Five Sins of Moral Research

Georg Lind

www.uni-konstanz.de/ag-moral/
The Need of Validity

“What is lacking is a psychological theory that dictates explicitly which items should be included on the test. ... Such an explicit theory - if it were true - would resolve all doubts as to whether or not the test actually measured what it was intended to measure.”

Moral-Democratic Competence

P is defined as the ability to solve conflicts of action on the basis of moral principles through thinking and discussion, rather than through violence, deceit, and power.
The Five Paradoxes of Studies of Moral-Democratic Competence

1. Defined as an *internal* disposition, but measured by an *external* standard.

2. Defined as a *structural* property of a person’s behavior, but measured with *itemized* instruments.

3. Defined as the *ability* to cope with *conflicting* courses of action, but measured as strength of single moral-democratic *motivations*.

4. Defined as *sub-conscious aspects* of behavior, but measured through *conscious* self-reports.

5. Defined as consisting of two distinguishable aspects (orientation and competence), but only *one* confounded score is produced in measurement.
... and More Shortcomings of Psychology and Social Sciences

1. Simplicity is lacking (Occam); complexity is in the eyes of the beholder, not a property of reality.

2. Effects must be measured in absolute terms so they can be compared among different studies; statistical significance is insignificant, relative effect sizes are somewhat better but not a solution.

3. Important concepts must be defined concisely and clearly, and in a way that the concepts can be unambiguously linked to observations and measurement.

4. The concept of validity must be taken seriously: Does the observation or measurement observe or measure what it intends to measure? Are theory and method of research aligned?

5. Methods are tools or means, not ends in themselves.
There is a voice inside of you
That whispers all day long,
‘I feel that this is right for me,
I know that this is wrong.’
No teacher, preacher, partner, friend
Or wise man can decide
What's right for you – just listen to
The voice that speaks inside.

(The Voice, by Shel Silverstein)
Kohlberg’s Definition of Moral Judgment Competence:

"the capacity to make decisions and judgments which are moral (i.e., based on *internal* principles) and to act in accordance with such judgments."

Lawrence Kohlberg (1964, p. 425; emphasis added)
Kohlberg’s (and his disciples’) Unresolved Paradoxes:

According to Kohlberg’s theory, we must measure moral competence

- in reference to the individual’s *internal* moral orientations, but he uses *external* standards derived from philosophy;

- as reflected in an individual’s manifest *behavior*, but in his interview method he bases scoring on the content of the participants’ *conscious* reasoning;

- as the *structure* of behavior that is revealed in respondents’ *pattern* of answers to probing questions, he uses itemized scoring from psychometric methods;

Although Kohlberg is interested in how students solve moral dilemmas and how we can promote their ability to do so, neither his definition nor his measurement makes any reference to this.
The *Moral Competence Test (MCT)*

**Difficult Situation**: The MCT confronts the participants with a difficult moral task, namely to judge agreeing and *opposing* arguments by their *moral quality* rather than their opinion-agreement.

**Schemata of Action**: Participants’ *pattern* of ratings of 24 arguments for and against a given decision.

**Structure Built into the Test**: The standard MCT consists of pro and contra arguments in two dilemma stories (workers, doctor), representing six moral orientations, thus forming a $2 \times 2 \times 6$ orthogonal, experimental design.

**Scoring the Two Aspects of Moral Behavior**:

- **Moral competence**: The C-score reflects the degree to which an individual’s action pattern is determined by his/her moral orientations.
- **Moral orientation**: The degree of preference for each of the six moral orientations.

* Formerly called “Moral Judgment Test” (MJT)

© Copyright by Georg Lind, 2014
2. Doctor's Dilemma

A woman had cancer and she had no hope of being saved. She was in terrible pain and so weakened that a large dose of a painkiller such as morphine would have caused her death. During a temporary period of improvement, she begged the doctor to give her enough morphine to kill her. She said she could no longer endure the pain and would be dead in a few weeks anyway. The doctor complied with her wish.

20. Do you disagree or agree with the doctor's behavior?
   I strongly disagree  I strongly agree
   -3  -2  -1  0  +1  +2  +3

How acceptable do you find the following arguments in favor of the doctor? Suppose someone said he acted rightly ...

21. because the doctor had to act according to his conscience. The woman's condition justified an exception to the moral obligation to preserve life.
   I strongly reject  I strongly accept
   -4  -3  -2  -1  0  +1  +2  +3  +4

22. because the doctor was the only one who could fulfill the woman's wish; respect for her wish made him act as he did.
   -4  -3  -2  -1  0  +1  +2  +3  +4

23. because the doctor only did what the woman talked him into doing. He need not worry about unpleasant consequences.
   -4  -3  -2  -1  0  +1  +2  +3  +4

24. because the woman would have died anyway and it didn't take much effort for him to give her an overdose of a painkiller.
   -4  -3  -2  -1  0  +1  +2  +3  +4

25. because the doctor didn't really break a law. Nobody could have saved the woman and he only wanted to shorten her suffering.
   -4  -3  -2  -1  0  +1  +2  +3  +4

26. because most of his fellow doctors would presumably have done the same in a similar situation.
   -4  -3  -2  -1  0  +1  +2  +3  +4
Contra

How acceptable do you find the following arguments against the doctor? Suppose someone said that he acted wrongly ...

I strongly reject  I strongly accept

27. because he acted contrary to his colleagues’ convictions. If they are against mercy-killing the doctor shouldn’t do it. .................... -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4

28. because one should be able to have complete faith in a doctor’s devotion to preserving life even if someone with great pain would rather die. .................... -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4

29. because the protection of life is everyone’s highest moral obligation. We have no clear moral criteria for distinguishing between mercy-killing and murder. .................... -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4

30. because the doctor could get himself into much trouble. They have already punished others for doing the same thing. .................... -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4

31. because he could have had it much easier if he had waited and not interfered with the woman’s dying. .................... -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4

32. because the doctor broke the law. If one thinks that mercy-killing is illegal, then one should refuse such requests. .................... -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4

Thank you!

Excerpt from the Moral Competence Test (MCT); Lind (2008). Contact: Georg.Lind@uni-konstanz.de
Structural Scoring

The moral competence score [C] describes the *individual pattern* of responses to a multivariate test situation. Fictitious example: Patterns of low and high competence-scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person: Opinion:</th>
<th>Arguments on Stage 1</th>
<th>Stage 2</th>
<th>Stage 3</th>
<th>Stage 4</th>
<th>Stage 5</th>
<th>Stage 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Person A</td>
<td>“The decision was right”</td>
<td>Contra</td>
<td>Pro</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 - 2 - 1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4</td>
<td>-3 - 2 - 1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4</td>
<td>-4 - 3 - 2 - 1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 - 2 - 1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4</td>
<td>-3 - 2 - 1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4</td>
<td>-4 - 3 - 2 - 1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 - 2 - 1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4</td>
<td>-3 - 2 - 1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4</td>
<td>-4 - 3 - 2 - 1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 - 2 - 1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4</td>
<td>-3 - 2 - 1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4</td>
<td>-4 - 3 - 2 - 1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C-score: <strong>0.4</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low moral competence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Person B         | “The decision was right” | Contra | Pro    |        |        |        |
|                  | 3 - 2 - 1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 | -3 - 2 - 1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 | -4 - 3 - 2 - 1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 |        |        |        |
|                  | 3 - 2 - 1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 | -3 - 2 - 1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 | -4 - 3 - 2 - 1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 |        |        |        |
|                  | 3 - 2 - 1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 | -3 - 2 - 1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 | -4 - 3 - 2 - 1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 |        |        |        |
|                  | 3 - 2 - 1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 | -3 - 2 - 1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 | -4 - 3 - 2 - 1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 |        |        |        |
|                  | C-score: **92.2**    |        |        |        |        |        |
|                  | High moral competence|        |        |        |        |        |


© Copyright by Georg Lind, 2014
**Internal Standards**

The moral competence score \([C]\) is tied to the participant’s *own* orientations, not to *external* norms.

Example: Same moral competence, but different moral orientations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Opinion</th>
<th>Arguments on</th>
<th>Person C</th>
<th>“The decision was right”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Stage 1</td>
<td>Contra</td>
<td>Pro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person C</td>
<td>“The decision was right”</td>
<td>-4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +3 +4</td>
<td>-4 -3 -2 -1 0 +2 +3 +4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contra</td>
<td>-4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4</td>
<td>-4 -3 -2 -1 0 +2 +3 +4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pro</td>
<td>-4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4</td>
<td>-4 -3 -2 -1 0 +2 +3 +4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

C-score: **92.2**
High moral competence
Modal moral orientation: **Stage 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person B</th>
<th>“The decision was right”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contra</td>
<td>-3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro</td>
<td>-3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

C-score: **92.2**
High moral competence
Modal moral orientation: **Stage 6**
How the Five Paradoxes of Moral-Democratic Competence Studies are Resolved by the MCT

1. Participants do not need to prefer the “highest” moral orientations in order to get the competence highest score.

2. The competence score “C” reflects a property of an individual’s total response pattern, not just an average of response items.

3. The MCT contains a difficult moral task, therefore the C-score reflects an ability, not a preference for certain moral orientations or principles.

4. The MCT reveals the subconscious competence of the participants; they do not have to be aware of it or be able to report it.

5. The MCT lets us measure the two aspects (orientation and competence) distinctly as aspects of one and the same pattern of responses.
MCT: Theory-Driven Test-Construction

P The items (arguments) have been created using Kohlberg’s Stage descriptions and validated through expert ratings
  ▶ No data-driven item selection was done to boost ‘reliability’ of test-items or correlation of the MCT with age

P Rigorous construct validation by theory-derived criteria:
  ▶ Non-fakeability of the moral competence score (Kohlberg 1958; 1984)
  ▶ Preference hierarchy of the six types of moral orientations (Rest 1969)
  ▶ Quasi-simplex structure of inter-correlations of the six types (Kohlberg 1958)
  ▶ Affective-cognitive parallelism (Piaget 1981; Kohlberg 1984)

P The MCT meets all four criteria very well, as studies in many countries show
  ▶ See Lind (2008); Nowak et al. (2013); Hemmerling (2014)

P The MCT is in use since 1977, and is validated in 39 languages

© Copyright by Georg Lind, 2014
MCT-Research Supports and Extends Our Dual-Aspect Theory of Moral Behavior and Development

**Relevance:** Participants with high C-scores show
- lower rates of criminal behavior
- better school learning (grades in various fields)
- political liberalism and reflectivity
- less extreme opinions on moral issues
- quicker decision-making in dilemma-situation and
- less ‘brain-effort’ (activity in the dorso-lateral prefrontal cortex)

**Evaluation of education:** The development of moral competence is fostered
- by opportunities for responsibility-taking
- by dilemma-discussions, especially by the *Konstanz Method of Dilemma-Discussion* (*r* > 0.50)
- and it is hampered by dogmatic religiosity of the students.
Conclusion

Paradoxes Resolved:
Adequate measurement of moral-democratic competence is possible and flourishing.
References


P For more references see: http://www.uni-konstanz.de/ag-moral/

© Copyright by Georg Lind, 2014
Validity: Parallelism of Moral Orientation and Competence

FORM-Project
German Univ Students
N = 756

Groups:
Level of Moral Competence
- 0-9
- 10-19
- 20-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60-69
- 70-79
- 80-100
### My Solution: Experimental Questionnaires

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classical Test Theory, Item Response Theory (e.g., MJI, DIT, SRM)</th>
<th>Standard for Scoring</th>
<th>Behavioral Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>External</strong></td>
<td><strong>Itemized</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental Questionnaire Method (e.g., MCT)</td>
<td><strong>Internal</strong></td>
<td><strong>Structural</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Report card

With the Moral Competence Test (MCT)
“a scoring algorithm can be arrived at for assessing pure stage structure score for an individual.”