Turkish Psychological Articles, June 2020, *23*(45), 139-144 DOI: 10.31828/tpy1301996120200219m000021

Summary
Morality According to Me: Lay Conceptions of Morality in Turkish Culture

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Extended summary

Kohlberg's (1971) cognitive-developmental theory of moral reasoning assumed that the essence of morality is justice, and that children achieve progressively more inclusive understandings of justice through a universal sequence of stages, culminating in "postconventional" morality with universal principles. However, other investigators have pointed to problems with some of Kohlberg's assumptions, such as universality across cultures (e.g., Snarey 1985), the primacy of justice concerns (e.g., Gilligan, 1982), or possible gender differences in the use of justice versus care criteria in making moral judgments (e.g., Colby & Damon, 1994; Gilligan & Attanuci, 1988). While gender differences in use of these criteria tend to be small (Jaffee & Hyde, 2000), a question that has not been explored is whether conceptions of morality vary according to the gender of the target of moral judgment. One of the aims of the current study is to examine differences related to gender of target.

Along with the issues of cultural and gender differences in morality as well as its conceptual scope, a number of researchers have pointed to the lack of research on laypersons' moral conceptualization and the potential benefits of investigating spontaneous lay conceptions using qualitative methods, noting also that the extant research is mostly restricted to Western, Christian cultures (e.g., Hardy, Walker, Olsen, Skalski & Basinger, 2011; Shaffer, 1994; Walker & Pitts, 1998) and that individual moral identity is also important (Blasi, 1980).

Shweder, Much, Mahapatra and Park (1997) have offered a pluralist (as opposed to monist) solution to the cultural diversity problem by positing three "ethics" or codes of morality that may receive different emphases in different cultures. This model, which may be called the CAD model, suggested that the *community ethic* reflects duties and traditions stemming from interdependence within a collective structure; the *autonomy ethic* is based on individual rights and preferences; and the *divinity ethic* is concerned with spirituality, purity and sacredness. Other approaches, such as the moral foundations theory of Haidt and colleagues (Graham, Haidt, Koleva, Motyl, Iyer, Wojcik ve Ditto, 2012) and the relationship regulation theory of Fiske (Rai & Fiske, 2011) similarly offer pluralist conceptions of the content of morality that can be applied across cultures.

In light of concerns about both cross-cultural variation in moral judgment and lack of information about lay conceptions of morality, the main aims of the present research are to (1) investigate how laypersons in Turkey, a non-Western, Muslim country, conceptualize morality; and (2) to uncover the underlying structure of their conceptions.

Three studies, involving a total of 963 participants, were carried out. Study 1 applied cluster analysis to open-ended morality definitions given by both university students and graduates. The clusters showed resemblance to the CAD model. For Study 2, the categories derived from Study 1 were used to develop a questionnaire which was then administered in an online survey. The results of factor analysis again revealed considerable parallels with Shweder's three ethics. Accordingly, in Study 3, the questionnaire created in Study 2 was compared with another standardized measure testing Shweder's three ethics, the EVA.

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Study 1

Method

Participants

Study participants were 251 university students (N = 144, 58%) and university graduates (N = 107, 42%), ranging in age from 18 to 52 years. Of the total sample, 168 were female (M_{age} = 23.80, *SD* = 6.12), and 83 were male (M_{age} = 29.06, *SD* = 8.04).

Instruments and procedure

Participants answered eight open-ended questions by writing their own definitions of *morality*, *immorality*, *moral person*, *immoral person*, *moral woman*, *immoral woman*, *moral man*, and *immoral man* separately. Each question was presented in this format: "According to me, morality…" Data were collected either in classroom settings or online.

Results and Discussion

Responses to the eight questions were subjected to content analysis (Bilgin, 2007) using the Maxqda computer program. An open, nontheoretical coding method (Joffe & Yardley, 2004) was used. Highly similar responses (e.g., "morality is respect" and "morality is being respectful of everyone") were grouped into the same category (e.g., "showing respect"), with final decisions about categorization being made jointly by the research team. Uninterpretable responses were discarded.

Category frequencies. As shown in Figure 1, the categories with highest frequencies for *morality* were "following social rules"; "importance/ubiquity of morality"; "relativity of morality". For *immorality*, the highest frequencies were for "not following social rules/norms"; "evil/badness"; and "lack of moral upbringing/training". As also found in earlier studies (e.g., Cesur, 2003, 2006; Işık & Salman, 2004), the most frequently mentioned concepts were those related to conformity to social rules. Society-oriented concepts such as showing and receiving respect and showing good upbringing were mentioned more prominently in relation to *immorality*. Immorality appears to be conceived as a condition that disturbs the social order. In line with this, the emphasis in definitions of *morality* on relativism (e.g.,"morality can mean different things to different people") is much reduced in definitions of *immorality*: immorality seems not to be seen as something that can vary across individuals or across cultures. Another striking feature of these definitions is the frequent mention of personal qualities such as honesty, virtue, and conscientiousness, a finding that is congruent with work by Walker and Pitts (1998) and supports claims by researchers such as Hardy, Walker, Olsen, Skalski and Basinger (2011) and Smith, Smith and Christopher (2007) to the effect that lay definitions of morality or of "being a good person" are not well represented in psychological theories or expert opinion.

As shown in Figure 2, for *moral person*, the categories with highest frequencies were "honesty", "showing respect", and "being virtuous". For *immoral person*, frequencies were highest for "disreputable", "harmful/useless", and "disrespectful". Definitions of *moral person* and *immoral person* show considerable emphasis on personal characteristics, particularly honesty/dishonesty. Inferring from the other definitions given, perception of an *immoral person* as evil or bad seems to be related to concepts such as being selfish/self-interested and harm-doing.

Figure 3 shows the frequencies of categories for *moral man* and *moral woman*. For both, the most frequently mentioned three categories were the same: "honesty/dependability", "being virtuous", and "fulfilling social roles". However, the fourth category for *moral woman* was "honor" (*namus*), which was not mentioned at all for *moral man*. This difference with regard to gender of the target is more pronounced in frequencies of categories for *immoral man* ("disrespectful", "harmful/useless" and "dishonest" – very similar to *immoral person*) in contrast to those for *immoral woman* ("disreputable", "lacking honor", "lack of moral upbringing/training"). Interestingly, definitions of *immoral woman* focus on her negative social position and reputation, while definitions of *immoral man* focus mainly on his personal characteristics. In traditional Turkish society, a man's honor depends on the honor of his wife and female relatives, leading to strict controls on a woman's behavior (Fişek, 1993, p.12; Kandiyoti, 1987), and a woman's honor, once lost, can never be regained (Belbez, 1979). Thus these definitions may imply greater punitiveness towards women and may be read as indicating stronger social control over women compared to men.

Cluster analyses. The categories derived from responses to the first four questions (*morality*, *immorality*, *moral person*, *immoral person*) were subjected to cluster analysis.

Definitions of both *morality* and *moral person* fell into two clusters (see Tables 1 and 3), in both cases roughly divided into social rules, roles and behaviors versus personal characteristics. This type of division might be anticipated on the basis of Shweder's (Shweder et al., 1997) CAD model, although the "divinity" code does not emerge as a separate cluster but rather seems to be part of what would otherwise be an "autonomy" cluster.

Tables 2 and 4 show the clusters for *immorality* and *immoral person*. Here the fit to Shweder's model is

much closer, with a clear three-cluster solution in both cases, falling for the most part into the community-autonomy-divinity pattern, although with considerable deviations for *immoral person*.

In light of the relatively good fit between the clusters of responses and the CAD model, and also keeping in mind the importance of cultural differences, we saw the next step as the development of a Turkish culture-specific instrument based on the categories that emerged in this first study. Development and testing of this instrument with a new sample constituted Study 2.

Study 2

Method

Participants

A total of 534 university students from four different universities in Istanbul participated; their ages ranged from 18 to 57 (436 female, M_{age} = 21.68, *SD* = 3.01; 84 male, M_{age} = 23.26, *SD* = 6.46; 14 gender unspecified).

Instruments and procedure

Response categories obtained from Study 1 were used as a base to compose a questionnaire. Using a 5-point Likert format, participants rated the importance for themselves of items derived from Study 1 in defining *morality* (13 items), *immorality* (10 items), *moral person* (45 items) and *immoral person* (45 items), with higher points indicating greater importance. Data were collected online and the scales, as well as the order of items within the scales, were presented in random order.

Results and Discussion

For each scale, the factor structure was examined, first by carrying out exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation (EFA) using SPSS 20, followed by confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), carried out using AMOS 21. This was followed by calculation of the reliability coefficient (Cronbach's α) for each factor and each total scale. In each case, preliminary tests for suitability were applied before the EFA, and items that reduced suitability were removed. Items that loaded on more than one factor in the EFA were removed, and items suggested for removal in the CFA were also removed. This process left a final measure with four scales, denoted here as the BGA inventory, with the following properties:

Morality scale: 12 items, three factors (objective morality, subjective morality and religion-based morality) explaining 60.4% of the variance, α = .75.

Immorality scale: 9 items, two factors (objective morality and subjective morality) explaining 55.6% of the variance, α = .64.

Moral person scale: 41 items, five factors (interpersonal morality; social roles and responsibilities; honesty; religion and honor; and conscience and purity) explaining 59.5% of the variance, α = .95.

Immoral person scale: 39 items, four factors (relationship-damaging and violation of honesty; social irresponsibility; violation of religion and honor; contamination of purity) explaining 58% of the variance, α = .95.

Details are shown in Tables 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9. Reliability is satisfactory for all four scales.

It should be noted that, while there is considerable resemblance between the items describing *moral person* and *immoral person*, and the items might appear simply to be opposites of one another, the connotations of the positive items can be quite different from the connotations of the negative items; thus, the two scales were analyzed separately.

The composition of the scales suggests two broad conclusions: (1) When evaluating the abstract concepts *morality* and *immorality*, responses were dominated by considerations of objective (absolute) versus subjective (relative) morality. A third factor, religion-based morality, appeared in the *morality* scale, but in evaluating *immorality* the corresponding items loaded on the objective morality factor. This pattern of "meta-ethics" supports findings by Goodwin and Darley (2008, 2010, 2012), while also showing cultural nuance in the Turkish conceptualization of religion-based morality.

(2) In contrast to the abstract concepts of *morality/immorality*, when evaluating a *moral/immoral person*, the emphasis was on personal virtues, character, and behavior, and the pattern of responses more closely resembled that suggested by Shweder's three-codes CAD model or Rai and Fiske's (2011; 2012) relationship regulation model. Similarities can be seen between Shweder's Community ethic and items in the BGA factors of social roles and responsibilities (and their violation); between the Autonomy ethic and interpersonal morality/relationship damaging, and honesty; and between the Divinity ethic and religion and honor (and its violation) as well as conscience and purity (and its violation).

While the scales do not conform precisely to the CAD model, they do show considerable resemblance, along with some interesting differences. One of the factors, "social roles and responsibilities" which appears in both *moral person* and *immoral person*, is a close fit to Shweder's Community ethic. However, the two factors in *moral person* that appear closest to the Autonomy ethic, namely "interpersonal morality" and "honesty", while incorporating concerns related to individual rights and fairness, also incorporate relational virtues, such as being compassionate, being sensitive to one's surroundings, not being self-centered, and being reliable (corre-

sponding items in *immoral person* fall into a single factor, "relationship-damaging and violation of honesty"). This pattern suggests that Turkish respondents conceptualize moral and immoral persons, not only as autonomous individuals, but as operating within a relational context, lending support to Rai and Fiske's (2011, 2012) relationship regulation theory (see also Everett, Pizarro ve Crockett, 2016). Similarly, Divinity concerns seem to fall into two distinct categories for both *moral* and *immoral person*: items relating to "Religion and Honor" (and their violation) constitute one factor, while items relating to "conscience and purity" constitute a separate factor. We may speculate that Turkish respondents distinguish rather sharply between religious and secular versions of purity (here the term "purity" from moral foundations theory – Graham et al., 2012 – may be more apropos than Shweder's "Divinity").

Given these findings, the next step was to compare responses of a new sample to the final form of the instrument with their responses to a scale designed to measure endorsement of Shweder's proposed three ethics. This would serve the dual purpose of (1) establishing construct validity for the new instrument and (2) providing evidence for the relevance of the CAD model to lay persons' definitions of morality in Turkish culture.

Study 3

Method

Participants

A total of 178 university students in Istanbul, ages 18-37 participated in Study 3 (148 female, M_{age}= 19.86, *SD*= 2.61; 26 male, M_{age}= 20.50, *SD*= 3.79 and 4 unspecified).

Instruments and Procedure

Study 3 used both the inventory generated through Studies 1 and 2 (the BGA Inventory), and the Ethical Values Assessment (EVA) developed by Walker and Jensen (2016) and adapted to Turkish by Dost-Gözkan (2017). The EVA is a scale designed to measure Shweder's proposed three moral codes (community, autonomy, and divinity) consisting of 6 items for each code, presented in a 5-point Likert format, with higher scores indicating greater importance to the participant. Cronbach α values for the subscales are reported as .72, .83 and .87 respectively. Data were collected online using Qualtrics; participants were asked to fill out both questionnaires. Questionnaires were presented in random order for each participant and included an attention check question. Students received partial course credit for participation and no identifying information was collected.

Results and Discussion

Correlations among the dimensions (factors) of the BGA inventory and the three scales of the EVA are shown in Table 10. The pattern of statistically significant correlations demonstrate that the BGA is both meaningful on theoretical grounds and culturally relevant.

Correlations among the EVA scales are as follows: for Community and Autonomy, r = .51; for Community and Divinity, r = .47; and for Autonomy and Divinity, r = .26. In other words, the Community ethic is related moderately strongly with both Autonomy and Divinity, but the relation between Autonomy and Divinity is weaker. These relations suggest a common core across the three dimensions but also considerable differentiation among them, particularly between Autonomy and Divinity.

Correlations among the BGA dimensions are obviously more complex but similarly show meaningful patterns. First, the corresponding dimensions derived from "Objective Morality" and "Objective Immorality" are highly correlated, r = .68, as are those derived from "Relative Morality" and "Relative Immorality", r = .74. In contrast, there is no significant relation either between "Objective Morality" and "Relative Morality" or between "Objective Immorality" and "Relative Immorality".

Evaluations of *moral person* and *immoral person* are strongly correlated. For "Social Roles and Responsibilities" and its counterpart "Violation of Social Roles and Responsibilities", r = .76. For "Religion and Honor" and its counterpart "Violation of Religion and Honor", r = .87. For "Conscience and Purity" and its counterpart "Violation of Conscience and Purity", r = .71. "Interpersonal Morality" and "Honesty" formed separate dimensions in evaluating *moral person*, and for these two r = .67, while in evaluating *immoral person,* the corresponding items fell into a single dimension. These high correlations between positive and negative aspects (*moral person* and *immoral person)* help to substantiate the validity of the scales.

Based on the intercorrelations discussed above, similar BGA dimensions were combined, resulting in five groups. "Social Roles and Responsibilities" and its "Violations" were combined to form *Communality*; "Interpersonal Morality" and "Violation of Interpersonal Morality and Honesty" were combined to form *Relational Individuality*; "Conscience and Purity" and its "Violations" were combined to form *Conscience and Purity*; and "Religion and Honor" and its "Violations" were combined to form *Religion and Honor*. Relations between the EVA scales and BGA dimensions are the main focus of interest for Study 3 (Note that "scales" of the BGA are defined by target, e.g., moral person, rather

than by content, while "dimensions" refer to factors as finalized using CFA.). Accordingly, correlations between total scores for these combined dimensions and the EVA scales of *Community*, *Autonomy*, and *Divinity* were calculated (see Table 11).

For *Community*, *Communality* would be expected to have the best fit, and indeed these two are strongly correlated, r = .45; on the other hand, *Community* is equally strongly related to *Relational Individuality*, r = .45. This should, however, be interpreted in light of the .51 correlation between *Community* and *Autonomy* within the EVA.

For *Autonomy*, the expectation is that *Relational Individuality* would be most closely related; with r = .40, this expectation is supported. In addition, the lowest (and only nonsignificant) correlation with *Autonomy* is that of *Religion and Honor*, r = .13, in parallel with the lowest correlation among the EVA scales, *Autonomy* and *Divinity* (r = .26). The correlation of *Autonomy* with what might be considered the other facet of *Divinity*, namely *Conscience and Purity*, is somewhat higher but still low, r = .20.

For *Divinity*, that pattern is reversed. By far the strongest relation between *Divinity* and the BGA scales is with *Religion and Honor*, r = .68, while the weakest is with *Conscience and Purity*, r = .24.

One of the most interesting patterns of association is seen in the case of the "Honesty" dimension, which is correlated positively with *Community* (r = .40), *Autonomy* (r = .30), *Divinity* (r = .31), "Interpersonal Morality (r = .67), "Social Roles and Responsibilities" (r = .48), "Religion and Honor" (r = .30), "Conscience and Purity" (r = .54), "Violation of Interpersonal Morality and Honesty" (r = .59), "Violation of Social Roles and Responsibilities" (r = .42), "Violation of Conscience and Purity" (r = .41), and "Objective Immorality" (r = .34) and somewhat more weakly, but still highly significantly, with "Violation of Religion and Honor" (r = .29), "Objective Morality" (r = .23), and "Religion-Based Morality (r = .19). "Honesty" seems to play something like a linchpin role, uniting almost all aspects of morality, except for relativistic conceptions, as a basic characteristic underlying social cooperation of all kinds. As conceptualized by evolutionary psychology, honesty is an essential component of the "social contract" regulating trust and reciprocity between individuals and groups (Tooby & Cosmides, 2015). The fact that negative "Honesty" items fell into the same factor with "Violation of Interpersonal Morality" also supports the regulatory role of honesty, as well as lending further support to the relationship regulation theory of morality (Rai & Fiske, 2011, 2012).

General Discussion

The present research, consisting of three studies, makes contributions to the literature on moral psychology in general and on moral psychology in Turkey in particular. The first study obtained spontaneous definitions of *morality*, *immorality*, *moral person*, *immoral person*, *moral man*, *immoral man*, *moral woman*, and *immoral woman* from students and graduates of universities in Istanbul and subjected the responses to cluster analysis. One important finding was that sex of the target (*moral/immoral man* versus *moral/immoral woman*), had an important effect on definitions, with women's immorality being evaluated more in terms of social norms and honor, and men's being evaluated more in terms of personal characteristics. A second major finding was that the abstract terms *morality/ immorality* elicited meta-ethic definitions chiefly concerned with the objective or relative nature of morality, while questions regarding morality/immorality of persons elicited mainly descriptions of character or behaviors. The result of cluster analysis was a set of terms that were then used to construct an indigenous measure for use in Turkish culture. The contents of the clusters also suggested parallels with Shweder's CAD model of three moral codes or ethics, which is proposed as a model that has cross-cultural validity.

In the second study, the terms derived from the first study were rated for their importance in evaluating *morality*, *immorality*, *moral person*, and *immoral person*. Scores for each target were subjected first to exploratory factor analysis and then confirmatory factor analysis, resulting in a set of items suitable for use as scales in a moral inventory with satisfactory psychometric properties and cultural validity. Investigation of the parallels between dimensions of this inventory, labeled the BGA inventory, and the three-ethics model were the basis of the next study.

The third and final study investigated the relations between the Ethical Values Assessment (EVA; standardized for use in Turkey by Dost-Özkan, 2018), designed to measure the CAD model, and the BGA inventory. Each scale from the EVA (Community, Autonomy, and Divinity) showed highest correlations with the BGA scale with similar content (Communality, Relational Individuality, Religion and Honor, respectively). This pattern of resemblance provides strong evidence for the cross-cultural validity of the pluralist CAD model, as well as supporting the construct validity of the BGA inventory.

However, the comparative weakness of the correlation of the BGA dimension Conscience and Purity with both EVA Divinity and BGA Religion and Honor points up an important local deviation from the overall pattern;

Turkish respondents distinguished quite sharply between religious traditions, including honor, and other aspects of spiritual experience as bases for morality. This may stem from historical developments that have pitted secularity against traditional religious conceptions in the political arena, and it may also be related to the close association between the "Honesty" dimension and the items in the Conscience and Purity dimension.

A third cultural characteristic that emerges from these studies is more frequent mention of BGA Communality items compared to the other dimensions; this provides a contrast with studies carried out in the US and the Netherlands, where Autonomy is rated more highly (Van Leeuwen ve Park, 2009; Vasquez, Keltner, Ebenbach ve Banaszynski, 2001) or those carried out in India, where Divinity is predominant (Shweder, et al., 1997). This finding supports Shweder's suggestion that different cultures may give different weights to the different ethical codes although all of them are used in relevant contexts (Shweder, et al., 1997).

Another cultural nuance is the inclusion of a number of relationship-relevant items in the BGA Relational Individuality dimension; this may indicate that Turkish respondents conceptualize the individual as more socially situated than the EVA Autonomy scale would suggest. This conclusion would be in line with Kagitcibasi's (2005) argument regarding the "autonomous-related self" self in modern Turkish culture as well as with self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2017). It may also support the relationship regulation theory of morality proposed by Rai and Fiske (2011, 2012).

Conclusions

As a result of the three studies reported here, a new inventory, the BGA inventory, is offered for use in the study of moral psychology in Turkish culture. This inventory is entirely based on spontaneous, open-ended definitions with no particular philosophical positions implied by the questions, sorted into clusters with no predetermined criteria, with dimensions defined empirically by cluster analysis and exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. Reliability of the dimensions is satisfactory, and their validity is supported by their pattern of significant relations with corresponding dimensions from another morality scale, the EVA. These studies have produced new findings regarding conceptualizations of morality in Turkish culture, such as the significance of sex of target; the preponderance of community-related concepts in the definition of morality in Turkish culture; the difference between abstract definitions of morality and targeted definitions; the relational and regulatory implications of many personal moral characteristics and virtues; and the distinction between conceptions of morality as based in religion and honor and those based in conscience and purity. They have also produced findings that support the general conception that morality is plural rather than singular, as well as supporting the cross-cultural validity of the three moral ethics proposed by Shweder (Shweder, et al., 1997) and the theory of morality as relationship regulation (Rai & Fiske, 2011; 2012).

The main limitation of the studies is that the items of the BGA are derived from responses of an urban, relatively young, educated population. Further investigations using a broader sample that includes older, less educated respondents as well as residents of towns and villages could potentially produce somewhat different results. However, in a time of rapid urbanization and continuing increases in educational levels of the Turkish population, it seems likely that responses are likely to converge on something resembling the current inventory.