

MORAL JUDGMENT, CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR AND PERSONALITY IN ADULT OFFENDERS *

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RESUMO

JULGAMENTO MORAL E PERSONALIDADE EM CRIMINOSOS ADULTOS

O presente trabalho investigou a relação entre os estágios de julgamento moral e as variáveis da personalidade de um grupo de presos adultos. Com base nas notas obtidas no "Rest's Defining Issues Test", que dá uma medida objetiva da teoria de Kohlberg sobre o desenvolvimento moral, 159 presos foram divididos em 5 grupos em relação ao julgamento moral. A variável dependente incluiu a escala multidimensional de Levenson quanto ao "locus" do controle e o "Psychological Screening Inventory."

Os resultados indicaram diferenças entre os grupos nos fatores: Internação, Risco, Alienação e Expressão. Além disto, verificou-se que o nível de julgamento moral dos presos era muito baixo. As implicações quanto à utilidade de se usar tratamentos para presos que se baseiam na teoria do desenvolvimento do julgamento moral são discutidas.

MORAL JUDGMENT AND PERSONALITY IN ADULT OFFENDERS

The need for a new look at the age-old problem of moral development has been met in recent years by the burgeoning growth of research interest in moral judgment; the cornerstone of much of this research was laid by Piaget (1932) and elaborated by Kohlberg (1969, 1975). Moral judgment involves the basic conceptual frameworks by which a person analyzes a social-moral problem and judges the proper course of action (Rest, 1979). Kohlberg has detailed both a theory and empirical support for the idea of moral judgment stages in the course of moral development, which will be presented in greater detail in the following section.

Extensive research has suggested that moral judgment is significantly related to a wide spectrum of dimensions (reviewed by Rest,

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1979). Although cognitive-developmental theory would postulate that moral judgment is best conceptualized as a developmental variable, rather than a personality variable, recent challenges have arisen as to whether moral judgment stages are measuring personality types or differences rather than pure moral stages (Kurtines & Greif, 1974). Specifically, there seem to be some clear-cut personality differences between those at different levels of moral judgment, especially at the higher stages (Hogan, 1970). In addition, there are a few studies (Alker & Poppen, 1973; Arbuthot, 1971; Bloomberg, 1974) which have found moral judgment to be related to locus of control expectancies. This raises the question of whether or not specific personality and behavioral dimensions are predictable by moral judgment stages.

A behavioral correlate such as criminal behavior seems to make the leap from the theoretical realm of moral development to the real world of moral behavior. In fact, Kohlberg's initial work (1958 dissertation) compared the moral judgment of delinquent boys with normal adolescent males.

One way to approach this investigation is to look at individuals who have characteristically invoked immature moral judgments and have violated property and/or people rights. This population has drawn much public attention because of the inappropriate moral decisions it has made to a number of social stimuli, severe enough to require some sort of control over them. The most extreme measure of control imposed is that of incarceration in a correctional facility. While incarcerated, society assumes that there will be some sort of change in the moral development of the individual inmate. However, there has been scant research looking at the moral development levels of adult inmates and how it may relate to personality variables. Furthermore, it is deemed of great importance to investigate the above psychological parameters of inmates when they first come into the prison system and while treatment programming is being considered.

The present investigation was intended to fulfill several purposes. First, the interrelationship among moral judgment and personality variables was explored. Second, a pioneer investigation of the use of an objective measure of moral judgment (the Defining Issues Test) with adult prisoners was conducted, and its feasibility with such a sample explored. For the most extensive review of moral development research using the DIT, the reader is referred to Rest's book, **Development in Judging Moral Issues** (1979). A look at the relationship between moral judgment and offense patterns (crimes against people, property or self) was made. Perhaps most importantly, the research was undertaken with the intent of supplying some baseline moral judgment data on a sample of adult offenders, upon which follow-up research ideas can be fashioned.

It was hypothesized that on the Levenson scale there would be differences between the groups, reflecting a direct positive relationship between Moral Judgment Stage and Internality, and an inverse relationship between stage and Powerful Others and Chance.

It was also hypothesized that on the Psychological Screening Inventory there would be differences between the groups, reflecting inverse relationships between Moral Judgment Stage and personality scales of Alienation, Discomfort, and Expression.

METHOD

Participants. From a potential volunteer pool of 210 adult male inmates, incarcerated in the maximum security prisons in a Midwestern state, 159 adults comprised five groups¹: (a) A Moral Judgment "Stage 2" group (n = 16), (b) a Moral Judgment "Stage 3" group (n = 40), (c) a Moral Judgment "Stage 4" group (n = 54), (d) a Moral Judgment "Stage A" or anarchistic antiestablishment group (n = 28), (e) a Moral Judgment "Stage P" or principled morality group (n = 21).

Analyses of variance were computed comparing the five subject groups on age, race, IQ, education, and California Achievement Test reading scores. Only education yielded a significant difference between the groups ($F = 3.14$; $df = 1,149$; $p < .01$), with Stage P subjects showing the highest average grade completed (12.1).

Table I
Demographic Description of Groups (Means)

	Groups				
	Stage 2 (n = 16)	Stage 3 (n = 40)	Stage 4 (n = 54)	Stage A (n = 28)	Stage P (n = 21)
Age	22.25	24.13	24.73	27.57	27.74
IQ	98.03	93.26	92.96	91.28	98.06
Education	11.17	10.31	10.79	11.03	12.10
C.A.T.	9.26	8.94	9.66	9.37	11.30
Race (n)					
White	14	29	37	23	16
Black	2	11	17	5	5

(1) J. Rest's unpublished manual, "Revised Manual for the Defining Issues Test: an objective test of moral judgment development" (1979) gives criteria on designation of subjects by stage types and principled morality ("P") score.

While the groups did not differ, there was a difference between races on IQ ($F = 13.52$; $df = 1,149$; $p < .001$) and California Achievement Test reading scores ($F = 8.53$; $df = 1,149$; $p < .01$). The IQ and C.A.T. means for blacks and whites, respectively: IQ: 88.55, 100.89; CAT: 8.83, 10.58.

Instruments. The variables of interest in this study were assessed by the following scales:

1. Moral judgment was measured by Rest's (1974) Defining Issues Test.

2. Personality adjustment was measured by Lanyon's (1970, 1973) Psychological Screening Inventory (P.S.I.). The P.S.I. consists of five scales within a 130 item, forced-choice format. The scales of interest included **AI** (Alienation), **Di** (Discomfort) and **Ex** (Expression).

3. Locus of control was measured by Levenson's (1974) 24 item, Likert-type scale, a multidimensional locus-of-control test measuring Internality (I), Powerful Others (P), and Chance (C) expectancies.

Procedure. For several months, inmates who went through the Assessment and Evaluation centers of two Midwestern maximum security adult institutions were asked to voluntarily fill out the D.I.T. Participation was voluntary, and it was explained by the examiner that all information was confidential.

Out of the approximately 300 inmates who were interviewed, 210 completed the D.I.T. Other residents who did not fill out the D.I.T. did so for a variety of reasons: refusal, illiteracy, did not show up at all for the meetings, sickness, etc. The inmates were tested in groups ranging from 5 to 18. The author's previous prison testing experience suggested that greater cooperation was possible if smaller groups were presented with the option of "taking a test". Scheduling problems and other time parameters did not always allow for ideal (e.g. 5-8) group sizes for participation. Instructional set followed that of Rest (1974a), with added emphasis (see Rest, 1974a, Chapter 1) on the task of rating and ranking the items.

Of the 210 potential subjects who completed the D.I.T., 171 protocols were deemed complete and judged valid, following Rest's (1974a) consistency check. An additional 12 protocols (7 Latinos and 5 Native Americans) were excluded from final analysis, as the small number of non-white and non-black persons rendered quite small, and in some cases, nonexistent, cell sizes for analysis. Therefore, the sample for this research consisted of 159 participants (119 were white, 40 black). A summary of demographic descriptions of the groups is presented in Table 1.

Table 2

Analysis of Variance
for the Internality (I) Scores

Source	df	MS	F
MJ (groups)	4	233.28	4.51**
ED (education)	1	169.80	3.28
MJ ED	4	14.46	.27
SS MJ ED	149		

** $p < .01$

Table 3

Newman Keuls Tests for the Ordered Mean
Internality (I) Scores

Group	4	P	A	3	2
Mean	38.33	37.87	36.03	34.66	30.46

Table of Differences between Means

	2	3	A	P
4	9.87**	3.66	2.30	.45
P	7.41*	3.20	1.84	
A	5.57*	1.36		
3	4.20*			

* significant at .05 level

** significant at .01 level

RESULTS

Locus of Control. A significant ($p < .01$) difference was found in Internality among the groups, using an analysis of variance (Table 2). Newman Keuls procedure found stage 4, P, 3 and A groups significantly ($p < .05$) higher than stage 2 group, with no differences found between stages 3, 4, A and P. (Table 3).

No differences were found between the groups on their Powerful Others locus-of-control scores ($F = .23; 4, 149; df = p > .05$).

Differences were found between the groups on chance scores (Table 4) with stage P lower than stage 3 (Table 5).

Psychological Screening Inventory. A significant difference on Alienation scores was found between the groups (Table 6) with stage 3 subjects scoring higher than stage P ($p < .01$) and stage 4 ($p < .05$) (Table 7). Stage 2 subjects also scored higher ($p < .05$) than stage P subjects (Table 7).

The groups did not differ on their Discomfort scores ($F = 2.29; 4, 149, df; p > .05$).

In Expression, stage A scored higher than stage 2 ($p < .05$) with no differences observed between the other groups (Table 8).

Regression analyses. In research to date on the D.I.T., Rest (1979) suggests that the P (principled morality) score as a most useful score to use in correlating moral judgment with another variable. The P score is the sum of weighted ranks given to Stage 5 and 6 items. This score is interpreted to mean the relative importance a person gives to principled moral considerations in making a decision about moral dilemmas.

P score as criterion. Regression analyses were utilized to look at the correlation for predicting moral judgment as indicated by the P score from the dependent (personality) variables. Stepwise multiple regression procedures were employed to predict the criterion. The results of these analyses for the entire sample are presented in Table 9. The R (multiple R) presented in this and subsequent tables were selected from the following criterion. The value of R selected was that value associated with the last predictor entering the equation which increased the R^2 by at least .005 units.

This Table (9) shows that Chance, Internality, Social Desirability, Expression and Powerful Others' scores predicted P moral judgment. The multiple R for predicting moral judgment was .39, accounting for 15 per cent of the variance.

The overall correlations and intercorrelations between P scores and dependent variables are presented in Table 10. The P score was related

($p < .01$) and positively correlated with Expression ($r = .20$) and I ($r = .21$) and negatively correlated ($p < .01$) with Chance ($r = -.23$).

Table 4

Analysis of Variance
for the Chance (C) Scores

Source	df	MS	F
MJ	4	362.49	3.12**
ED	1	26.69	.23
MJ ED	4	90.13	.77
SS MJ ED	149	116.04	

** $p < .01$

Table 5

Newman-Keuls Tests for the
Ordered Mean Chance (C) Scores

Group	3	2	A	4	P
Mean	23.75	22.81	22.16	22.03	14.00

Table of Differences between Means

	P	4	A	2
3	9.74**	1.71	1.58	.93
2	8.81	.77	.65	
A	8.16	.12		
4	8.03			

** significant at .01 level

Table 6

Analysis of Variance
for the Alienation (AI) Scores

Source	df	MS	F
MJ (groups)	4	471.24	4.32**
ED (education)	1	290.06	2.66
MJ ED	4	85.59	.78
SS MJ ED	149	109.01	

** p < .01

Table 7

Newman-Keuls Test for the Ordered
Mean Alienation (AI) Scores

Group	3	2	A	4	P
Mean	62.51	60.61	56.85	55.86	50.93

Table of Differences between Means				
	P	4	A	2
3	11.57**	6.64*	5.65	1.89
2	9.68*	4.74	3.75	
A	5.92	.98		
4	4.93			

* significant at .05 level

** significant at .01 level

DISCUSSION

The overall locus-of-control data offer support for the notion that more advanced moral judgment reflects different locus-of-control expectancies, with the principled level utilizing greater Internality and less Chance.

The prediction that differences on Alienation scores would be observed between groups was confirmed. It appears that principled

Table 9

Summary Table of Stepwise Multiple Regression Analyses

Variables predicting Moral judgment (P)	R	R ²	R ² Chance	r	B	BETA
Chance	.23	.05	.05	-.23	-.2326	-.3285
Internality	.31	.09	.04	.21	.1830	.1772
Social Desirability	.35	.12	.02	-.07	-.1744	-.1286
Expression	.37	.14	.01	.20	.1183	.1348
Powerful Others	.39	.15	.01	.00	.1197	.1583
Alienation	.39	.15	.00	-.17	-.0356	-.0502
Discomfort	.39	.15	.00	-.13	.0356	.0475
Social Nonconformity	.39	.15	.00	.03	-.0307	-.0419
Defensiveness	.39	.15	.00	.03	-.0077	-.0111
(Constant)				12.1528		

Analysis of Variance				
Source	df	SS	MS	F
Regression	9	1497.33	166.37	3.05
Residual	149	8119.08	54.49	

Standard Deviation of Residuals = 7.38

morality is associated with better personality adjustment than the pre-conventional morality of stage 2 or the initial stage of conventional morality (stage 3). There is also an indication that more advanced conventional moral reasoning as measured by stage 4 responses expresses significantly more psychological adjustment than stage 2 responses. Further investigation would be necessary to see if increments in moral judgment would be related to less of the concomitants of high Alienation scores. Specifically, as moral maturity increased, one would look for the **absence of**: unusual thoughts, interpersonal difficulties, feelings of isolation and loneliness, suspicion, mistrust, denial of normal expression of affect and external locus of control.

Table 10

Overall Correlations and Intercorrelations, P scores and Personality Variables
(decimals omitted)

	AI	Di	Ex	Sn	De	I	O	C	SD
P	-17	-13	20**	03	03	21**	00	-23**	-07
AI		59**	-18	20**	-30**	-27**	26**	37**	-06
Di			-29**	35**	-45**	-30**	-19	32**	-23
Ex				00	07	13	01	14	-04
Sn					-53**	08	26**	14	-43
De						20**	-18	-19	39
I							14	-07	13
O								64**	-29
C									-22

** p < .01 A correlation \geq .20 is significant at .01, using a conservative n = 150.

p < .05 A correlation \geq .15 is significant at .05, using a conservative n = 150.

Only the p < .01 correlations are noted.

The mean AI scores for stage P ($\bar{X} = 50.93$) subjects is the same as the mean for Lanyon's (1970) normative sample. It appears that at the principled moral level, inmates seem much more "average" in their perception of an emotionally satisfactory life as measured by the AI scores. Longitudinal follow-up and moral judgment enhancement may find AI scores as a useful dependent variable in reflecting moral growth.

Discomfort. There was a failure to confirm the prediction that differences would be found between the groups on Di scores.

Expression. The analyses revealed a significant difference between groups in their Ex scores. However, only stage A group members were found to have significantly higher Ex scores than stage 2. No differences were found between any other groups.

The use of regression analyses show that if one wanted to predict moral judgment, the use of the Levenson C, I, PO scales coupled with the SD scale and Ex scale of the P.S.I. are correlated .37 with moral judgment. Caution should be observed, however, as this reflects that only about 15 percent of the variance of moral judgment P scores can be accounted for in terms of these predictors. Although statistically significant, the magnitude of the correlations found in this study appears to be small.

Finally, it is felt that the use of an objective measure of moral judgment (D.I.T.) can be utilized with an adult male inmate population. It is suggested that for pragmatic purposes future clinicians administer the shorter (3-story) version of the D.I.T. with correctional clients to alleviate the possibilities of boredom, shortness of attention span, and motivation to complete a measure which is dependent on verbal skills.

The mean P score for the present group is the lowest ever reported for any sample, lending credence to the general notion that offenders as a group certainly make scant use of principled moral thinking. The baseline data generated by the present study should be expanded to compare the moral judgment of institutionalized vs. noninstitutionalized (e.g., probation, half-way houses, parole) offenders. Are lower stage offenders more likely to recidivate? If so, should therapeutic experiences be devised during their incarceration to help raise their moral judgment? Are there sound empirical methods to incorporate moral judgment data with the decision-making process of setting up treatment progress for inmates?

ABSTRACT

MORAL JUDGMENT AND PERSONALITY IN ADULT OFFENDERS

This study investigated the relationship of moral judgment stages and personality variables in a group of incarcerated male offenders.

On the basis of their scores on Rest's Defining Issues Test, an objective measure of Kohlberg's moral development theory, a total of 159 inmates comprised five moral judgment groups. Dependent measure included Levenson's multidimensional locus-of-control scale and the Psychological Screening Inventory. Results indicated differences among the groups in Internality and Chance as well as Alienation and Expression. In addition, the moral judgment level of inmates was found to be exceedingly underdeveloped. Implications of the utility of basing treatment interventions of law violators on moral judgment theory are discussed.

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