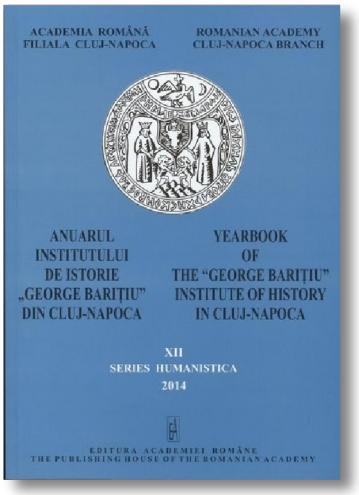

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MORAL COMPETENCE AS MEASURED WITH MJT AND MORAL EDUCATION THROUGH READING TALES AND STORIES

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Abstract. *Reading tales and stories is a widespread practice, traditionally considered to be important for the children's moral education. But currently, there are few scientific data to support that claim. The purpose of my research was to be a contribution in that direction, by investigating whether moral competence, as measured with Moral Judgment Test (Lind, 2000*[1]*), can be significantly changed on a short-term by merely reading a moral narrative, assumed to prime participants' moral identity, supposedly linked with moral competence. Its initial hypothesis was that, in the experimental condition, immediately after reading a moral tale, the moral competence score should increase, whereas, in the control condition, immediately after reading a text without moral meaning the moral competence score should remain the same. A number of 67 second year students at University of Fine Arts and Design from Cluj-Napoca participated at the research (46 females, 21 males, with a mean age of 20,6 years), 33 in the experimental group, and 34 in the control group, randomly assigned. The obtained results were not in accord with the results expected based on the initial hypothesis. But the statistical supplementary analysis indicates the possibility that the expected effect may have been masked by other factors, the moral tale effect being decreased in a certain measure in the experimental group by those factors that lead to a decrement of the moral competence score in the control group. Therefore, the participants from the experimental group were only able to maintain at posttest in a higher measure their moral competence score from pretest in comparison with those from the control group. Several possible interpretations of the obtained data are discussed, taking in view also the limits of the current study, and directions for the future research are identified.*

Key words: *moral competence, moral education, moral narrative, MJT.*

[1] G. Lind, *Review and Appraisal of the Moral Judgment Test (MJT)*, University of Konstanz, 2000, retrieved April 3, 2013, from http://www.unikonstanz.de/ag-moral/pdf/Lind-2000_MJT-Review-and-Appraisal.pdf.

An. Inst. de Ist. „G. Barițiu” din Cluj-Napoca, Series Humanistica, tom. XII, 2014, p. 121–135

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Tales and stories with moral content are still read by parents to their children. Also, teachers still read such tales and stories to their pupils, as it is assumed, traditionally, to play an important role in the children's moral education (Vitz, 1990[2]). But currently, there are few scientific data to support that claim, and little research has been done in order to find out the significance for the moral development of such widespread practices of reading literature with a moral content. One exception is Narvaez's (1998[3], 1999[4], 2002[5]) and her colleagues' (Narvaez, Bentley, Gleason, & Samuels, 1998[6]; Narvaez, Gleason, Mitchell, & Bentley, 1999[7]; Narvaez & Gleason, 2007[8]) work, who have consistently approached the issue from the perspective of the way moral text are comprehended and recalled by children or young people with different moral orientations, as measured with Defining Issues Test (Narvaez, 1998[9]). Based on her research, Narvaez (2002[10]) concluded that children do not understand the moral message of a narrative in the way adults expect them to understand it, their comprehension being influenced by their cognitive and moral judgment development and by their moral experience and knowledge structured in particular moral schemas. So, she suggests that just reading stories with a moral content, supposing that their message is obvious, may not have the expected efficiency in what respects the moral education of the children and that further research is needed in order to determine the types of moral narratives and the factors that could facilitate moral themes comprehension.

Although the comprehension of a moral narrative may be limited by several factors, there are reasons to believe that the widespread practice of reading moral tales and stories still may have a role in moral education. In the first place, such stories and tales may be a useful source that provides various arguments for solving

[2] P. C. Vitz, *The Use of Stories in Moral Development. New Psychological Reasons for an Old Educational Model*, "American Psychologist", 1990, 45, p. 709–720.

[3] D. Narvaez, *The Influence of Moral Schemas on the Reconstruction of Moral Narratives in Eighth Graders and College Students*, "Journal of Educational Psychology", 1998, 90, p. 13–24.

[4] D. Narvaez, *Using Discourse Processing Methods To Study Moral Thinking*, "Educational Psychology Review", 1999, 11, p. 377–393.

[5] D. Narvaez, *Does Reading Moral Stories Build Character?*, "Educational Psychology Review", 2002, 14, p. 155–171.

[6] D. Narvaez, J. Bentley, T. Gleason, J. Samuels, *Moral Theme Comprehension in Third Grade, Fifth Grade and College Students*, "Reading Psychology", 1998, 19, p. 217–241.

[7] D. Narvaez, T. Gleason, C. Mitchell, J. Bentley, *Moral Theme Comprehension in Children*, "Journal of Educational Psychology", 1999, 91, p. 477–487.

[8] D. Narvaez, T. Gleason, *The Relation of Moral Judgment Development and Educational Experience to Recall of Moral Narratives and Expository Texts*, "The Journal of Genetic Psychology", 2007, 168, p. 251–276.

[9] D. Narvaez, *The Influence of Moral Schemas on the Reconstruction of Moral Narratives in Eighth Graders and College Students*, ed. cit.

[10] D. Narvaez, *Does Reading Moral Stories Build Character?*, ed. cit.

moral dilemmas and solutions for prototypical moral situations. In the second place, it may be that their reading has a cumulative effect, contributing in time to the developing of their moral understanding, although initially they are poorly understood. In fact, a narrative is the starting point of any moral discussion, its understanding developing through dialogue and guided reflection. In the third place, it may be that moral narratives may have a role in building the moral identity of the children, when they are identifying with the heroes of those tales and stories. Therefore, as moral identity was shown to have a role in the self-regulation of moral behavior (e.g., Aquino & Reed[11], 2002), moral narratives may contribute indirectly in that respect too. In the fourth place, as Dehghani, Gentner, Forbus, Ekhtiari, & Sachdeva (2009[12]) have shown, based on their experiments with Iranian and American participants, core cultural narratives can influence moral reasoning for current moral dilemmas by analogical mapping. Their results indicate that the differentiating factor in the participants' answers across the different dilemma variants and between the two studied cultural groups was the analogical accessibility to cultural narratives that are similar in structure to a given moral dilemma. Therefore, they concluded that familiarity with different collections of cultural narratives may be a core differentiating factor in moral reasoning between cultures, so that different cultural stories would cause different moral judgments, depending on culture, even if the foundations and the logic of morality are universally present. So, they suggest that the formal examination of the moral narratives characteristic to the various cultures might explain some well known findings on moral reasoning. Vitz (1990[13]) is another author who supports the view that narratives are essential for a person's moral development, based on the argument that the narrative thought has been shown to be important to the cognitive development in general and for its articulation with the affective development. In his view, moral narratives, in comparison with the abstract propositional arguments, have the power to engage the reader or the listener and to provide a link between the cognitive and affective aspects of the moral development. Tappan and Brown (1989[14]) support the same view, considering that children's storytelling creates authorship of moral choices when the story told is able to lead to a real moral experience.

As it can be seen from above, there are some research data linking moral orientation to the reading of moral narratives, but little is known about the role played by the reading of stories and tales with a moral message in what respects the

[11] K. Aquino, A. Reed, *The Self-Importance of Moral Identity*, "Journal of Personality and Social Psychology", 2002, 83, p. 1423–1440.

[12] M. Dehghani, D. Gentner, K. Forbus, H. Ekhtiari, S. Sachdeva, *Analogy and Moral Decision Making*, Sofia, Analogy 09, 2009.

[13] P. C. Vitz, *op. cit.*

[14] M. B. Tappan, L. M. Brown, *Stories Told and Lessons Learned: Toward a Narrative Approach to Moral Development and Moral Education*, "Harvard Educational Review", 1989, 59, p. 182–204.

other aspect of the moral development, the moral competence as defined by Lind (2008[15]). Besides the fact that moral dilemmas are always presented in a narrative form, functioning as a starting point for any moral discussion, I assume that, too, through their role in building and priming moral schemas and moral identities, moral narratives may have a contribution in what respects moral competence by proving models in that respects. Additionally, an assumption of mine is that moral identity may have a part in which a moral agent develops in time an image of herself or himself as a principled moral reasoner, as a competent moral judge or decider, able of impartiality and detachment of her/his own point of view. It may be possible, in this context, that reading a moral narrative, able to prime the schemas of moral identity, to lead, indirectly, to the priming of that moral competence component of the moral identity, promoting a principled moral reasoning and behavior.

Having in mind the above-mentioned assumptions, the present paper intended to investigate, in a pilot study, whether the moral competence, as measured using Moral Judgment Test: MJT (Lind, 1978, cited in Lind, 2000[16]), in a sample of young adults, can be significantly changed on a short-term by mere reading a tale with a pronounced moral content by priming with it the moral identity of the participants, supporting, in that way, the traditional pedagogical thesis that moral literature is important for the moral development.

The chosen moral narrative was a well-known Romanian tale that is frequently read to the Romanian children, being part of the Romanian culture. It presents in a narrative context the contrast of two extreme moral characters, one personifying modesty, industry, generosity, altruism, the constant application of the moral principles, the other one the opposing attributes, and the long-term consequences of their decisions. The content of this moral tale has no direct link with the moral content of the dilemmas of the MJT through which was measured the moral competence of the participants. So, it was not expected that it would influence their moral competence through directly changing the assessment of the presented moral arguments of the MJT, as there is no obvious surface similarity between their content and the moral message of the Romanian tale. But it was expected that such a tale to be able to prime the participants' moral identity through their exposing to the clear-cut moral profile of its positive character, promoting indirectly, in that way, their moral competence, if moral identity has a component linked with moral competence.

The possibility to prime moral identity, increasing its accessibility and saliency, through exposing participants to moral positive exemplars was evidenced

[15] G. Lind, *The Meaning and Measurement of Moral Judgment Competence. A Dual-Aspect Model*, in: *Contemporary Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives on Moral Development and Education*, D. Fasko, Jr., W. Wayne (eds), Creskill: Hampton Press, 2008, p. 185–220.

[16] G. Lind, *Review and Appraisal of the Moral Judgment Test (MJT)*, ed. cit.

in a series of experiments by Aquino, McFerran and Levan (2011[17]). They have shown also that the moral elevation, as a distinct moral emotion stirred by exceptionally moral positive examples, is more pronounced at the participants for whom their moral identity is more central, and that moral elevation can motivate moral behavior and lead to an increased weight of the virtuous arguments linked with "a desire to emulate a moral exemplar". For those high in moral identity centrality, moral elevation may lead to "a desire to act in a manner consistent with their sense of self" (Aquino et al., 2011[18]). The above-mentioned authors have sustained that they have reasons "to believe that even a seemingly weak stimulus, like a story of moral goodness, can evoke moral elevation responses in nonexperimental settings" (p. 716).

In the current research, by presenting a moral tale which is part of the Romanian cultural background, the purpose was to elicit this moral elevation and to increase the salience of the participants' moral identity in order to find out their influence over their moral competence. For the control group, with which the experimental group that was asked to read the moral tale was compared, it was chosen a literary text similar in length and fantastic character to the moral tale, but that has no obvious moral content.

2. **HYPOTHESIS**

Given the above-mentioned reasons, the following general hypothesis was formulated: after reading the moral tale, the moral competence, as measured with C-index of MJT, of the participants from the experimental group should increase in comparison with their moral competence measured before reading the moral tale, whereas the moral competence of the participants from the control group should remain the same after reading the non-moral literary text in comparison with their moral competence measured before reading it.

In other words, in operational terms, it was expected to occur a significant negative difference between the C-index at pretest and the C-index at posttest for the participants from the group for which the experimental task was to read a moral tale, whereas for the control group, for which the task was to read a literary text without a moral content, no such difference between pretest and posttest in what respects C-index was expected.

3. **METHOD**

Participants: A number of 68 second year students at University of Fine Arts and Design from Cluj-Napoca participated at the research (46 females, 22 males,

[17] K. Aquino, B. McFerran, M. Laven, *Moral Identity and the Experience of Moral Elevation in Response to Acts of Uncommon Goodness*, "Journal of Personality and Social Psychology", 2011, 100, p. 703–718.

[18] *Ibidem.*

with a mean age of 20,6 years), 34 in the experimental group, and 34 in the control group, randomly assigned by distributing alternatively the two kinds of literary text to the their seat places. One participant from the experimental group completed MJT only at pretest. The participants received credit points for their completion of the experimental tasks, based on the presence list.

Materials and procedures: Moral competence was measured with Moral Judgment Test (Lind, 1978, cited in Lind, 2000[19]) in the Romanian variant (Lupu, 2009[20]), a measure that was proved to be valid (Lind, 2000[21], 2008[22]) and useful for measuring change in moral competence.

The moral tale read by the participants from the experimental group was a Romanian tale that is part of the Romanian cultural background: "The Old Man's Daughter and the Old Woman's Daughter", written by Ion Creangă, to be found in its English version in *Annex 1*).

The text with a neuter content without a significant moral meaning, read by the participants from the control group, was a fragment from "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland", by Lewis Carroll, similar in length (approximately two pages) and fantastic character with the moral tale.

The participants were collectively administered, in the same session, first the MJT, then they had to read, in an interval of twenty minutes, one of the two above-mentioned texts, depending on the group in which they were included, and, after that, they were asked to complete once again the MJT. Finally, they had to answer two control questions regarding the content of the given texts, intended to control if they actually read and understood the given text. Participants were told that the research had two independent purposes: to investigate their memory for the given text, and to find out the reliability of the MJT. At the second administration of the MJT, they were asked to complete the MJT by ignoring their answers for the first administration, as if they would see it for the first time, because the purpose of the research was to see how their answers vary in time.

4. **RESULTS**

For this sample, the criteria proposed by Lind (2000[23]) for checking the theoretical

[19] G. Lind, *Review and Appraisal of the Moral Judgment Test (MJT)*, ed. cit.

[20] L. Lupu, *Moral, lernumwelt und religiosität: Die entwicklung moralischer urteilsfähigkeit bei studierenden in Rumänien in abhängigkeit von verantwortungsübernahme und religiosität*. Doctoral dissertation, University of Konstanz, Germany. 2009, retrieved January 24, 2012, from http://kops.ub.uni-konstanz.de/handle/urn:nbn:de:bsz:352-opus-95865

[21] G. Lind, *Review and Appraisal of the Moral Judgment Test (MJT)*, ed. cit.

[22] G. Lind, *The Meaning and Measurement of Moral Judgment Competence. A Dual-Aspect Model*, ed. cit.

[23] G. Lind, *Are Helpers Always Moral? Empirical Findings from a Longitudinal Study of Medical Students in Germany*, in: *International Perspectives on Human Development*, A. L. Comunian, U. Gielen (eds), Lengerich: Papst Science Publishers, 2000, p. 463–477.

cultural validity of MJT data were in general satisfied by the data for the pretest on the entire sample. The preferences for the six moral orientation stages are ordered increasingly from the first stage until the fifth one, and the sixth one is a little lower than the fifth one, but the difference is not statistically significant. The intercorrelations of those preferences form an almost perfect quasi-simplex structure, as it was shown by the plot of the factor loadings of the two factors obtained after applying for them the principal component analysis with simple varimax rotation. The only exceptions were the fact that the correlation between the preferences for the sixth stage and the first stage was higher than the one between the preferences for the fifth stage and the first one (but both were not statistically significant at p = .05), and the fact that the correlation between the preferences for the sixth stage and the first stage was higher than the one between the preferences for the sixth stage and the second stage (in this case, too, both were not statistically significant). Finally, the C-index score correlated significantly (at a threshold of $p = .05$) negatively with the preferences for the first, second and third stage (the nonparametric correlation coefficients Spearman in the above-mentioned order being $\rho = -.26$, $p = .014$; $\rho = -.35$, $p = .001$; $\rho = -.24$, $p = .02$), and positively with the preferences for the fifth and sixth stage (the correlation coefficients Spearman in the above-mentioned order being $\rho = 39$, p = .000; $\rho = -.34$, $p = .002$).

The statistical descriptive data for the both groups are presented in *Table 1*.

Table 1

Descriptive statistical data for the C-index score for the control and experimental groups

Group type	Test phase	N	C-index mean	C-index standard deviation	C-index minimum value	C-index maximum value
Experimental: Moral tale	Pretest	34	23.6	13.6	1.4	70.4
	Posttest	34	22.7	13.1	0.2	50.7
Control: Nonmoral text	Pretest	34	15.1	11.7	2.7	57
	Posttest	34	12.4	9	0	42

No significant difference was found between the control and experimental group in what respects the gender, and, also, no significant gender differences were found for the C-index at pretest or posttest.

The distribution for the C-index score at the first and the second administration was statistically significantly departed from normality (Shapiro-Wilk Test was significant at a threshold of p = .05), with the exception of the case of the experimental group at the second administration. The distributions were in general skewed toward the lower values of the C-index.

Given the non-normal distributions and the relatively small sample, it was used the nonparametric test Wilcoxon in order to find out if there is a statistically significant (at $p = .05$) repeated measure effect for each group. No statistically

significant difference between the C-index at pretest and posttest was found for the both groups, although, surprisingly, the difference for the control group was relatively closed to the statistical significance at a threshold of $p = .05$ (being statistical significant at $p = .08$).

The relative effect size indicated by the Cohen coefficient for the control group was of $d = .32$, which is interpreted as a small to medium effect size, suggesting the possibility that the relatively small sample may have impeded the occurrence of a statistically significant effect.

Calculating the absolute effect size for the change difference between the experimental and control group, a value of 0.7 was obtained, as the difference between the pretest mean C-index score and the mean posttest C-index score for the experimental group was -2.05, and for the control group was -2.75.

Taking into consideration that the participants' initial level of moral competence may influence their answer to the experimental manipulation, data analysis was extended beyond the one required by the initial hypothesis in order to interpret better the first obtained results. This decision was based on several theoretical reasons. The first one was the fact that, in spite of the randomization procedure, it happened to be a statically significant difference between the experimental group and the control group for their mean C-index score at pretest (Mann-Whitney test $U = 328.5$, $p = .002$), the experimental group having a higher mean C-index score than the one of the control group. The second reason, linked with the first one, was the possibility that the obtained results to be explained based on the regression to mean tendency for the second administration of the MJT. The third reason was the possibility that the understanding and the interpretation of the given texts, especially the moral tale, and consequently, their impact on the subsequent answers to MJT, could have been influenced by the initial level of C-index score at the first administration, the moral message of the moral tale being more readily recognized by those having an elevated C-index at pretest (Narvaez & Gleason, 2007[24]). The forth reason was the supposition that those with a higher C-index score at pretest may have moral identities that have a higher level of centrality (Aquino & Reed, 2002[25]), and, as a consequence, may be more easily primed by a moral tale (Aquino et al., 2011[26]).

The whole sample was divided, in a first phase, in two groups, based on the median value for the C-index score at pretest.

The descriptive statistic data for the four resulted groups are presented in the *Table 2*.

[24] D. Narvaez, T. Gleason, *The Relation of Moral Judgment Development and Educational Experience to Recall of Moral Narratives and Expository Texts*, ed. cit.

[25] K. Aquino, A. Reed, *op. cit.*

[26] K. Aquino, B. McFerran, M. Laven, *op. cit.*

Table 2
Descriptive statistical data for the C-index score for the groups defined by the experimental manipulation factor and the level of the C-index score at pretest

Group type	C-index compared with median value	Test phase	N	C-index mean	C-index standard deviation	C-index minimum value	C-index maximum value
Experimental: Moral tale	**higher**	**Pretest**	22	29.9	12.8	18.2	70.4
		Posttest	22	25.1	12.4	2.5	47.7
	lower	**Pretest**	12	12	4.2	1,4	16.5
		Posttest	11	15.1	9	0.2	34.3
Control: Nonmoral text	**higher**	**Pretest**	12	27.5	11	16.7	57
		Posttest	12	18	10.9	5.4	42
	lower	**Pretest**	22	8.4	4.3	2.7	16.7
		Posttest	22	9.3	6.2	0	22.4

There was calculated a score, varying between 0 and 2, for the level of correctness in answering at the two memory questions, controlling for the level of engagement in the task and the effectiveness of the experimental manipulation through the level of understanding and memory for the to be read texts. The mean score for the entire sample was 1.5 ($SD = .5$), and the median value was 1.8. A significant difference was found between the control and experimental group in what respects the memory score, by applying the nonparametric test Mann-Whitney: $U = 259.5$, $p = .000$, the memory scores being higher for the experimental group (mean value 1.8, $SD = .29$) than the ones from the control group (mean value 1.3, $SD = .59$). No significant correlation was found between the C-index at pretest and the memory score. Then, the whole sample was split in two groups by the median value as cutting point, in order to analyze the effect of the experimental manipulation taking into account this factor, too. By applying the Wilcoxon test, a statistically significant difference between the C-index at pretest and posttest was obtained only for the participants from the control group that had higher memory scores ($z = –1,961$, $p = .05$), the C-index for posttest (the mean value: 10.145, $SD = 7.5$) being lower than the C-index for pretest (the mean value: 13.26, $SD = 8.4$).

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The obtained results show that there seems to be a tendency for the C-index to decrease at posttest for both groups, this tendency being more pronounced for the control group, but the difference is not significant at the chosen statistical

threshold. They are not in accord with the results expected based on the hypothesis formulated in operational terms initially. Several interpretations are possible for these results.

Considering the fact that the obtained results did not reach the chosen statistical threshold of $p = .05$ for the control and experimental group, it may be that the moral tale was not able to prime, at least at a clearly detectable level, the moral identity of the participants and its putative component linked with the moral competence. An alternative interpretation is that there is no link whatsoever between reading tales, moral identity and moral competence. A third possible explanation is that uncontrolled factors, such the ones that lead to a decrease of the C-index at a second administration of MJT, may have masked the expected effect. Taking in view the obtained absolute effect size and the small to medium relative effect size, and the marginally significant difference obtained for the control group, it may be also possible that the expected statistically significant results were not obtained because of the relatively small sample of this research. This alternative interpretation is supported by the supplementary statistical analysis that was made considering the participant's initial level of the C-index at the pretest from both the experimental and control group. These supplementary data indicated a statistically significant decrease of the C-index score at posttest for the participants from the control group that had higher scores at pretest, whereas for the participants from the experimental group with similarly higher C-index score at pretest no such significant difference occurred for the C-index score at posttest. This significant decrease may be interpreted in different ways. One possible explanation is the regression to mean. But even though the regression to mean may account partially for the obtained results, the data do not support entirely such an explanation. One reason for that is that there lacks a statically significant increase of the C-index score for the participants with lower C-index score at pretest. A second argument would be the fact that a significant decrement of the C-index score at posttest occurred for the participants from the control group that do not have extreme C-index scores at pretest, having a medium level of moral competence relative to the present sample. In the same time, for the participants from the experimental group that have a similar medium level of C-index at pretest, no such significant decrement occurred for the C-index score at posttest.

Another possible interpretation is that the obtained decrease of the C-index at posttest is similar to the regression of the C-index signaled by Lind (2008[27]) as occurring at the second administration of MJT, if the given instruction was not successful for this sample in eliminating the factors that may induce such a decrement of the C-index at the second administration (e.g., frustration, tiredness). In this case, for the experimental group, the possible effect of the moral tale was

[27] G. Lind, *The Meaning and Measurement of Moral Judgment Competence. A Dual-Aspect Model,* ed. cit.

annihilated by such factors that lead to a decrease of the C-index score at the second administration. Or, stated in other words, the possible effect of the moral tale to increase the moral competence balanced in a certain measure the effect of the factors that lead to the a decrease of the moral competence index at the second administration, as it was the case for the participants from the control group. In the support for this alternative interpretation, which supposes that the moral tale is able to increase the moral competence index, may be invoked, also, the verbal spontaneous comment made by one of the participants from the experimental group when he came to give me the completed form of the MJT after its second administration. He felt the need to tell me that after reading the moral tale he perceived an influence from it at the second administration of the MJT, in spite of the fact that he believed that no such influence should have been occurred given the instruction I gave to them. He said that something was changed in his view in what respects the presented arguments, although he was not able to specify what exactly had changed.

It may be also that participants with a higher level of the C-index at pretest are more susceptible to be influenced by the factors that lead to a decrease of their C-index score at posttest, as it was noted by Lind (2008[28]), too. This may happen because in order to obtain a higher C-index score it might be necessary to invest a higher cognitive and self-regulative effort and to maintain that effort at the second administration of MJT, when the participants' resources may be depleted (tiredness) or they may be affected by demotivating factors (e.g., frustration), leading to a decrement of the investment of cognitive and self-regulative effort. The process may be similar to the one involved in the phenomenon of ego depletion (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Muraven, & Tice, 1998[29]), or the one involved in the moral licensing (De Witt Huberts, Evers, & De Ridder, 2012[30]), interpreted as self-indulgence in following the affective aspects of the moral judgment, which are no longer controlled by the cognitive aspect. At the same time, the participants with lower C-index at pretest do not invest a cognitive effort from the start, remaining unaffected by those factors that may influence it.

A complementary explanation for the differential susceptibility of the participants with higher and lower levels of C-index scores at pretest for the experimental manipulation would be a possible link between the initial level of moral competence and the centrality of the moral identity, as it was also hypothesized in the theoretical part. In accordance with such a link, the participants having an initial higher level of moral competence as measured with MJT may

[28] *Ibidem.*

[29] R. F. Baumeister, E. Bratslavsky, M. Muraven, D. M. Tice, *Ego Depletion: Is the Active Self a Limited Resource?*, "Journal of Personality and Social Psychology", 1998, 74, p. 1252–1265.

[30] J. C. De Witt Huberts, C. Evers, D. T. D. De Ridder, *License to Sin: Self-Licensing as a Mechanism Underlying Hedonic Consumption*, "European Journal of Social Psychology", 2012, 42, p. 490–496.

have a more central moral identity that may have been more readily primed by the exceptional moral exemplar presented by the moral tale. In the case of this explanation, the effect of the moral tale is supposed to be of a relatively little magnitude for the participants with a lower level of moral competence and to have a relatively greater magnitude for those with higher a moral competence.

By combining the two last explanations, it may be understandable why there is no significant increase of the C-index at posttest for the participants from the experimental group who are not significantly affected by the factors that tend decrease the C-index score at the second administration (tiredness, frustration, moral licensing), having lower level of moral competence at pretest, whereas, in the same time, the participants from the experimental group with higher moral competence at pretest are less affected by those factors that may have decreased their C-index score at posttest in comparison with the participants from the control group having a similar level of moral competence at pretest. In other words, it may be said that the moral tale, having the power to prime the moral identity of the participants with higher moral competence at pretest because it is more central in their case, elicits the motivation needed in order that the participants to at least continue the initial investment of the cognitive effort in a principled moral reasoning, by maintaining the effort required to control the affective factors involved in the moral judgment (Lind, 2008[31]) against the influence of those factors that tend to decrease it.

It may be also that the moral narrative may not have the power to change upward an existing moral competence, but it may promote the power to resist the tendency to relax a principled moral judgment at a second administration of the MJT. This variant of interpretation is similar to the case cited by Lind (1997[32]), who explained, in a similar manner, the effect of the Konstanz Moral Dilemma Discussion (KMDD) in a sample of juvenile delinquents as a regression that it is stopped.

A final possible interpretation would take into account two possible characteristics of the text presented at the control group, which may have been acted as confounding factors. It may be that the fantastic character of the fragment from the "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" to be more pronounced than that of the moral tale, promoting a worldview in which anything is possible. Therefore, it may induce an attitude of detachment from the constraints of the reality of the social world, including its moral and rational ones, leading to a relaxation of the

[31] G. Lind, *The Meaning and Measurement of Moral Judgment Competence. A Dual-Aspect Model*, ed. cit.

[32] G. Lind, *The Relative and Absolute Effect Size of the Konstanz Method of Dilemma Discussion (KMDD)*, paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, in the symposium *The Quality of the Konstanz Method of Dilemma Discussions (KMDD) for Teaching Moral and Democratic Competencies in Chicago*, April 9–13, 1997, retrieved at 2.05. 2013 at http://www.uni-konstanz.de/ag-moral/pdf/Lind-2007_effect-size-KMDD.pdf

principled moral reasoning. Also, the fragment from the "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" may have been harder to be memorized, having a higher level of details, more complexity and a less coherent structure because of its more pronounced fantastic content, and because the level of past familiarity with this text is lower. So, the participants' cognitive effort may have been higher to understand and to memorize it in order to answer to the announced control questions in comparison to the one required by the moral tale. As a consequence, at the second administration of the MJT, the participants with higher moral competence at pretest from the control group may have been more tired or their resources for cognitive effort were more depleted by the reading task in comparison with the participants from the experimental group, so that was harder for them to maintain their initial investment of cognitive effort in the second MJT completion. This last alternative is partially supported by the significant higher memory scores for the participants from the experimental group in comparison with those from the control group. But, this difference may be explained also by a significant difference in what respects the memory ability of the participants of these two groups, or by a possible difference in the difficulty of the memory questions for the two texts. Also, this alternative may be supported by the fact that only the participants from the control group who had a higher memory score obtained a significant decrement of the C-index at posttest in comparison with their C-index at pretest.

In order to establish more clearly the short-term effect of the reading of a moral tale over the moral competence measured with MJT and the find out the adequate interpretation for the obtained results, more research is needed in the future, taken into consideration the limits of this pilot study. It would be needed, in the first place, a sample with a bigger size. In the second place, two other control situations would be helpful. The first one would replace the text to be read with a relaxing activity during the corresponding time interval. The second one would require the participants to read a very simple text without a fantastic character and without a moral meaning. The experimental condition should be supplemented with a new moral tale, without a fantastic character and presenting an exceptionally moral character that may better promote the identification of the participants with her/his characteristics. Also, there has to be found a more appropriate instruction that would control better those factors that tend to decrease the C-index score at a second administration.

I consider that such future research is worthwhile given that the results of the pilot study are, in my view, promising in supporting predominantly the interpretation that a moral tale with an exceptionally moral character may motivate the people, by supposedly priming their moral identity, to maintain at least their motivation for a principled moral reason when they are confronted with contexts that would decrease it. So, the moral tale may have promoted a more moral behavior in the second administration of the MJT for the participants with a higher moral competence at pretest, maintaining their seriousness, motivation and

responsible attitude in completing it and increasing their patience for such a frustrating situation. In other words, completing MJT may be a moral task in itself, and the answer to it may have been influenced by the presented moral tale. Another reason to continue the research would be that establishing the short-term effects of moral narratives on moral competence would be a first step for the study of their long-term effects in that respect, and for the study of the factors that may influence the moral education effectiveness of the widespread practice of storytelling.

6. **Annex: THE OLD MAN'S DAUGHTER AND THE OLD WOMAN'S DAUGHTER**[33]

Once upon a time there was an old man and an old woman who lived in a house. Each of them had a daughter. The old man's daughter was friendly, hard working and kind, while the old woman's daughter was lazy, proud and unfriendly. One day, the old woman ordered the old man's daughter to leave the house. So the good girl left. On her way, she met a dog that was sick and full of fleas. The dog said to her "Please help me, and I will be of useful to you someday". The girl nursed the dog, then went on her way. Later, she met a fountain that was broken and dry. The fountain said to her "Please help me and I will be of useful to you someday". The girl fixed the fountain and continued her journey. Soon, she met an oven of clay, broken and dry. "Please help me, said the oven, and I will be useful to you someday". She fixed the oven, mended its cracks then continued her way. Then, she met a pear tree that was full of caterpillars and had many dry branches. "Please help me, said the tree, and I will be useful to you someday" The girl cleaned the tree and went on. She arrived at the house of Saint Sunday, who was a very wise old woman. "Welcome, girl, said Saint Sunday. I must go away, but while I'm gone, please wash my babies and feed them. And keep some food warm for me, when I come back". Saint Sunday went away. The girl called the babies from the forest, but the babies were strange animals, some bigger, some smaller. She was not afraid of the strange animals, she washed them and fed them. When Saint Sunday returned, she found good food waiting for her. "Girl, you have done a good job here, she said. Now go upstairs in the attic. There are many boxes, some old, some new and shiny. Choose a box as a reward for your work, whichever you think is right for you". The girl went to the attic and saw many boxes. She was not greedy, so she chose the smallest box, made of wood. Then she said good bye to Saint Sunday and started to go back home.

On her way, she arrived at the tree. The tree was full of big, yellow, juicy pears. The tree bowed down and let her pick some pears. Then, the girl met the oven. The oven was full of fresh cookies. She ate some cookies, then went on. She

[33] http://www.rybnik.pl/sp5/eTwinning/the_old_man_rumunia.pdf

met the fountain, which was full of clear water and had two silver glasses on the edge. She drank some water and took the glasses with her. Then she met the dog, who had a necklace of gold. “Take the necklace, said the dog, as a thank you for your help”. She took the necklace, then went on and arrived home. She called her father and they opened the wooden box. From the little box appeared many cows, horses, chicken, pigs, orchards and crops, that filled the garden. “We are rich now”, said the old man, very happy.

The old woman and her lazy daughter were very envious. “I’ll go too, said the lazy daughter, I will bring even more riches”. So off she went. She met the dog who asked for her help, but she refused. “Did you have many servants before?” she yelled at the dog and went on. She met the fountain that was broken and dry. The fountain asked her for help, but she replied: “How can I dirty my hands with you?”. She went on and met the oven. The oven asked for help, but she refused in the same way. After that, she met the tree that asked for help too, but she refused again. And she arrived at the house of Saint Sunday. “Girl, please feed and wash my children while I am away. And keep some food for me too when I return”, said Saint Sunday. The lazy girl called the children and the strange animals appeared. “What sort of creatures are these?” she said very disgusted. And she boiled water to wash them, but she burned them with hot water. Then she burned the food too and let it get cold. When Saint Sunday returned and saw the disaster, she remained calm. “Girl, go to the attic and choose one box that you think you deserve for your work”, she said. The lazy girl went upstairs and chose the biggest box, golden and shiny. Then she ran off, without saying a word to Saint Sunday. She arrived at the tree. The tree was full of big, yellow juicy pears, but when she wanted to pick one, the tree became so tall, she could not reach it. She went on and arrived at the oven. The oven was full of warm cookies, but when she wanted to eat, the oven burned her hands. She had to go on hungry. She saw the fountain that was full of clear water and had two silver glasses. She wanted to drink, but the glasses and the water disappeared. She went on thirsty. She met the dog who had a golden necklace. She wanted to take the necklace, but the dog barked and bit her. She arrived home and called the old woman. They opened the shiny big box, but from inside appeared huge monsters that ate them both and then disappeared with the box. The old man and the good daughter remained to live their peaceful lives after that. The good daughter found a good man and got married. And they lived happily ever after.