reasoning between the two genders



The present study

Aims of the study

The present study investigated

- a) the association between the Big-Five personality factors (neuroticism, openness to experience, extraversion, conscientiousness and agreeableness) and moral judgment competence of Greek teenagers' moral judgment within the context of everyday life
- b) *if* and *how* these factors, in conjunction with the gender of these high-school students and their geographical area of living (urban, semi-urban and rural) affect their moral judgment competence

Sample

- 331 students of first and second grade of Greek high schools
 - 160 boys & 171 girls
 - Average age of students were circa 13-years-old (Avg.= 12.47, SD = 0.740).
- The questionnaires were distributed in 4 prefectures of Greece: Serres, Kilkis, Thessaloniki and Drama
 - Urban centers were considered the cities of Thessaloniki and Serres with population more than 50.000 people
 - Semi-urban was the city of Kilkis with population between 10.000 and 49.999 people
 - Rural areas were the villages of Paranesti in the Prefecture of Drama, Petritsi, Vironeia and Nigrita in the Prefecture of Serres and Polikastron in the Prefecture of Kilkis with population of 9.999 or lower



Instruments

- Moral Judgment Test (Lind, 1978) for assessing moral competence (Greek version Mouratidou, Chatzopoulos & Karamavrou, 2008)
- The Inventory of Child Individual Differences (Besevegis & Pavlopoulos, 2002)

Statistical analysis

- Pearson correlation was used to assess the correlation between personality factors and moral competence
- 3-way ANOVA was used to assess possible interactions among geographical location, personality factors and gender and a further Scheffe test analysis was utilized to assess differences among the three groups
- Stepwise Regression analysis was used in order to estimate the affect of personality factors on moral competence
- For all analyses $p < .05$ was utilized



Results

Correlation of C-index with personality factors

- Low significant positive correlation between C-index and Conscientiousness ($r = 0.128, p < .05$)
- The other correlations were not significant
 - C-Index and Openness to Experience ($r = 0.086, p > .05$)
 - C-Index and Agreeableness ($r = -0.022, p > .05$)
 - C-Index and Extraversion ($r = 0.086, p > .05$)
 - C-Index and Neuroticism ($r = -0.022, p > .05$)

ANOVA results

- Geographical location affects moral competence in every day life [$F(2, 93) = 6.230, p < .01$],
- Interactions between geographical location and gender affect moral competence in every day life as well [$F(2, 87) = 3.956, p < .05$ and [$F(2, 87) = 6.758, p < .01$ respectively]
- Scheffe test analysis indicated that there is a significant difference between rural and semi-rural areas, with the students attending urban schools scoring higher in the C-index and girls in urban settings score higher than boys

Stepwise regression analysis

- Stepwise regression analysis indicated that only the personality factor conscientiousness affects moral competence ($F_{1,280} = 5.105, p > .025$) however the *R squared values were very low which can lead to no safe predictions as far as personality and moral competence*



Conclusions



Personality factors and moral competence

- **Conscientiousness** seems to be related to moral competence in everyday life, whereas the other personality factors do not, **BUT** cannot predict moral competence by itself alone
 - Not surprisingly so since people with high levels of conscientiousness are more logical, tend to follow a plan, they are hardworking individuals and think before they act

Geographical location and moral competence

- Students in urban settings showed higher levels of moral judgment than students in semi-urban settings ($p < .01$)
 - This is in accordance with previous studies indicating that residents of rural settings don't exhibit high levels of moral competence (Nissan & Kohlberg, 1982· Park & Johnson, 1984· McCarthy & Hom, 1996)

Gender and moral competence

- Gender affects moral competence only when the factor of geographical location comes into play with girls in urban settings scoring higher than boys
- Previous studies have shown that there are no significant gender differences when it comes to moral competence (Walker, 1984· Lifton, 1985· Feleta, 1995, etc.)
- However, a study by Light (1970) has shown that girls living in urban settings were more prone to examine the situation in which a behavior occurred regardless of whether this behavior was moral or not. By contrast girls living in rural settings were more traditional and tended to adhere to old traditions and values

Limitations of the study

- Young age of participants doesn't allow for generalizations in the general population
- Except the MJT and the personality inventory no other assessment was utilized (i.e. observation or interviews) therefore we can't be sure about the children's responses, further studies with older age groups deemed necessary