

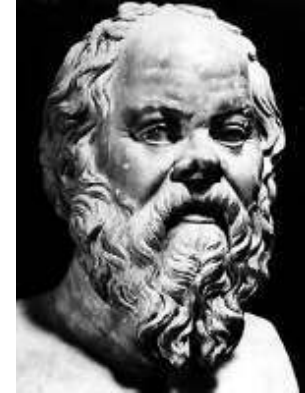
Moral Competence and Social Behavior – Clarifying a Confused Relationship

Prof. Dr. Georg Lind

Contact:
<http://www.uni-konstanz.de/ag-moral/>
Georg.Lind@uni-konstanz.de

Moral Orientations and Competence

- ✓ “But if this be affirmed, then the desire of good is common to all, and one man is no better than another in that respect?
- ✓ And if one man is not better than another in desiring good, he must be better in the power of attaining it?
- ✓ Then, according to your definition, virtue would appear to be the power of attaining the good?”



Socrates (469 - 399 B.C.E.).
Plato: Dialogue with Meno
(abridged).

Overview

- P The Controversy
- P Clarification of Concepts
- P On Hypothesis-Testing
- P The desire to Be Good is Universal
- P Experimental Evidence is Unambiguous: Moral Competence Facilitates Social Behavior
- P Conclusion

Pro: Morality Determines Behavior

"Plato's view [is] that to see the Good is to choose it."

Thomas E. Wren, from: Caring about morality. London: Routledge, 2001, p. 155

Contra: Morality is Irrelevant for Behavior

- P “The force exerted by the moral sense of the individual is less effective than social myth would have us believe.”
 - ▶ Milgram (1974, p. 6)
- P "Moral reasoning is usually an ex post facto process used to influence the intuitions (and hence judgment) of other people."
 - ▶ Haidt (2001, p. 814)
- P The scores in Kohlberg’s test “hardly correlate significantly with moral behavior.”
 - ▶ Schulman & Mekler (1985, p. 16)
- P "The correlation is not large. At average it is $r = 0.30$ " [Blasi, 1980]
 - ▶ Uhl (1996, p. 100; my translation, GL)
- P “One need not score at Kohlberg's highest stages in order to exhibit high degrees of moral commitment and exemplary behavior.”
 - ▶ Colby & Damon (1992, p. 328)

Need for Clarification - Still

- P “For in psychology there are experimental methods and *conceptual confusion*. The existence of experimental methods makes us think we have the means of solving the problems which trouble us; though problem and methods pass one another by.”
 - ▶ Ludwig Wittgenstein (1953): Philosophical investigations.

- P "The research on morality is in considerable disarray, largely because so many of these authors fail to appreciate the philosophical dimensions of the psychological positions they have argued for (and from)."
 - ▶ Thomas Wren (1991): Caring about morality. (p. 3)

Conceptual & Empirical Relationships

Possible Sources of Confusion

- P Object A, e.g. Moral Behavior (as seen from the person's point of view)
 - ▶ Aspect I: e.g. Moral Orientation
 - ▶ Aspect II: e.g., Moral Competence

- P Object B, e.g. Social Behavior (as seen from society's point of view)
 - ▶ Aspect II, e.g. Social Norm
 - ▶ Aspect III, e.g., Norm-enforcement system

Morality: What are We Talking About?

William Occam: Do not multiply constructs without necessity!

Perspective ↔

Aspect ⇕

External

Society, Parents, Teachers,
Superiors, Leaders, Researchers ...

Internal

Individual, Person, Subject, Parti-
cipant, Citizen ...

Desire

(content)

Social Norm

Rights, Laws, Orders, Norms,
Contracts, ...

Moral Orientation

Moral Ideals, Feelings, Values,
Desires, Principles, Duties ...

Power

(structure)

Social Behavior

Ability to solve conflicts on the basis
of formal and informal norms through
institutionalized procedures.

Moral Competence

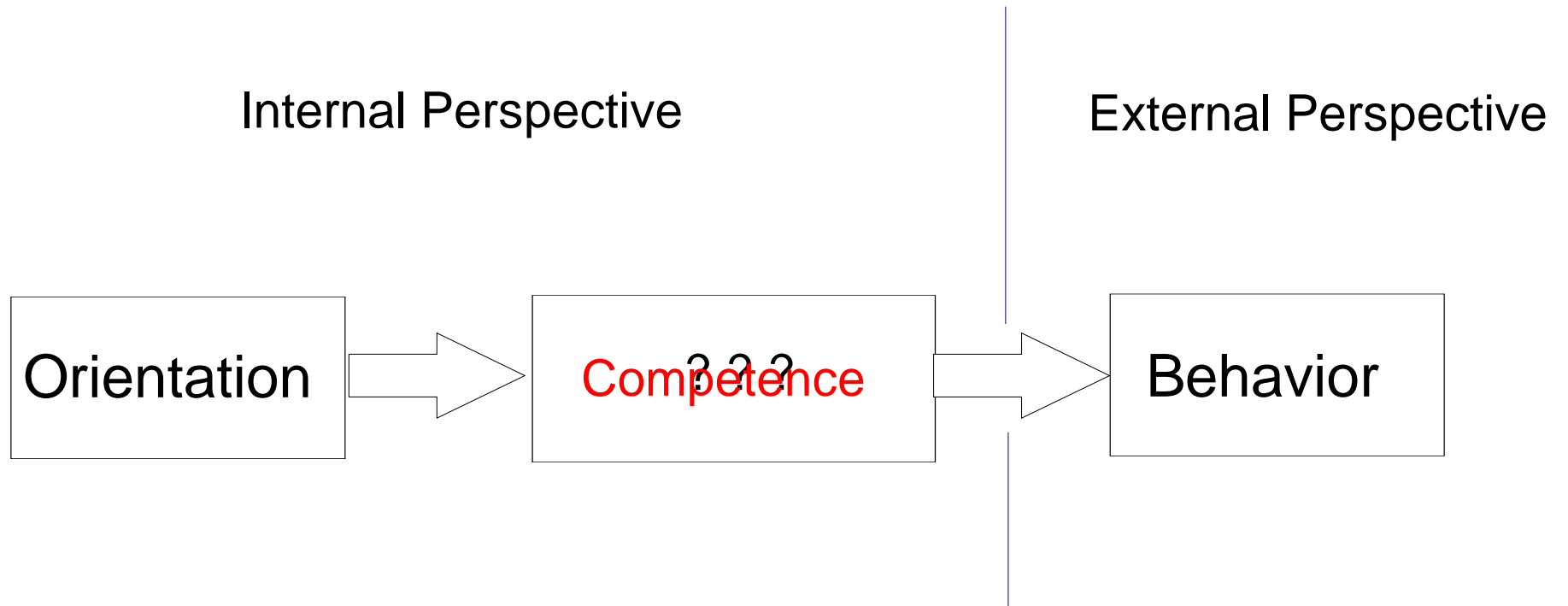
Ability to solve dilemmas on the
basis of moral orientations through
thinking and discussion ...

Moral Competence: A Definition

- P Moral competence is *the ability to solve dilemmas through thinking and discussion on the basis of (shared) moral principles rather than through violence, deceit, and abuse of power.*

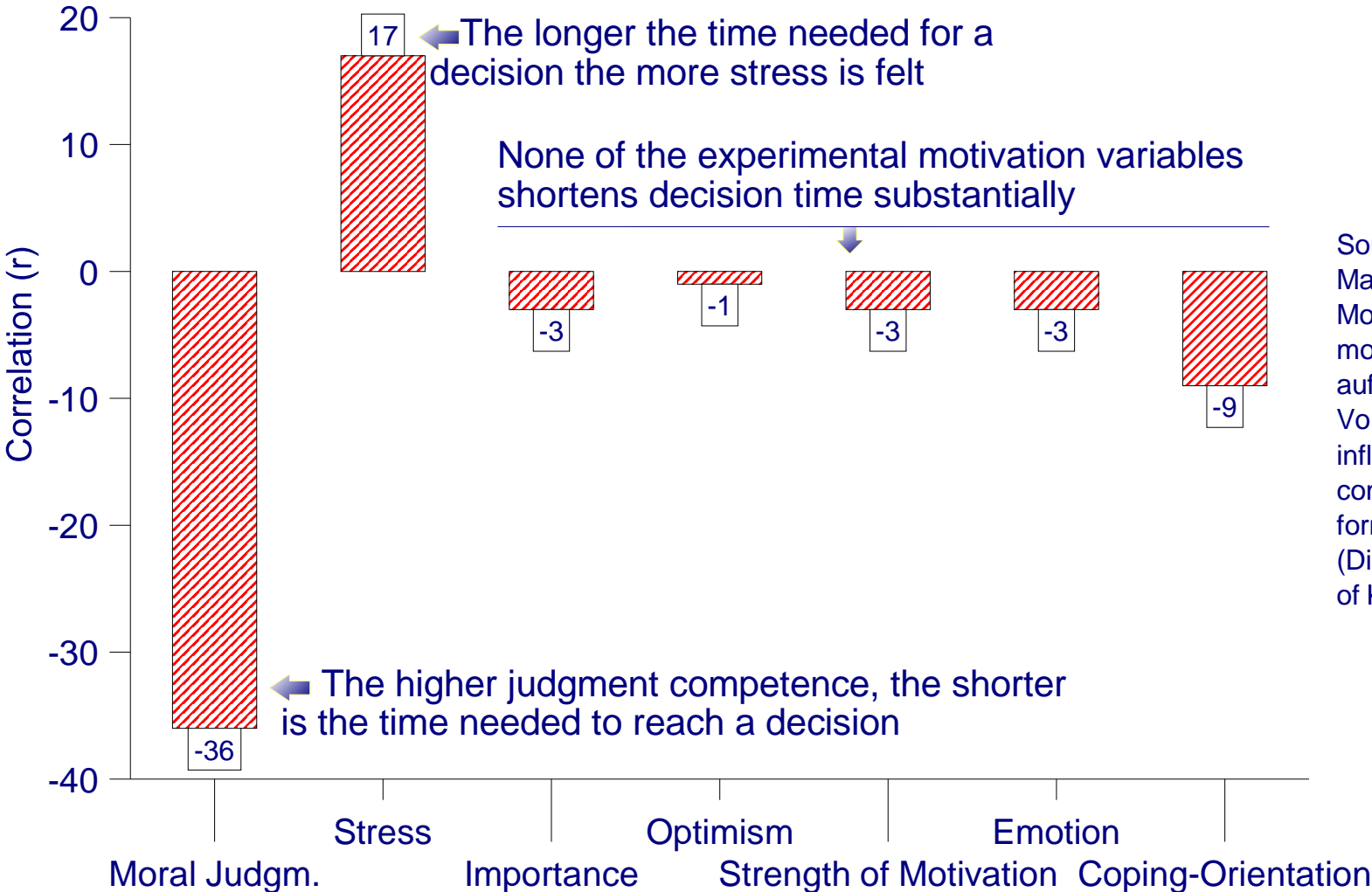
- P Sources: Definitions by
 - ▶ Kohlberg (1964): Development of moral character and moral ideology.
 - ▶ Habermas (1983): Moralisches Bewusstsein und kommunikatives Handeln
 - ▶ Neiman (200): Moral clarity. A guide for grown-up idealists
 - ▶ Nussbaum (2006): Frontiers of justice....
 - ▶ Sen (2009): The idea of justice
 - ▶ Socrates: Dialogue with Meno

Dual-Aspect Theory: Moral Competence Bridges the Gap between Moral Orientations and Behavior



Lind, G. (2008). The meaning and measurement of moral judgment competence -- A dual aspect theory. In D. Fasko & W. Willis, Eds., *Contemporary philosophical and psychological perspectives on moral development and education*. Creskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

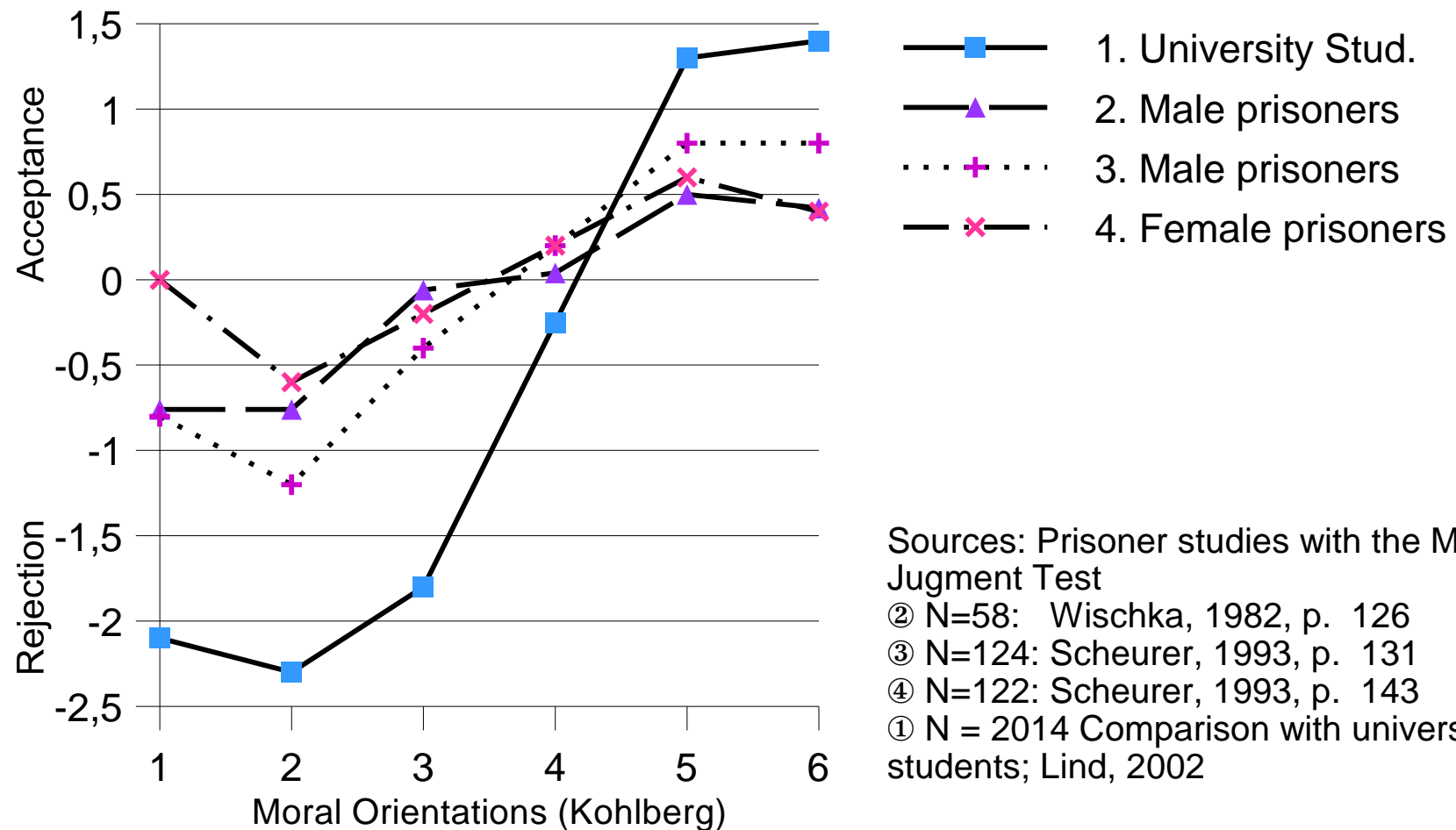
Moral competence is a more powerful predictor of decision-making time than motivation



Source:
Mansbart, F.-J. (2001).
Motivationale Einflüsse der
moralischen Urteilsfähigkeit
auf die Bildung von
Vorsätzen [Motivational
influences of moral judgment
competence on the
formation of intentions.]
(Diploma thesis, University
of Konstanz)

Even Criminals Desire the Good (Moral Orientations)

MJT-Studies



The Gap

“By nature, men are nearly alike; by practice, they get to be wide apart.”

Confucius

“The most important human endeavor is the striving for morality in our actions.”

Albert Einstein, from Letters to a minister, 1950.

The Prediction: Moral Competence is a Strong Factor of Social Behavior

Predicting Social Behavior: Experimental Evidence

- P Break a contract
- P Misbehave: Deceit, not whistle blowing ...
- P Help
- P Resist power abuse
- P Engage for democracy
- P Reject violence
- P Substance use
- P Make swift decisions
- P Learn facts
- P Get good grades
- P Teach well
- P Reject an absolutist ethical stance

On Hypothesis-Testing:: Chosing the right statistics

- ▶ *Statistical Significance* tells us only whether the *sample size* is large enough to detect a certain difference.
 - ▶ In a huge sample, even meaningless differences become “significant.”
- ▶ Coefficients of *correlations* do not depend on sample size, but on form and size of the distributions of the causal variable(s).
 - ▶ If there is no variation there can be no correlation.
 - ▶ $r = 0.30$ can mean a strong relationship!
- ▶ Absolute effect size like differences in scores and percentages do not depend on sample size or form of distribution, but on variance of the causal variables.

See Lind, G. (2012). Effektstärken: Statistische versus praktische und theoretische Bedeutsamkeit. Erweiterter Vortrag. [Effect sizes: statistical, practical, and theoretical significance of empirical studies.] <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:bsz:352-217760>

Breaking a Contract

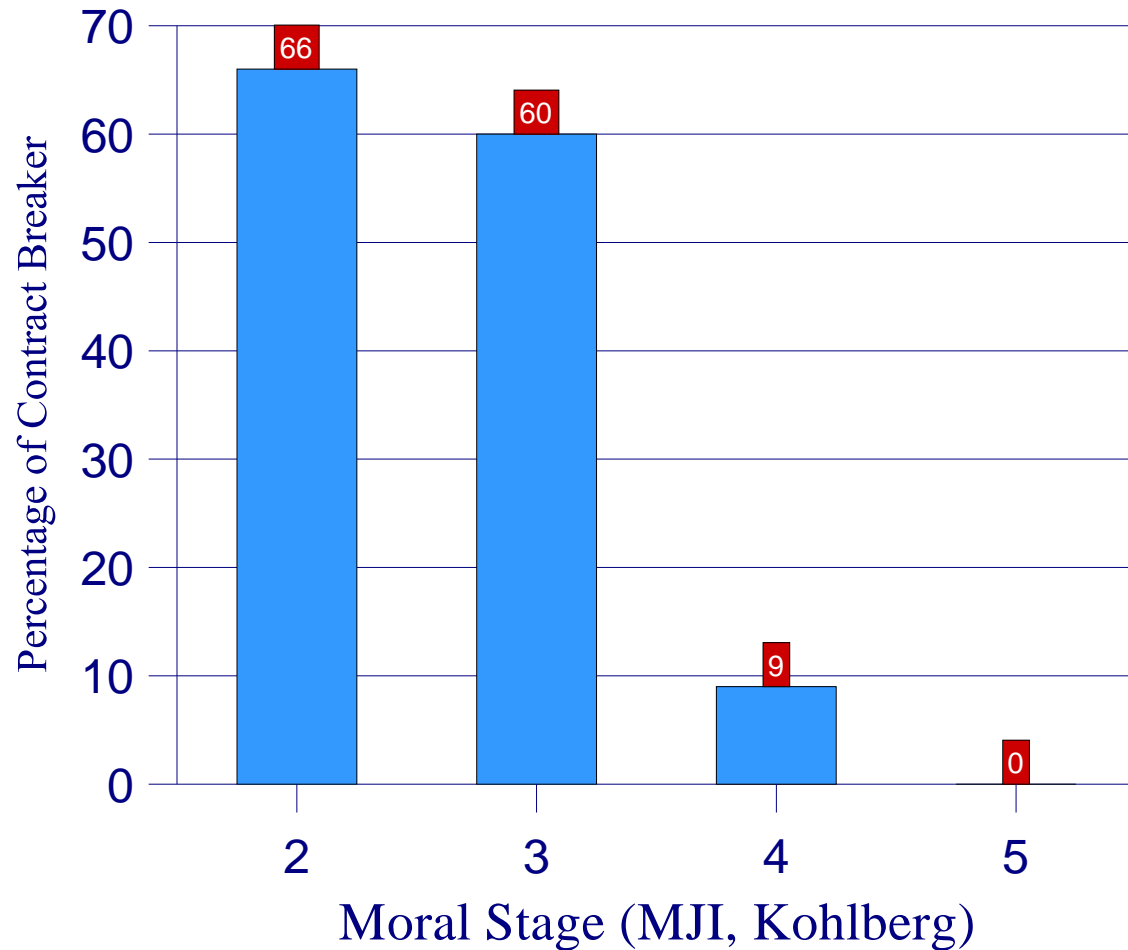
Sample: 31 college students

Criterion: Not sending the questionnaire back

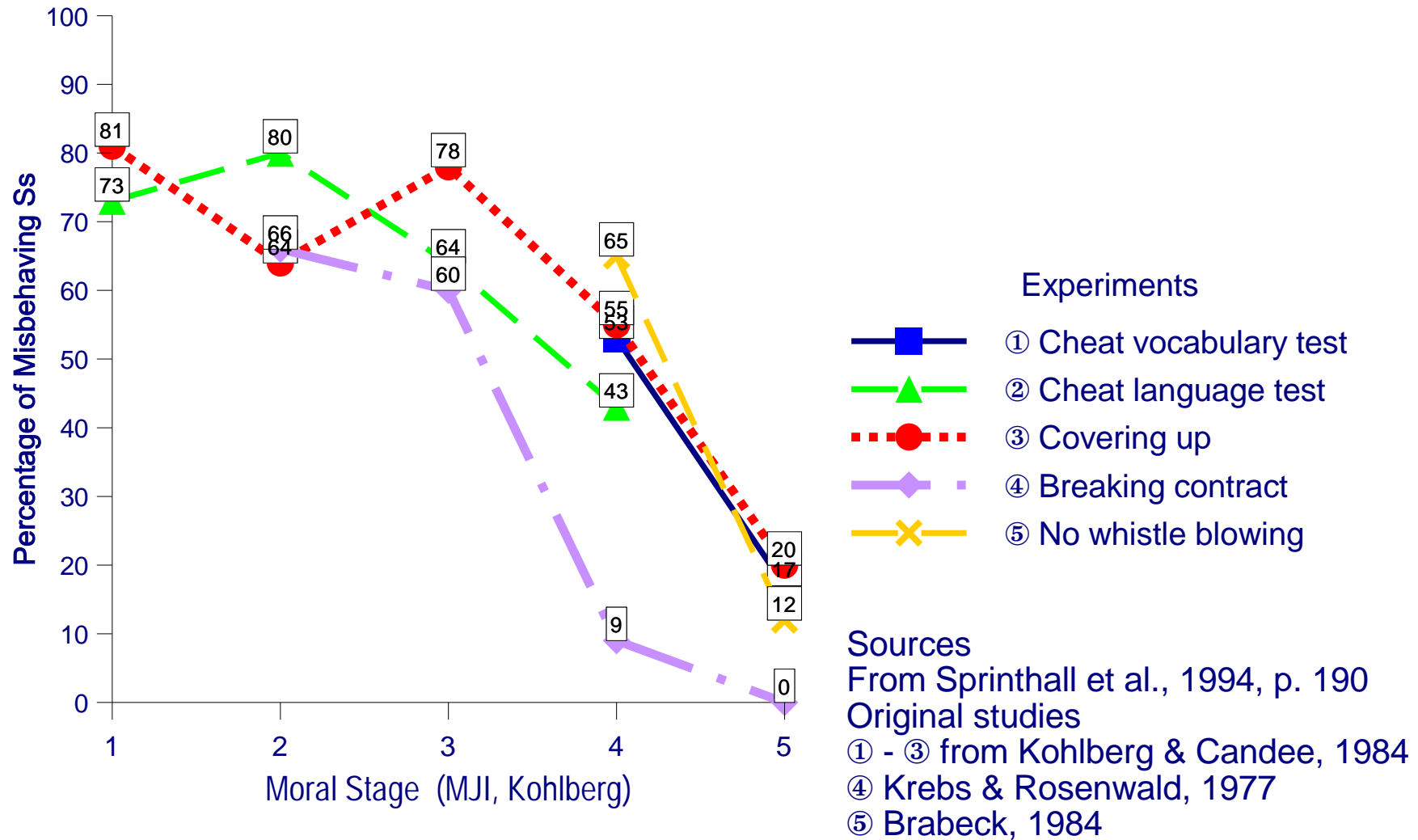
Factor: Moral Judgment, Kohlberg's Interview-Method.

Effect size: $r = .57$

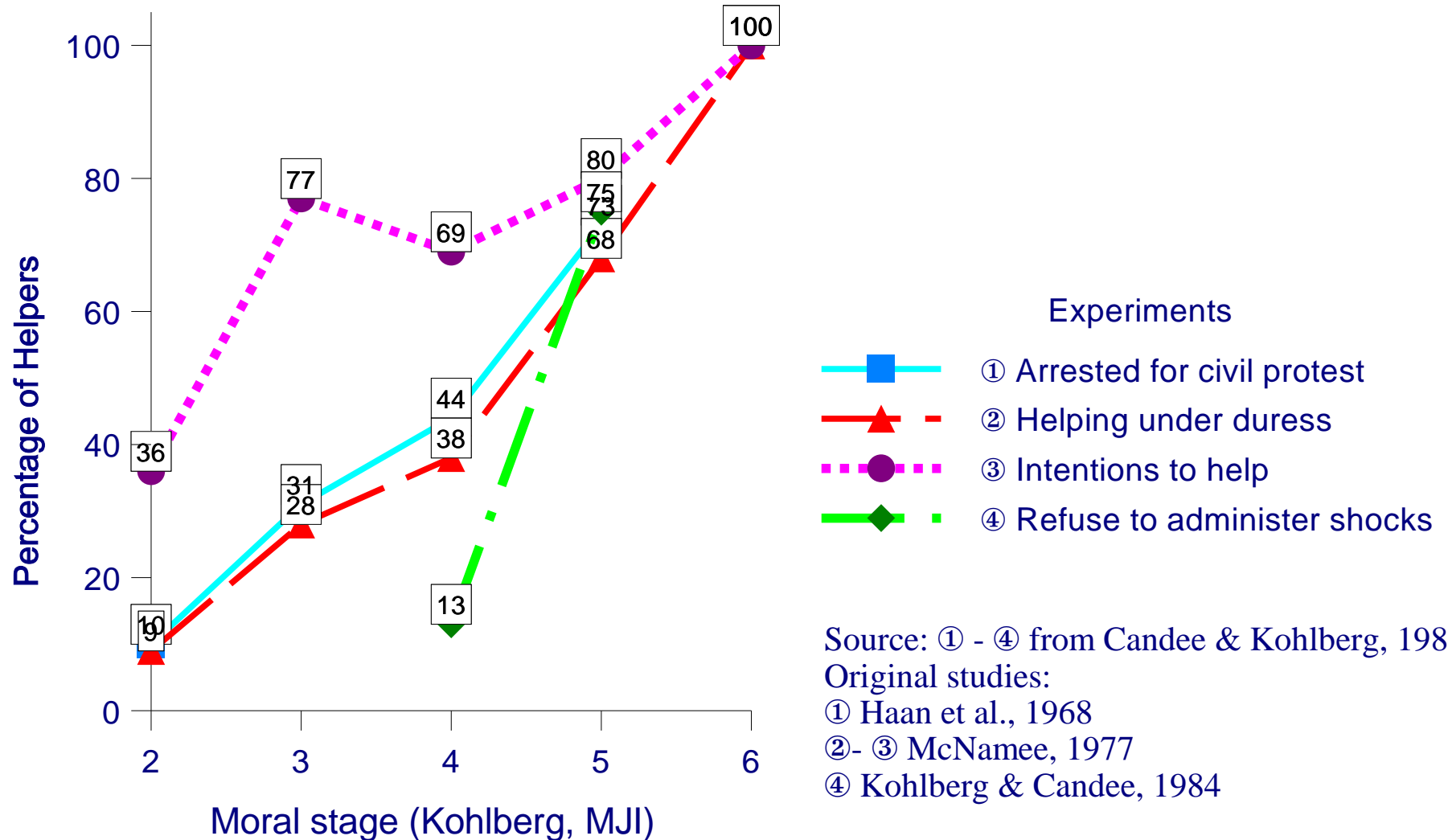
Source: Krebs & Rosenwald, 1977



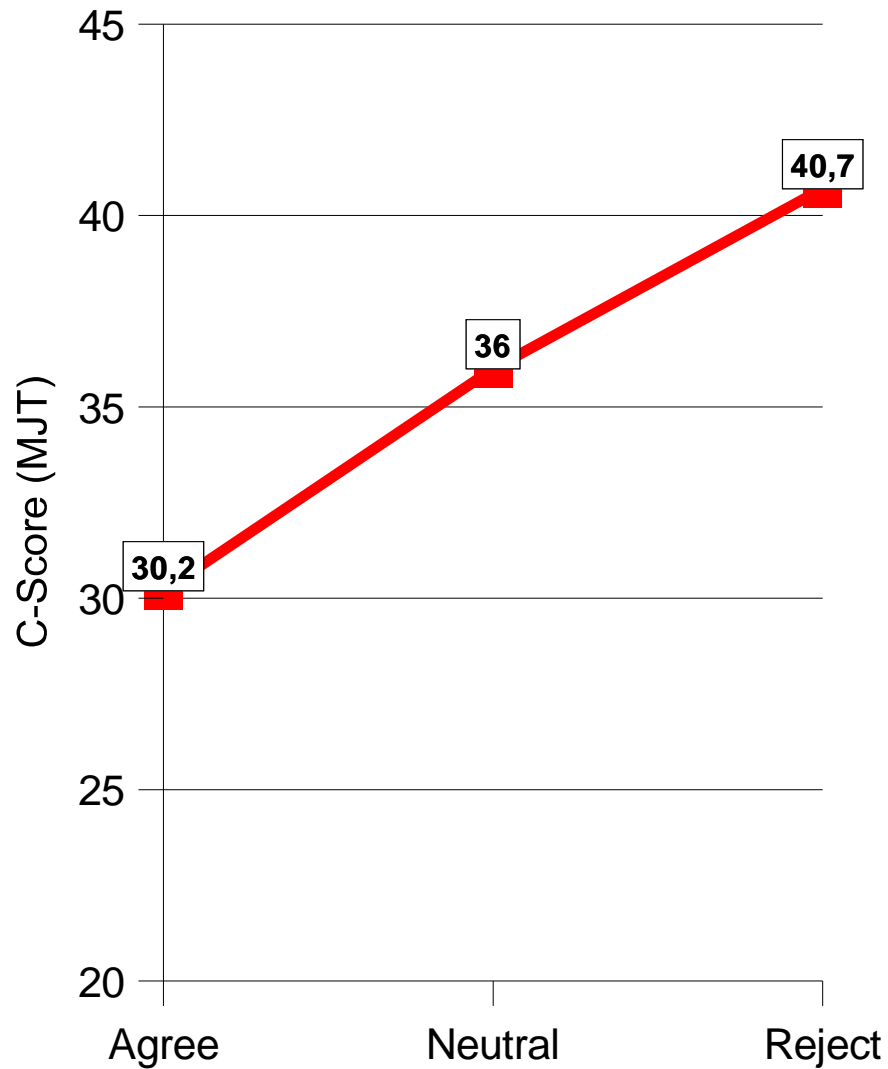
Misbehaving ...



Helping Behavior and Civic Protest



Rejecting violence as a means to change society



Source: Special Research Unit 23,
Research Project "Socialization in
Higher Education."
University students, 1st semester
ca. N = 2000

Acquiring knowledge (experiment)

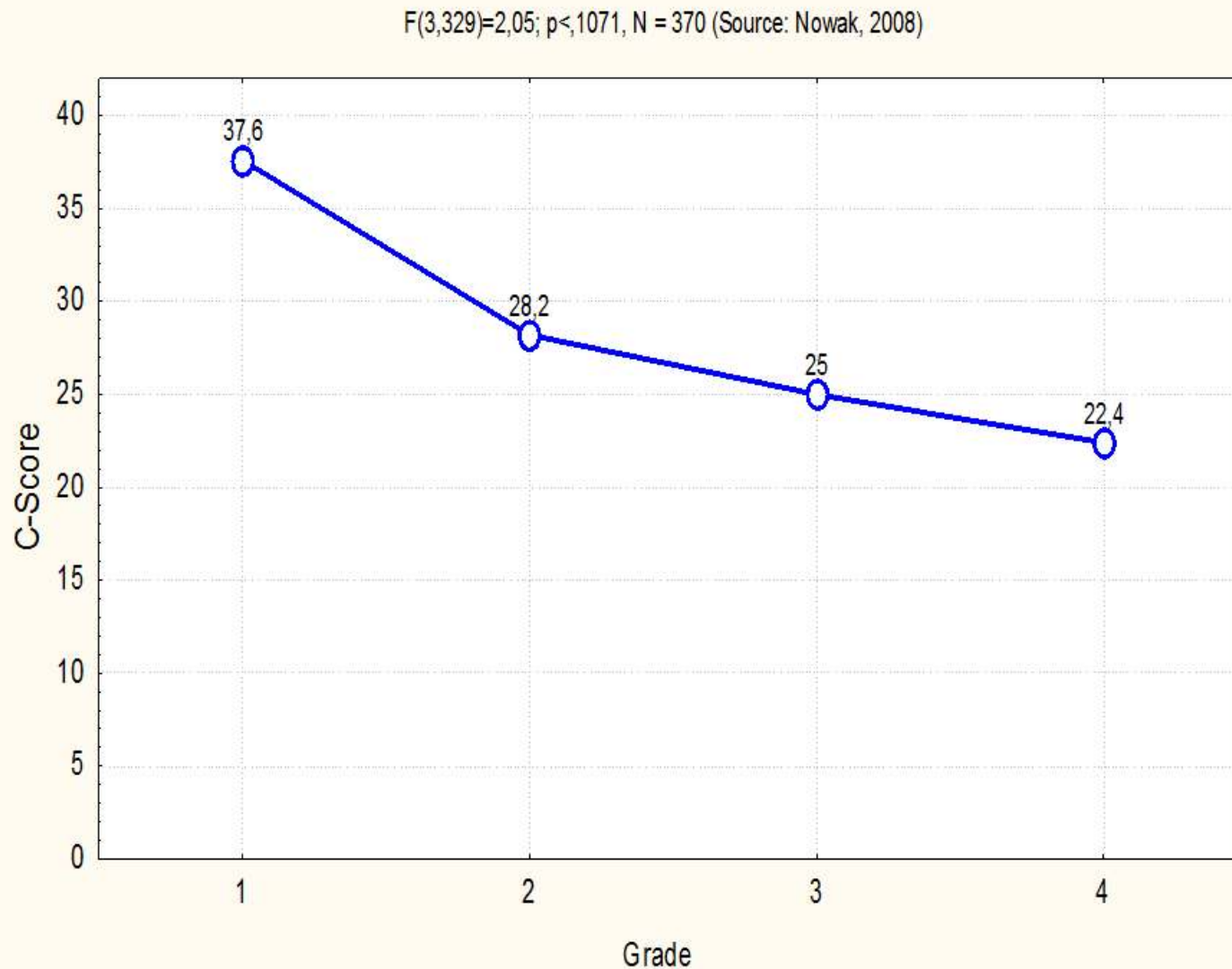
Correlations between C-score (*Moral Judgment Test*, MJT), cognitive complexity (*Paragraph Completion Test*, PCT) and knowledge about organ transplantation before and after watching a teaching video:

| | Knowledge: | Pretest | Gain |
|-----|------------------------|---------|---------|
| MJT | - Moral competence | 0.25 ** | 0.22** |
| | - Opinion agreement | -0.03 | -0.31** |
| PCT | - Cognitive complexity | 0.41** | 0.26** |

n = 140; ** p < 0.01

Source: Heidbrink, H. (2010). Moral judgment competence and political learning. In: Lind, G., Hartmann, H. A. & Wakenhut, R., eds., *Moral judgment and social education*, pp. 259 - 271. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publisher.

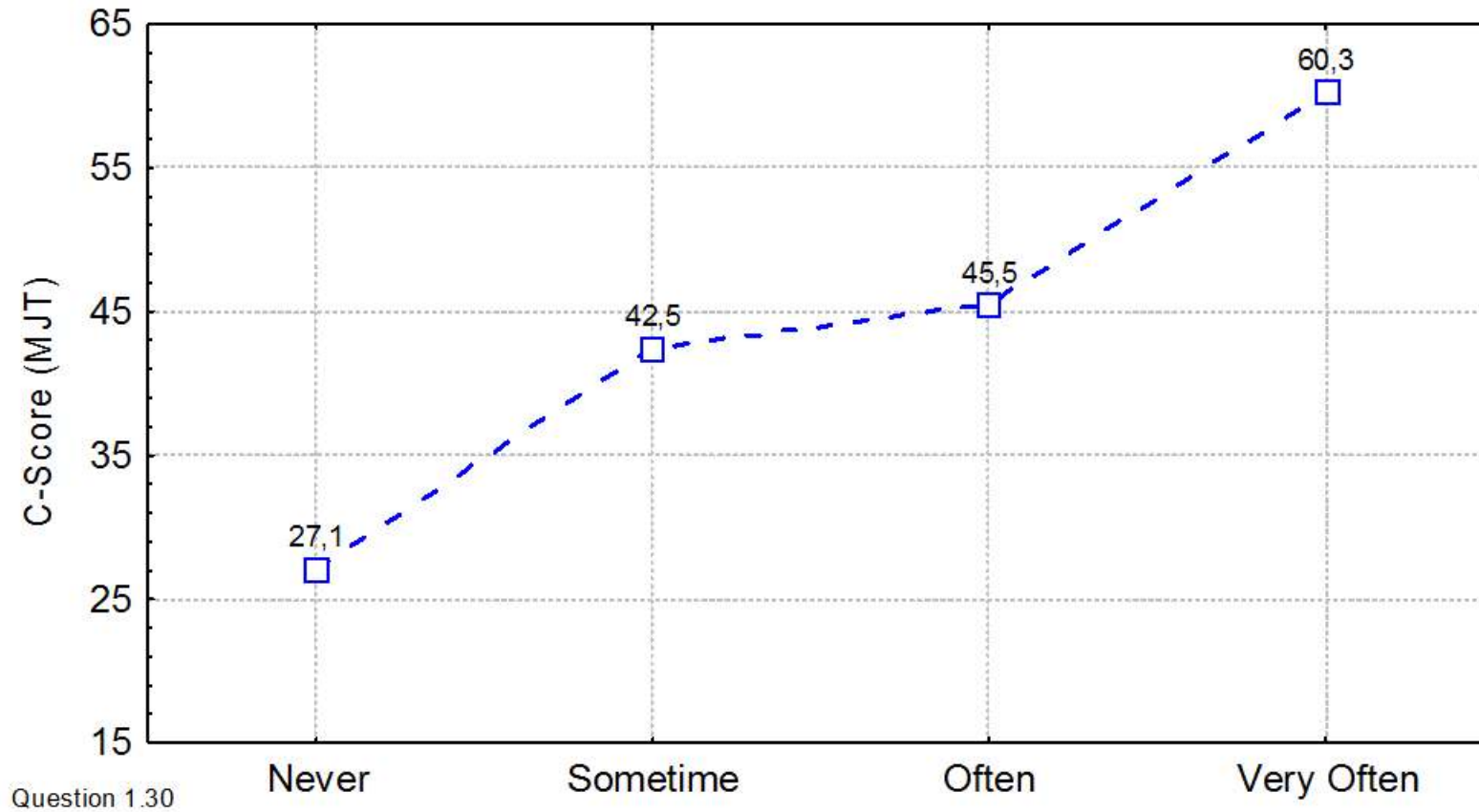
Better grades in last high school year (Poland)



Source: E. Nowak, personal communication, 2008.

Better teaching

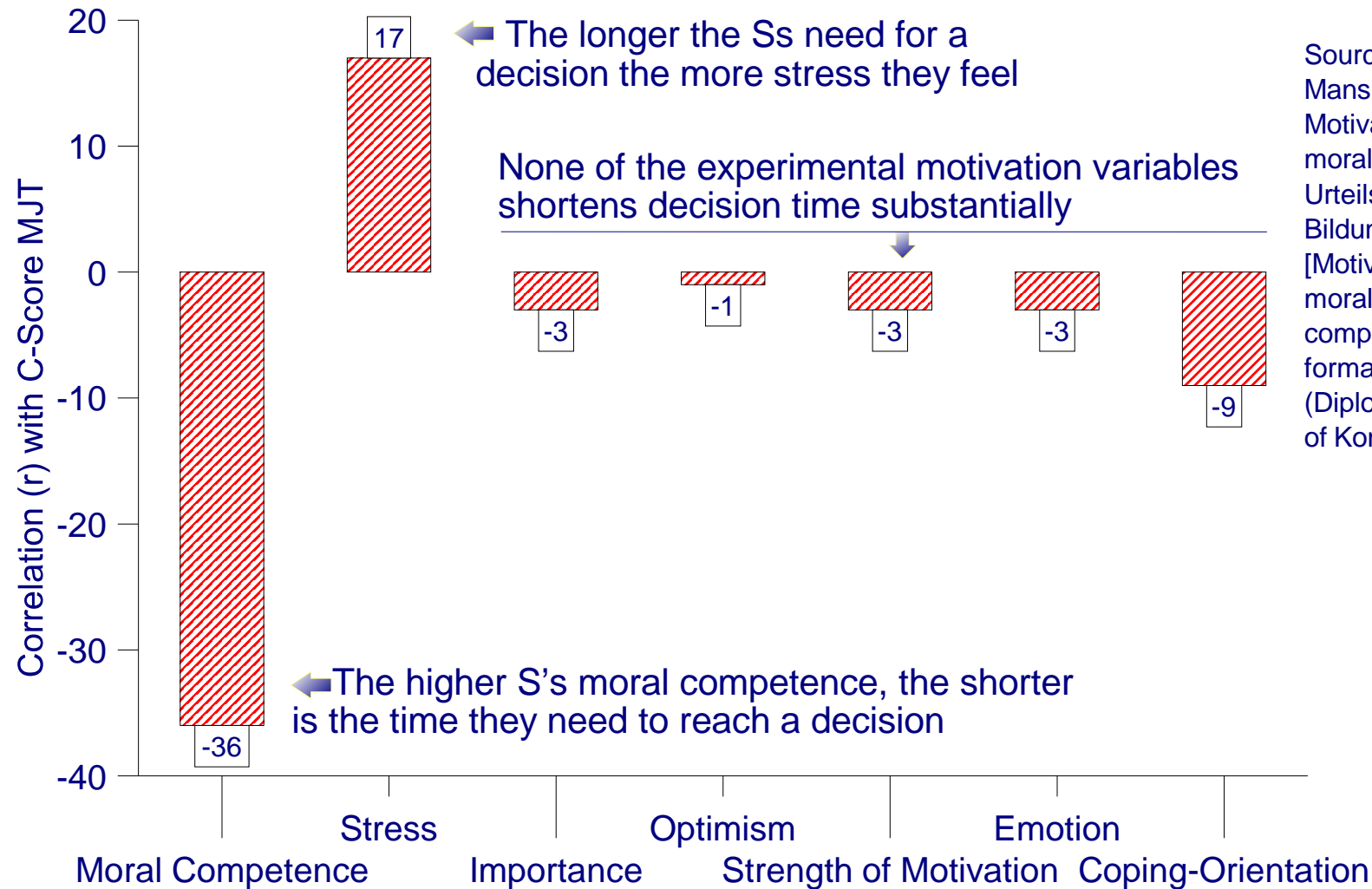
Moral Judgment Competence and Learning:
"How Often Have You Used Cooperative Learning?"
Teachers (N=15)



Question 1.30

Source: Own data

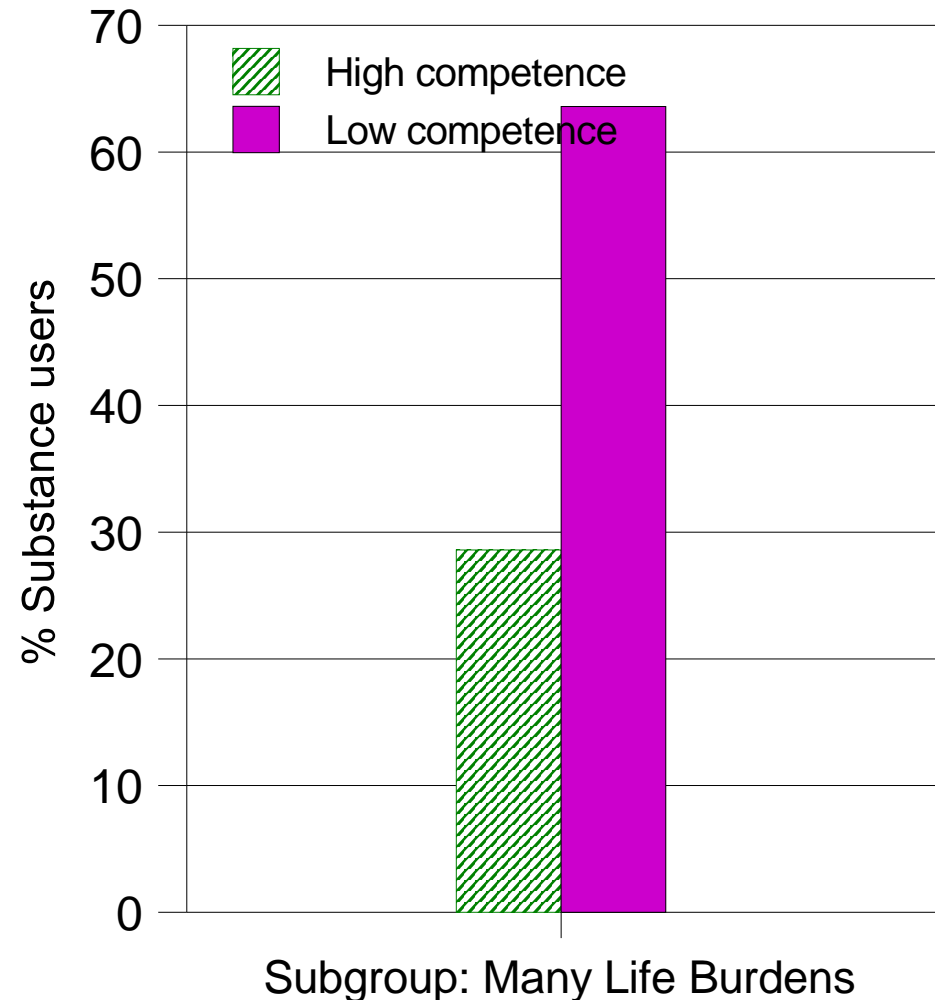
Moral competence is better predictor of decision-making time than motivation



Source:
 Mansbart, F.-J. (2001).
 Motivationale Einflüsse der
 moralischen
 Urteilsfähigkeit auf die
 Bildung von Vorsätzen
 [Motivational influences of
 moral judgment
 competence on the
 formation of intentions.]
 (Diploma thesis, University
 of Konstanz)

Many life burdens and *low* moral competence: High risk of dysfunctional behavior (substance use)

- P Behavior: Substance use
- P Factors:
 - ▶ Moral competence
 - ▶ Life burdens
- P Source:
 - ▶ Lenz, B. (2006). Moralische Urteilsfähigkeit als eine Determinante für Drogenkonsum bei Jugendlichen [Moral judgment competence as a factor of drug consumption of juveniles.]



Ethical absolutists prefer high moral principles (DIT) but have low moral competence (MJT)

Ishida, C. (2006). How do scores of DIT and MJT differ? A critical assessment of the use of alternative moral development scales in studies of business ethics. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 67, 1, 63-74.

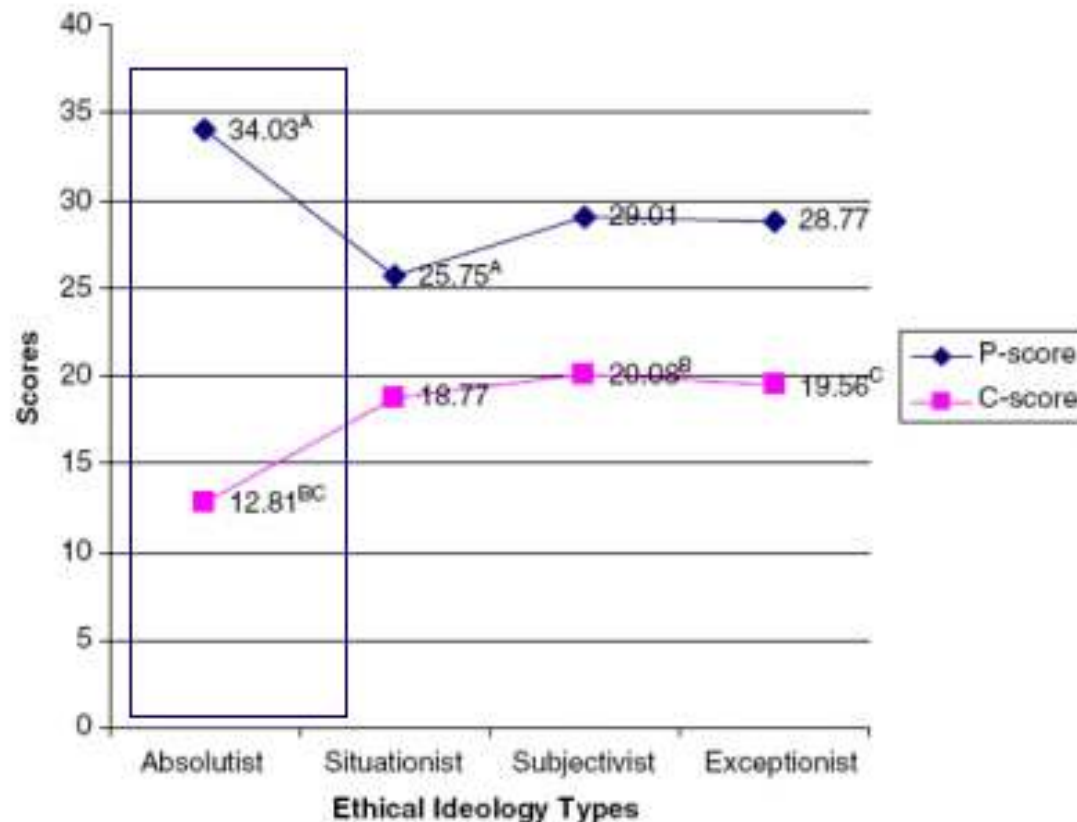
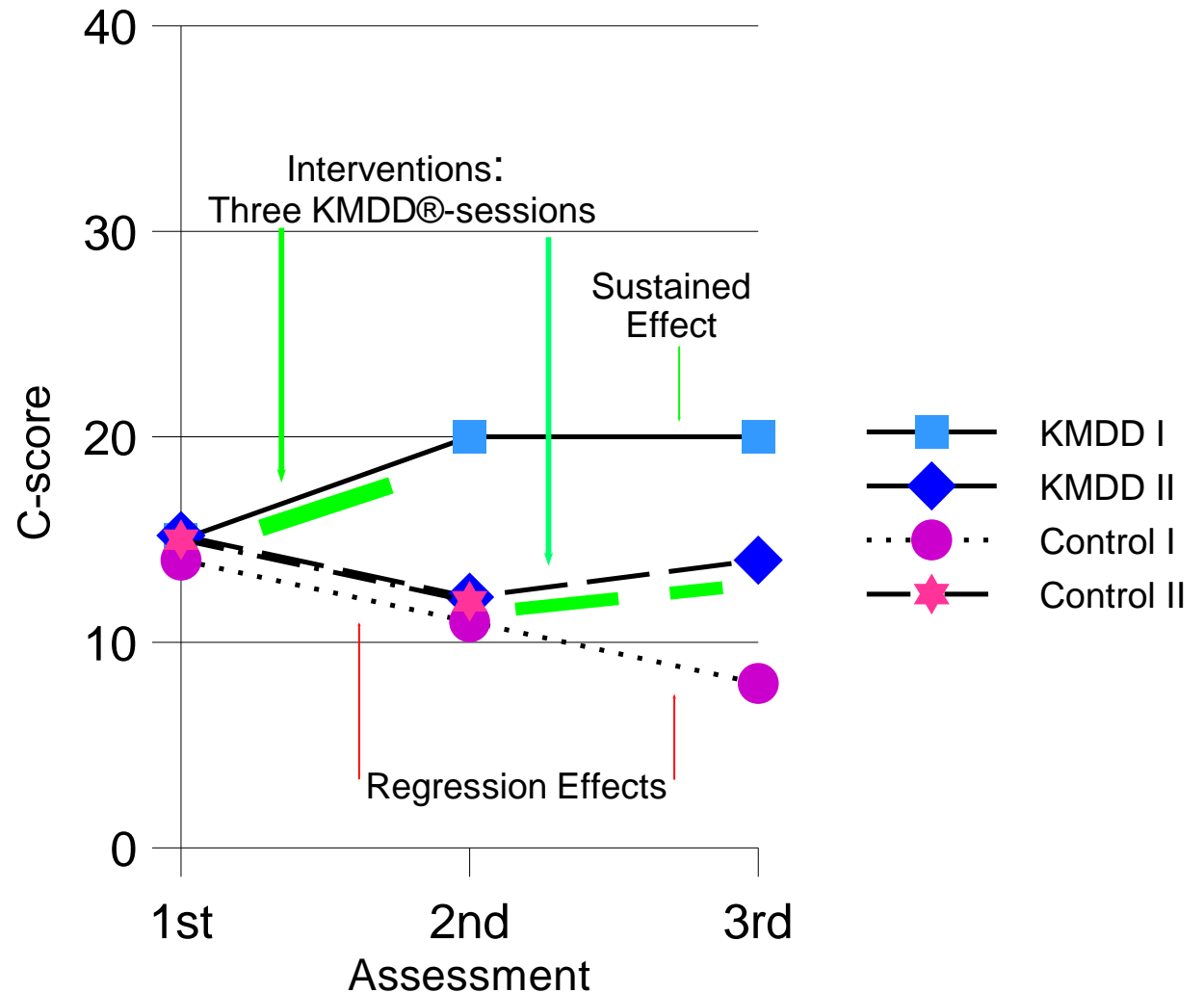


Figure 1. Mean values across ethical ideology types (values with common superscripts are significant $p < 0.05$).

Closing the gap between moral ideals and behavior: Fostering the moral competence of prisoners

Adapted from
Hemmerling, K. (2014).
*Fostering moral competence of
prisoners as a new approach to
social rehabilitation. An
intervention study.* (Doctoral
dissertation). Frankfurt: Lang, in
press.



Conclusion

- P Moral competence has a vast impact on social behavior; it is a key competence for living together in a democracy.
- P Basic moral orientations (moral feeling, principles etc) are inborn and need not to be taught.
- P Moral competence needs to be taught AND can be taught.

References

- P Colby, A. & Damon, W. (1992). *Some do care. Contemporary lives of moral commitment*. New York: the Free Press.
- P Haan, N., Smith, M. B. & Block, J. H. (1968). Moral reasoning of young adults: Political-social behavior, family background, and personality correlates. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 10, 183-201.
- P Haidt, J. (2001). The emotional dog and its rational tail: A social intuitionist approach to moral judgment. *Psychological Review* 108, 4, 814-834.
- P Hemmerling, K. (2014). *Fostering moral competence of prisoners as a new approach to social rehabilitation. An intervention study*. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Konstanz). Frankfurt: Lang, in press.
- P Kohlberg, L. (1958). *The development of modes of moral thinking and choice in the years 10 to 16*. University of Chicago, Unpublished doctoral dissertation.
- P Kohlberg, L. & Candee, D. (1984). The relationship of moral judgment to moral action. L. Kohlberg, Ed., *Essays on moral development, Vol. II, The psychology of moral development*, pp. 498-582. San Francisco: Harper & Row.
- P Krebs, D.L. & Rosenwald, A. (1977). *Moral reasoning and moral behavior in conventional adults*. *Merrill Palmer Quarterly*, 23, 77-87.
- P Lind, G. (2002). *Ist Moral lehrbar? Ergebnisse der modernen moralpsychologischen Forschung*. Berlin: Logos-Verlag.
- P Lind, G. (2009). *Moral ist lehrbar. Ein Handbuch zur moralischen und demokratischen Bildung*. München: Oldenbourg
- P Lind, G. (2008). The meaning and measurement of moral judgment competence -- A dual aspect theory. In D. Fasko & W. Willis, Eds., *Contemporary philosophical and psychological perspectives on moral development and education*. Creskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- P Lind, G. (2012). Effektstärken: Statistische versus praktische und theoretische Bedeutsamkeit. Erweiterter Vortrag. [Effect sizes: statistical, practical, and theoretical significance of empirical studies.] <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:bsz:352-217760>
- P Cont'd

References (cont'd)

- P Milgram, S. (1974). *Obedience to authority. An experimental view*. New York: Tavistock.
- P Nowak, E., Schrader, D., & Zizek, B., eds. (2013): *Educating competencies for democracy*. New York: Peter Lang.
- P Prehn, K. (2013). Moral judgment competence. A re-evaluation of the dual aspect theory based on recent neuroscientific research. In: E. Nowak, D. Schrader & B. Zizek, eds., *Educating competencies for democracy*, pp. 9 -22. New York: Peter Lang Verlag.
- P Scheurer, H. (1993). *Persönlichkeit und Kriminalität. Eine theoretische und empirische Analyse*. Regensburg, Germany: S. Roderer.
- P Schulman, M. & Mekler, E. (1985). *Bringing up a moral child. A new approach for teaching your child to be kind, just and responsible*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publ. Inc.
- P Uhl, S. (1986). *Die Mittel der Moralerziehung und ihre Wirksamkeit*. Bad Heilbrunn: Klinkhardt.
- P Wischka, B. (1982). *Moralisches Bewußtsein und Empathie bei Strafgefangenen*. (Moral consciousness and empathy of prisoners.) Unpubl. diploma thesis, University of Marburg, Germany. Dept. of Psychology.
- P Wittgenstein, L. (1953). *Philosophical investigations*. Translated by G. E. M. Anscombe. London: Blackwell.
- P Wren, Thomas E. (1991). *Caring about morality. Philosophical perspectives in moral psychology*. London: Routledge.

More references: [Http://www.uni-konstanz.de/ag-moral/](http://www.uni-konstanz.de/ag-moral/)