

1. Citation:

Derryberry, W. P. et al. (2005, Fall). Moral judgement developmental differences between gifted youth and college students. *The Journal of Secondary Gifted Education*, XVII(1), 6-19.

2. Abstract:

“In order to better understand contributing factors of moral judgment development, gifted youth and college students were compared. ACT scores, attributional complexity, and descriptors of personality were assessed among 140 college students and 97 gifted youth. Important distinctions favoring the gifted sample were seen among aspects of all considered variables. Stepwise hierarchical regression models noted that there was variability in how these variables in the gifted sample relative to the college sample. Efforts to understand populations prone to early advancement, such as the gifted, are recommended in the hopes of transferring gained knowledge to other populations” (Derryberry et al., 2005, p. 6).

3. Summary:

- a. **Purpose of Study:** Derryberry et al. (2005) attempted to explore the differences in moral judgment development between college students and gifted youth on moral judgment development by assessing their level of formal education, intellectual faculties, attributional complexity, and personality traits. The researchers also attempted to determine how or if, these differences impacted their moral judgement development.

- b. **Framework:**

In order to compare the differences between the moral judgment development of college students and gifted high school youth, Derryberry et al. (2005) based their study on prior research conducted by Lawrence Kohlberg and neo-Kohlbergian researchers, including Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau, & Thoma (1999) and the success of the Defining Issues Test (DIT) to better “understand the psychology of morality by induction, . . . [and] what underlying factors are fundamental contributors to one’s moral judgment development? Also, how and under what situations are such factors likely to impact growth?” (p. 6). In addition, Derryberry et al. (2005) used prior literature on college students and youth (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Rest, Deemer, Barnett, Spickelmier, & Volker, 1986) (Howard-Hamilton, 1994; Narvaez, 1993; Tirri & Pehkonen, 2002). The following are the primary research questions of this study:

1. Are there differences between college students and gifted youth on indices of moral judgment and indices related to moral judgment?

2. Are there differences between college students and gifted youth in how certain variables account for or predict moral judgment? (p. 10)

- c. **Population and Sample Size:** Both student samples were taken from an institution of higher learning in the Southeastern region of the United States. 140 college students were compared with 97 summer program gifted high school youth.
- d. **Overview of methods:** The researchers examined a total of 97 gifted youth from a summer program held at a Southeastern university, 52 females and 45 males, grades 7 through 10 who achieved cut-scores on ACT or SAT. A sample of 140 college students (109 female and 31 male) ages 17 to 52, from the same Southeastern university were also examined. In order to assess moral judgment development, the researchers used The Defining Issues Test (DIT; Rest et al., 1999). The SAT and ACT were used to assess intellectual ability, while the attributional complexity scale allowed the researchers to determine the student's "complexity of thought involved in explaining human behavior" (p. 12) and personality descriptors to determine each student's self-assessed personality traits.
- e. **Variables**
 - i. One background variable used by the authors was the role of gender. Derryberry et al. (2005) address the role of gender, based on Gilligan's (1977) concept that suggests, "distinct gender differences should be seen for Kohlbergian-based considerations of moral judgment development" (p. 13).
 - ii. The Independent/Predictor variables used by the authors include ACT or SAT scores, intellectual faculties, attributional complexity, and self-assessed personality traits and DIT scores.
 - iii. The outcome of this study was to determine the impact that the independent variable shown above had on moral judgment development.
- f. **Findings/Results:** The findings of this study show that Formal Education and intellectual faculties accounted for most of differences in the DIT scores. This study also showed that intellectual ability, including the ACT scores, which were higher for the gifted youth, had a stronger impact on gifted youth's moral judgment development than college students, while the social activities on campus more greatly impacted college students. It should also be noted, that no significant gender differences were found on any of the ACS indices.

- a. **Implications:** The implications of this research demands increased studies that explore additional factors impacting the improved DIT scores for gifted youth. This will also assist in preparing college students to attain a higher level of moral judgment development.

4. Critiques & Limitations:

- a. **Conceptual:**
The findings of this study are limited in that the authors did not examine the socio-economic status, or family background of the student samples that were used. There may or may not be some relationship between these components and moral judgment development that would more greatly impact the outcome than academic ability. In addition, although, the authors verify the validity of the DIT, there is still some question as to whether or not this test is an accurate measure of an individual's Moral Judgment Development.
- b. **Data:** The data obtained from the stepwise hierarchical regression models yield significant information and comparisons of the moral judgment development of the gifted high school youth and college students.
- c. **Analysis:** Overall, this study proves to yield important information and a good comparison of the moral judgment development of the gifted high school youth and college students. This study can also serve as a basis for new research that explores additional factors that increase the level of moral judgment of gifted youth.
- d. **Interpretation:** The logic of the researcher's arguments, seems viable as it relates to academic ability and self-assessed personality tests. However, there needs to be more information on the student's background and socio-economic status to further explore the success level of the gifted high school youth.
- e. **Application:** This study may be beneficial for public school and college educators to understand how to improve a student's moral judgment development. However, the gifted youth who scored better on the ACT and SAT than college students,

5. Follow-Up

- a. **Little Questions:**
What unexplored factors determine why gifted youth score better on ACT and SAT scores?

b. **Big Questions:**

Since gifted youth scored higher on ACT and SAT and in several ways, showed a faster rate of moral judgment development, can it be assumed that IQ/intellectual ability is the dominant factor in moral judgment development for all student populations?

- c. **Next Steps:** Additional research on gifted youth and their moral judgement development is needed to answer why or why not these students rank higher on the SAT and ACT and DIT (check this). Issues associated with socio economic status, family background, and IQ need to be explored to measure the validity and reasons behind why this student population excels in the area of moral judgment development. Understanding how these findings can be applied to other student populations.

Annotation Author(s): Alethea Kilgore
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