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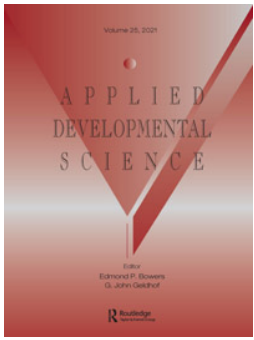
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Moral reasoning among children in India: The intersection of culture, development, and social class

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ABSTRACT

The study included 144 Indian children in middle childhood and early adolescence of high and low SES. Based on the cultural-developmental approach, the aims were to test hypotheses about use of the three Ethics of Autonomy, Community and Divinity, and to gain qualitative insights into the children's indigenous moral concepts. Three findings stood out: 1) Older children employed a rich set of indigenous duty concepts, thereby also using the Ethic of Community more than younger children. 2) Younger children already reasoned in terms of the Ethic of Divinity. 3) High-SES children used the Ethic of Autonomy more than low-SES children and conceptualized the individual in independent and psychological terms; whereas low-SES children's view of autonomy invoked fear of physical punishment. The cultural-developmental theory and methodology revealed sides of children's moral reasoning that are largely missing in Western studies, and point to new research directions in moral development and socialization.

In recent decades, scholars have called for moral psychology to include more than one kind of moral reasoning (e.g., Colby & Damon, 1992; Edwards, 1997; Gilligan, 1982; Miller, 1994; Padilla-Walker & Carlo, 2014; Shweder et al., 2003; Trommsdorff, 2012), in order to move beyond earlier conceptualizations of morality as a unitary structure (Kohlberg, 1981) or domain (Turiel, 2002). Scholars have encouraged a focus on moral reasoning pertaining to concepts such as care, prosociality, beneficence, spiritual purity, and religious injunctions in addition to the previously prevalent focus on concepts such as individual rights and fairness. Comparable arguments for plurality have also been put forth for other fundamental aspects of human psychology, including intelligence (Sternberg, 1985), creativity (Mouragues et al., 2015), and self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Typically, the arguments have been inspired by consideration of culturally diverse individuals and groups. What has so far received less attention is the development of these psychological phenomena, and how developmental patterns may vary among cultures. This is because it takes time to build knowledge about new constructs, such as “creative intelligence,” “interdependent self,” and “Ethic of Divinity.” It also takes new ways of

thinking to theoretically capture the development of a pluralistic phenomenon.

Nonetheless, an emerging focus in moral psychology research is how to theorize and research the development of plural kinds of reasoning, and the extent to which such developmental trajectories vary across cultures. Obtaining this knowledge is important in order to describe, explain, and predict moral development in a manner that is valid both across and within cultures (Harkness & Super, 2020a; Thalmayer et al., 2021). In turn, such knowledge is crucial as the basis for applied interventions and policies (Harkness & Super, 2020b). The cultural-developmental approach to moral psychology has been proposed as a novel way to conceptualize the development of three kinds of moral reasoning—Ethics of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity—across different cultures (Jensen, 2008, 2011, 2015).

The aims of this study were to quantitatively test hypotheses based on the cultural-developmental approach among children in India, and to use qualitative data to provide in-depth insight into the nature of the children's moral reasoning as well as their use of notable indigenous concepts. The cultural-developmental approach, as described below, addresses both

quantitative and qualitative changes in moral reasoning. The study included children in middle childhood and early adolescence in Vadodara, India, who came from families of high and low socio-economic status (SES).

The study extended previous research in several ways. First, while the cultural-developmental approach lays out life-course trajectories, the approach can readily be used to study more specific developmental periods. This study was the first to home in on the transition from middle childhood to early adolescence which is an important, perhaps even “sensitive” period, for cultural learning (Goyal et al., 2019; Minoura, 1992). Second, research on the moral reasoning of children in India—a majority world country of over a billion inhabitants—is scarce. Yet, as described below, research suggests that Indian views of morality are pluralistic and distinctive in ways that are fruitful for testing the cultural-developmental approach as well as providing new knowledge. Third, research on the influence of SES on children’s moral reasoning has been limited, and the inclusion of Indian low-SES children from slum communities is exceptionally rare (Kapadia, 2019; Nolan, 2015). Yet, their everyday lives—as also described below—are vastly different from those of children from higher SES backgrounds in ways that may well impact moral development.

We start with a review of the cultural-developmental approach. This is followed by descriptions of the Indian context and moral worldview, and of relations between social class and morality. It is important to note at the outset that culture is defined here as beliefs and behaviors that a community constructs, institutionalizes, and aims to pass on to the next generation (Goodnow, 2010; Miller et al., 2021). Of course, individual members of a culture vary in their beliefs and behaviors, as scholars addressing cultural issues have long observed (Gramsci, 1971). Also, an important source of variation both within and across cultures is access to power (Causadias, 2020). Power differentials occur along lines such as region of the world, nationality, and socioeconomic status. We list all groups—cultural and otherwise—in alphabetical order when possible in order to avoid any suggestion of a preference for some groups over others or a presumption of a power differential. There is a tendency for more powerful cultural groups to be mentioned first (Jensen, 2015).

The cultural-developmental approach

Based on a synthesis of findings from different research traditions, the cultural-developmental

approach lays out developmental trajectories for the three Ethics of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity (Jensen, 2008, 2015). These trajectories are flexible rather than fixed because, as explained below, they are conceptualized as “templates” that accommodate cultural differences.

The three ethics involve different, albeit not incompatible, conceptions of a person. The Ethic of Autonomy involves a focus on persons as individuals. Accordingly, specific types of moral reasons within this ethic include the well-being, interests, and rights of individuals (self or other), and fairness between individuals. The Ethic of Community focuses on persons as members of social groups, such as family and society. Here moral reasons include duty to others, and concern with the welfare, interests, and customs of groups. The Ethic of Divinity focuses on persons as spiritual or religious entities, and reasons encompass divine and natural law, lessons in sacred texts, and the goal of spiritual purity (Jensen, 1995; Shweder, 1990).

Research has shown the presence of the three ethics in persons of different ages from a wide variety of cultures, including Brazil, Finland, Germany, India, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and the United States (Arnett et al., 2001; Bhangaokar & Kapadia, 2009; DiBianca Fasoli, 2018; McKenzie, 2019; Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2015; Schwarz et al., 2020; Vainio, 2003; Vasquez et al., 2001). Research has also demonstrated the utility of the three ethics in examining differences in moral reasoning in groups within countries, including groups of different socio-economic and religious backgrounds (Haidt et al., 1993; Jensen & McKenzie, 2016). Additionally, surveys have confirmed that moral reasons provided by a nationally representative sample of American adults (Padilla-Walker & Jensen, 2016), and by convenience samples of different ages in countries such as Brazil, Israel, Japan, Macedonia, New Zealand, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States differentiate into factors that fit the three ethics (Guerra et al., 2013; Guerra & Giner-Sorolla, 2010, 2015; Schwarz et al., 2020).

The cultural-developmental approach describes moral development in terms of changes and consistencies in the *degree* of use of the three ethics over the life course. In other words, it addresses quantitative changes in the use of the three ethics. The approach also speaks to the specific *types* of moral reasons used within an ethic. Within the Ethic of Community, for example, reasoning in terms of one’s duty to others is qualitatively different from reasoning in terms of one’s desire to avoid social sanctions.

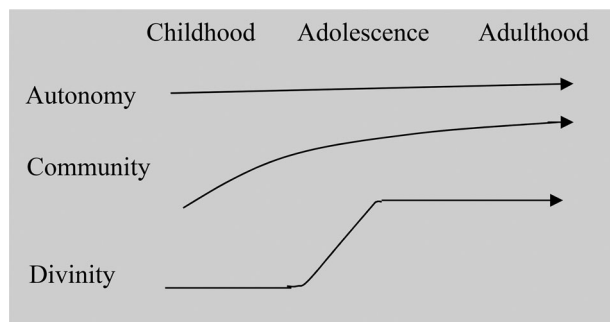


Figure 1. The cultural-developmental template of moral reasoning.

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). (This is also the case for subsequent figures).

(Examples of types of reasons within each ethic can be seen in the first column of Table 2).

Figure 1 shows the developmental template for degree of use of each ethic (Jensen, 2008, p. 290). The cultural-developmental proposal is that the Ethic of Autonomy emerges early in life and remains relatively stable across adolescence and adulthood. However, the specific types of Autonomy reasons used are likely to change with age. Longstanding lines of research show that children from across cultures speak about harm to the self and interests of the self (Colby et al., 1983; Turiel, 2002), as well as the needs and interests of other individuals (Carlo, 2006; Miller, 1994; Thompson, 2012). As children grow into adolescence and adulthood, they continue to reason in terms of the well-being of the self and other individuals (Eisenberg et al., 1995; Jensen, 1995; Vasquez et al., 2001; Walker et al., 1995; Zimba, 1994). They may also use other Autonomy-oriented concepts in their moral reasoning more frequently as they become older. For example, research suggests that American adolescents and adults are more likely than children to reason about individual rights and equity (Killen, 2002; Walker, 1989). While these concepts may not prevail across cultures, research has indicated that adolescents and adults in cultures such as India and Zambia give consideration to equity and justice (Miller & Luthar, 1989; Zimba, 1994).

The Ethic of Community, according to the cultural-developmental approach, increases with age both in degree of usage and the diversity of types of reasons. Developmental and cultural research shows that young children talk about Community concepts related to family (Miller et al., 1990; Olson & Spelke, 2008; Shweder et al., 1990). By late childhood and

adolescence, Community concepts related to non-familial groups such as friends and work colleagues are added (Carlo, 2006; Chen, 2011; Rubin et al., 2013; Schlegel, 2011). Longitudinal research in the United States has shown that older adolescents and adults also reason with reference to society as a whole (e.g., Eisenberg et al., 1995).

The Ethic of Divinity remains insufficiently studied in moral psychology. In cultures that emphasize scriptural authority or where people conceive of supernatural entities (e.g., God) as largely distinct from humans (e.g., omniscient and omnipotent), the cultural-developmental approach proposes that the Ethic of Divinity will be low among children and will then rise in adolescence to become similar to adult use of this ethic (Jensen, 2008). One reason is that in such religious cultures, the 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. Recent research with children, adolescents, and adults from American evangelical communities has provided support for the cultural-developmental proposal. One study found that evangelical children almost never reasoned in terms of the Ethic of Divinity in response to either public issues (moral issues where judgments are applied to people in general) or private issues (where judgments are made for oneself about one's moral experiences), whereas evangelical adolescents and adults made frequent use of this ethic (Jensen & McKenzie, 2016). Another study with evangelical child-parent dyads found that parents, but not children, frequently introduced Divinity reasoning in conversations about moral scenarios. This study also showed how parents in various ways reframed their children's Autonomy reasoning in an Ethic of Divinity light, thereby suggesting that "social-communicative processes" may contribute to a rise in the Ethic of Divinity in adolescence (DiBianca Fasoli, 2018, p. 1671). As described below, however, the cultural-developmental approach also specifies that the above age pattern may not apply in cultures such as India because conceptions of and practices pertaining to the supernatural are different.

Thus, the cultural-developmental approach is not a one-size-fits-all model. Instead, the developmental trajectories in Figure 1 are proposed as templates that accommodate the different constellations of ethics held by culturally diverse peoples. Specifically, the point of emergence of each trajectory and their slopes of development depend on the prevalence of the three

ethics within a culture and the hierarchy among them. For example, the approach predicts a particularly early and strong emergence of the Ethic of Community within cultures that value interdependence relatively more, as has been found among Taiwanese toddlers (Miller et al., 2012). Also as detailed above, a notable upsurge in the Ethic of Divinity has been observed among adolescents in American evangelical communities, where adults hierarchize the Ethic of Divinity above the Ethics of Community and Autonomy. However, in American mainline protestant communities where Autonomy and Community are hierarchized above the Ethic of Divinity among adults, Divinity reasoning remains low among adolescents (Jensen & McKenzie, 2016). In sum, the cultural-developmental approach provides developmental templates that need to be merged with knowledge of a culture in order to generate reasonably precise hypotheses.

The Indian context and moral worldview

India is a diverse society that encompasses many different moral concepts (Paranjpe, 2013). The available research suggests that all three Ethics of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity are prevalent in India, and that spiritual and material conceptions of persons and the world are commonly fused (Jensen, 1998). We now turn to the implications of this research for the hypotheses for the present study.

Several cross-cultural studies have found that Indian adults, like adults in the United Kingdom and the United States, regard transgressions pertaining to justice and individual rights as moral. Indian participants, however, were significantly more likely to regard violations pertaining to interpersonal relationships, responsibilities to others, and social hierarchy as moral (Laham et al., 2010; Miller et al., 1990; Miller & Luthar, 1989). These findings indicate that both behaviors involving Ethic of Autonomy considerations and behaviors involving Ethic of Community considerations are deemed to be moral in Indian society.

Furthermore, research has shown that Indian adults often invoke both Autonomy and Community considerations in response to moral issues. A questionnaire study with Indian college students found that they overwhelmingly preferred solutions to moral dilemmas that blended individual and collective considerations (87%), as compared to solutions that focused solely on individual (12%) or collectivistic (1%) considerations (Sinha & Tripathi, 1994). Also, Panda

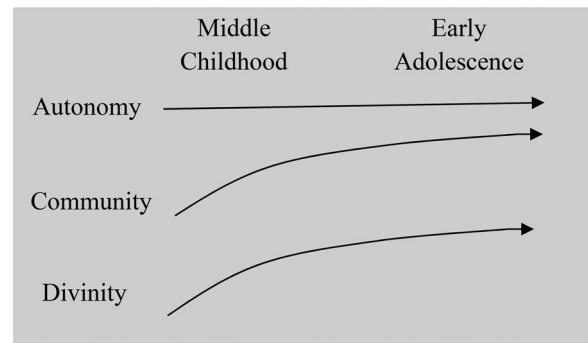


Figure 2. Hypothesized expression of the template among Indian participants in middle childhood and early adolescence.

(2013) examined the usage of *madhyam marg* in Indian adults' understanding of "critical incidents" in their lives, as well as the usage of the concept in scriptural and folk narratives. *Madhyam marg* may be translated into English as finding a middle path when faced with a dilemma. Panda's analysis indicates that Indian adults and traditional narratives aim for the development of a *madhyam marg* consciousness that balances goals of the individual and the collective.

A recent interview study that included both adolescents and adults, however, suggests that there may be age differences. While Indian adults responded to moral dilemmas by expressing equal concern for the pursuit of personal goals and role-related responsibilities, adolescents invoked autonomy-oriented considerations more than community-oriented ones (Kapadia & Bhangaokar, 2015).

Ethics of Autonomy and Community, then, seem readily present in Indian society, and it may be that adulthood is when the Ethic of Community reaches equal prominence with the Ethic of Autonomy. Based on the available findings from India and the cultural-developmental template, we thus hypothesized that the children in middle childhood and early adolescence would be similar in their use of the Ethic of Autonomy, and that the older children would use the Ethic of Community more than the younger ones. These hypotheses are depicted in Figure 2.

As also shown in Figure 2, we did not expect the Ethic of Divinity primarily to emerge in early adolescence as proposed in the original cultural-developmental template (see Figure 1). As described above, the original template depicted the development of the Ethic of Divinity in cultures that largely conceptualize supernatural entities in abstract ways and as distinct from humans. In long-standing Indian religious and philosophical traditions, however, the material and the spiritual are relatively merged, as compared to Western traditions (Paranjpe, 2013; Rao & Paranjpe,

2016). For example, *Dharma*, has been a central organizing concept in Indian society for several millennia and continues to have present-day salience (Bhangaokar & Kapadia, 2009; Bhatia, 2000; Chatterjee, 1995; Saraswathi et al., 2011). While *Dharma* is a concept that has multiple interpretations and cannot easily be translated into English, it encompasses living in accordance with cosmic law. As a central life goal, *Dharma* integrates the material and the immaterial in that it involves a balanced pursuit of material prosperity (*artha*), pleasure (*kāma*), and spiritual liberation (*moksha*).

Tripathi and Ghildyal (2013) have also argued that many practices in Indian society reflect the idea that divinity is an immanent part of nature, persons, and relationships. This is reflected in the many ways that religiosity coalesces with everyday activities (Bhangaokar, 2020; Misra & Gergen, 1993). Religious devotion commonly finds expression in tangible activities, such as feeding, bathing, and dressing the Gods. There are many places within and outside the home for worship, including household shrines, temples, and roadside shrines. Natural phenomena, such as trees, are sometimes shrines or places viewed as having holy qualities. There are also a variety of persons seen to have God-like status or special connections with the Gods, including gurus, *sadhus* (renouncers), and temple priests. Thus, as depicted in Figure 2, Indian children may reason about moral issues in terms of Ethic of Divinity concepts from early on, including in middle childhood, because these concepts are tied repeatedly to everyday phenomena (Jensen, 2008, 2011; Saraswathi et al., 2011; Shweder et al., 1990). With age, including in adolescence, Ethic of Divinity reasoning may then increase further, as depicted in Figure 2.

Social class and moral reasoning

Research across countries indicates that views of the self as autonomous rise with socioeconomic development (Santos et al., 2017). With respect to use of the three Ethics, research in Thailand found that high-SES urban adolescents used the Ethic of Autonomy more than low-SES rural adolescents, whereas the low-SES adolescents used the Ethic of Community more than their high-SES age-mates (McKenzie, 2018). Similarly, in a study in Brazil, high-SES adults reasoned more in terms of Autonomy and less in terms of Community than low-SES adults (Haidt et al., 1993). These findings indicate that the role of social class on the development of the three ethics merits closer examination.

In India, research on the relation of social class to children's moral reasoning is rare, and studies with low-SES children are virtually non-existent. The daily lives of low-SES and high-SES Indian children, however, are very different in ways that seem likely to influence their moral reasoning. As detailed below in the Method section, the present low-SES children lived in slum communities and their families had very low incomes. Unlike the high-SES children, most of the low-SES children did not attend school and none attended regularly. School is a context where teachers and peers often provide exposure to relatively diverse ways of thinking and behaving, and where a common goal is for individuals to continuously acquire new knowledge and skills. Instead of attending school, the low-SES children worked in or outside their households. When children are in a work context, there is typically a premium on obeying adult directives. At the same time, children's labor is valuable to their families' livelihood and income.

A study focusing on parenting found that low-SES Indian families were more likely than high-SES families to emphasize benevolence, whereas high-SES families were more likely to value truthfulness (Srivastava et al., 1996, as cited in Misra & Mohanty, 2000). Observations of children's behaviors in school have also established that low-SES children were more cooperative and less competitive, compared to high-SES children (Pal et al., 1989; Srivastava & Lalnunmawii, 1989, as cited in Misra & Mohanty, 2000). Based on these findings, we hypothesized that low-SES children would show higher use of the Ethic of Community and lower use of the Ethic of Autonomy, compared to high-SES children.

We did not propose any difference between the two SES groups for the Ethic of Divinity because religious beliefs continue to influence child-rearing and socialization across social classes in spite of rapid economic and social changes to Indian society (Albert et al., 2007; Pande, 2013; Saraswathi & Ganapathy, 2002). Finally, we did not propose any hypotheses with respect to the interaction of age and SES as no relevant research is available.

Method

Research design

The present study was a cross-sectional interview study. A cross-sectional design was used for several reasons. First, the age-gap between children in middle childhood and early adolescence is unlikely to constitute a cohort difference that would otherwise be a

confound with development. Second, the present study asks novel research questions which a cross-sectional design is well-suited to address in an efficient manner, whereas a longitudinal approach would be unwarranted in terms of its cost and the length of time required. Third, the inclusion of low-SES children from an Indian slum community requires extensive efforts to establish trust, and the transient living conditions of these children and their families makes it essentially impossible to follow them longitudinally. In-depth interviews were employed because they are conducive to the establishment of trust, and they provide detailed insight into participants' reasoning as well as choice of words and expressions. As such, interviews—while time-consuming—are helpful for generating ecologically valid and nuanced knowledge.

Participants

The sample consisted of 144 children in the city of Vadodara, Gujarat, India. It was divided evenly ($n=72$) between children in middle childhood ($M=8.22$ years, $SD=0.61$) and early adolescence ($M=11.54$, $SD=0.50$). Each age group had an equal number of children from high- and low-SES backgrounds ($n=36$). There was also an equal distribution of boys and girls within each age and SES group.

With respect to SES, the average monthly family income of the high-SES children was Indian rupees 80,000 (approximately US \$1,090). For comparison purposes, a typical (median) urban household in Gujarat earned Indian rupees 56,500 (approximately \$770) (Desai et al., 2010). High-SES parents had obtained bachelors or professional degrees and were primarily employed in business and medical professions. The average monthly family income of the low-SES children was Indian rupees 4,000 (approximately US \$50) which is below the international poverty line (World Health Organization, 2021). Among these parents, 54% had no formal education, 30% had attended primary school, 13% had attended high school, and 3% had completed 12th grade. The majority was occupied as self-employed vegetable vendors and unskilled laborers (e.g., domestic help, sweepers, and workers in grocery shops). Ten percent were unemployed.

Given the differences in the daily contexts of high- and low-SES children in India, the two groups had to be recruited differently. High-SES children attended school regularly and were recruited through a private, English-medium school. The children in middle childhood were in third grade and the early adolescents

were in sixth grade. (Private English-medium schools have gained popularity as high- and middle-class urban Indians regard English as the global language and send their children to these schools). Children who expressed an interest in participating after an orientation about the study received a description of the project and a consent form to show their parents. Subsequently, the researchers contacted parents by phone. Children who returned consent forms signed by their parents were interviewed.

Most of the low-SES children did not attend school and none attended regularly, because they assisted their parents at work or did household tasks at home. Consequently, low-SES children were not recruited through school. Instead, peer leaders (39%) were first recruited through a local nonprofit organization that provides educational assistance in slum communities. In turn, the peer leaders helped recruit additional participants (61%) from the community. This snowballing approach was crucial because the peer leaders helped establish rapport with low-SES families. Parents or other adults responsible for the children provided informed oral consent (in case of illiterate adults) or written consent.

Procedure

Prior to the start of the study, it received Institutional Review Board approval. High-SES children were interviewed at school, and low-SES children were interviewed at home. Children decided whether to be interviewed in English, Gujarati, or Hindi. The latter two are the most common local languages.

Interviews were tape recorded. In the low-SES community, researchers familiarized children with the recording device before starting the actual interviews in order that they would not be distracted by the unknown technology. Researchers also spent extra time at the outset habituating the low-SES children to the question-answer format of an interview, because the children were not used to being asked their opinions.

Materials

In line with the aims of the study, researchers sought to elicit emic moral concepts rather than only using etic ones. Emic concepts encompass the indigenous concepts that people in a culture use. In contrast, etic concepts are the ones that researchers have formulated prior to going into a culture to do research, and which they now intend to use in studying a new

culture. Thus, the present interview materials were not constructed on the basis of etic conceptions of the realm of moral issues or by contrasting predetermined types of moral issues (e.g., deontological versus utilitarian, or justice versus helping). While research focused on etic conceptions can be useful, the present goal was to elicit as many of the children's different and indigenous moral reasons as possible. Interview materials focused on a priori etic definitions and contrasts would have risked overlooking moral issues and reasons of importance to the present children.

The children participated in an interview about five scenarios that involved moral dilemmas. The scenarios were developed through an extensive process aimed at ensuring that they were: 1) germane to the everyday experiences of the children in the present Indian context, 2) readily understood by children across age and SES groups, and 3) sufficiently diverse to elicit all or most of the children's different types of reasons.

The first step in developing the scenarios involved a survey of research in India and elsewhere to identify common moral issues and dilemmas. Next, informal discussions were conducted with children representing the present age and SES groups about their familiarity with these issues and dilemmas, as well as additional moral experiences they wished to describe. Children spoke of real-life experiences and concepts that they deemed as moral in their everyday lives.

Based on this extensive information, the researchers generated an initial pool of 20 scenarios. Focus groups and individual pilot interviews with children, again representing the age and SES groups, were used to reduce this pool to the five scenarios that best met the above three selection criteria. This rigorous process of formulating and finalizing the scenarios ensured that the scenarios were culturally and developmentally appropriate for participants. The children who took part in the development of the scenarios did not participate in the interviews for the present study.

Briefly, one scenario described a child on the way to play an important soccer match. On the way, the child finds an injured kitten. The dilemma is whether to help the kitten or proceed to the match. In a second scenario, a child stops in the park to play with friends and loses a packet of sweets intended for guests at home. The question is whether the child should take money from a wallet lying in the park to purchase new sweets. A third scenario takes place during the time of an Indian festival when a child unintentionally breaks a community idol of a God (*Ganesh*) made for the occasion. The dilemma is whether to tell adults in the neighborhood or remain

quiet. In a fourth scenario, a child has to decide whether or not to pass on their homework to a needy friend while the teacher is not looking. In the fifth scenario, a child eats some *prashad* before it is offered to God. *Prashad* is food that is supposed first to be offered to God in order to receive a divine blessing, and only subsequently to be eaten by worshipers. The dilemma is whether to tell the mother or to let her offer previously tasted *prashad* to God.

The scenarios were structured in a narrative form to keep the children's interest. They were initially written in English, then translated into Gujarati and Hindi, and finally validated by language experts. The order of presentation of scenarios and the gender of scenario protagonists were randomized.

For every scenario, children were asked to indicate the right moral action for the protagonist (moral judgment), and to explain why (moral reasoning). Follow-up questions encouraged children to discuss all their moral reasons and to elaborate. For example, if participants spoke of duty, they were asked to explain who had a duty to whom, and the nature of the duty. Duty, as will be described later, was an important concept. But that also makes it all the more important to flesh out the diverse moral meanings pertaining to duty. As much as possible, researchers used children's words when asking follow-up questions about moral reasons in order to gain insight into their terminology and ways of thinking, as well as to avoid imposing terminology and new ideas. For example, when children used the indigenous concept of *paap*, which pertains to God's punishment and will be more fully described below, researchers would use the word when asking children to describe what they meant by it.

Coding

All interviews were transcribed verbatim, and interviews in Gujarati and Hindi were subsequently translated into English. Some Gujarati and Hindi terms and phrases were retained in the English transcripts to preserve notable indigenous concepts.

Moral reasons were coded with the manual for the three Ethics of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity (Jensen, 2008, 2015). The original development of the coding manual was based on a comprehensive review of cross-cultural literature on moral reasoning that included research in India. The manual consists of the three major codes or ethics. It also contains 44 "subcodes:" 15 for Autonomy, 13 for Community, and 16 for Divinity. Additionally, it provides guidance for

Table 1. Degree of use of three ethics: Means (standard deviations) and main effects.

Ethic	Age		F	η^2	SES		F	η^2
	Middle Childhood	Early Adolescence			High	Low		
Autonomy	3.01 (2.03)	4.02 (2.31)	2.66	.02	4.26 (2.21)	2.77 (1.98)	3.80*	.03
Community	1.01 (1.03)	1.52 (0.15)	3.71*	.03	1.41 (1.07)	1.12 (1.13)	0.01	.00
Divinity	2.93 (1.97)	2.80 (2.27)	8.27**	.05	3.12 (2.37)	2.61 (1.81)	3.61 ⁺	.03

** $p < .01$. * $p < .05$. + $p < .10$.

researchers to create additional subcodes if needed based on their data. Subcodes are the equivalent of specific *types* of moral reasons (see Introduction). For the sake of clarity, we refer to types of reasons in the remainder rather than using the coding manual terminology of subcodes.

The coding manual provides a definition for each ethic and type of reason. Additionally, examples are provided for each type of reason. Classifying every moral reason both in terms of an ethic and a type aids in: 1) ensuring that all stated reasons are coded, 2) differentiating among reasons, and 3) determining that a reason is sufficiently well-elaborated to decide which one of the three ethics is invoked.

The transcribed interviews amounted to an average of 10 pages per participant, for a total of 1,140 pages of text to code. A total of 1,104 reasons were coded. Inter-rater reliability was assessed for two independent coders on 20% of randomly selected interviews. For the three ethics, Cohen's Kappa was .97. Differences between the coders were resolved through discussion. (All data are available from the first author.)

Results

Degree of use of the three ethics

To test the hypotheses, 2 (Age) X 2 (SES) multivariate analyses of covariance (MANCOVAs) were conducted. The dependent variables were use of each of the three ethics across the five scenarios.

Total number of reasons provided by participants was entered as a covariate. An a priori analysis of variance (ANOVA) had indicated two main effects. One was for age, $F(1, 136) = 7.63$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .11$ (middle childhood: $M = 6.70$, $SD = 2.80$, early adolescence: $M = 8.10$, $SD = 3.78$). The other main effect was for SES, $F(1, 136) = 17.17$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .05$ (high-SES: $M = 8.50$, $SD = 3.47$, low-SES: $M = 6.37$, $SD = 2.96$). Total number of reasons was entered as a covariate to ensure that any significant differences in the use of the three ethics could not be accounted for by some groups providing more reasons than others. It was a significant covariate in all analyses.

For the Ethic of Autonomy, as seen in Table 1, there was a significant main effect for SES. As hypothesized, high-SES children employed this ethic more than low-SES children. For the Ethic of Community, there was a significant main effect for age. As hypothesized, older children used this kind of reasoning more than younger children. With respect to the Ethic of Divinity, there was an unexpected main effect for age. Younger children used this ethic more than older ones. There was also an unexpected trend where high-SES children reasoned more in terms of Divinity than low-SES children. Figure 3 illustrates the expression of the cultural-developmental template among the younger and older participants.

Types of reasons used within each ethic

In order to delve into the types of reasons used within the three ethics, a two-step process was used. First, "majority types" were identified in the same manner as in past research (Jensen & McKenzie, 2016). Second, quotations by the children that referenced each majority type were culled from the interviews, and representative excerpts are presented. These excerpts are presented both to flesh out how the children spoke, and to point to the roles of culture, age, and SES in children's understandings of the three ethics in general and the majority types in particular.

In order to identify the majority types, the frequency with which the age and SES group used every type of reason was calculated (as described above the coding manual differentiates more than 40 types). Next, the types with the highest frequencies were added up until a threshold of 50% was reached. For example, for the older low-SES children we added frequencies starting with the most frequent type of reason (i.e., "Divinity: Punishment Avoidance from Gods" at 21.5%, as shown in the last column of Table 2) and moving downward until we had surpassed the sum of 50%. The cutoff was set at 50% because this captured the majority of types used and the remaining types were infrequent.

Table 2 shows the use of majority types. The sample as whole reasoned in terms of a total of 12 types. The children conceptualized each of the three ethics

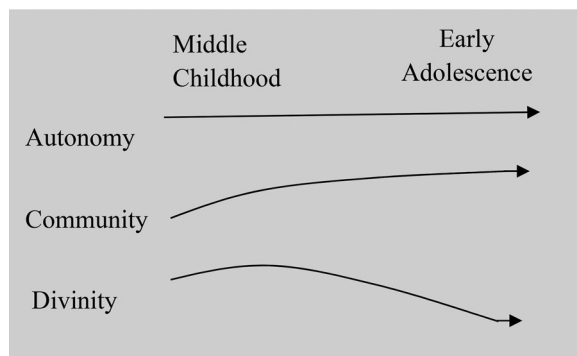


Figure 3. Resultant expression of the template among Indian participants in middle childhood and early adolescence.

in multiple ways. Specifically, the entire sample reasoned in terms of 6 majority types for Autonomy, 2 for Community, and 4 for Divinity.

Next, we turn to a more detailed elaboration of the majority types shown in Table 2 through a presentation of quotations by the children. For the sake of clarity, each majority type is underlined when first introduced. Also, indigenous words and expressions that were preserved in English translations of interviews are italicized with approximate translations in parentheses.

Majority types within the Ethic of Autonomy

There were no age group differences in use of the Ethic of Autonomy (as expected). Reciprocity was a majority type among both younger children (high-SES) and older children (low-SES), and they expressed the idea in similar words. One younger child explained that “I will help my friend with the homework because suppose someday I need help, she will also help me then.” An older child said, “[I will share] because someday when I don’t have something, he will share his things with me.” Both younger and older children also spoke of reciprocity in regard to animals. Here is how one child put it: “Animals give

us so much love, we should also give them the same love.” Commonly, then, children in middle childhood and early adolescence expressed the idea that you should treat others, animals and humans, as you would wish for them to treat you.

Punishment avoidance to the self was also a common concern among younger and older children. There are different ways of conceptualizing punishment avoidance within each of the three ethics, as described further below. Within the Ethic of Autonomy, the focus is on harm or cost to the individual person rather than on the social context of sanctions or God’s punishment. Younger and older children from both SES groups described how wrongdoing would result in punishment to the self from parents, especially mothers. They also mentioned teachers, and sometimes the police.

While low- and high-SES children referenced similar sources of punishment to the self, a closer reading of the interviews indicated that the two groups described different kinds of punishment. Children from the low-SES families primarily spoke of physical punishment. Here are three of many examples: “He should tell everyone that he broke the idol because mummy would beat me, right? *Phat phat* (sound made when being struck), like that she would beat me with a stick”; “No, we will not give the homework because the teacher will...beat us with a ruler”; and “She should not take the money, otherwise someone will see her and they will complain to the police and then at the police station she will have to take beatings, that’s why.” High-SES children did not speak of “beatings,” but instead mostly feared being “scolded.” For example, one child said, “I will tell my mother. Later if she finds out or if I have to tell her, then she may scold me more, saying that ‘why did you not stop me? I could have made fresh *prashad* again’.” Another described how “If I give [my homework] and the teacher finds out, then I will be scolded.”

Table 2. Majority use of types of reasons (percent).

Ethics	Types	Middle Childhood		Early Adolescence	
		High-SES	Low-SES	High-SES	Low-SES
Autonomy	Punishment Avoidance to Self	13.1	20.7	4.6	12.1
	Reciprocity	6.9			7.0
	Means-Ends Considerations: Ends of an Individual	6.5		7.2	
	Other Individual’s Psychological Wellbeing	4.8		7.2	
	Self’s Psychological Wellbeing			8.7	
Community	Conscience (Guilt)			4.3	
	Punishment Avoidance: Social Sanctions		8.0		7.8
	Duty to Others			5.5	5.9
Divinity	Punishment avoidance from God(s)	15.9	30.0	8.7	21.5
	God(s)’ Authority	7.3			
	Customary Authority of Religious/Spiritual Nature	4.2		5.2	
	Duty as a Spiritual/Religious Being			4.9	

The high-SES children's focus on being verbally reprimanded ties in with other ways that they spoke about the Ethic of Autonomy. Their focus was on the psychological side of persons, including aspirations, emotions, and internal motivations. As described above, high-SES children reasoned more in terms of Autonomy than low-SES children (as expected). Four kinds of reasons were majority types among high-SES children but not the low-SES children, and all of these invoked the psychological side of individuals.

High-SES children spoke of means-ends considerations where the end often centered on individual aspirations and accomplishments. For example, a child stated: "I will play the [soccer] match and win, then I will get selected for the national-level game and win medals." Another child highlighted the value of attaining independence, explaining that: "Everyone should know how to live independently and to make decisions independently. If we don't do our homework sincerely but [instead] depend on others, then in the future how will we be successfully independent?"

High-SES children also spoke of both another individual's psychological wellbeing and the self's psychological wellbeing. Speaking of the mother who had made *prashad*, one child said that "If [the] mother finds out she will feel bad. She will think 'Is this what I have taught my daughter?' She will be too sad." Speaking of the school friend, another child thought that "If I give her my homework then she will feel better." Just as they discussed negative and positive emotions experienced by other individuals, they did the same for the self. Using an indigenous concept, one child detailed how "If [I] stayed quiet [about breaking the idol of *Ganesh*] then I would be affected by it. I would get dreams about it at night, and it would give me *dukh* (sorrow or anguish)." Helping an injured kitten, one child exclaimed, "It would feel so good! If you are able to save someone's life through your efforts, then it would feel very good." A fourth majority type invoked by high-SES children (in early adolescence) pertained to one's conscience. At some length, these children spoke about an internal—and often enduring—feeling of guilt. Here is how one child, among several, discussed how the prospect of guilt ought to hinder a transgression: "You don't want to feel guilty for what you have done because it will bother you forever. You will keep thinking of how the owner of the wallet frantically searched for their wallet and the troubles they had because you stole their hard-earned money. That guilt will never go away."

Majority types within the Ethic of Community

The Ethic of Community was more common among older children than younger ones (as expected). There were two majority types within this ethic. Duty to others was only a majority type among early adolescents. These children often spoke of responsibilities that come from being a friend and family member. As one child made clear, "She is my friend and friends always help their friends. Otherwise, you are not really a friend." Invoking the indigenous concepts of *kartavya*, another child said, "She is a friend of mine... It's not like she was lazy or she was not serious about the homework, but she had a real reason. So it is my *kartavya* (duty) that I help her out, because she is my friend." Still another child likened friends to siblings, saying that "We should help our friends, they are like our brothers and sisters." Some children also spoke of their duties to parents. For example, one child said: "We should tell our parents because our parents... they do everything for us. We are who we are because of their hard work. We should not hide anything from them, it is our duty to tell them the truth even if it is something wrong you did."

In addition to speaking of duties to people to whom one is close, the adolescents also commonly described communal membership as obligating people to help those in need. Invoking indigenous concepts that cannot easily be translated into English words, a number of older children spoke of *faraj* and *zimme-dari*. We will return to these two concepts, as well as *kartavya*, in the Discussion. One child explained that "It is our *faraj* (duty) to help others in need. (Researcher: Also an animal?) Yes." Another child said, "Animals are very nice, and they give us a lot of love. We must take *zimme-dari* (responsibility) [and help]." Another child, invoking both indigenous concepts simultaneously, said, "Because it is everyone's *zimme-dari* (responsibility) and *faraj* (duty) to help everyone. We have to help others." Concisely, once child simply declared: "It is my *faraj* (duty) to help others."

Apart from duty to others, the other Ethic of Community majority type was punishment avoidance in the form of social sanctions. This was a majority type among low-SES children. Unlike reasoning pertaining to punishment avoidance within the Ethic of Autonomy, the moral reasoning here indicated a deep concern with one's status and inclusion in the neighborhood community. One child explained that "There will be someone who is around and [they] will see that I took the money. Then they will tell everyone and then everyone will call me 'Thief! Thief!' They

won't leave me, they will beat me. They will always call me a thief." In a vivid description, another child exclaimed: "I will not steal any money! I will go and tell my mother everything. What if people in my neighborhood see me and if they talked? They will always call me names and won't keep relations with me. *Beizzati ho jaegi* (I will lose honor)." Also concerned about maintaining honor, a child explained the importance of being honest about having broken the neighborhood idol of *Ganesh*: "If we lie, we are liars. Then everyone will call me a liar; *beizzati ho jaegi*." Low-SES children were similar to high-SES children in their degree of Ethic of Community reasoning (contrary to expectations). The use of majority types, however, showed that low-SES children were notably concerned with remaining in good standing within their neighborhood and avoiding dishonor and ostracism.

Majority types within the Ethic of Divinity

The Ethic of Divinity was used not only by older children, but also younger children (as expected). Younger children, in fact, surpassed older children in their use of Divinity (unexpectedly). Punishment avoidance from God(s) was a highly popular majority type among all children and certainly among younger ones. The children overwhelmingly spoke in terms of the indigenous concept of *paap*. For example, one child stated that "If we just take away someone's hard-earned money, then ... we will get *paap* (punishment from God). God will punish us for it." Another child explained that "We have to tell [that we broke the idol] because it is God's idol that has broken. [If we don't], then *Ganpati dada* (the God *Ganesh*) will teach us a lesson. Then we will fall ill, get high fever, vomiting, all that: *paap*." Still another child described how "If I see the injured kitten but choose to go for a [soccer] match instead of helping her, then that will be *paap*. God will make us a kitten in our next life, just like the dying kitten, and then no one will help us." According to the children, *paap* encompasses consequences that are both material and immaterial, involve both body and soul, and pertain to both this life and the next.

There was a trend (unexpected) for high-SES children to use the Ethic of Divinity more than low-SES children. Three kinds of reasons were majority types among high-SES children but not the low-SES children. High-SES children spoke of God(s)' authority, which entails following directives that God has provided as well as aiming to please and not displease

God. One child, for example, argued that "[He] should tell everyone that the idol broke because of him. He should not lie because then *Ganeshji* will feel bad that we lied to everyone. *Ganeshji* will feel very sad." (*Ji* is a suffix that indicates respect.) Another child spoke of God's anger, "God will definitely see her and then God will become angry. God will feel very bad and will think 'why should I eat food that is for me but tasted already by someone else?' God likes it more if we offer fresh food, with clean hands."

High-SES children also spoke of the importance of following customary authority of a religious or spiritual nature. The children often spoke in detail about common and tangible activities in the community and the home. One child described how "everyone [in the neighborhood] prays together in the evenings for the 10 days of this festival. That is how it has always been, it is a tradition that we follow every year. How can I not tell them that I broke the idol? If I tell them, we can follow the tradition and immerse the broken idol [in water]. Then we can together welcome a new idol and continue offering prayers." Another child elaborated on how "We can't offer tasted *prashad* to God. [The way we do it is that we] first put all [the food] that is made in front of God to make the offering. We then do *aarti* (light oil lamps that are offered to God), then we say some *mantras* (chants or phrases) and *shlokas* (verses). Then the cover over the *prashad* has to be opened a little bit, only for God to taste. And after saying a prayer, it can [then] be eaten by everyone."

The third majority type used only by high-SES children (older ones) pertained to duty as a spiritual or religious being. For example, one child stated: "All living beings are sacred because God gives them life. It is also said that God is present in everything in nature, including us and the kitten too. How can we then ignore the kitten that is hurt and maybe dying? We should help the kitten. It is our duty to do that. If we help the kitten then it is like service to God, which we must do to at least say thanks to God for what he has given us." Using the indigenous term of *kartavya* also mentioned above, one child stated that "We are not helpless like animals. We are humans and it is our *kartavya* to help. Once I have seen the [injured] kitten, I must save it."

Discussion

This study used the cultural-developmental approach to gain insight into the moral reasoning and development of Indian children in middle childhood and

early adolescence who were of high- and low-SES backgrounds. Three key findings stood out: 1) Older children reasoned in terms of a remarkably rich set of indigenous duty concepts, contributing to their using the Ethic of Community more than younger children. 2) Children in middle childhood already reasoned in terms of the Ethic of Divinity, likely due to the many ways that Indian culture incorporates divinity into everyday beliefs and behaviors. 3) Social class impacted Ethic of Autonomy reasoning. High-SES children used this ethic more than low-SES children and conceptualized the individual in independent and psychological terms; in contrast, low-SES children's view of autonomy often invoked fear of physical punishment.

These three key findings provide a sharp contrast to results from the majority of the moral development literature. This literature has overwhelmingly focused on concepts within the Ethic of Autonomy, such as harm, rights, and fairness. Perhaps because so many of the research participants have come from wealthy Western societies, research has seldom addressed the extent to which autonomy concepts are significantly premised on having economic resources (Henrich et al., 2010). Nor has this mainstream literature delved into diverse duty concepts or younger children's ability to address moral issues in terms of divinity.

Here, our use of the cultural-developmental approach allowed us to generate new hypotheses about the Indian children's moral development. Because the approach proposes templates that are flexible rather than one-size-fits all, our hypotheses took into account not only ontogeny but also culture and social class. Since the approach involves coding for specific types of reasons within each of the three Ethics of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity, we were able not only to examine the role of age and SES in use of the three ethics, but also illuminate diverse and indigenous reasons invoked by the children. In other words, the approach provided information about both quantitative and qualitative similarities and differences in moral reasoning among the age- and SES-groups. Jointly, the theory and methodology of the cultural-developmental approach revealed a side of children's moral reasoning that is largely missing in Western studies.

We now turn to an explication of the three key findings. Throughout the Discussion, we will describe questions for future research. Additionally, we will highlight two important future lines of research pertaining to processes of moral development and indigenous Indian moral concepts in separate sections.

The rise in Ethic of Community: Duty

The results supported the hypothesis that Ethic of Community reasoning rises with age. The present findings additionally showed that even though they were separated by only about three years, early adolescents explained their moral decisions more in terms of Community considerations than children in middle childhood. These findings open up to the possibility—which would be worthwhile following up in future research—that development of the Ethic of Community in the present Indian context increases rapidly in the course of adolescence.

The difference between the two age groups derived partly from older children reasoning in terms of a remarkably rich set of duty concepts, as shown by the analysis of children's majority types of reasons. Previous research has shown that children and adults in India regard a variety of interpersonal and pro-social behaviors as moral (e.g., Laham et al., 2010; Miller et al., 1990, 2011). Recent research has also shown that children in India, unlike the United States, experience a variety of social expectations as inherently part of the self (Goyal et al., 2019).

The present findings add to previous research by showing that the early adolescents, irrespective of SES, invoked a variety of indigenous duty concepts. They spoke of duties, for example, to protect others, to tell the truth, and to help. They spoke of duties that exist, for example, in relationships that involve children and parents, siblings, friends, strangers, and humans and animals. Perhaps most tellingly, the children already had an elaborate moral vocabulary pertaining to what in English would be collectively glossed as duty or responsibility.

Specifically, the early adolescents spoke of *faraj*, *zimmedari*, and *kartavya*. These concepts suffuse everyday life in India and find expression across socialization contexts, as we know from our research as well as living in India. For example, the concepts are common in Indian epics, such as the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. In the *Mahabharata*, while narrating the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna explains: "Human beings should never run away from performing their *kartavya* because performance of one's *kartavya* is the most important *dharma*" (Singh, 2017). Parts of the Indian epics as well as classic childhood stories, such as the *Jataka* and *Panchatantra* tales, are commonly narrated in Indian families. The title of one of the stories in the *Jataka* tales is "The *Kartavya* of a Son." Proverbs, too, give voice to the indigenous concepts pertaining to duty. One popular proverb states, "The person who runs

away from their *zimmedari* can never become the best.” This kind of proverb is commonly invoked by adults in their interactions with children. It is also commonly posted on bulletin boards in schools. Advertisements, Bollywood movies, and daily TV series are also rife with references to duty. Billboards sponsored by the government’s *Swaachha Bharat Abhiyaan* (Clean India Campaign) proclaim “Listen to our kind request, cleanliness is our collective *faraj*.” Political leaders, too, rely on duty to inspire their followers. Gandhi stated that “rights are not fundamental, it is *kartavya* that is fundamental.” It is a quote that subsequent politicians, including the current Prime Minister of India in a recent address to students, have invoked anew (Baruah, 2020). These examples, along with the quotations from the early adolescents in the present study, indicate that *faraj*, *zimmedari*, and *kartavya* are central to an Indian understanding of morality. Below when discussing future directions, we will elaborate on the need to study these indigenous concepts further, including ways they carry across the different ethics.

The early emergence of the Ethic of Divinity: Gods in the everyday

The Ethic of Divinity, as expected, was already used by middle childhood. The analysis of majority types and the children’s quotations lend support to the argument presented in the Introduction that this early emergence is tied to the way that divinity is conceptualized and practiced in India. The children echoed long-standing Indian religious and philosophical traditions that merge material and immaterial conceptions (Tripathi & Ghildyal, 2013). Thus, the children regarded divinity as immanent in nature when they explained how divinity is imbued, for example, in the self, other persons, and animals (such as kittens). The children’s moral reasoning also showed how they drew upon ways that religious devotion commonly finds expression in tangible activities that are part of everyday life. Thus, they described numerous religious practices within their homes and neighborhoods, including behaviors pertaining to food and the lighting of oil lamps, recitals of verses and chants, and the construction of and proper treatment of religious idols.

The children’s discussion of the indigenous concept of *paap* (punishment from God) further supports to this argument. Many children invoked *paap* in response to several of the moral scenarios. According to the children, *paap* ranges from falling ill with a

fever to abandonment by other people, to being reborn as an injured animal. *Paap*, in this view, encompasses the body and the soul, the concrete and the abstract, the present and the future. In short, Indian religious beliefs and behaviors seem to readily translate into Ethic of Divinity reasoning by middle childhood. In recent years, moral development researchers have focused on the emergence of Ethic of Autonomy concepts such as fairness and Ethic of Community concepts such as helping in the first years of life (Dahl, 2020; Hamlin & Tan, 2020; Vaish & Tomasello, 2014). Research addressing the potentially very early emergence of Ethic of Divinity concepts is lacking, and the present results suggest that such research could fruitfully include Indian samples.

Surprisingly, early adolescents reasoned less in terms of the Ethic of Divinity than children in middle childhood. This result was contrary to the hypothesis and merits future replication to better understand the developmental trajectory of the Ethic of Divinity among groups in India.

There was also an unexpected trend where Ethic of Divinity reasoning was used more by high-SES children than low-SES children. Additional research is necessary to know if this trend constitutes a valid difference. The present analyses, however, suggest two reasons why it might be. One has to do with the difference between the groups in economic resources. The high-SES children reasoned in terms of several majority types within the Ethic of Divinity that low-SES children did not employ. These included “God(s) authority” and “customary authority of a religious or spiritual nature.” As they spoke in terms of these types, the high-SES children made references, for example, to 10-day festivals, fresh food, oil lamps, and clean hands. While these references involve items and behaviors that members of low-SES communities also regard as part of religious devotion, members of these communities cannot purchase religious items or engage in religious behaviors on the same scale as high-SES communities. The references and many others in the interviews assume access to economic resources, and therefore emerge only in high-SES children’s moral reasoning. Compared to the low-SES families, the high-SES families had far more money to participate in religious events on special occasions and in daily life. Recall how one high-SES child (quoted in Results) explained that the mother “could have made fresh *prashad* again” to rectify her child having eaten some of the original food. In the slum community in which the present low-SES children lived, several families would typically need to pool their resources to

make *prashad*, and money may not be readily available to make more.

Apart from more economic resources, high-SES families also possess social resources or status that give them more access to religious places, practices, and religious leaders (such as family priests and gurus). This may be why high-SES children spoke of authority—their customary authority as well as divine authority. High-SES communities possess more authority. In contrast, low-SES communities have higher representation of lower castes who have traditionally faced religious restrictions, including constraints on religious participation, exclusion from temple premises, and untouchability.

Variations in the Ethic of Autonomy: Social class

The high-SES children used the Ethic of Autonomy more than the low-SES children, as expected. Multiple socialization contexts promoted autonomy in the lives of the high-SES children. Their parents had enrolled them in a private English-medium school. The curriculum and teaching styles of these schools follow a Western model of education, including emphasizing individual expression and achievement. The parents also promoted their children's extra-curricular activities. These often centered on the individual interests of the children as well as the potential for individual accomplishments. This was vividly exemplified by the high-SES child who advocated attending the soccer match in order to “win, [and] then get selected for the national-level game and win medals.” Often the high-SES families' routines were scheduled around their children's activities. In short, the high-SES children are coming of age in socialization contexts—family, school, extra-curricular groups, and globalization—that promote their individuality and autonomy. This helps to explain why a high-SES child, but not a low-SES child, would say that “Everyone should know how to live independently and to make decisions independently.” It also helps explain why the high-SES children, but not the low-SES children, used several majority types with the Ethic of Autonomy that pertained to the psychological well-being and emotions of individuals.

Not only did the low-SES children reason less in terms of the Ethic of Autonomy than the high-SES children, but the interviews showed that they commonly spoke of autonomy in terms of avoiding physical punishment. High-SES children also wanted to avoid punishment but spoke of being “scolded,” not “beaten” as did the low-SES children. A beating is

severe and perhaps reflects the potential severity of impact from low-SES children's transgressions. For example, the present low-SES children took care of infants and young children, and they worked to help provide income for their families. These are high-stakes activities. In this light, low-SES parents (and others in the community) may use physical discipline to be unambiguously clear that failure to do what a child is supposed to do might be devastating.

Beatings, as compared to scoldings, differ on two other notable dimensions. Scoldings can take quite a lot of time—something which low-SES parents do not have—as an adult and a child discuss the moral implications of and circumstances surrounding a behavior. Also, scoldings open up the possibility of a child voicing their questions, thoughts, and feelings. While this may not signify equality between an adult and a child, it does entail autonomy of expression for a child. As described in the Method section, the researchers had to familiarize the low-SES children with the interview format because they were not used to being asked their opinion. In sum, both quantitatively and qualitatively, the Ethic of Autonomy differed across social class.

One key implication for future research: Including more socialization contexts

Apart from the questions for future research described above, we now turn to what we regard as two key implications of the present findings for future research. The first pertains to processes of moral socialization (Raeff et al., 2020). While the present study was designed to provide in-depth insight into the nature and development of children's moral reasoning in India, the analyses also pointed to ways that socialization contexts were both similar and different for the high- and low-SES children. Figure 4 summarizes what the children's moral reasoning (described above) revealed to be their primary socialization contexts. The figure does not purport to capture all socialization contexts in the children's lives, nor does it entail that a socialization context only indicated for one of the SES groups does not have any impact on the other SES group. The figure depicts the socialization contexts of most importance to the present children as revealed by their moral reasoning.

The moral development literature has overwhelmingly focused on the micro-contexts of parents, schools, peers, and friends (DiBianca Fasoli, 2021; Jensen, 2015). The present findings, however, highlight the need to broaden this focus. Urban and high-

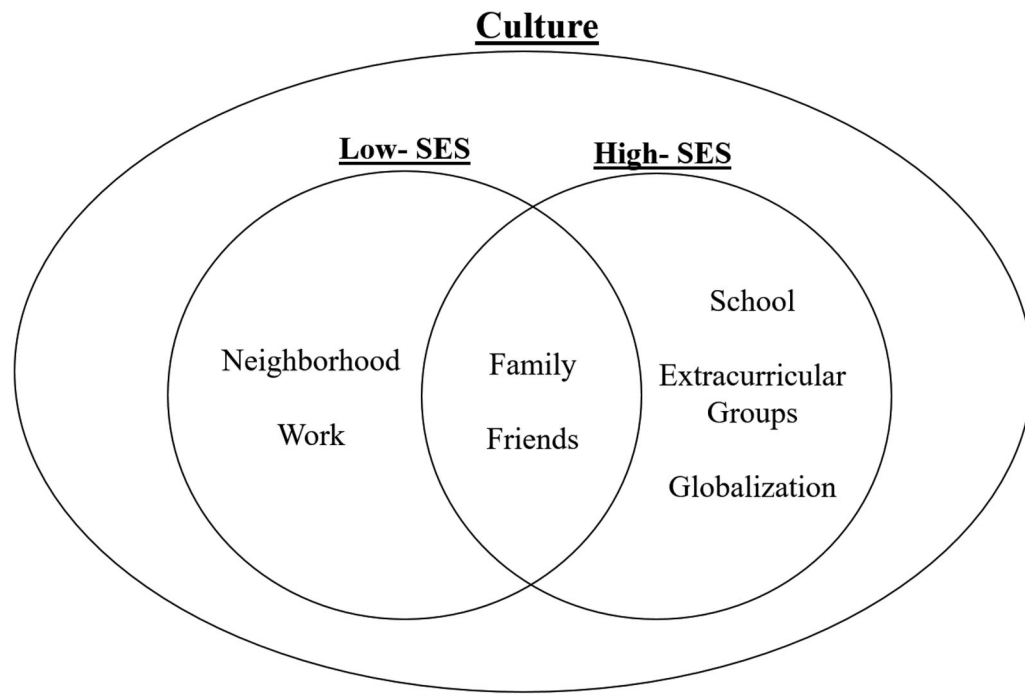


Figure 4. Primary socialization contexts for the development of moral reasoning among low- and high-SES participants.

SES children in many majority world countries are significantly influenced by globalization, which the present findings along with other recent research have shown to promote Ethic of Autonomy reasoning (McKenzie, 2018, 2019).

For low-SES children in majority world countries, neighborhood and work are often important socialization contexts. The present low-SES children lived in close-knit neighborhoods where families depended on one another for basic resources, such as water and food. Members of the community also helped one another find work. Mutual dependency and close living quarters, at least in part, explain why both the younger and older low-SES children (but not the high-SES children) reasoned in terms of social sanctions as a majority type. In their neighborhood, as they explained, someone will see what you are doing. If you transgress, neighbors may talk about you in negative ways, or shame you, or beat you. You may lose honor, *beizzati ho jaegi*. Understanding the importance of neighbors and work to low-SES children's daily lives and livelihood casts new light on their moral reasoning and development.

A second key implication for future research: Including more indigenous concepts

A second notable implication of the present findings is to examine in more detail the indigenous concepts pertaining to duty: *faraj*, *zimmedari*, and *kartavya*. As

described above, the Indian moral worldview is in many ways centered on duty. Within this worldview, duty is at the very core of *Dharma*, or cosmic law, described in the Introduction. The *Mahabharata*, the Indian epic mentioned above, describes a wide range of duties from following universal principles pertaining to truth and nonviolence to specific principles based on one's life stage and social roles (Radhakrishnan, 2008). As the present results reveal, indigenous concepts pertaining to duty were notable in the moral reasoning of early adolescents, but not among children in middle childhood.

In our view, future research on *faraj*, *zimmedari*, and *kartavya* would contribute important missing knowledge about their respective meanings and development, as well as interconnections among these indigenous concepts (Mistry, 2011; Raeff, 2011). For example, do adolescents and adults in India attribute the same meanings to *faraj*, *zimmedari*, and *kartavya*? And how are these duty concepts differentiated and integrated over the course of development? Research on the meanings and development of fairness, for example, is abundant. Duty, however, has received far less attention. Yet, it is a concept that may well be important across cultures, even if meanings and implications vary.

Furthermore, as the present children's quotations illustrated, reasoning in terms of some of the indigenous concepts pertaining to duty carry across ethics. Specifically, early adolescents spoke of *kartavya* within

both the Ethics of Community and Divinity. There is virtually no social science research on the concept of *kartavya*, as far as we are aware. One study focused on the interpersonal side of *kartavya* in terms of responsibilities to family and friends (Miller et al., 2011). Akin to the present findings, however, a case study of three adults in India also found that *kartavya* referenced both a person's social roles and connection to the divine (Pande, 2013).

The case study also suggested that in some interpretations *kartavya* entails behaving in selfless or altruistic ways. We think that future research on a moral concept, such as *kartavya*, that involves the co-occurrence of two ethics would be fruitful (Hickman & DiBianca Fasoli, 2015). When a concept carries across ethics, it may be particularly powerful in motivating moral behaviors, including difficult or demanding moral behaviors such as altruistic ones, precisely because it taps into more aspects of a person.

Implications for applied developmental science

To return to our point at the outset that research with diverse groups and cultures enhances psychological research and its applications (Thalmayer et al., 2021), we wish to highlight a couple of implications for applied developmental science based on the present findings. First, interventions and policies need to be attuned to and implemented in the contexts of relevance to children's lives. Here, SES played a significant role in the children's everyday social contexts. We already knew this to some extent. For example, this is why we recruited the low-SES children through a neighborhood-based NGO and by working with neighborhood peer leaders. Clearly, neighborhood and work contexts are places to reach children and families akin to the ones from the slum community in the present study. In contrast, high-SES children and families can readily be reached through school and extra-curricular contexts. Additionally, we believe that certain media, such as radio and television, provide a compelling context or means for applied interventions because most Indian families are exposed to some media whether at home, work, school, or other places. In short, applied programs must meet people in the places where they spend their time.

Additionally, applied programs will often benefit from "meeting" people through use of concepts of salience to their thinking, feelings, and everyday behaviors. Indigenous concepts pertaining to duty that are embedded in the Indian moral worldview would be culturally relevant, compelling—and therefore—

effective in bringing about behavioral and social change. For example, an advertisement by an Indian radio station uses a popular Bollywood movie dialogue to urge all Indians to get vaccinated and comply with COVID norms for the sake of a healthy family and society. The advertisement uses language that centers on one's *kartavya* as a family member and citizen. Such purposeful use of indigenous moral concepts in health, education, and social campaigns can have a powerful impact on individuals, thereby initiating positive change.

Limitations

The present study was cross-sectional. While the two age groups are unlikely to represent different cohorts, longitudinal research would more definitively address developmental change. While moral reasoning has been studied longitudinally in Europe and North America, we are not aware of any comparable efforts in India. As noted in the Introduction, some populations such as the present low-SES Indian children are virtually impossible to track longitudinally. They merit careful developmental research, even if such research cannot be longitudinal except perhaps for microgenetic designs.

Future research on participants' real-life moral experiences would provide additional insight into their moral reasoning. The present scenarios, as described earlier, were created through an extensive process to be highly salient to the everyday lives of all the children included here. Also, the use of scenarios meant that all children responded to the same moral issues, unlike what happens when participants are asked to discuss their own real-life moral experiences. As the interviews showed, children often discussed the scenarios by speaking of "I" and what they would do. Nonetheless, research on children's own moral experiences would provide additional insight into their actual lives and socialization contexts, and it would show the extent to which their reasoning depends on whether an issue involves the self or a protagonist in a story. The present results suggest that to arrive at an understanding of moral development among Indian participants—children, adolescents, or adults—that is inclusive of all of their moral reasons, future methods and analyses would benefit from the inclusion of an emic approach. Both scenarios that are salient to participants' everyday lives and participants' real-life moral experiences represent such emic approaches.

Finally, future research with a larger sample would increase the power of quantitative analyses. Here,

many of the analyses came out significant. Research using the present data collection and analysis approaches are highly time consuming, and this needs to be balanced against increasing sample size.

Conclusion

The ways that children reason morally about behaviors is influenced by cognitive and social commonalities that all children share, as illustrated by the cultural-developmental template. However, the emergence and unfolding of templates for the Ethics of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity depend upon the cultural beliefs and behaviors that communities construct, institutionalize, and aim to pass on to the next generation.

In contrast to the corpus of current literature on moral development, the present cultural-developmental study with Indian children contributes three key new findings. First, early adolescents reasoned in terms of a rich set of indigenous duty concepts which partly accounted for their higher use of the Ethic of Community, compared to children in middle childhood. Second, children in middle childhood already reasoned in terms of the Ethic of Divinity, regarding Gods as involved in their present and future everyday lives. Third, high-SES children reasoned more in terms of the Ethic of Autonomy than low-SES children. While low-SES children mainly were concerned with avoiding physical discipline, the high-SES children spoke extensively of individual interests, emotions, and aspirations. Thus, the present results highlight that ontogenetic moral development is shaped by culture and social class.

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