Moral reasoning, cultural practices, and social inequalities

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Abstract

This article addresses a set of questions regarding relations between culture and morality. Unlike positions of moral relativism based on varying orientations in different cultures, it is proposed that moral development involves the construction of thinking in the moral domain through children's reciprocal interactions with others. Along with the construction of moral reasoning based on understandings of welfare, justice, and rights, children construct judgments about conventions in the social system and areas of personal jurisdiction. The analyses presented show that cultural comparisons require attention to variations within cultures, commonalities between cultures, and patterns of similarities and differences between cultures. One seemingly common feature in most cultures is the existence of social hierarchies and inequalities, with groups distributed in positions of greater power and status over other groups. Research in several cultures, including patriarchal ones, shows that people in subordinate positions regularly challenge cultural practices of inequality and unfair restrictions on their personal choices and autonomy. Social opposition and resistance stem from moral judgments by which individuals are able to reflect upon systems of social organization and cultural practices.

Razonamiento moral, prácticas culturales, y desigualdades sociales

Resumen

Este artículo aborda una serie de cuestionamientos respecto a las relaciones entre la cultura y la moralidad. A diferencia de las posturas que proponen que el relativismo moral está basado en diversas tendencias en culturas diferentes, aquí se propone que el desarrollo moral implica la construcción del razonamiento en ese dominio a través de las interacciones recíprocas de un niño con los demás. Junto con la construcción de un razonamiento moral basado en la comprensión del bienestar, la justicia y los derechos, los niños crean criterios acerca de las convenciones en el sistema social y en las áreas de jurisdicción personal. Los estudios expuestos demuestran que las comparaciones culturales requieren que se ponga atención a

las variaciones dentro de una cultura, a las semejanzas entre diversas culturas, y a los patrones de similitud y diferencia entre culturas. Una característica aparentemente común en la mayoría de las culturas es la existencia de las jerarquías y desigualdades sociales, con ciertos grupos ubicados en posiciones de poder. La investigación realizada en varias culturas, incluso patriarcales, demuestra que la gente ubicada en las posiciones subordinadas desafía frecuentemente las prácticas culturales de desigualdad y las restricciones injustas sobre sus elecciones personales y su autonomía. La oposición social y la resistencia provienen de criterios morales mediante los cuales los individuos pueden reflexionar sobre los sistemas de organización social y las prácticas culturales.

I n this essay, I discuss the broad issues of morality and culture with regard specifically to cultural practices that institutionalize social inequalities and social injustices. These issues raise two interrelated questions. One is the long-debated question of whether morality is relative to cultures or if it can be applied across cultures. Are moral standards and values different in incomparable ways from one culture to another? Or are there moral standards and values that are not restricted to particular cultures? The institutionalization of cultural practices of inequalities in social hierarchies can be and has been viewed in at least two ways. One is that the inequalities are part of a general cultural orientation to morality that is accepted by those in different positions and roles in the social hierarchy. In other cultural orientations greater equality might be part of their different moral systems. In an alternative interpretation, people across cultures form moral judgments, by which they regard inequalities as entailing social injustices. In that perspective, individuals form moral judgments that include critical evaluations of social organization and cultural practices and which can result in social opposition and moral resistance.

Approaches to social and moral development

I approach these questions regarding culture and morality as a developmental psychologist who has conducted studies in several cultures. A major focus of my research has been on the development of moral judgments, as well as other social judgments, from childhood to adolescence and adulthood. As is well known, in psychology and other social sciences there are different types of explanations of morality and how it develops in children. Those approaches have implications for thinking about moral relativism and universality.

Some psychologists and anthropologists have taken a rela-
tivistic position on morality in that they propose that children's
development involves an incorporation of the values, standards,
or customs of society through their transmission by parents and
other adults. This is the case in psychoanalytic, behaviorist,
and social learning theories (Aronfreed, 1968, Freud, 1930; Gru-
sec, 2006; Hoffman, 1970; Skinner, 1971). In those perspectives,
mechanisms of acquisition (e.g., identification, reinforcement,
imitation) are proposed to account for how children learn to
abide by society's values and standards. The assumption of moral
relativism stems from the proposed process of acquisition since
the content of morality depends on the society one happens to
populate. Consequently, moral values are particular to societies,
incomparable with each other, and in a sense arbitrary but estab-
lished by convention.

Another approach of this general type comes from research-
ers who propose that children come to identify with a general
orientation in their culture to morality, self, and the group. It is
proposed that cultures are cohesive and integrated, and that dif-
ferent cultures can have very different orientations from each
other. Such a view was put forth many years ago by the cultural
anthropologist Ruth Benedict (1934), who asserted that there is a
great deal of variation in what might be considered fundamental
moral values, such as in the "matter of taking a life" (such as kill-
ing by custom one's first two children; a husband's right to life
and death over his wife; a duty to kill parents before they are old).
She viewed these variations as non-random since cultures were
integrated: "The significance of cultural behavior is not exhausted
when we have clearly understood that it is local and man-made
and hugely variable. It also tends to be integrated. A culture… is
a more or less consistent pattern of thought and action" (Bene-
dict, 1934, p. 46). With regard to development, Benedict put forth
the following position for processes of acquisition: "The life-his-
tory of the individual is first and foremost an accommodation to
the patterns and standards traditionally handed down in his com-
munity. … Every child that is born into his group will share them
with him, and no child born into one on the opposite side of the
globe can ever achieve the thousandth part" (Benedict, pp. 2-3).

In more recent times some cultural psychologists have pro-
posed that cultures can be divided by their orientations to either
individualism or collectivism (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Shweder
& Bourne, 1982). These orientations are usually associated with
Western (e.g., the United States and European countries) and
non-Western (e.g., Japan, India, China, and Middle-Eastern coun-
tries) cultures. In addition to identifying differences in specific
social norms and cultural practices, characterizations of individ-
ualism and collectivism are meant to define respective general
orientations to morality, the group, and persons. It is said that

individualists emphasize independence, freedom of choice, and rights, whereas collectivists emphasize the group, interdependence, moral duties, and adherence to roles in the social hierarchy. In fulfilling social roles, collectivists accept roles of dominance and power for certain groups (e.g., males) and roles of subordination for other groups (e.g., females).

Approaches that explain moral development, and its associated relativism, as the incorporation of societal standards or cultural orientations differ from the approach I have taken. My approach is, in a general sense, consistent with the developmental theory of Jean Piaget (1932, 1970). In a Piagetian perspective, children's development does not occur through the internalization of the values and standards of society, but involves construction from reciprocal interactions of the individual and the environment (see also Kohlberg, 1969. 1971; Overton, 2006; Werner, 1957). From a young age, children think about their experiences and try to make sense of the world around them, including their social relationships with parents, other adults, and other children. As put by Piaget (1951/1995): "socialization in no way constitutes the result of a unilateral cause such as the pressure of the adult community upon the child through such means as education in the family and subsequently in the school. Rather, … it involves the intervention of a multiplicity of interactions of different types and sometimes with opposed effects" (p. 2).

The construction of moral judgments as distinct from other social domains

In this view, children construct moral judgments about fairness, justice, rights, the need to avoid harming people and to help others. They also develop, through their experiences, concerns with the suffering of others and with the inequalities between groups (including concerns with dominance and subordination in social hierarchies). Moral reasoning, therefore, is central in people's social relationships –as the philosopher Martha Nussbaum (1999) stressed in her assertion that "human beings are above all reasoning beings." Similarly, Amartya Sen (2006; see also Sen, 2009) stated, "Central to leading a human life … are the responsibilities of choice and reasoning" (p. xiii). However, it is important to recognize that the emphasis on reasoning does not mean that emotions do not play an important role (Nussbaum, 2001). Research with young children has shown that they experience emotions like sympathy, empathy, and affection, which are connected to their moral judgments.

In her comment about reasoning, Nussbaum (1999) refers to a core assumption of the "tradition of liberalism," which is not meant to refer to a political ideology, but rather a philosophical

perspective "in the tradition of Kantian liberalism represented to-
day in the political thought of John Rawls, and also the classical
Utilitarian liberal tradition of John Stuart Mill" (p. 57). The core
features of the tradition, as agreed upon by philosophers like
Kant, Mill, and Rawls (as well as many other contemporary phi-
losophers, such as Dworkin, 1977, 1993; Gewirth, 1982; Haber-
mas, 1993; and Sen, 2006, 2009), are the following (Nussbaum):

> At the heart of this tradition is a twofold intuition about human
> beings: namely, that all, just by being human, are of equal dig-
> nity and worth, no matter where they are situated in society,
> and that the primary source of this worth is a power of moral
> choice within them, a power that consists in the ability to plan
> a life in accordance with one's own evaluations of ends. To
> these two intuitions –which link liberalism at its core to the
> thought of the Greek and Roman Stoics– the liberal tradition
> adds one more, which the stoics did not emphasize: that the
> moral equality of persons gives them a fair claim to certain
> types of treatment at the hands of society and politics. (p. 54)

Within these views morality entails substantive considerations of
welfare, justice, and rights and is not defined by traditions or the
common practices of a group or collectivity (society, culture). As
reasoning beings, humans have the power of moral choice and
plan their lives with autonomy and agency. In turn, people's mor-
al choices entail the recognition that humans are of equal dignity
and worth and should be accorded freedoms and fair treatment
by each other and by society.

Psychological research on morality shows that children de-
velop ways of thinking about welfare, justice, and rights, which
constitute the moral domain, and that they develop distinct ways
of thinking about the social conventional and personal domains
(for reviews see Smetana, 2006; Turiel, 1983, 2006). Within the
moral domain, judgments about issues like hitting, theft, and un-
equal treatment are not contingent on rules, authority dictates, or
existing practices. Moral judgments differ from judgments about
social organizations with their systems of norms, and conven-
tions (issues like forms of address, modes of greeting, eating hab-
its). Conventional norms are judged to be dependent on existing
rules, the dictates of those in authority, and common practices in
a social system. The personal domain refers to concepts of areas
of freedom of choice and autonomy (issues like privacy, choice of
friends, choice of occupations).

I will not go into greater detail on these domains, except to
say that the existence of these distinct types of judgments means
that individuals maintain different types of thinking about dif-
ferent aspects of social relationships –which has implications for
how we think about cultures. One implication is that people do

not have one general orientation to social relationships. People in Western and non-Western cultures make judgments about cooperation, helping others, and fairness; at the same time they make judgments about personal choice, freedoms, and autonomy. The heterogeneity of domains of social thinking indicates that it is not accurate to characterize cultures in the general and homogeneous orientations to individualism or collectivism. The supposedly individualist concerns with personal choices and autonomy are part of the personal domain and are part of the thinking of people in non-Western cultures. Correspondingly, in Western cultures thinking about personal choices and autonomy co-exist with moral concerns for the welfare of others. Therefore, the co-existence of different types of judgments constructed in the process of development means that there are important commonalities among different cultures in moral, social, and personal judgments and that these domains make for variations in judgments within cultures (and within individuals).

That people construct moral judgments of welfare, justice, and rights also implies that people in non-Western and Western cultures do not simply adhere to systems of social organization, roles in the social hierarchy, or the dictates of those in positions of authority (Laupa, Turiel, & Cowan, 1995; Turiel, 2002, 2003). Research I discuss here supports the proposition that people typically apply their moral judgments in critical ways to the organization of society. The research shows that people can be critical of cultural practices and do attempt to change them to achieve greater equality and justice.

Consider one feature that seems to be common among cultures all over the world: that of social hierarchies, which often embed social inequalities. In turn, social inequalities bring with them social opposition and moral resistance because people make moral judgments about existing cultural practices. This also means that within a culture people who are in different positions in the social hierarchy will not always agree with each other. This is the case for inequalities based on social class or caste, and it is the case for inequalities in many cultures where men and women are not in positions of equality.

Before I discuss the relevant research showing that roles in the social hierarchy are not necessarily accepted, it is necessary to consider the reasons that some researchers seem to find that they can characterize some cultures with a general orientation of collectivism with the absence of disagreements among their members and acceptance of their roles without opposition. The answer to this question lies with the methods that have been used by many researchers, which involve a reliance on people who are in positions of authority and power to inform them about the culture. By excluding those in positions of lesser power, researchers obtain a one-sided view, as has been noted by several

commentators on the problem. As one example, the cultural anthropologist Unni Wikan (1991) has stated that "looking mainly at culture's spokesmen … at the exclusion of the poor, the infirm, women, and youths" has resulted in "the concept of culture as a seamless whole and of society as a bounded group manifesting inherently valued order … that effectively masked human misery and quenched dissenting voices" (p. 290).

Making a similar point, the philosopher and political scientist, Susan Okin (1989) maintained that "oppressors and oppressed –when the voice of the latter can be heard at all– often disagree fundamentally. Contemporary views about gender are a clear example of such disagreements; it is clear that there are no shared understandings on this subject, even among women" (p. 67).

Wikan and other anthropologists (Abu-Lughod, 1993; Spiro, 1993) have documented that there are many disagreements and conflicts within cultures so that there is no general consensus on practices and expected actions. On the basis of her extensive ethnographic research with people living in poverty in Cairo, Wikan (1996) concluded: "These lives I depict can be read as exercises in resistance against the state, against family, against one's marriage, against the forces of tradition and change, against neighborhoods and society" (pp. 6-7).

The study of morality in cultural contexts

Therefore, to adequately understand moral, social, and personal judgments in cultural contexts at least three considerations must be taken into account. One is that it is necessary to study the perspectives of people in different positions in the social hierarchy and not only those in positions of status and power. Second, it is necessary to consider the possibility that people in such different positions might have different perspectives on the social system and on certain cultural practices. Third, it is necessary to consider not only how people participate in the culture but also how they may be critical and rejecting of aspects of the culture.

There is research that has been guided by these requirements. We have conducted studies in patriarchal cultures in the Middle-East (Wainryb & Turiel, 1994), India (Neff, 2001), Colombia (Mensing, 2002), and Benin (Conry-Murray, 2009). In these studies, we looked at how adolescent and adult females and males think about inequalities between the sexes that are institutionalized in cultural practices. These include inequalities regarding educational and work opportunities, recreational activities, and decision-making within the family. We examined whether there are concerns with the individual, independence, and freedoms in the cultures, and whether individuals accept their roles and positions of inequality. We expected that individualism is in many

ways important in patriarchal cultures because men are granted a good deal of freedom, independence, and autonomy. In keeping with our general perspective on moral and social thinking, we expected that females would negatively judge certain cultural practices of inequality.

Space does not permit discussion of the details of the procedures used or of the results obtained. Instead, I summarize some of the findings and illustrate them with examples of responses from a few of the participants in studies conducted in a Druze Arab community in northern Israel (Turiel & Wainryb, 2000; Wainryb & Turiel, 1994). As expected, we found that males assert their independence and autonomy, as well as their right to exert control over the activities of females in the family. An acceptance of personal choices, freedoms, and the idea of autonomy are very much a part of "traditional" cultures–as mainly granted to males. Males think they should have freedom to make their own choices. We also found that females are aware of the freedoms granted to males. The recognition of the freedom of males in cultural practice is reflected in the responses of an adolescent (14-year-old) female in the Druze community (Turiel, 2002):

> Because in our culture a man is given complete freedom … no one would oppose a man being free. … That is the way it is among the Druze. [A male] has the right to choose his own way. (p. 247)

Her responses indicate that females are aware of the freedoms granted to males and that in some respects they accept their roles. However, such acceptance is often for pragmatic reasons; that is, they fear the consequences, which can be severe, of defiance. Nevertheless, females desire freedoms and equality, but think that these are difficult goals to achieve and that they must struggle to do so. An example of such thinking can be seen in the responses of an 18-year-old Druze female, who said (Turiel, 2002):

> We live in a conservative culture. Maybe in the future I might want to treat my daughter in the same way I would treat my son, but the culture wouldn't let me do it. … I believe in equality, but the culture would grant more to a male. (p. 249)

We also found that the large majority of females judged the inequalities as unfair, as illustrated by the responses of an adult female (Turiel, 2002):

> A man's life is simple. He works, he comes back home; he has no other responsibilities. I work too and I have kids and a home. He knows that when he comes back, everything will

> be ready for him. That's such a pleasure. When I come home I
> have more work to do at home. So, who do you think deserves
> to get out a little and enjoy life? (p. 249)

There are also studies yielding similar results by other research-
ers. One was conducted in villages in eastern Turkey using dis-
course analysis (Guvenc, 2011). She studied the perspectives of
adult women in those patriarchal contexts. Guvenc concluded
from the research that women "position themselves as dependent
on family members, but also want to resist authority. They blame
their husbands, on the one hand, try to understand them on the
other" (p. 12). The research showed that women are concerned
with fairness in the family, as illustrated in responses from two
women. One said: "I try to criticize myself and try to find my
fault because everyone can make mistakes. A woman and man
should be equal and fair to each other" (p. 20). Another said: "Ev-
erybody has rights and you have to see this. A woman and man
are equal" (p. 21).

Anthropologists who engaged in ethnographic research in-
volving observations and interviews conducted other studies doc-
umenting that women oppose cultural practices. I have already
referred to Wikan's (1996) studies with people living in pover-
ty in Cairo. She conducted fieldwork through visits to the same
community over several years. The struggles and conflict in
the community noted above included family conflicts and women
wanting greater equality. Again, I can illustrate the finding by pre-
senting an example of the responses of a woman who said in
reference to her husband (Wikan, 1996):

> I tried to make Mustafa understand that we must be open
> with each other and mutually adjust–that we must tell each
> other what each of us liked and wanted from life, so we could
> make each other happy. But he just scowled and said, 'I do as
> I please!' and 'I am free.' Of course, the man should have his
> freedom, but not at the woman's expense! (p. 31)

Note that this woman's sentiments are similar to those of the
Druze woman quoted earlier.

Another anthropological study was conducted by Abu-Lughod
(1993) in a rural Bedouin village in northwestern Egypt. She, too,
conducted the research by observing women's activities and con-
ducting interviews. Abu-Lughod found that Bedouin women were
often critical of the restrictions placed on them in their daily lives.
Moreover, they sought ways to avoid the control that men exerted
on them. The women used several means, sometimes involving
deception, to evade restrictions placed on their personal choices–
such as on their educational and work opportunities. They also
used deceptive means to avoid general cultural practices, such as

arranged marriages and polygamy. As an example, Abu-Lughod relates a story of a woman who disapproved of polygamy and thought it was unfair for her son to have more than one wife. So when her son would express an interest in a woman to marry as an additional wife, the mother would tell that woman negative things about her son and that her son would not be a good husband so as to persuade the woman against marrying the son.

Abu-Lughod also reported that many of the women believed that the practice of polygamy was unfair. As put by one woman in Abu-Lughod's study (1993):

> And this business of marrying more than one wife–I wish they'd change their views on this. It is the biggest sin. The Prophet–it is not forbidden but the Prophet said only if you treat them fairly. But a man can't, it can't be done. Even if he has money, he can't. As a person in his thoughts and his actions, he can't be fair. He'll like one more than another. (p. 293)

My interpretation of the findings of all these psychological and anthropological studies is that they show that there are multiple perspectives within cultures, and that the perspectives of those in different positions in the social hierarchy can vary. The findings can also be interpreted to show that whereas people do participate in their culture and share much with each other, they also have disagreements and conflicts with each other. Consequently, there are complex patterns of commonalities and differences between cultures. There are commonalities in the moral judgments people make in different cultures, but there are also differences in the ways moral judgments are applied. Therefore, it can be said that people in a particular position in the social hierarchy in some respects have similar perspectives as people in like positions in other cultures. That is, there are ways that the perspectives of those in lower positions in the social hierarchy are more like those in lower positions in other cultures than those in higher positions within their own culture.

These propositions, which are based on research findings, are bolstered by journalistic reports of how people in several non-western cultures have reacted to laws and practices perceived to unfairly restrict activities. Two clear examples can be found in many journalistic reports from Afghanistan and Iran, where it appears that people secretly engage in many activities banned by the governmental and religious authorities. While the Taliban was in power in Afghanistan before September 2001 they imposed severe restrictions on many activities, including use of televisions, VCRs, much music and art, movies, and more. Women were required to wear burkas and schools for girls were banned. Nevertheless, people kept hidden many of the banned objects and

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women ran secret schools for girls and beauty shops for women (see Turiel, 2003).

Governmental and religious authorities in Iran have imposed similar restrictions. They have included prohibitions on ways of dressing, watching videos, listening to music, use of alcohol, and relations between males and females ("Lipstick politics in Iran," *The New York Times,* August 19, 1999; V. S. Naipul, "After the revolution," *The New Yorker*, May 26, 1997). In spite of great risks of detection, many people engage in hidden activities and thereby resist the authorities. Many of these activities involve deception, as reflected in the comments of an Iranian woman ("Beating the system with bribes and the big lie," *The New York Times,* May 27, 1997):

> We live a double-life in this country. My children know that when their school teachers ask whether we drink at home, they have to say no. If they are asked whether we dance or play cards, they have to say no. But the fact is we do drink, dance, and play cards, and the kids know it. So they are growing up liars, knowing that their parents are also liars and knowing that to survive in this country we have to be. That's a terrible thing, and I want to change it. (p. A4)

There is one more non-research example I wish to provide that well illustrates the ways women oppose restrictions and rules placed on them by men. It comes from the memoirs of a Moroccan woman, the sociologist Fatima Mernissi (1994), in which she relates aspects of her life while growing up in the city of Fez in the 1940s. In *Dreams of Trespass*, Mernissi tells of an incident that occurred when she was nine years old that is, on the surface, about women wanting to listen to music. However, the incident is also about women rejecting inequality and dealing with how cultural practices prevent them from making their own decisions.

According to Mernissi the women, who were confined to the walls of the compound where they lived, were not allowed to listen to a special radio kept locked in a cabinet when the men were not at home. However, when the men were out of the house the women did listen to that radio. It turned out that one day, Fatima's father asked her and her cousin what they had done that day. They told him that they had listened to the radio. Not surprisingly, the men were not pleased at this news. Mernissi related the ensuing events as follows:

> Our answer indicated that there was an unlawful key going around. … it indicated that the women had stolen the key and made a copy of it. … A huge dispute ensued, with the women being interviewed in the men's salon one at a time. But after two days of inquiry, it turned out the key must have fallen from the sky. No one knew where it had come from.

> Even so, following the inquiry, the women took their re-
> venge on us children. They said that we were traitors, and
> ought to be excluded from their games. That was a horrify-
> ing prospect, so we defended ourselves by explaining that
> all we had done was tell the truth. Mother retorted by saying
> that some things were true, indeed, but you still could not say
> them: you had to keep them secret. And then she added that
> what you say and what you keep secret has nothing to do with
> truth and lies. (pp. 7-8)

Mernissi's story is a good example of resistance of those in po-
sitions of power. The women violated the rules, but resisted
revealing how they obtained the key in spite of two days of
questioning. The women then attempted to teach their children
a lesson of opposition and resistance. They told the children, as
did the Iranian mother quoted above, how to act in such situ-
ations and how to approach matters of truth, lies, and secrecy.
As Mernissi writes about the women, their resistance went be-
yond prohibited activities like listening to music to include other
realms of endeavor and rights. The women also desired a future
for their daughters with greater freedoms and opportunities than
had been available to them.

Conclusion: Morality, culture, relativism, and universalism

It is important to reiterate that the propositions articulated in
the previous section regarding the heterogeneity of orientations
to morality, social relationships, and persons, as well as social
opposition and moral resistance to inequalities are supported by
research findings I did not detail (see Abu-Lughodm 1993; Conry-
Murray, 2009; Guvenc, 2011; Mensing, 2002; Neff, 2001; Spiro,
1993; Wainryb & Turiel, 1994; Wikan, 1996). These findings are
not in accord with key tenets of moral relativism: that cultures can
be characterized in terms of homogeneous orientations and that
most participants accept the system of social organization and
practices of their culture.

Furthermore, the research findings bear on explanations of
development. The findings show that moral development is not
a straightforward incorporation of the values and standards of
society or culture. If it were, then people would not typically en-
gage in critique and opposition to the strongly held requirements
of social hierarchy and its associated inequalities. These types of
judgments are not specific or relative to cultures. Moreover, pat-
terns of opposition and resistance are not new to contemporary
times. As Vlastos (1962) has commented: "The great historical
struggles for social justice have centered about some demand

for equal rights: the struggle against slavery, political absolutism, economic exploitation, the disfranchisement of women, colonialism, racial oppression" (p. 31). Vlastos regarded these struggles to have occurred throughout history and into the time of his writing in the middle of the twentieth century.

Whereas there are differences between cultures, those differences need to be understood in the context of significant similarities among people's moral judgments in different cultures, and in the context of differences in people's perspectives within cultures. The patterns of complex similarities and differences among cultures are inconsistent with a straightforward relativistic conception that individuals acquire different orientations in different cultures. The evidence strongly suggests that concepts of welfare, justice, and rights constitute moral foundations about social relationships that are not culturally specific.

However, the evidence also does not support the idea of moral absolutism since people do not apply their moral concepts categorically (see Turiel, 2012, in press). That moral concepts are not applied categorically is evident in the ways deception has been used in order to combat restrictions perceived to be unfair. Many decisions of this sort involve coordinating, or weighing and balancing, different moral goals, as well as between moral and non-moral goals (Turiel, 2008, in press). Although the women in the research by Abu-Lughod (1993) and the mother from Iran, as examples, value honesty, they subordinate it to goals of fairness in some situations. A number of other studies have shown that social decision-making often involves such coordination. Some studies have documented that children, adolescents, and adults uphold honesty in many situations but also in other situations subordinate honesty to goals of preventing harm and attaining autonomy of individuals when it is restricted unfairly by those in positions of power (Freeman, Ruthore, Weinfurt, Schulman, & Sulmasy, 1999; Perkins & Turiel, 2007; Turiel & Perkins, 2004). Similar processes of coordination occur in people's application of concepts of rights and concepts of fairness in exclusion in social groups (Helwig, 1995; Killen, 2007). Rights and fairness are often upheld, but they are in some situations subordinated to other moral and social goals.

These variations in social and moral decisions are neither random nor simply due to the forces of the situations. The findings show that reasoning, reflection, and evaluative scrutiny of the ways people relate to each other are very much a part of the ways people function that are not the province of any particular set of social arrangements or cultures. Morality is multifaceted. Concepts of trust, harm avoidance, and rights, as examples, all coexist. Social life is such that one moral good can conflict with another. In most cultures, choices must be made that can result in variations in the application of a moral good so as to maintain

a moral good. Moral and social thinking, therefore, involves flexibility of mind. People think about social relationships and construct their social understandings in the process of development.

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