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**Psychology of Morality &
Democracy and Education**

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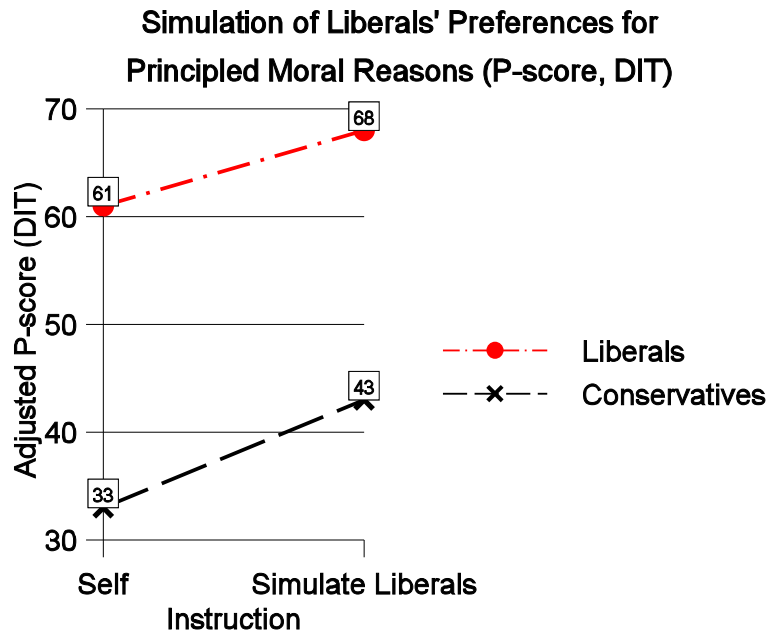
A re-analysis of the Barnett, Evens and Rest (1995) DIT-faking-study

Emler et al. (1983), Markoulis (1989) and others showed in their experiments that the P-score (the main index used with the DIT) can be faked upward when the subjects are properly instructed, and thus raised two questions: *a*) Is the DIT a cognitive-developmental measure, and *b*) if yes, does this mean that morality is *not* a *competence* as cognitive-developmental theory asserts?

Barnett et al. (1995) argue that an increase of P-score of subjects who are instructed to simulate the responses of liberals or left wingers, does not disprove the claim that the DIT is a developmental measure. They attribute such findings to the fact that the regular DIT includes fewer items with “anti-authoritarian content,” so-called A items, than P items, which reflect post-conventional moral reasoning. Because of this uneven number of A and P items, Barnett et al. (1995) “content that when Emler et al. asked conservative subjects to respond as radicals [or ‘liberals’], the subjects primarily endorsed A items, not on the basis of arriving a fair and just solution to a moral problem, but rather on the basis of how anti-authoritarian (i.e., radical) the items sounded. Once A items were endorsed, conservative subjects selected P items as a second resort” (p. 270). Therefore, they conclude, if one would include the same number of A items as of P items, one should expect that “subjects’ A score would increase whereas their P-score would *decrease* or remain the same” (p. 270). Their analysis of the finding appeared to support Barnett et al.’s hypothesis. They report that, while the subjects’ A-scores increase after they were instructed to simulate liberals’ responses to the DIT, their P-scores decreased.

However, Barnett et al.’s (1995) finding needs to be re-analyzed, because their analysis is strongly biased toward their hypothesis. As they admit, “because of the *ipsative nature* of the DIT[-scores], an increase in A-scores necessarily leads to decreases in one or more of the other scores” (Barnett et al., 1995, p. 273). That is, if a subject prefers many A items, their preferences for other item types cannot sum up to 100 percent. As Barnett, Evens and Rest (1995) further point out there is a special link between choosing A items and P items. Because of this, we *must* expect that an increase of the number of A items in the DIT

will necessarily affect most the P-score. The ipsative scoring of the DIT produces a *spurious decrease* of the P-score whenever the subjects also prefer A items. In order to omit this experimental bias, the P score must be adjusted which is rather simple.



For adjustment, the P-score is re-calculated by subtracting the A-score from 100, the percentage basis. After, this the P-score is not anymore logically linked to the A-score. The formula for the adjustment of the P-score is:

$$P^* = \frac{P}{100 - A}$$

	Self	Simulate Scores of Liberals
Liberals' P	51.9	39.16
Conservatives' P	30.9	26.5
Liberals' A	15.3	42
Conservatives' A	7.6	38.9
Liberals' P*	61	68 (adjusted for A)
Conservatives' P*	33	43 (adjusted for A).

This necessary adjustment of the P-score alters the finding dramatically. In contrast to Barnett et al.'s hypothesis, the experimental instruction to fill the DIT out as a 'liberal' ('left-wingers') leads to an *increase* rather than a decrease of the P-score. That is, the DIT score *can* indeed be faked upward. This finding coincides well with the findings by Emler et al. (1983) and by Markoulis (1989) who also found that low-scoring 'conservatives' ('right wingers'). Although in some studies the instruction failed to make subjects fake the DIT upward, this is sufficient and thorough enough evidence to conclude that the assumption that the DIT is a developmental measure of moral judgment competence, is clearly *refuted* by empirical evidence.

Of course, because the DIT measures mostly moral *preferences* or *attitudes*, but not moral *competencies*, DIT-data cannot serve as valid criteria for testing hypotheses about the development of those moral *competencies*. Emler et al. (1983) seem to have ignored this implication of their finding, when they conclude that their experiment disproved cognitive-developmental theories. If the data do not reflect a competence, they can by no means be used to test a hypothesis about moral competencies. Barnett et al. (1995) seem to acknowledge this logical link when they say that their DIT-experiment was "not designed to prove the superiority of cognitive developmental views of moral reasoning" (p. 270).

The empirical validity of cognitive-developmental theory of morality must be tested with a theoretically valid measure of moral judgment *competence*, which cannot be faked upward. The *Moral Judgment Interview* by L. Kohlberg (see Colby et al., 1987) may be considered for this though there is only scarce and ambiguous evidence about its fakability; Weinreich-Haste et al. (1985) report that in an experiment with 31 subjects, the instruction to simulate *leftists'* reasoning did *not* result in an increase of average gains, whereas the instruction to simulate *rightists'* reasoning resulted in a sharp drop of *MJI*-scores. The *Moral Judgment Test* by G. Lind also claims to provide a true measure of moral judgment competence (the C-score). This claim is clearly supported by two experiments, *a*) by one which was designed like the one by Emler et al. (1983) except that the *MJT* was used instead the *DIT*, and *b*) by an experiment by W. Wasel, in which the subjects were asked to simulate *real* persons with C-scores higher than their own (see also Lind, 1995).

Although the controversy, which Emler et al. (1983) have ignited, turned out to be of *methodological* nature, it indirectly provides strong support for the empirical validity of cognitive-developmental theory. It showed that some findings, which were apparently dissonant with this theory, could be clearly attributed to the use of poor measurement instruments. So far research which used more theoretically valid tests, like the *MJI* and the *MJT*, unanimously supports the core hypothesis of cognitive-developmental theory by J. Piaget and L. Kohlberg, that morality has a strong *cognitive* or *competence* “component.”

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