Psychol Stud (July–September 2018) 63(3):236–242
https://doi.org/10.1007/s12646-018-0451-0

REVIEW ARTICLE

The Moderating Role of General Mood Between Agreeableness and Moral Maturity

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Received: 7 August 2017 / Accepted: 19 April 2018 / Published online: 16 May 2018
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Abstract The purpose of this study was to examine the moderating role of general mood on the relationship between moral maturity and agreeableness. In the present study, total of 150 administrative and academic staff (70 females and 80 males) were surveyed from the Turkish universities. Data were collected on the Big Five Personality Scale, The Scale of Moral Maturity and Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory. The relationship between moral maturity and agreeableness personality was found to be moderated by the general mood of employees.

Keywords Moral maturity · Big five · Agreeableness · Emotional intelligence · General mood

Introduction

Both theory and research on moral development have shown that people's judgments on a variety of subjects are determined by the moral stage they have reached. However, may be the question which is hard to answer is very important: "What is the right or wrong?" In our opinion being a "moral" human requires casuistry (Ersoy, 1997). No doubt, for living with the society in a good agreement, we should track its norms and values. As Villegas de Posada and Vargas-Trujillo (2015) stated, social life requires morality, which ultimately consists in acting on conformity with a code of conduct that prescribes what right or wrong is. According to Hogan (1973), obeying the rules or disregarding them, and applying a regulation upon someone are types of moral behaviors. A critical factor which determines these behaviors can be personality traits, because a person's personality can be predicted from his/her moral behaviors (Balat, 2005). As Athota, O'Connor, and Jackson (2009) found, emotional intelligence was a significant predictor of four of the Big Five Personality dimensions (extraversion, openness, neuroticism, agreeableness), which in turn were significant predictors of Moral Reasoning. Besides that, Curtis, Billingslea, and Wilson (1988) found significant associations between Moral Maturity and the two traits empathy (similar to agreeableness) and socialization (extraversion) and Athota et al., (2009) stated in their study that agreeableness was the strongest predictor of Moral Reasoning. Since general mood represents happiness and optimism, we thought that an individual's happiness or optimism level moderates the relationship between moral maturity level and personality trait of agreeableness.

Hence moral behaviors can be treated as a reflection of personality. And also, moral codes are created by culture. In this vein, moral behaviors can be learned in the socialization process and they substitute as a factor.

In line with the researches about moral maturity, we proposed that administrative and academic staff's personality trait of agreeableness positively predicts their moral maturity. But also one of the emotional intelligence dimension—general mood—may moderate this relationship. In the next section, the theoretical and practical

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implications of this hypothesis in the literature are discussed.

Moral Maturity

Kohlberg's (1984) moral development theory postulated that moral maturity is multidimensional, developmental and social process which grows through conflict, strife and stressors. Individuals develop opinions about certain moral issues based on parental instruction and the opinions of others, as well as innate opinions of right and wrong. However, these moral opinions are "soft" in that they are not internalized beliefs. They can be challenged and discarded (Wright, 2015). As the person grows up, his or her moral maturity level manifests how the individual chooses to respond to real-life events. In that case, the moral sense of the person moderates the behaviors toward others. Moral maturity contains both moral values, internalization and consolidation, in conscience (Güldü, 2014).

Mathieson (2003) identified seven factors of moral maturity: moral agency and a sense of the self as a moral being; the ability to harness cognitive ability to make decisions; the ability to harness emotional resources and sensitivity toward others; using social skills to persuade others; identifying and using higher-order principles as guidance for our choices; valuing and respecting others; and developing a sense of one's life purpose. Liddell and Cooper (2012) stated that these factors help the individual to determine which course of action is morally the best one. Because only the person whose moral maturity levels are high can commit to an action based on the understanding of the principals involved as there is a harmony between their motives and behaviors (Şengün & Kaya, 2007).

Agreeableness Personality and Linkages with Moral Maturity

According to Costa and McCrea (1992), the united five factors of the Big Five model of personality include: openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and emotional stability. In other words, this model of personality contains a set of interacting and intercorrelated traits developed in five broad factors or dimensions which shape and influence individuals' tendencies and behaviors (Attia, 2013). Agreeableness describes whether someone is amiable or agreeable to other people. An agreeable person has a pleasant character, is fundamentally kind, trustful, cooperative, warm and ready to help and support others. Agreeableness is characterized by friendly and empathic behaviors. Agreeable individuals are helpful, warm, altruistic, generous and loving (Marsh, Nagengast, & Morin, 2013). A disagreeable person is cold, unpleasant, uncooperative and sometimes aggressive. He/she cares much more about climbing toward high positions without regard to other considerations and other people (Attia, 2013). Barrick, Mount, and Judge (2001) stated that agreeable people are chosen by others in all life areas (work, intimate relationships, family and teams) because of their helping, cooperating and nurturing behaviors. In our opinion, this altruistic personality profile should contain the idea of being a "good person". So, agreeable people should have much more high scores on the moral maturity scale. Then, agreeableness should predict the amount of moral maturity of the individuals.

General Emotional State as a Contributor of Moral Maturity

As known, personality factors have been associated with individual differences for a long time. The construct of emotional intelligence (EI) has also been researched and evaluated as a measure of individual difference. According to Salovey and Mayer (1990, p. 189), emotional intelligence is "the ability to monitor one's own and other's feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions". As Hartoğlu (2015) pointed out, according to Bar-On's model, to be emotionally and socially intelligent, an individual has to understand and express oneself effectively, understand and relate well with others, and successfully cope with daily demands, challenges and pressures. The five dimensions in the Bar-On's model include (a) intrapersonal, (b) interpersonal, (c) adaptability (d) stress management and (e) general mood (Gürman Kahraman, 2013).

It has been argued that emotional intelligence and personality are highly correlated (Van der Linden, Tsaousis, & Petrides, 2012) and that emotional intelligence should be regarded as a personality trait (Petrides, Siegling, & Saklofske, 2016). According to these considerations "general mood" can be seen as a personality trait because of its self-motivation nature. By including happiness and optimism under the category of general mood, morally positive behaviors can be linked to these positive thoughts and to willingness for being a "good person."

The Present Research

In the present study, we expect that emotional intelligence—general mood—may moderate the relationship between moral maturity level and agreeableness personality trait. Our sample was chosen from administrative and

academic staff. The main reason of choosing this sample is that academicians and non-academic professional staff members with high educational levels are key components in today's higher education and make a great contribution to the improvement of the youths for being a good human in the future. Because personality aspects combined with social behaviors and competencies and individual personality could contribute to emotional intelligence improvement (Zhang, Cao, & Wang, 2018), these variables are important for this sample, too. If their moral maturity level is high, they should be much more fair and empathic. Being a good role model for the university students is more likely one of the most important aspect besides the profession of teaching for the academicians. Obviously, in different degrees of morally positive behaviors, these special groups' agreeable personalities can make different impacts on moral maturity levels. In other words, while the educational levels affect the general mood of individuals, it also affects their moral maturity level as well (Ersoy, 1997; Rest & Narvaez, 2014). But when it comes to the relationship between agreeableness and moral maturity levels, general mood level intervenes as a moderator and changes the nature of this relationship. It means that no matter what their emotional intelligence level is, especially as long as their general mood level is as high as it can be, if their agreeableness level is limited, moral maturity levels will be low-level too.

In order to explore the answers to these and related questions, this research has been conducted and attempted to explain how agreeableness level predicts moral maturity level at the different levels of general mood. Thus, this study was aimed to examine whether the personality and the emotional intelligence are main determinants of the moral maturity levels or not.

The proposed model is presented in Fig. 1.

Based on the past research findings, theoretical explanation reported in the literature review and our expectations, we hypothesized the following:

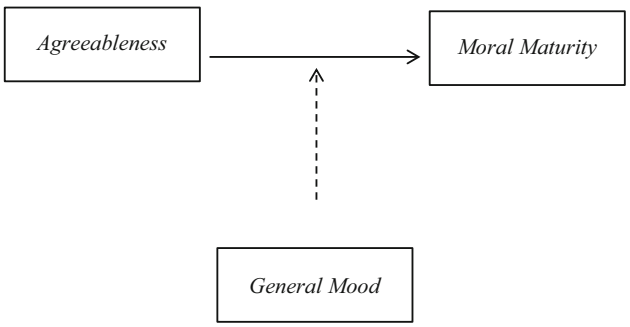

Fig. 1 Research model of agreeableness, moral maturity and general emotional state (dashed lines indicate moderation hypotheses)

H1 There is a relationship between general mood and moral maturity level.
H2 There is a relationship between general mood and agreeableness.
H3 There is a relationship between moral maturity and agreeableness.
H4 The relation between moral maturity and agreeableness is moderated by general mood.
H5 The relationship between agreeableness and moral maturity differs according to the amount of general mood level.

Method

Data were collected from 150 administrative and academic staff working at Turkish universities. There were 70 females (46.7%) and 80 males (53.3%) with mean ages 32.62 and 36.86, respectively. Among them, 64% were under 35, while 36% were above 35. As can be seen in Table 1, slightly more than half of the participants were administrative staff (52.7%) and slightly less than half of them were working as academics (47.3%). 90% of the respondents have a university degree or master degree. The frequencies and percentages of the demographics of the participants are summarized in Table 1.

Measures

In order to collect the related data, Big Five Personality Inventory (Benet-Martinez & John, 1998), The Scale of Moral Maturity (Şengün & Kaya, 2007) and Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory (Bar-On, 2007) were used.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics for the respondents (n = 150)

	n	%
Gender		
Male	80	53.3
Female	70	46.7
Age		
Under 35	96	64
Above 35	54	36
Educational level		
High school	15	10
Undergraduate	61	40.7
Graduate	74	49.3
Profession		
Administrative staff	79	52.7
Academic staff	71	47.3

Additionally, a demographic information form was completed by the respondents. The instruments and demographic information forms were distributed to the participants by the researchers. More detailed information about the measuring instruments used in the study is presented below.

Big Five Personality Scale

Personality was measured with the 44-item Big Five Personality Inventory (Benet-Martinez & John, 1998), which assesses five main personality traits: agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, openness to experience and extraversion. The validity and reliability of the Turkish version of the scale were assessed by Sümer, Lajunen, and Özkan (2005). They found that the Turkish version of the scale is valid and reliable (Basım, Çetin, & Tabak, 2009).

The Scale of Moral Maturity

The second scale used in the study is "Moral Maturity Scale" developed by Şengün and Kaya (2007). The Scale of Moral Maturity consists of 66 items and is prepared in the form of Likert scaling. The highest score which can be obtained in this scale is 300 and the lowest is 30. Test–retest reliability was found as .88, split half reliability was computed as .89, and Cronbach's alpha was found as .93 (Şengün & Kaya, 2007).

Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory

The Bar-On EQ-I (Bar-On, 2007) includes 133 questions and for every question there are five numbers on a continuum. Participants chose among Likert-scale descriptions ranging from "totally agree" to "totally disagree" according to their perception of the statements (Yüksel, 2006). The total score reflects overall emotional intelligence; scores on 5 higher-order composite dimensions (Deniz, 2013). The scale adapted to Turkish by Acar (2001) was used for emotional intelligence measurement. The Turkish form of the EQ-I is an 88-item measure that provides an overall score of EQ-I based on five composite scales. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were .92 for overall score, .83 for intrapersonal intelligence, .77 for interpersonal intelligence, .65 for adaptability, .73 for stress management and .75 for general mood (Acar, 2001; Deniz, 2013).

Results

The main aim of the present study was to explore whether general emotional state moderates the relationship between moral maturity and agreeableness personality. But at the beginning of the analysis, we computed all the correlations among dependent variable (moral maturity) and independent variables (emotional intelligence and agreeableness personality trait). For all analysis, an alpha value of .05 was chosen to indicate the significance. The analyses were conducted with SPSS 18.0.

Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Matrix

The means, SDs and correlations among the research variables are presented in Table 2.

As can be seen in the Table 2, moral maturity score was positively correlated with agreeableness and negatively correlated with general mood. Thus, Hypothesis 1, Hypothesis 2 and Hypothesis 3 were supported.

The influences of general mood and agreeableness level on moral maturity were used to analyze the effects of independent variables, especially the moderating role of general mood between agreeableness and moral maturity. In other words, to test the hypothesis that moral maturity levels are the function of personality traits and emotional intelligence levels, and more specifically whether general mood moderates the relationship between agreeableness and moral maturity, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted.

Results of the Moderator Regression Analysis

Moderation occurs when the direction, strength, or both of the relation between an independent variable and a dependent variable are affected by a third variable, which is termed as a moderator (Baron & Kenny, 1986). In multiple regression, moderation is typically represented by linear interaction between the independent variable and the moderator variable and to probe interaction effects prior to analysis where the predictor variable should be centered (Aiken & West, 1991) or transform estimates to the desired simple slopes (Hayes & Matthes, 2009; Liu, West, Levy, & Aiken, 2017; Preacher, Curran, & Bauer, 2006). We preferred the first option. Before the regression analysis, to avoid potentially problematic high multicollinearity with interaction term, the independent variables (agreeableness and general mood) were centered, and the interactions between them were then calculated (Aiken & West, 1991). The regression involved two steps: All of the independent

Table 2 All variables' means, SDs and correlation matrix

	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1. Moral maturity	276.47	31.50	–		
2. General mood	26.92	6.16	− .57*	–	
3. Agreeableness	36.54	4.49	.50*	− .36*	–

*$p < .05$

variables were introduced into the regression equation to test the main effects (step 1), and the interaction terms were introduced into the regression equation to test the moderating effects (step 2). In the first step, two variables were included: agreeableness and general mood.

These variables accounted for a significant amount of variance in moral maturity degree, R^2= .39, $F_{3–146}$ = 47.83, $p < .05$. Next, the interaction term between agreeableness and general mood was added to the regression model, which accounted for a significant proportion of the variance in moral maturity, ΔR^2 = 0.03, $p < .05$. These results supported the hypothesis and indicated that the interaction between agreeableness and general mood was significantly associated with moral maturity. Afterward, we used PROCESS macro option of SPSS and found that overall model was significant, $F_{3–146}$ = 34.12, $p < .05$, R^2= .42; agreeableness b = 1.76, t_{146} = 3.09, $p < .05$; general mood b = − 2.29, t_{146} = − 4.82, $p < .05$; and interaction b = 0.16, t_{146} = 2.52, $p < .05$). The regression equation for moral maturity is displayed as follows:

$$\begin{aligned}\text{Moral Maturity} = {} & \text{constant} + 1.76\,(\text{Agreeableness}) \\ & -2.29\,(\text{General Mood}) \\ & + 0.16\,(\text{Agreeableness} * \text{General Mood})\end{aligned}$$

We first aimed to test whether general mood of respondents moderates the relationship of agreeableness with moral maturity (Hypotheses 4). Because the interaction term was statistically significant, we computed simple slopes test for a more thorough examination of the moderation phenomenon (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). To provide a further understanding of the effects we obtained, interactions were plotted using the method recommended by Aiken and West (1991).

We estimated the simple slopes of the relation between moral maturity and agreeableness, for low general mood (lower than − 1 SD) and for high general mood (higher than + 1 SD). For low general mood, the simple slope between moral maturity and agreeableness had positive value (b = 0.74, t_{146} = 1.12, $p < .05$) which means that the positive relationship between agreeableness and moral maturity becomes stronger, by Υ_{11} = .74 units as staff's general mood increases by one unit. For high general mood, the same relation was also positive (b = 2.78, t_{146} = 3.77, $p < .05$). So, the positive relationship between agreeableness and moral maturity becomes much stronger, by Υ_{11} = 2.78 units as staff's general mood increases by one unit. To sum up, the results revealed significant cross-level interaction effects of agreeableness and general mood level on moral maturity in university staff. Thus, Hypotheses 4 and Hypotheses 5 were supported. The resulting simple slope plots are depicted in Fig. 2. Examination of the interaction plot showed that at low general mood, moral maturity level was at maximum level when agreeableness increased. At high general mood, as agreeableness decreased, moral maturity was at the weakest level. In brief, the results of the hierarchical regressions showed that general mood played a moderating role between agreeableness and moral maturity.

Discussion

Our research model shows the effect of general mood as a moderator on the relationship between agreeableness and moral maturity. As known, general mood is a part of emotional intelligence and has a self-motivated nature and can be seen as a personality trait. So, being happy and optimistic can produce socially approved behaviors. People at low general mood have the highest level of moral maturity and depict high level of agreeableness. But it is interesting to observe that there is a negative relationship between general mood and agreeableness. It means that they have realistic emotional perceptions instead of Pollyanna attitude. Pollyanna attitude implies that whatever happens, it happens for a good reason and sees the positive in every situation. Indeed, as a positive thinker, Pollyanna does not ignore the negative aspects of life, but focuses only on the positive aspects in her life. Optimists choose to be hopeful for the future, and even if things do not turn out as expected; they try to derive lessons from mistakes and move on (Kaur & Chadha, 2016). This more rational approach to the life events helps people fight against daily social pressures successfully. Therefore, it can be said that the level of general mood affects the relationship between

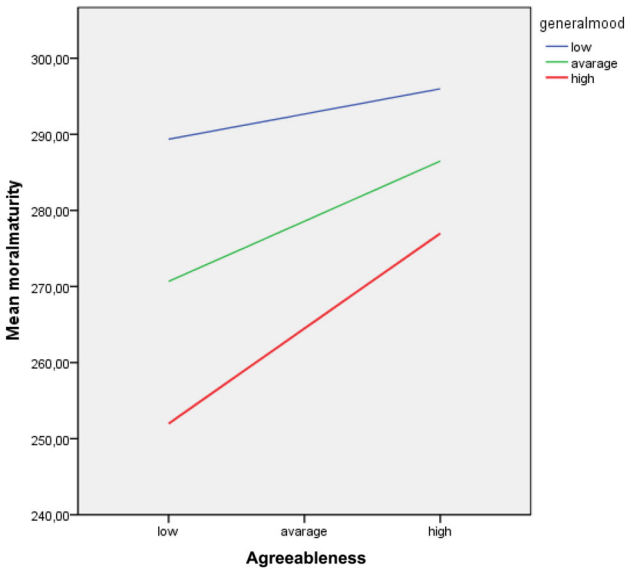

Fig. 2 The moderating function of general mood on the relationship between agreeableness and moral maturity

agreeableness and moral maturity, namely the slope of the line (agreeableness–moral maturity) is at the most vertical angle when general mood is high (tangent $\alpha = 2.78$). When general mood level is low, moral maturity reaches to the highest level when agreeableness level increases. In other words, the slope of the line (moral maturity—agreeableness) is at the most horizontal angle when general mood is low (tangent $\alpha = 0.74$). It means that the high level of general mood is not needed for establishing positive social relations with others. In that case, when general mood level is high, low agreeableness level makes moral maturity levels the weakest. So it can be said that people who have high general mood levels don't have adequate moral maturity skills for coping with interpersonal conflicts. Therefore, it is not surprising to see that they can't hold with other people easily. In our opinion, people with extreme and unrealistic optimism cannot act the way which they find correct for them without thinking whether it is ethical or not in order to manage the social relationships with others. Then, those who work at universities are expected to be much more morally matured, because of their high educational level, and cannot be labeled as "high in moral maturity", if they are not agreeable in nature. As Digman (1990) stated, low agreeable people depict hostility, indifference to others, self-centeredness, spitefulness and jealousy at the other. This means that for them, non-compliance to social norms or ignorance of others' expectations is not a big problem because their interests are always at the first place. But if their agreeableness level becomes higher, their moral maturity level will be stronger. These results indicate that having a Pollyanna attitude is not always a good option to cope with problems in a life with ups and downs (Kart, 2004). In the case that an individual follows his/her principles for the sake of fair behaviors, it is not necessary for them to make other people happy all the time. Also, our results depicted that moral maturity level is very poor when agreeableness level is low, even though general mood scores are at the highest level. It means that education and emotional intelligence are not compensation mechanisms for inadequate moral maturity. We should mention that self-regularity mechanisms as self-monitoring are ignored in our model. In fact, high self-monitors are good at meeting others' social expectations (Day & Schleicher, 2006). As a result, our model reveals not only the moderator role of general mood on the relationship between agreeableness and moral maturity but also points out the agreeableness' strategic role in the model.

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