

Memorable Moral Messages and Moral Position among Collegiate Students

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Abstract – Moral development plays an important role in shaping life decisions including moral positions. Different moral positions are results of individual perspectives of right and wrong. In Kohlberg's Moral Development theory, parents are considered to have more time and authority to teach their younger children of what is good and bad, but as part of child's growth and development, moral maturity occurs. Thus, this study is about the relationship of moral messages recalled by 395 selected tertiary students from their parents and their moral position on selected moral issues. Specifically, the study aimed to know the moral messages recalled by the students, primary source of their moral messages among their parents, their moral positions on selected issues, and the relationship between memorable moral messages and moral positions. Moral messages were categorized into five moral domains namely: Relational Ethics, Self-honoring behavior, Honesty/Fraudulence, Harmful Acts, and Respecting Higher Authority while selected moral issues are Abortion, Homosexuality, Premarital Sex, and Substance Abuse. These moral messages and moral issues were identified through related literatures and Focus Group Discussion (FGD). Then, it was used in modifying the survey, parallel to Philippine culture. Interestingly, the findings of the study show that there are only few moral messages related to the moral position of the respondents. Therefore, this was concluded that other sources that could be significant with the respondents moral position on selected moral issues.

Keywords - moral messages, moral position, moral issues, memorable, moral development.

INTRODUCTION

Parents are considered to have an important role in a child's moral socialization. Since they are the most closely related in the child's character, and they socialize more often with their child. According to Oladipo (2009) parents provide concrete and exact models or examples for their child's moral character development [1]. Also, parents explore other examples or models of what character trait they want to learn or to embody of their child. When a parent's provides immediate response in their child's violation and gives clear reasoning in such situations it may result in a responsive moral development. With this, a good family interaction concludes to motivate the child to listen and adapt the moral teachings of the parents and considered as the first moral teachers [2].

Command statements that the parents communicated to their child are ought to be followed by the child and are believed by the parents as right conduct. Some messages from the parents can recall

and believe to build child's moral which can influence the process of thoughts. This memorable messages is defined as messages that have been passed through generations and received by a child on its early stage of life [3]. This communicated messages received by an individual are commonly centered in moral guidance and are identified as memorable messages when an individual evoked it in a long period of time and assumed to be meaningful influence in different aspects of human's views and actions. These messages are also assumed to greatly influence a person's decision making [4]. Decision making is a cognitive process on identifying possible solutions or actions in a certain situation [5]. Therefore, applying recalled moral messages that can assumingly influence the decision making. It concludes that moral values of an individual can be a guide in deciding what are the possible solutions or actions in a situations. The judgments, criticism, attitudes, and opinions we give on an issue

based on our moral intelligence is so called moral positions [6].

Moral positions, are identically similar to the terms “moral belief” and moral conviction [6]. This explains that what an individual’s moral position on a certain issue defines his/her moral outlook. Also, it is associated on defending your moral stand on a certain issue. According to Tappan (2006), messages that came from the parents are being communicated to the child because the parents’ wants to prepare the child for the moral challenges they will be facing, these messages can be a foundation of an individuals’ moral positions [7].

Philippines is believed to be a conservative country, because of its great value on morality [8]. However, increasing involvement of millennials to morally questioned behaviors is quite alarming considering the irony of this situation to the conservatism of the Philippines. They faced issues varying through culture, structure of the society, place and others, but mostly issues in morality. High percentage rate of teenage pregnancy, abortion, premarital sex, and HIV/Aids cases are arising [9]. Millennials are also known to be very different between older generations [10]. They are known for their liberalism. Liberalism denotes on moral dilemmas that creates gaps between liberals and traditionalist. Memorable moral messages defines the person’s sense of right and wrong, which can be the foundation to the set of rules to build balance in the society and assumed to influence individual’s decision making [11]. This identified that studying how advantageous the parents influence and guidance on the emerging adults, assumingly regulate their moral positions is interesting.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Increasing involvement of millennial to morally questioned behaviors is quite alarming considering the irony of this situation to the conservatism of the Philippines. Cognitive theories believed that moral development is part of the responsibility of the parents especially in the primary years of their children. However, aside from parents other agents such as peers, educators, and allied media can also influence moral judgments [12]. This opens discussion if moral messages from parents still influence moral position of millennials considering their moral maturity. Thus, this study aimed to determine the moral messages recalled by the tertiary students of Polytechnic University of the Philippines (PUP) from their parents

in terms of five moral domains namely Relational Ethics, Self-Honoring Behavior, Honesty/Fraudulence, Harmful Acts, and Respecting Higher Authority. The primary source of their moral messages between their parents, their moral position on abortion, homosexuality, premarital sex, substance abuse, and teenage pregnancy, as well as whether memorable moral messages of tertiary students are significantly related to their moral position on selected moral issues.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Holding a strong foundation of morality as well as gap differences, the researchers chose collegiate students as respondents. In view that Polytechnic University of the Philippines, Manila has the largest population of collegiate students; hence a wide range of undergraduate students can be achieved at the place. From the total population of 34,411 PUP undergraduate students, the sample of this study is 395 undergraduate students given the 5% margin of error.

Specifically, the researchers used a sampling technique called proportionate convenience where the selection of respondents was equated proportionately based on total population per college as well as classified per course. Considering that the topic requires personal beliefs on morality, the researchers ensure that the respondents fully understand its objective and are willing to answer the questionnaires through orientation and discussion on confidentiality. To give emphasis confidentiality clause was also included. After the respondents complete the survey, they are required to sign it as a proof of agreement.

However, since the study mainly focused on moral messages and moral position, situation such as having no parents, either biological or foster, in the early stage of developing morality may void chance of the respondent to answer the survey.

The study utilized the use of correlational research method, an approach in which the research is a data that gathered from two or multiple variables and after that, the relation between those variables was investigated. Therefore, to determine the association between the variables, statistical techniques were applied to the data.

The survey questionnaire had four parts: The Nature of Message, Moral Position, and Demographic Profile. The Nature of Message focuses on selected moral messages of the respondents which came from their parents (either mother or father). The foundation of these moral messages was the FGD conducted by the

researchers and the study about memorable moral messages of [11]. In order to elaborate clearly the recalled moral messages, there are sub-categories under Moral Messages Survey. The sub-categories are based on the moral domains also used in the study of memorable moral messages. The moral domains for this questionnaire are relational ethics, self-honoring behavior, honesty/fraudulence, harmful acts, and respecting higher authority. Each of the moral domains will have six statement items with quoted Filipino translation to help respondents in recalling. This section will be interpreted through its level of frequency in a 5-point Likert Scale interpreted as Never (1.50-below); Rarely (1.51-2.50); Sometimes (2.51-3.50); Often (3.51-4.50); and Always (4.51-above).

Furthermore, statistical formula was used to measure the variables which includes frequency and percentage, mean, and Pearson correlation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Moral Domains are moral values which are assessed and grouped into subsets, through instrument of measuring moral suitability and index of each value [13]. As emerged in the study “how parents communicate right and wrong” by Waldron, Kloeber, Goman, Piemonte, and Danaher (2014) moral domains were selected based on fourteen literatures which later became seven and presented as five Domains. Each moral domain provides five selected statements that represents the communicated moral messages under their respective moral domain [11].

Relational Ethics- is mutual respect, embodied knowledge, engagement [14].

Duties/obligations, sex/sexuality, treating others, and appropriateness [11].

Self-Honoring Behavior- refers to the factors of self which are self-esteem, self-actualization, self-concept, self-transcendence [15].

Honesty and Fraudulence- Honesty was define as part of modesty and justice which belongs to good morals while fraudulence was discussed as a shameful depravity [16].

Harmful Acts/ Careless Acts- Harmful/ Careless acts are undertakings done when an individual does not acquire the certain amount of information needed that will lead in positive response.

Respecting Higher Authority- or simply religious belief but other than respect to God this moral domain

also explicated the respect of elders, laws and people with state power

Table 1. The Memorable Moral Messages Recalled by the Respondents

Moral Domain	Mean
Relational Ethics	3.54
To always be fair to others	3.82
To be a role model to my siblings	3.80
To always think about the reputation of our family	3.13
To not engage in premarital sex	3.61
To respect homosexuals	3.33
Self-Honoring Behavior	4.14
To be goal-oriented	4.42
To continue my educational career	4.70
To enjoy my life while I'm young	3.62
To always be decent	3.87
To be independent	4.10
Honesty/ Fraudulence	4.05
To always ask for permission	4.25
To always tell the truth	4.22
To borrow things than stealing it	4.04
To not cheat (In general)	3.92
To not steal because it is against the law	3.84
Harmful Acts/ Careless Acts	3.90
To not take illegal drugs	3.77
To not drink too much alcoholic drinks	3.41
Don't smoke	3.77
To do the right thing even if no one else is doing it	4.07
To be responsible on your actions	4.46
Respecting Higher Authority	3.95
To always follow the constitutional law	3.46
To follow God's word	3.89
To forgive others	3.81
To always obey the elders	4.28
To always listen to elders	4.33

* Always (4.51-above), Often (3.51-4.50), Sometimes (2.51-3.50), Rarely (1.51-2.50), Never (1.50-below)

Overall, the respondents narratively assessed all moral domain as “Often” communicated to by the parents.

Specifically, in the moral domain “**Relational Ethics**” Three (3) on the five (5) selected statements is provided was assessed as “often”. The two (2) remaining statements was assessed as “sometimes”.

In the moral domain “**Self-Honoring Behavior**” One (1) statement was assessed as “always”. The four (4) remaining statements was assessed as “often”.

In the moral domain “**Honesty/ Fraudulence**” all

five (5) statements was assessed as “often”.

In the moral domains “*Harmful Acts/ Careless Acts*” and “*Respecting Higher Authority*” four (4) statements was assessed as “Often” and one (1) remaining statement was assessed as “sometimes”.

The results of the moral domains contradicts to the literature of Waldron, Kloeber, Goman, Piemonte, and Danaher (2014) which the students recalled moral messages in the ranking that the most concern of their parents in communicating moral messages is Relational Ethics, Self- Honoring Behavior, Honesty/ Fraudulence, Harmful Acts/ Careless Acts, and least is Respecting Higher Authority [11]. While the result on the table 1 shows Filipino parents most concern in communicating moral messages is Self- Honoring Behavior, Honesty/ Fraudulence, Harmful Acts/ Careless Acts, Respecting Higher Authority, and least is Relational Ethics.

This is interpreted by the researchers’ as there is a difference between Filipino moral messages and other western culture of moral messages. It is also reflected in the literature studied by Vasquez, Keltner, Ebenbach and Banaszynski (2001) which is stated that in the overall discussion looking for the similarities and differences in the moral rhetoric’s and cultural variation between Philippine and United States they’ve said that there is a clearly difference between the countries [17].

Table 2. The Respondents Primary Source of Moral Messages

Primary Source	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<i>Mother</i>	308	78.0
<i>Father</i>	81	20.5
<i>No Response</i>	6	1.5

Majority of the respondents primarily received moral messages from their “Mother” which comprises 308 or 78.0 percent of the respondents’ total population, the rest of 20.5 percent of the respondents’ total population determined “Father” as their primary source of moral messages which comprises 81 of the respondents’, and the remaining 6 respondents’ identified as no responses.

Since the parents is the most closely related in child’s character and the one who more often to socialize with their child, they considered parents as the first moral teachers [2].

The result shows that the primary source of moral

messages comes from ‘Mother’ is reflected in the literature Philippine Culture – Common Family Traits (2016) stated that in the Filipino setting, mother who are usually left at home is the one in charged to take care of the children, which is one of the reason why they see mothers to have more deep connection and closeness to her child or children [18]. In addition, according to Holladay (2002) mothers are often more sources of moral messages [19]. Where in children often recalled it from their mothers [20].

Table 3. The Moral Position of the Respondents in the Moral issues

Moral Issues	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
Abortion	1.91	Agree
Homosexuality	3.19	Disagree
Premarital Sex	1.72	Agree
Substance Abuse	1.85	Agree
Teenage Pregnancy	1.96	Agree

Four (4) of the moral issues was narratively assesses as “agree”. Specifically, ‘Abortion’, ‘Substance Abuse’, ‘Premarital sex’, and ‘Teenage Pregnancy’. While the moral issue of ‘Homosexuality’ was assessed as “agree”.

This result is reflected in the past studies conducted by, Acuña (1991) and Mangahas and Guerrero (1992) that both results shows that Filipinos considered to be in a conservative side when it comes to the topic about sexual relations [21] [22]. Moreover, according to the survey result of Pew Research Center (2014) conducted March to April 2014, abortion is morally ‘unacceptable’ with 93% of Filipinos says that abortion is morally unacceptable [23]. This was also justified by Yapchiongco (2014) which stated that Filipino believes that sex is an act only shared by a married couple [24].

This contradicts, Youth Adult Fertility and Security Studies (2013) states that 1 in every 3 Filipino had engaged in premarital sex ranging from 15 to 24 years of age, 88.3 % who are elementary graduates, and 79.6 % of them are high school graduates and 66.7 % are college graduates [25]. This report supports why Philippines by UN Population Fund (UNFPA) was the top most country in ASEAN who has numerous cases of teenage pregnancy. According to the National Demographic and Health Survey (2013) in every 10 young Filipino women ages 15 to 19 years old, one has begun childbearing and the percentage of Filipino women engaging to teenage pregnancy is continuously increasing up to now [26].

While, Steiner (2016) said that even there are modern states that rapidly transits into a pro-view on the usage of such substances some countries most especially conservative ones does not take substance abuse or even drugs and alcohol-use as a medium to escape reality [27].

In spite of the fact that the Philippines ranked 3 as the most religious nation in the world, Tubeza (2013) stated that Philippines considers homosexuals are acceptable in the society, which makes it positioned 10 among 17 nations as homosexual friendly country regardless of the country's religiosity [28].

Table 4. Correlation between Recalled Memorable Moral Messages and Moral Issues

MD		A	H	PMS	SA	TP
RE	Pearson Correl.	-.138*	.053	-.065	-.100*	-.019
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.006	.884	.197	.049	.714
	N	391	391	391	391	391
SHB	Pearson Correl.	-.063	.088	-.075	-.107*	-.065
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.214	.081	.136	.034	.201
	N	391	391	391	391	391
H/F	Pearson Correl.	-.100*	.042	-.054	-.073	-.039
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.049	.407	.285	.149	.443
	N	391	391	391	391	391
HA/CA	Pearson Correl.	-.044	.035	-.017	-.024	.010
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.387	.496	.740	.637	.844
	N	391	391	391	391	391
RHA	Pearson Correl.	-.098	-.029	-.176*	-.122*	-.095
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.053	.568	.000	.016	.844
	N	391	391	391	391	391

***. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)*

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).*

The decision was to reject the null hypothesis if the P-value was less than (or equal to) the 0.05 level of significance. However, if the P-value was greater than the 0.05 level of significance, then the null hypothesis was accepted.

Since memorable messages considered to influence different aspects of human's views and actions, this messages also assumed to greatly influence a person's

decision making [4]. Decision making is a cognitive process on identifying possible solutions or actions in a certain situation [5]. The judgments, criticism, attitudes, and opinions we give on an issue based on our moral intelligence is so called moral positions [6]. Moral Positions is simply defined by Dworkin (1977) as an act of defending your moral's outlook that can be judge or questioned with another moral belief [6].

Based on the correlation table, in the moral issue of "Abortion" only moral domains of "Relational Ethics" and "Honesty/ Fraudulence" have a significant relationship on the respondent's moral position on this moral issue.

The relationship of "Relational Ethics" and "Abortion" supports the statements that the most common reason of aborting is unwanted pregnancy which is also one of the effects of premarital sex [29]. In the Philippines, this issue is considered as a shame for the family Barrameda, Carbonel, Estepa and Lagera (n.d.) as it is a considered a conservative country [30]. This Philippine culture is associated to the statement of Waldron, Kloeber, Goman, Piemonte, and Danaher (2014) that relational ethics involves the qualities of being a good child and siblings [11].

In the aspect of "Honesty/ Fraudulence" and its relationship to the moral issue of "Abortion", the researchers considered Waldron, Kloeber, Goman, Piemonte, and Danaher (2014) idea of this moral domain as a shameful depravity and false realities [11]. This is associated to the reason of aborting as explained by Barrameda, Carbonel, Estepa and Lagera (n.d.) that because unwanted pregnancy causes emotional breakdowns, abortion became a way to break away with the issue [30].

In the moral issues of "Homosexuality" and "Teenage Pregnancy". Correlating each moral domain in the moral issues of "Homosexuality" and "Teenage Pregnancy" presents in the table above that each moral domain gets a higher P-value than 0.05, therefore the decision leads to accept the Ho/ Hypothesis.

With this, the researchers interpreted that since recalled memorable moral messages or the respondents' from their parents are not significant with their moral position, this could be significant on other sources of memorable moral messages like religion/ church Oladipo (2009), educators Benipayo (2014), law Treanor (2016), media, friends/peers and others (Jensen, n.d.) [1] [31] [32] [33].

In the moral issue of **“Premarital Sex”** only moral domains of **“Respecting Higher Authority”** have a significant relationship on the respondent’s moral position on the moral issue of “Premarital Sex”.

Waldron, Kloeber, Goman, Piemonte, and Danaher (2014) defines the domain “Respecting Higher Authority” as respect to religious belief, to elders and to the law [11]. There is no law against premarital sex except if it was an act of raped, thus the domain must be related to elders moral laws and religion. Based on the study of Dedman (1959), religious attitude affect individual’s attitude towards premarital sex. He cited Kinsey’s study which finds out that religiously active men have lesser sex outlets than those inactive [34]. Paralleled to the result of the study moral messages which involves religious beliefs affects the way respondent’s think about premarital sex in concerned with morality.

In the moral issue of **“Substance Abuse”** only moral domains of **“Relational Ethics”**, **“Self-Honoring Behavior”**, and **“Respecting Higher Authority”** have a significant relationship on the respondent’s moral position on the moral issue of “Substance Abuse”.

Waldron, Kloeber, Goman, Piemonte, and Danaher (2014) characterized the domain “Relational Ethics” that contains moral messages about appropriateness of the behavior [11]. Paralleled to the result of the study moral messages which involves appropriateness of the behavior affects the way respondent’s think about substance abuse in concerned with morality

While “Self- Honoring Behavior” was characterized by Waldron, Kloeber, Goman, Piemonte, and Danaher (2014) as moral messages about refers to own self’s perspective of self-role and personal development and also self-honor was represented by ‘amor propio’ which refers to “respeto” at “pagpapahalaga sa sarili” and commonly related to family legacy [35]. Paralleled to the result of the study moral messages which involves self- development or “pagpapahalaga sa sarili” affects the way respondent’s think about substance abuse in concerned with morality.

Last is “Respecting Higher Authority” defines by Waldron, Kloeber, Goman, Piemonte, and Danaher (2014) defined by moral messages about respect on elders, laws and people with state power [11]. Also, elaborated in Kohlberg’s six stages of moral reasoning

that in our primitive year’s individuals base their moral position on Pre-conventional morality (1st stage) whereas people make decision for punishment-avoidance and obedience. As cognitive skills develops, moral reasoning also levels up, for the statement “to always follow constitutional law” it is under stage 4 whereas people see the society according to the guidelines set by the government for orderliness of living [36]. Paralleled to the result of the study moral messages which involves following the elders and especially constitutional laws affects the way respondent’s think about substance abuse in concern with morality.

Overall, variables which identified to have a significant relationship have the strength of either “Weak” or “Very Weak”.

Furthermore, moral domains that are not related with the moral position of the respondents in the respective moral issues concluded that could be significant on other sources of memorable moral messages mentioned above.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Results of the research yield an understanding of the subject and provide a different focus for future implications and study developments. It gives appreciation and importance in supporting the continuous learning of a child about morality and moral communication. It teaches the importance of morality in the society to improve one’s moral development aiming children to perceive the significance of morality and moral position to the trend of moral issues.

In acknowledgement of Kohlberg’s stages of moral development, we recognize that moral positions of the students can shape through different sources. Thus, it is important that educators are aware that their moral beliefs can be passed to the students and can be a basis for developing one’s moral position. Though, being focused in the moral messages given by parents, this can be utilized as an interesting reference for communication students and professionals specifically, to study how moral position shapes and how the family as a basic unit of the society affects it. Based on the findings, different communication styles can affect why certain moral domains are most recalled by the students and some are least recalled which puts emphasis on the significance of moral messages from parents in relation to students’ moral position. With the importance of the study, the researchers also

recommend this study to make use as an instrument for understanding morality and moral communication.

Overall, assessment of the respondents on the four moral issues observed to contradict on some related issues given the increasing number of millennials involve in that moral issues. This result of the study only shows that millennials also considers other significant sources of their moral position. This supports the Kohlberg's moral development theory which states morality develops by stages in accord to persons' mental capability. As the study delve on the relation of messages acquire as pre-conventional morality to the existing moral beliefs of a child at the age of conventional morality, results gives more justification on the development of morality. Based on the findings, stage 1 of the theory which states that morality comes on child acknowledging and obeying the powerful authority which includes their parents does not retain at the stage 4 where a child becomes more concerned at the society knowing they are part of it. This development does not instantly change; it is a process of moral thinking from believing authorities are right to recognizing other moral beliefs reflected as other sources and becoming more individualistic, up to considering social norms and harmonious living. This shows the principle of the theory whereas adult integrates all the perceptions gained in all stages and derived a new context. Hence, we strongly recommend to future researchers to further study the reasons on this contradicting result to give an elaborative detail on how morality changes and develops.

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