

Bridging Cultural and  
Developmental Approaches  
to Psychology

*New Syntheses in Theory,  
Research, and Policy*

EDITED BY

LENE ARNETT JENSEN

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To my parents, whose many travels and moves have  
given me more than one place to call home.

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# CHAPTER 1

## The Cultural-Developmental Theory of Moral Psychology

### *A New Synthesis*

LENE ARNETT JENSEN

At a time when people increasingly grow up and live in a globalized world with exposure to multiple cultures, we are challenged to conduct research that captures both the developmental and cultural sides of people's psychology (Arnett, 2002; Jensen, 2003; Jensen, Arnett and McKenzie, in press; Larson, 2002; Nsamenang, 1992; Phinney, 2000; Valsiner, 2007). Across diverse research areas, scholars more and more recognize culture and psychological development as intertwined (Cole, 1996; French, Schneider, and Chen, 2006; Leichtman, 2006; Rothbaum et al., 2000; Shweder et al., 2005; Sternberg, 2004). Here my aim is to present a theoretical synthesis that takes both culture and development into account with respect to moral psychology. I term this new conceptualization a *cultural-developmental template* (see also Jensen, 2008a).

The template charts developmental patterns across the life-course for moral reasoning in terms of the three Ethics of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity (e.g., Jensen, 1991, Shweder, 1990). In this chapter, I thus start by providing a brief background on the three ethics approach. Then, I describe how the cultural-developmental template model builds on findings utilizing the three ethics as well as a substantial body of developmental and cultural findings on morality from other research traditions. Next, I illustrate how the cultural-developmental template is not a one-size-fits-all model. I give two examples of how its general developmental patterns accommodate to the different constellations of Ethics

held by culturally diverse peoples. The chapter then turns to specific research expectations as well as broader research implications that follow from the present theoretical proposal. Finally, I discuss how the cultural-developmental template model entails suggestions for policy consideration.

Here, development is defined as psychological change that occurs in human beings as they age. Developmental change may involve increase or decrease; it may be quantitative or qualitative; and it may be gradual or stage-like. Culture is defined as symbolic and behavioral inheritances shared and co-constructed by members of a community (Shweder et al., 2006). Symbolic inheritances are conceptions of divinity, nature, society, and persons, and behavioral inheritances consist of common or habitual familial and social practices. Culture, then, is *not* synonymous with country or ethnicity but rather describes communities whose members share key beliefs and behaviors. For example, the present chapter includes discussion of religiously conservative and liberal cultural communities. It bears mention, too, that there is variation among individuals within cultural communities, and variation exists among cultures in their degree of ideological and behavioral heterogeneity.

Although the focus here is on moral psychology, the present cultural-developmental template conceptualization might be useful for other research areas as well. Thus it provides a way to strike a balance between universalistic, one-size-fits-all approaches and particularistic, one-theory-for-every-culture approaches.

### Beyond a Single Moral Structure: The Three Ethics Approach

During the 1980s and 1990s, a number of researchers made the case that existing theories of moral development, such as the cognitive-developmental and domain theories (Kohlberg, 1981; Turiel, 1983), highlighted moral conceptions pertaining to the welfare and rights of individuals but that insufficient consideration was being paid to an array of other moral conceptions important to people across diverse cultures (e.g., Colby and Damon, 1992; Dien, 1982; Edwards, 1987; Gilligan, 1982; Jensen, 1997a; Ma, 1988; Miller, 1989; Nisan, 1987; Shweder, 1982a, 1982b, 1990; Zimba, 1994). For example, researchers noted that concepts pertaining to community, collectivity, and interdependence were in need of additional attention, as were concepts pertaining to religion and spirituality.

During this time, many researchers also came to the conclusion that community- and divinity-oriented moral concepts, such as the Chinese concept of filial piety or the Buddhist concept of Nibbana or self-liberation, cannot simply be classified as "content" rather than "structure" of moral reasoning. First, the criteria by which such concepts constituted content rather than structure were not articulated in a convincing and compelling way (c.f., Brainerd, 1978, on criteria for structure to serve as an explanatory device). Second, it became increasingly clear that relegating a wide variety of community- and

divinity-oriented reasons to a "content" heap of research oblivion was tantamount to dismissing key conceptions of morality that exist within a variety of cultures.

Aiming to encompass highly diverse moral conceptions, Shweder and colleagues proposed a tripartite distinction between Ethics of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity (Jensen, 1991; Shweder, 1990; Shweder et al., 1997). These three ethics involve different notions of what is at the heart of personhood and, consequently, different moral reasons.

The Ethic of Autonomy—to which developmental moral psychology has long paid the most attention, according to Shweder—involves a focus on people as individuals who have needs, desires, and preferences. The moral goal is to recognize the right to the fulfillment of these needs and desires and to strive to make available the means to satisfy them. Whereas an autonomous self is free to make many choices, the self is restricted by concerns with inflicting harm on other individuals, encroaching on their rights, and consideration for their needs. Thus, in terms of moral reasoning, the Ethic of Autonomy centers on moral concepts that address the interests, well-being, and rights of individuals (self or other) as well as fairness between individuals. It also includes the notion of taking responsibility for oneself and autonomy-oriented virtues such as self-esteem, self-expression, and independence.

The Ethic of Community addresses how people are members of social groups such as family, school, and nation and how they occupy various roles and positions within these groups. The moral goal of this social self is the fulfillment of role-based duties to others as well as protecting and ensuring the positive functioning of social groups. Accordingly, the Ethic of Community includes moral concepts pertaining to persons' duties to others, and concern with the customs, interests, and welfare of groups. This ethic also comprises community-oriented virtues such as self-moderation and loyalty toward social groups and their members.

The Ethic of Divinity focuses on people as spiritual or religious entities. Here the moral goal is for the self to become increasingly connected to that which is pure or divine. The central moral conceptions of the Ethic of Divinity pertain to divine and natural law, injunctions and lessons found in sacred texts, and the striving to avoid spiritual degradation and come closer to moral purity. This ethic also taps divinity-oriented virtues such as awe, faithfulness, and humility.

Research has shown the presence of all three ethics in diverse cultures (e.g., Arnett, Ramos, and Jensen, 2001; Buchanan, 2003; Haidt, Koller, and Dias, 1993; Jensen, 1995, 1997b, 1998a, 1998b, 2008b, 2008c; Rozin, Lowery, Imada, and Haidt, 1999; Vainio, 2003; Vasquez et al., 2001). Furthermore, research has indicated cultural differences across and within countries. Across countries, findings suggest that American participants use Ethic of Autonomy concepts more than participants in countries such as Brazil, India, and the Philippines (Haidt et al. 1993; Jensen, 1998a; Vasquez et al., 2001). Research within India, Finland, and the United States has also indicated a difference between religious groups, with religiously liberal persons reasoning more in

terms of Autonomy and less in terms of Divinity than religiously conservative persons (Jensen, 1997b, 1998a; Vainio, 2003). Moral motives pertaining to Autonomy, Community, and Divinity, then, are widespread across cultures.

### A New Cultural-Developmental Synthesis

Research with the three ethics provides for a way to capture highly diverse moral concepts used by different cultural groups. Up until now, however, research with the three ethics addressing development has been limited. To address the intersection of culture and development, it may thus be helpful to consider how Shweder's cultural approach can be extended by accounting for developmental findings and concepts.

In considering how the three ethics vary developmentally, it is necessary to address two issues: (1) the *degree* to which an ethic is used at different ages (e.g., Does use of the Ethic of Community go down, remain stable, or go up with age?) and (2) the specific *types* of moral concepts that persons of various ages use within an ethic (e.g., Does a child reason in terms of different kinds of Ethic of Community concepts as compared to an adolescent or an adult?).

Much of the research that has analyzed people's moral reasoning in terms of the three ethics has used a coding system developed and revised by Jensen (1991, 1996, 2004). In this system, each moral reason a person provides is coded into one ethic (i.e., Autonomy, Community, or Divinity), allowing for an assessment of the *degree* to which a person uses each of the three ethics.

Furthermore, each of a person's moral reasons is coded into one of numerous subcategories (each ethic includes 13–16 subcategories, e.g., "Self's Psychological Well-Being" and "Rights" for Autonomy, "Duty to Others" and "Social Order or Harmony Goals" for Community, and "Scriptural Authority" and "God-Given Conscience" for Divinity), allowing for an assessment of the specific *type* of moral concept used within an ethic. Distinguishing not only among the three ethics but also among types of moral concepts within each ethic means that highly diverse concepts can be taken into account. For example, both the Chinese concept of shame (Fung, 1999) and the Indian concept of role-based obligations (e.g., Miller, 1994) would be coded into the Ethic of Community. However, they would most likely be coded into the different subcategories of "Community-Oriented Virtues" and "Duty to Others," respectively.

In the following, I will first propose a model for how degree and type of use of the three ethics is related to development. This model builds on a substantial body of developmental and cultural research to be described below. The model as a whole is thus based on extensive empirical work, but for some of its elements the available evidence is more limited. Where this is the case, it will be noted. The description of the model will be followed by an explanation of how my intent is for it to be used as a *cultural-developmental template* for research with different age groups within diverse cultures. The model, then, is not one-size-fits-all but, rather, accommodates the prevailing ethics of diverse peoples.

In other words, the template model takes different forms in different cultures. Examples of this will be shown.

### Development and the Three Ethics

The model in Figure 1–1 illustrates the present proposal for how the three ethics are used across childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. In other words, the three lines show a developmental pattern for the Ethics of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity. The positions of the lines, however, do *not* indicate their relative frequency in relation to one another (e.g., use of Autonomy being more frequent than use of Community and Divinity).

With respect to the Ethic of Autonomy, the proposition is that reasons within this ethic emerge early and that the *degree* to which persons use this ethic stays *relatively* stable across adolescence and into adulthood. However, the *types* of Autonomy concepts that persons use are likely to change, in part, with age.

Support for this proposition comes from the consistent finding across the research approaches of Kohlberg, Turiel, and Gilligan that children in different cultures speak early about harm to the self and the interests of the self (Colby et al., 1983; Gilligan, 1982; Kohlberg, 1984; Snarey, 1985; Turiel, 2002; Walker, 1989; *see also* Eisenberg et al., 1995). Furthermore, as domain work by Turiel and colleagues has shown, children in quite diverse cultures also reason about harm to other individuals and their needs or interests (Turiel, 2002). This finding has also been found in studies from different cultures using a variety of other theoretical approaches (Gilligan, 1982; Haidt et al., 1993; Miller, 1994).



FIGURE 1.1 The cultural-developmental template.

*Note.* Each of the lines shows developmental patterns across the life span, from childhood to adulthood. The positions of the lines do *not* indicate their relative frequency in relation to one another (e.g., use of Autonomy being more frequent than use of Community and Divinity).

As persons in different cultures grow into adolescence and adulthood, research has shown that some reasoning pertaining to the welfare of the self and other individuals remains (Eisenberg et al., 1995; Gilligan, 1982; Haidt et al., 1993; Jensen, 1995, 1998a; Turiel, 2002; Vasquez et al. 2001; Walker et al., 1995; Zimba, 1994). Adolescents and adults continue to reason in terms of these concepts for diverse issues and perhaps especially for issues of relevance to their own lives (Buchanan, 2003; Walker et al., 1995). And it is likely that many or even most of the moral issues that people contemplate (outside of a research setting) are indeed of personal relevance.

Yet, in the course of adolescence and adulthood, other types of Ethic of Autonomy reasoning also become increasingly used, even if they are unlikely to become the most common types of Autonomy reasoning. Research with European and American participants, including the moral development work by Piaget (1932/1965), has indicated that adolescents and adults are more likely than children to speak of concepts such as individual rights and equity in a consistent manner (Killen, 2002; Walker, 1989). Although these concepts do not prevail in the reasoning of adults across cultures (Snarey, 1985), research has indicated that adolescents and adults in cultures such as India and Zambia give consideration to equity and justice (Miller and Luthar, 1989; Zimba, 1994).

The proposal here, then, is that the degree of Autonomy reasoning stays relatively stable across the lifespan but with some changes in types of Autonomy reasoning. However, it also needs to be noted that in cultures where there is a very strong push for collectivity or submission to divinity, there may be somewhat of a decline over time in Autonomy reasoning. In such cultures, considerations of the needs, desires, and interests of individuals (especially the self) are seen as either irrelevant or morally objectionable, and hence, by or into adulthood, such moral considerations might go down.

Turning to the Ethic of Community, the proposal is that both the *degree* of usage and the diversity of *types* of concepts rise throughout childhood and into adolescence and adulthood. As shown in developmental research by Kohlberg and colleagues (Kohlberg, 1984) as well as cultural research by Shweder and colleagues (1990), younger children in diverse cultures invoke some Community concepts, such as those relating to the interests of one's family and familial customs. Cross-cultural research with the domain approach also shows this, even as domain researchers have regarded the reasoning as "conventional" rather than moral (Turiel, 1983, 2002). Moral reasoning related to the family finds continued expression past childhood and probably even more so in the course of adolescence and adulthood as a person's awareness of diverse types of family considerations increases (e.g., duty to family in addition to family interests and customs; e.g., Miller, Bersoff, and Harwood, 1990). Also, in the course of adolescence and with the transition into adulthood, people take on an increasing number of adult family roles and responsibilities.

By late childhood and adolescence, a person is likely also to add community concepts that pertain to social groups other than the family. Thus, research across many cultures has found that children's social circle widens as they

reach late childhood and grow into adolescence (Whiting and Edwards, 1988). For example, by late childhood and early adolescence, the salience of friends and peers rises (*see* Chen, 2011; Hurrelmann, 1996; Rubin, Bukowski, and Parker, 1998; Schlegel and Barry, 1991; Youniss and Smollar, 1985). Other collective contexts, too, gain in importance across cultures, including school and workplace (*see* Schlegel, 2011). Thus, compared to younger children, the expectation reflected in Figure 1-1 is that older children and adolescents use more Community concepts pertaining to nonfamilial groups.

By the time a person reaches late adolescence or adulthood, moral concepts that pertain to even broader social entities such as society as a whole become used in a more frequent and consistent manner. Thus, longitudinal research has shown how persons in their late teens and adulthood reason more about matters pertaining to societal organization (e.g., utilitarian considerations), as compared to children and younger adolescents (Eisenberg et al., 1995; Walker, 1989; *see also* Flanagan, Martínez, & Cumsille, 2011). Although this longitudinal research has been carried out in North America, the findings are likely to generalize. A variety of cultural research with adults, including in India, Israel, and Zambia, has shown how they give consideration to what is best for society as a whole (Jensen, 1998a; Nisan, 1987; Zimba, 1994).

With respect to the Ethic of Divinity, there is less research available, and hence, the proposal here has a more restricted empirical basis. In cultures that emphasize scriptural authority or where people conceive of supernatural entities (such as God) as largely distinct from humans (e.g., as omniscient and omnipotent), the present suggestion is that the *degree* of use of the Ethic of Divinity will be low among children but will then rise in adolescence and become similar to adult use of this ethic. The reason is that in such communities, the culturally articulated concepts pertaining to supernatural entities are of such an abstract nature that they may be readily translated into moral reasoning only by adolescents whose cognitive skills allow for more abstraction than those of younger children (Adelson, 1971; Keating, 1990; Kohlberg, 1976; Piaget, 1972). It should be noted that research indicates that children growing up in cultures with a predominance of abstract conceptions of the supernatural can express conceptions of these supernatural entities (Jensen, 2009a; Oser, Scarlett, and Bucher, 2005). The suggestion here is that these conceptions do not get applied to moral reasoning until adolescence. Additionally, the present proposal is that the *types* of Divinity concepts used by older adolescents will be largely similar to those used by adults. Older adolescents are likely to be as capable as adults of using diverse Divinity concepts such as those referencing scriptural authority, God's authority, and spiritual virtues.

Preliminary research support for this pattern derives from in-depth interviews with children (ages 7-12 years), adolescents (ages 13-18 years), and adults (ages 36-57 years) who formed part of an American religiously conservative congregation (Jensen and McKenzie, in preparation). In their conservative Protestant religion, God is omniscient and omnipotent. In response to six different moral issues, the adolescents and adults used significantly more Ethic of Divinity reasons than the children, and the children used very few Divinity

reasons. Furthermore, adolescents and adults did not differ in the number or types of Divinity concepts that they used.

Support for the pattern is also suggested by the fact that a number of religious traditions have ceremonies and celebrations in early or mid-adolescence that explicitly confer moral responsibility on the adolescents and link that responsibility to knowledge of religious teachings (Mahoney et al., 2003; Sita, 1999). Within Catholicism, for example, adolescents who take part in the Confirmation ceremony promise to live by the teachings of the Catholic Church, and they show that they are ready to be responsible for their actions. Within Judaism, when an adolescent boy becomes Bar Mitzvah or an adolescent girl becomes Bat Mitzvah, they assume responsibility for obeying the laws of Judaism and the Jewish people. Thus, Bar Mitzvah and Bat Mitzvah are Hebrew for "son of the commandments" and "daughter of the commandments," respectively. The presence of these rituals in diverse religions begins to point to adolescence as a key time for the explicit expression of moral reasons within an Ethic of Divinity.

The age pattern for the Ethic of Divinity proposed above, however, may only apply to some religious cultures. In cultures where scriptural accounts of supernatural or transcendent entities are less salient or where people regard such entities as less distinct from humans, it is possible that Divinity concepts are more accessible to, and hence used more by, children in their moral reasoning (Saraswathi, 2005). In some Hindu communities, for example, religious devotion finds expression in tangible and recurrent activities (e.g., bathing, dressing, and feeding the gods); there are many places within and outside the home for worship (e.g., household shrines, temples, roadside shrines); and there are a variety of persons seen to have god-like status or special connections with the gods (e.g., gurus, sadhus [renouncers], temple priests) (Jensen, 1998a; Shweder et al., 1990). In such cultures, children may reason about moral issues in terms of Ethic of Divinity concepts from fairly early on because these concepts are tied repeatedly to specific everyday activities and objects. Then, in the course of adolescence and adulthood, additional Divinity concepts may become part of a person's moral reasoning.

As Figure 1-1 shows, the present proposal is that use of each of the three ethics generally either stays relatively stable or increases. With age, there is likely to be increasing cognitive complexity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993; Lerner, 2002), which would allow for increased use of diverse moral concepts. Research on moral reasoning also shows that the number of moral reasons provided by participants goes up with age (Jensen and McKenzie, in preparation; Walker et al., 1995).

### *The Cultural-Developmental Template*

As mentioned above, my intent is for Figure 1-1 to serve as a *cultural-developmental template* for research with different age groups within diverse cultures. This means that the developmental patterns in Figure 1-1 are accommodated to the constellation of ethics that prevail within different cultures.

Thus people of different cultures vary on the extent to which they emphasize the three ethics.

To give an example, research in a number of countries has shown that in some religiously liberal cultures, adult members frequently use the Ethics of Autonomy and Community and quite rarely use the Ethic of Divinity (Buchanan, 2003; Jensen, 1997a, 1997b, 1998a, 1998b; Vainio, 2003). Given this finding, it is possible to make predictions for the expression of the cultural-developmental template in these kinds of religiously liberal cultures. As seen in Figure 1-2, the expectation would be that children, adolescents, and adults will make frequent use of Autonomy concepts, although as described earlier, the type used may well change with age. Community concepts will be rarer among younger children but will then become quite common among adolescents and adults. (It is possible that the Ethic of Community will rise more quickly among religiously liberal children in relatively interdependence-oriented societies such as India, as compared to children growing up in religiously liberal communities in relatively independence-oriented societies such as the United States; *see also* Phinney & Baldelomar, 2011). With respect to the Ethic of Divinity, the expectation is that it will be used infrequently at all ages, and if it emerges, this will only occur in the course of adolescence.

To give another example, in some religiously conservative cultures, adults frequently reason in terms of the Ethics of Community and Divinity and infrequently in terms of the Ethic of Autonomy (Buchanan, 2003; Jensen, 1997a, 1997b, 1998a, 1998b; Vainio, 2003). Accommodating the cultural-developmental template to this finding, Figure 1-3 shows the predicted cultural-developmental patterns for religiously conservative groups. Here, children, adolescents, and adults will infrequently use the Ethic of Autonomy. In fact,

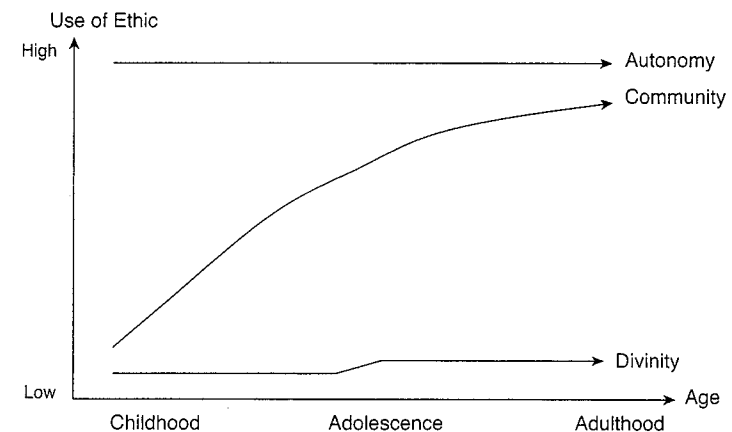


FIGURE 1.2 Expression of the cultural-developmental template among religious liberals

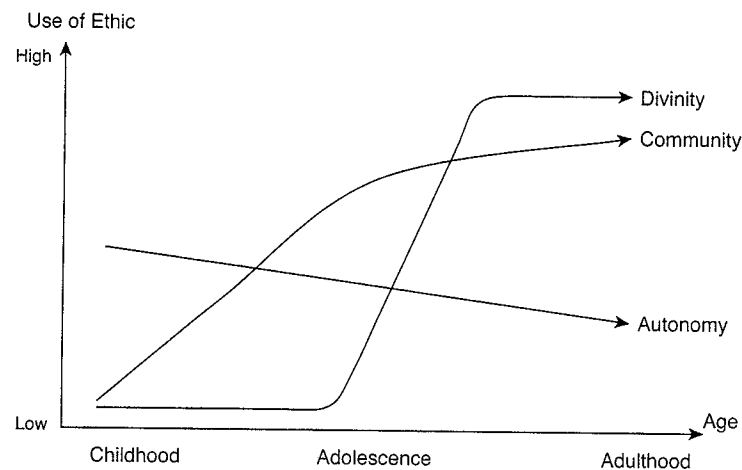


FIGURE 1.3 Expression of the cultural-developmental template among religious conservatives

as noted earlier, there may even be some decrease in this ethic over the lifespan because of the emphasis on renouncing self-interest that characterizes some religiously conservative communities. With respect to the Ethic of Community, the expectation would be that its prevalence will be fairly low among younger children, higher among children in late childhood and early adolescence, and high among late adolescents and adults. Use of the Ethic of Divinity will be low among children (at least for religiously conservative communities with abstract conceptions of the supernatural, as explained earlier) but will then rise markedly in adolescence and remain high throughout adulthood.

In summary, the *cultural-developmental template* allows for a way to conceptualize moral development in children, adolescents, and adults who form part of diverse cultural communities. The template incorporates highly diverse moral concepts that culturally diverse peoples use to explain and guide their behaviors. The template incorporates complexity by accounting for multiple dimensions; specifically, it allows us to see people's moral lives through the lenses of *both* culture and development (Jensen, 2008a). The template also allows for flexibility in that it allows for consideration of the interaction of development and culture. The present theoretical synthesis, then, strikes a middle ground between having a single model for people everywhere and the prospect of having one model for every culture.

#### Prospects for New Research: Specific Expectations

Like all theoretical proposals, the present one entails specific research expectations. The present proposal, however, also has some broader implications for

how to conduct research on moral psychology. This is because it synthesizes two research paradigms with different conceptions and traditions of how to study morality. I will discuss the specific research expectations first and then turn to the broader research implications.

#### *The Template Thesis*

The cultural-developmental template described above lays out expectations for developmental changes in use of the Ethics of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity in the context of cultural variation. As described, the proposed developmental changes in *degree* of usage of the Ethics of Autonomy and Community are supported by a substantial body of research, and the expectation would be that they would find continued support.

We know somewhat less about some of the lifespan developmental changes in *types* of Autonomy and Community reasoning used within various cultures. Here there is a need for more research to test and elaborate on the present proposal.

We know relatively little about lifespan changes for the Ethic of Divinity. It is an emerging area of research. The present template suggests how changes in Divinity reasoning may occur developmentally (with adolescence being an important period), as well as how this developmental pattern may depend on both the extent of Divinity reasoning used within a culture and the kind of conceptualizations of the supernatural that prevail within a culture. These specific suggestions require additional testing.

#### *The Definition of Morality Thesis*

The present cultural-developmental proposal entails a broad definition of morality that includes Autonomy, Community, and Divinity reasoning. The present model also details how cultures differ on their constellation of ethics (e.g., in some cultures there is a general preference for Community over Autonomy, whereas in other cultures it is the other way around). Consequently, one expectation is that people from different cultures, to some extent, will vary in the kinds of behaviors they include within the moral domain. For example, people who reason in terms of Ethic of Divinity concepts such as God's will or the human body being God's temple are likely to regard a number of behaviors as moral that people who do not use this kind of reasoning will imbue with little or no moral significance. Research has shown support for this thesis with respect to behaviors such as suicide in the case of terminal illness and alcohol use (Jensen, 1995). For example, to some people who consider their body to be God's temple, any alcohol use is regarded as a moral offense because it adulterates that which is part of God. More research is needed on how different constellations of ethics (at various ages and in various cultures) are related to different definitions of what is moral and what is not.

Another expectation is that people from different cultures may vary on the kinds of criteria they have for regarding behaviors as moral. In some theories



of moral development, especially in domain and cognitive-developmental theory, the criteria of universalizability has been prominent. This criterion means that in order for a rule to be moral, it must apply to everyone. The universalizability criterion, however, may not be universal. For example, research has indicated that religiously conservative cultures have a hierarchical worldview (Ammerman, 1987; Jensen, 1997a, 2006). In this view, God is above humans. Among humans, differences exist between various groups, including believers and nonbelievers. Based on such a worldview along with Ethic of Divinity reasoning, a conservative Christian can maintain that one may require more morally of a Christian than a non-Christian (such as sexual abstinence prior to marriage, modesty in dress, and tithing). An orthodox Jew can hold that moral expectations for Jews are different from those for non-Jews (such as keeping kosher and circumcision).

It would seem that a large number of peoples do not share the universalizability criterion that came out of Western rationalist philosophy (Wilson, 1993), or at least it is not their only or foremost criterion. As noted by Blasi (1987, 1990), we need more research on people's indigenous criteria rather than presupposing criteria coming out of particular philosophical traditions. The present proposal is that it would be fruitful to examine the kinds of criteria held by people with different constellations of the three ethics.

### *The Constellation of Ethics Thesis*

As described earlier, the proposal here is that cultures are characterized by distinct constellations of ethics (such as Autonomy and Community above Divinity). Furthermore, the present expectation is that individuals, too, reason about different moral issues in terms of particular constellation of ethics and that these constellations change with development. In other words, the expectation is not what we might term a toolbox approach to moral reasoning, which would predict that an individual uses one kind of reasoning (or tool) for one issue, a different kind for another issue, and so forth. Instead, the present expectation is in harmony with recent identity work on moral reasoning and behavior that also emphasizes a certain measure of moral reasoning coherence within the self (Blasi, 1994; Colby and Damon, 1992; Lapsley and Narvaez, 2004; Youniss and Yates, 1997). As described by Blasi (1994), for example, a person will reason in terms of certain moral concepts across diverse issues. As a person comes to identify strongly with these concepts, they become a core part of the person's sense of self that will habitually guide behavior. In turn, the behaviors may reinforce and refine the moral identity.

The present thesis, however, does not entail that an individual's constellation of ethics is impervious to some variation across moral issues. Research has suggested that people, to some extent, reason differently about researcher-generated vignettes than participant-generated personal moral experiences. This has been found both for research with Kohlberg's stages (Walker et al. 1995) and the three ethics (Buchanan, 2003; Jensen and McKenzie, in preparation).

Research with the three ethics has also suggested that individuals' reasoning about some issues may be influenced by public debate. For example, across highly varied moral issues, religiously conservative American adults almost never reason in terms of the Ethic of Autonomy concept of individual rights. A clear exception, however, occurs for the issue of abortion, where they often invoke the rights of the fetus. Here, their reasoning seems influenced by recognition of the popularity and persuasiveness of rights language in the American public forum (Jensen, 1998b).

Also, it may be that there is some cultural variation on the extent to which people aim for a stable constellation of ethics to apply across moral issues. For example, research with Chinese participants has noted a proclivity to reason about moral issues on the basis of the specifics of the situation and their reluctance to formulate highly general moral principles (Dien, 1982; Walker and Moran, 1991).

Research, then, is needed on how development and culture influence individuals' constellation of ethics. Merging the above findings with the identity work, we might expect that persons would be particularly likely to experience fluctuation or inconsistency in their constellation of ethics during periods of developmental change (e.g., moving from one phase of the life course to another) and during periods of cultural change (e.g., within a culture as a whole or for a person moving from one culture to another).

### *The Moral Emotion Question*

The proposed cultural-developmental template is mainly based on a large body of available research focusing on reasoning. Some work, including recent findings, has highlighted moral emotions (e.g., Eisenberg, 1992; Haidt, 2001; Kagan, 1987). Here, some questions for research on moral emotions from a cultural-developmental perspective will be put forth: Could developmental templates be proposed for various moral emotions, such as guilt, shame, or gratitude? How might such templates vary across cultures? How might development and/or culture relate to what is defined as moral rather than non-moral emotions? How might development and/or culture influence the extent to which people's moral behaviors are based on emotions or reasoning? How might development and/or culture even influence how this distinction between reasoning and emotions is understood and experienced?

To the extent that some moral emotions map onto the three ethics, it is possible that the present template is applicable to these emotions. In a series of studies, Rozin and colleagues (1999) found that anger, contempt, and disgust were strongly related to the Ethics of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity, respectively. If more research were to show such relations for a number of other emotions, it might be that specific cultural-developmental expectations could be proposed for the *degree* to which people experience Autonomy, Community, and Divinity emotions as well as for the specific *types* of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity emotions that they experience.

## Prospects for New Research: Broader Implications

### *Cultural Variations in the Life-Course*

Turning to broader research implications of synthesizing developmental and cultural perspectives, one of those is the need to consider that cultural variations in the life-course itself may influence moral development. For example, recent research indicates that a new phase of the life-course has become normative in the United States and other post-industrial societies. Spanning the late teens through the mid-to-late twenties, researchers term this period *emerging adulthood* (Arnett, 1998, 2000, 2004, 2011). Emerging adulthood has been found to be distinct from both adolescence and adulthood behaviorally, demographically, and subjectively. It is a “self-focused age” (Arnett, 2004), with emerging adults aiming to form independent beliefs, establish financial autonomy from parents, and take responsibility for the consequences of their own actions. As noted, emerging adulthood is not a period of life that is present in all cultures. Researchers see it as a period that has become notable in societies where educational training has become extended and marriage and family obligations often are postponed (Mayseless and Scharf, 2003; Nelson, 2009).

In cultures where there is an emerging adulthood phase, one might expect this phase to be characterized by substantial Ethic of Autonomy reasoning. There might even be a temporary uptick in the Autonomy pattern described in Figure 1–1. Several studies with the three ethics has indeed shown a pronounced, if not exclusive, use of the Ethic of Autonomy among American emerging adults (Arnett et al. 2001; Jensen, 1995; Jensen, Arnett, Feldman, and Cauffman, 2002, 2004).

To give another example of the significance of cultural variations in the life-course, the indigenous Indian conception of the life-course includes a final “Sanyasa” phase, where older persons are supposed to renounce their ties to community to focus on their connection with the spiritual notion of Atman. As described by Saraswathi and colleagues (2005, 2011), the Sanyasa ideal is to lead a life as water on a lotus leaf—on the leaf but not of it. For Indians who adhere to this life-course conception, one might expect a final decrease in the otherwise common Ethic Community pattern described in Figure 1–1.

### *Cultural Variations and Developmental Contexts*

Taking a cultural-developmental approach also entails addressing how the contexts that influence moral development will vary across cultures. Over the course of the early 20th century—as mass education in Europe and the United States became common and compulsory—Piaget (1932/1965) emphasized the peer context. Kohlberg (1984) continued the emphasis on peers. There also appears to be an implicit focus on peers in domain research (Turiel, 2002). The moral vignettes that domain researchers use in their research typically involve interactions between peers (e.g., hitting an age mate, pushing a playground peer off a swing, failing to share with a classmate, teasing a peer). Recent research

on morality has addressed other contexts—especially family (e.g., Smetana, 2000; Walker, 1989) but also civic organizations (e.g., Flanagan, 2003; Jensen, 2009b, in press; Youniss and Yates, 1997).

Today’s children and adolescents growing up in urban areas all over the world are exposed to moral messages from many other sources too: after-school counselors, extracurricular activity coaches, television, magazines, websites, and so forth. What is the influence on moral development of these other contexts? Meanwhile, in a number of areas of the world (especially rural and poor ones), the moral contexts surrounding children and adolescents are different. Children’s daily access to mass media, such as television and the Internet, is much more restricted. Adolescents—especially girls—are far less likely to attend secondary educational institutions. Both children and adolescents spend more time in the contexts of family and small communities. What are the implications for the moral development of these children and adolescents? Because the contexts of moral significance are likely to vary not only across age but also across cultures, an implication of taking a cultural-developmental approach is the need to consider more contexts than typically have received research attention (Jensen and Larson, 2005).

## The Cultural-Developmental Approach and Policy Considerations

In this final section, I turn to policy considerations. I briefly discuss how social policies and moral development research share common foci, and then I turn to some suggestions for how the present cultural-developmental approach to morality has implications for social policies.

Like moral development research, social policies are centrally focused on moral values and goals. Social policies consistently aim to promote that which is deemed morally desirable and decrease that which is deemed morally deficient. For example, social policies often involve weighing of moral goals such as individual rights, the duties of individuals or societies who are well-off toward individuals or societies who are less well-off, and how to optimize a variety of psychological and physical benefits for various members of society.

Like moral developmental research, social policies also often address the development of children or youth. Social policies influence children, either directly as in educational programs or more indirectly as in policies that affect families and other contexts of importance to children. Social policies also often go beyond the short run and have as their purview the society that youth will inherit and of which they will take leadership. In other words, policy is often made not only with an eye to today’s societal members but also tomorrow’s generation.

The fact that social policies and moral development research both address moral goals, moral development, and posterity make it clear that the two areas can inform one another. In light of the focus of this chapter and the present book, I will specifically discuss how the cultural-developmental

approach to morality has implications for social policy aimed at culturally diverse groups.

The cultural-developmental template indicates that moral development across cultures takes both common and variable forms. There is not one and only one moral developmental trajectory, but nor are all moral goals and trajectories across cultures incommensurable and incompatible. One general implication is that social policies should be able to bridge between cultures.

More specifically, such bridging might more often than not be most successful if it builds on a willingness to examine where there are points of commonality between cultures while simultaneously allowing for some cultural variation. For example, recent research with immigrants in the United States indicates that they judge civic involvement to be important (Jensen, 2008b), and they are about as civically involved as non-immigrants (Huddy and Khatib, 2007; Jensen, in press; Lopez and Marcelo, 2008; Stepick, Stepick, and Labissiere, 2008). Here, then, is a moral value and behavior shared across cultural groups. However, immigrants' moral motives for civic involvement are not identical to those of non-immigrant. Immigrants' civic involvement is rooted, in part, in values of their cultures and religions of origin, as well as their distinctive bicultural experiences (Jensen, 2008b).

Looking at immigrants, it might be easy to see cultural differences, to infer that such differences preclude positive involvement in American society, and to urge social policies aimed at comprehensive changes to the cultures of immigrants. And indeed, prominent scientists and public policy pundits have done just that (e.g., Huntington, 2004). In contrast, the cultural-developmental template approach presented here suggests that it might be worthwhile for policy-makers (and researchers) to recognize cultures as multifaceted, to ascertain and build on moral goals shared between cultures, and to be open to the possibility that some cultural differences can co-exist. In fact, some cultural differences can be a conduit rather than an encumbrance to shared goals, the way that immigrants and non-immigrants are motivated by somewhat different cultural values to be civically engaged.

Although the cultural-developmental template points to a social policy approach to bridging between cultures, it may also be useful in identifying circumstances where bridging will be difficult and even fraught with conflict. More often than not, bridging will be most challenging where cultural groups apply different Ethics to reach opposing moral judgments or to reach different views of the extent to which issues fall within the moral domain. For example, as described earlier, religiously liberal and conservative cultural groups are markedly different in their use of the Ethics of Autonomy and Divinity. This difference underpins how the two groups reach opposing moral judgments on a substantial number of issues (Jensen, 1997a, 1997b, 1998a, 1998b, 2000, 2006, 2008a). Many religious conservatives, for example, apply an Ethic of Divinity to a variety of life-and-death issues (i.e., abortion and terminal illness), reasoning that decisions about these issues ought to be left to God. Many religious liberals, in sharp contrast, apply an Ethic of Autonomy to these issues invoking the right of individuals to make decisions on their own behalf.

The difference in the two groups' use of the Ethics of Autonomy and Divinity also underpins differences on the extent to which an issue is deemed moral. As described earlier, to religious conservatives who regard the human body as God's temple, some issues such as alcohol use may be viewed as moral to an extent that is not shared by liberals. In sum, finding a consensus on social policy will be particularly difficult on issues where cultural groups use different ethics to reach opposing moral judgments or divergent assessments of their moral significance.

In the case of the opposition between religious liberals and conservatives in the United States, this difficulty has been captured by the application of the term *culture wars* (Hunter, 1991). The term recognizes deep and real divisions between the groups in terms of morality and worldviews. Yet, perhaps here, too, it might be worthwhile to return to the suggestion above of remembering that cultures are multifaceted and to aim to ascertain and build on moral values and goals shared between cultures.

## Conclusion

The cultural-developmental template and the research that undergirds it make it clear that morality is fundamental to the human condition. Across cultures and across essentially all phases of the life-course, we ascribe moral meaning to behaviors and experiences.

At the same time, people increasingly live in a globalized and multicultural world, and it is time to see people's moral lives in light of both developmental and cultural psychology. Persons ages 7, 17, and 47 years to some extent differ in their moral reasoning, even if they share a common culture. Persons from diverse cultures such as India, Kenya, and the United States to some extent differ in their moral concepts, even if they are the same age. The present cultural-developmental synthesis offers the possibility of integrating both of these valuable insights in future theoretical and methodological work in moral psychology. The synthesis also points to implications for social policy consideration.

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