

# PSYC3016: Developmental Psychology

## Moral Development 1

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## Reading – MD1

### Recommended reading

- Social regulations and domains of social concepts (Turiel, 1978)
- Preschool children's conceptions of moral and social rules (Smetana, 1981)
- Kohlberg

## What are morals?

Are they...

- Code of conduct?
- Necessary rules to maintain social structures?
- Universal right/wrong?
- An emotion?
- Avoidance of negative feelings?
- Avoidance of punishment?
- Evolution of survival?
- Black and white?
- Grey?
- Context dependent?

## The feeling of conscience and the growth of moral understanding

Today and next lecture we will:

1. Discuss some important developmental components of conscience and the growth of moral understanding
2. Introduce classical cognitive developmental theories of the growth of moral understanding
3. Contrast this classical approach with the social domain theory approach

## Learning outcomes

- LO1 – understand what is meant by moral reasoning and know the developmental pattern outlined by Kohlberg
- LO2 – be able to articulate the theoretical and methodological strengths and limitations of Kohlberg's theory
- LO1 – be able to discuss the differences between moral prescriptions and social conventions and how they can be used to inform us about the way in which children appraise different types of behaviour
- LO1 – understand the developmental and theoretical differences between moral reasoning and moral appraisal

## Background: Self conscious emotions



- Self-awareness is THOUGHT to emerge at about 18 months (Rouge/Mark Test)
- Turns out that apes (maybe also elephants and dolphins) can pass the Rouge Test!
- *Identity formation* is generally thought to consist in a lessening of egocentricity and increasing of self-other differentiation

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- *Identity formation* is generally thought to consist in a lessening of egocentricity and increasing of self-other differentiation
- Sense of self is required to become a “moral agent”
  - If “you” does not exist then “you” have no responsibilities
- Even very young children (2 years) appear to display pride and embarrassment, though such displays are hard to interpret and are linked to current circumstances
- Pride  $\neq$  happiness
- Shame  $\neq$  sadness
- **Social** emotions require an audience... feedback
- A 2 year old may **experience** pride in front of an audience whereas an 8 year old can appraise his/her own actions as pride-worthy (or not) **even in the absence of an audience**

## Background: Self conscious emotions



- Self-awareness is THOUGHT to emerge at about 18 months (Rouge/Mark Test)
- Turns out that elephants, apes and monkeys can pass the Rouge Test!
- *Identity formation* is generally thought to consist in a lessening of egocentricity and increasing of self-other differentiation
- Even very young children (2 years) appear to display pride and embarrassment, though such displays are hard to interpret and are linked to current circumstances – so a 2 year old may experience pride in front of an audience whereas an 8 year old can appraise his/her own actions as pride-worthy (or not) even in the absence of an audience
- Self-conscious emotions imply some thought(s) about the actions of the *self as good or bad*, which probably arise because of awareness of the audience
- While developmentally critical, the presence of the *actual* audience becomes increasingly less important for self-conscious emotions: **appears to be a process of internalization**

## Classical theories of moral development

- Both Piaget (1932) and Kohlberg (1971) use structured tasks (clinical interview) to establish how children are able to *reason* about moral dilemmas or ethical situations

*One afternoon, on a holiday, a mother had taken her children for a walk along the Rhône. At four o'clock she gave each of them a roll. They all began to eat their rolls except the youngest, who was careless and let his fall into the water. What will the mother do? Will she give him another one? What will the older ones say?*

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- Both concluded that there is a clear developmental sequence in the child's capacity to *reason* about moral dilemmas

## What is moral *reasoning*?

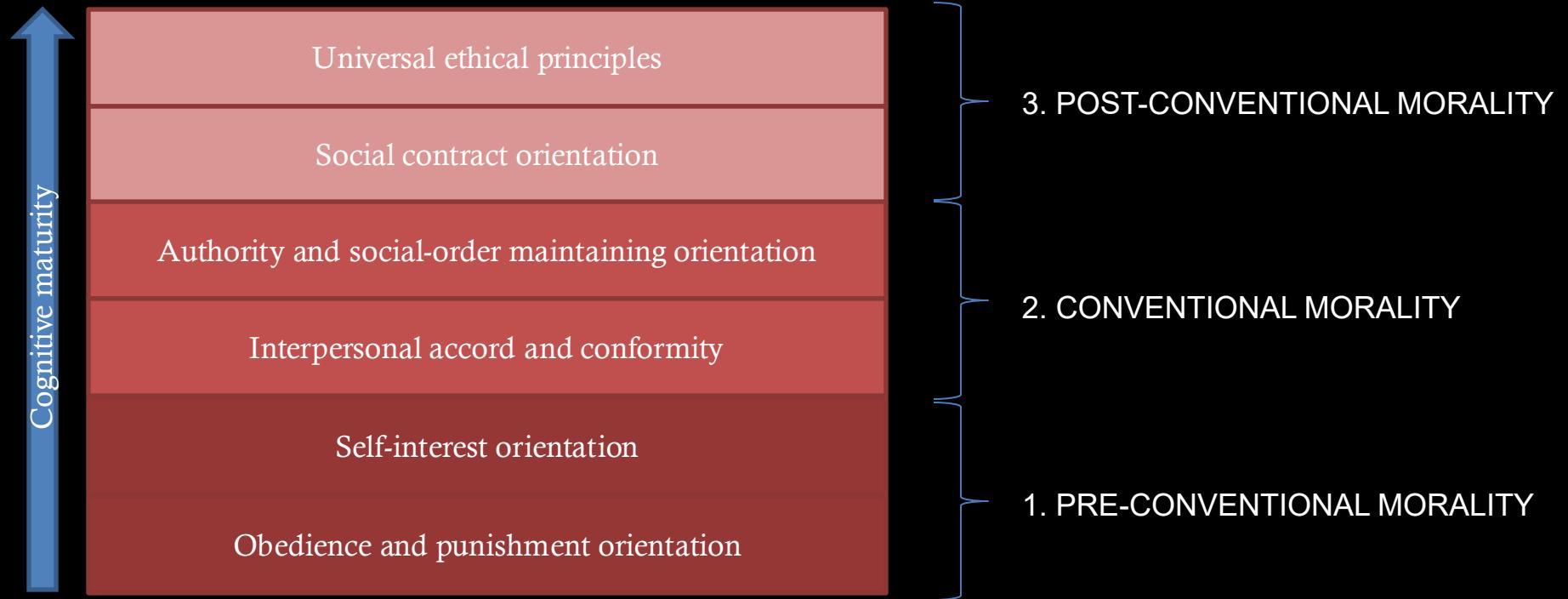
- *Cognitive* component of moral development
- Working out what you *should* do in any given situation
- Kohlberg's stages of moral reasoning

## Brief background to Kohlberg

- “Stages of Moral Reasoning” – 1958
  - 6 stages within 3 levels
  - Progression through the stages as age increases
  - Each new stage reflects a qualitatively different, more adequate way of thinking than the one before it
  - Measured using “Moral Judgement Interview”
- Built on the theories of Piaget
  - Discrete stages
  - Hierarchical structure



# Kohlberg's stages of moral reasoning



# Level 1 – Pre-conventional morality

- External consequences
- Early childhood
- Behave in a way to avoid punishment
- “If someone is punished they must have done something wrong”
  - E.g. Drawing on the wall



Obedience and punishment orientation

# Level 1 – Pre-conventional morality

- Early-mid childhood
- “What is best for me?”
- Does not include consideration of how others would view their behaviour
- E.g. “ If you do your homework I will take you to the cinema”.

Self-interest orientation

Obedience and punishment orientation

❖ **PTC:** How influential is parenting to a child's development of moral reasoning?

# Level 2 – Conventional morality

- Typical for adolescents and adults
- Takes account of the views and expectations of the **society**
- “Good girl / good boy”
- Moral action decisions based on what would be considered best by others
  - E.g. helping an elderly person cross the road

Interpersonal accord and conformity

Self-interest orientation

Obedience and punishment orientation



# Level 2 – Conventional morality

- Moral actions obey laws and social conventions
- Main focus is to maintain social order
- “Beyond the individual”
- E.g. Reporting an incident of stealing

Authority and social-order maintaining orientation

Interpersonal accord and conformity

Self-interest orientation

Obedience and punishment orientation

❖ PTC: Would someone without “theory of mind” be able to develop conventional morality?

# Level 3 – Post-conventional morality

- Laws and social rules are not set in stone
- Different opinions and beliefs are respected
- Rules can be changed by the majority to benefit the majority
- Moral dilemmas
  - E.g. steal food in order to feed child?
- Only 10 – 15% of adult population

Social contract orientation

Authority and social-order maintaining orientation

Interpersonal accord and conformity

Self-interest orientation

Obedience and punishment orientation

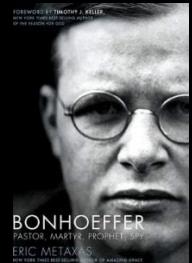


# Level 3 – Post-conventional morality



- Considered rare by Kohlberg
- “Beyond the law”
- Overarching ethical principles – e.g. human rights
- Personal ideals may guide behaviour over and above social rules, laws and expectations

❖ PTC: What happens when societal laws are considered immoral?



# What is moral reasoning not?

Moral reasoning is not the same as moral behaviour

- E.g. A woman is being harassed by a man...
  - Another man punches him in the face.
  - What level of moral reasoning is he functioning at?
  - 2 – self-interest? 3 – other people's opinion?
- E.g. Level 2, stage 3 (interpersonal accord and social conformity)



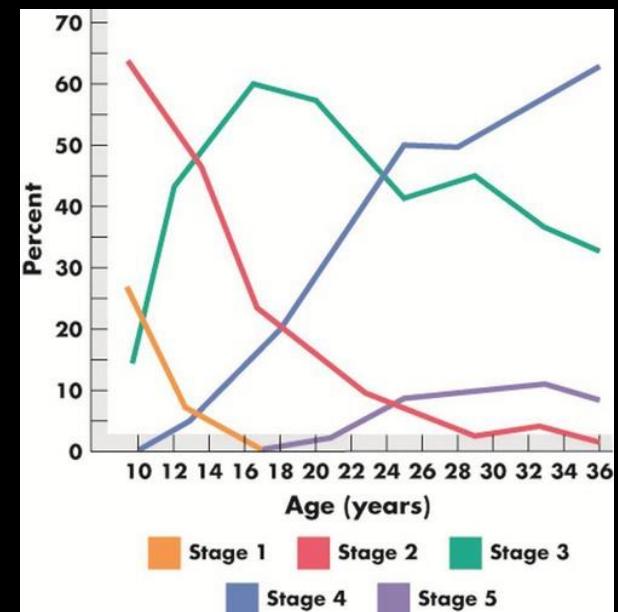
# Moral reasoning (according to Kohlberg) is not gender fair

- Gilligan (1982)
- Kohlberg's results based on a male sample
- Ethics of care (female) vs ethics of justice (male)
- Stage 3 – good-girl vs stage 4 – law and justice
- Focus on relationships (emotional facet of morality) more than laws (cognitive facet of morality)



# The development of moral reasoning is not strictly hierarchical

- Different situations – different stage of moral reasoning
  - Social factors
  - Consequences
- People can reason at two stages simultaneously



# Other criticisms...

- Kohlberg's scenarios were not ecologically valid - Nancy Eisenberg
  - People might answer differently if they were actually in a situation not just imagining it
- Cultural variability in the relationship between morality and convention
  - Individualist versus collectivist
- Stage 6 is too rare
- Children under about 7 years of age find it very difficult to articulate reasons

# Lecture Quiz

- Kohlberg's theory of the development of moral reasoning is concerned with...
  - a) What people use to guide their moral compass.
  - b) What people think they should do in a given situation
  - c) What people think they would do in a given situation
  - d) How people feel in a given situation
  - e) How people think other people would want them to behave in a given situation

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# Children's understanding of right and wrong, good and bad, and the moral-conventional distinction



- Whereas Piaget and Kohlberg pressed children in order to see what they thought they should *do* in hypothetical situations, and why they would do it, a different research tradition has grown based on the theoretical work of Turiel (1979, 1983), which is concerned with how children appraise (or judge) actions in *moral* terms (*right or wrong*)
- *Reasons versus feelings (is it right or wrong?)*
- Turiel and others (Smetana, 1983, 1993) have argued that even very young children, 36 months or younger, make a distinction between **moral** (*feeling*) and **conventional** (*rules*) social rules

**Social conventions** are ... behavioral uniformities which coordinate interactions of individuals within social systems. ... Consequently, conventions (e.g., modes of greeting, forms of address) provide people with means of knowing what to expect of each other ... Conventions involve coordinations at the level of social organization; they are **uniformities** that coordinate the stable interactions of individuals functioning within a social system and the ends are social organizational.

... In contrast with convention, **moral prescriptions** are not perceived to be alterable by consensus. ... Again, in contrast with convention, in the moral domain actions are not arbitrary, and though moral prescriptions form part of social organization, they are not defined by social organization nor is their rationale based on their status as implicit or explicit regulations. The individual's moral prescriptions (e.g., regarding killing and the value of life) are determined by factors inherent to social relationships, as opposed to a particular form of social organization. An individual's perception of an act such as the taking of a life as a transgression is not contingent on the presence of a **rule**, but rather stems from the factors intrinsic to the event ... The moral theories formed by individuals are based on concepts regarding the welfare of persons, the rights of persons, and justice, in the sense of comparative treatment of individuals and means of distribution. (pp. 38-40)

Example: is it wrong to not wear clothes?

## Children's understanding of right and wrong, good and bad, and the moral-conventional distinction

The evidence for a moral-conventional distinction in children's appraisals of certain acts is pretty good: For example, Smetana (1981) showed that,

- Moral transgressions (e.g., hitting, not sharing, shoving, stealing) are judged to be more wrong in the absence of rules than conventional transgressions (e.g., not sitting on the rug at story time, not saying grace, not putting toys away correctly) by children as young as 30 months!
- These children also agreed that moral transgressions were more serious, more deserving of punishment, and less contextually bound (wrong at home and at school)
- Finally, despite a diverse age-range, 30-57 months, there were **no age differences**

# Children's understanding of right and wrong, good and bad, and the moral-conventional distinction

In sum,

- There is good evidence that children are, very early, sensitive to different kinds of **transgressions**, regarding those that relate to harm, suffering or interpersonal tension (*moral*) as worse than those that relate to social conventions
- To some extent at least, the origins of such differential understanding lie in the different meaning that such events have and the different responses they provoke in children and adults
- What if a transgression of convention caused harm?
- We might well ask, WHY is it so obvious to children that some transgressions have a different status and why does it apparently take so long for children to fully comprehend the emotional implications of moral transgression?
- We might also ask how children's moral understanding is related to their feelings and empathy development

If you get lost... come back to this slide!

- The philosophy of morality and ethics are huge areas of study!
- We are not trying to compete – focus on aspects that lend themselves to developmental psychology
- In the realm of moral development there are some grand theories
  - *rationalist and sentimental*
  - *rules and reason (Kohlberg) versus emotional consequences and feelings*

## Next time...

- Today we looked at moral judgements (Kohlberg)
- He is as far as we go into the foray of the **rationalist** tradition and moral reasoning
- Next lecture will focus on the **sentimentalist** tradition
  - The inherent social basis of moral systems
  - The analysis of intentions in moral situations
  - Both of these approaches are important for understanding children's moral development