

# Moral development in adolescence: The role of individual and family factors



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# Objectives

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- Empirically examine moral development in adolescence in relation to individual and family attributes.
- Apply both variable-centered and person-centered approaches.
- Draw on developmental and social-psychological perspectives on morality.
- Provide evidence to support theoretical assumptions not tested extensively.
- No relevant research in Greece.

# Kohlberg's theory of moral development (Kohlberg, 1969, 1984)

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- Three levels, each consisting of two stages:
  - Pre-conventional (obedience/punishment, self-interest)
  - Conventional (conformity, social order)
  - Post-conventional (social contract, universal principles)
- Emphasis on cognition.
- The individual's construction of moral epistemology.
- Developmental process.
- The shift from conventional to post-conventional thinking.

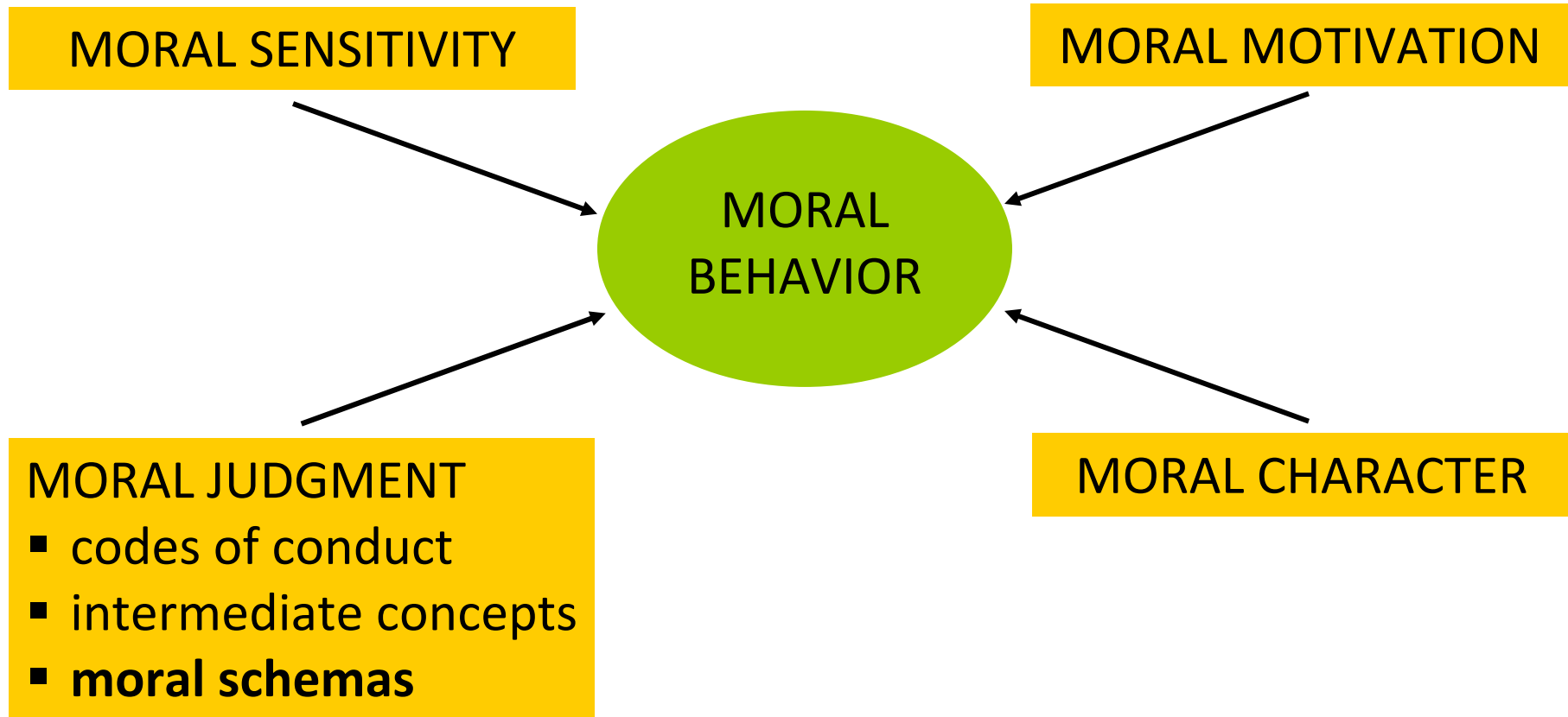
# The neo-Kohlbergian approach

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- Cognitive structures are not defined in terms of “operations” (e.g., “justice operations” INRC operations).
- The staircase-stage concept (schemas *vs.* stages).
- Methodology (recognition *vs.* production task).
- Universality (cross-cultural universality of moral schemas has not been studied systematically).

# The four component model

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(Narvaez & Rest, 1995; Rest et al., 1986)

# Moral schemas

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Moral schemas are general knowledge structures used in social cooperation that reside in long-term memory (Narvaez & Bock, 2002; Rest et al., 1999).

Memory objects



Mental models  
Moral schemas



Moral judgments  
Dilemmas solving

Cognitive fields

# Moral schemas

(Rest et al., 1999)

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POST-CONVENTIONAL  
(internalized evaluative criteria  
based on shared ideals)

MAINTAINING NORMS  
(sociocentric perspective)

PERSONAL INTERESTS  
(egocentric perspective)



# Factors related to moral reasoning

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## ■ Individual

- ✓ Ego identity status (Kroger, 2004; Skoe & Marcia, 1991)
- ✓ Decisional/Behavioral autonomy (Steinberg, 1999)
- ✓ Internal locus of control (Chiu et al., 1997; Lipkus, 1991)
- ✓ Belief in a just world (Oppenheimer, 2005; Subbotsky, 2000)

## ■ Family

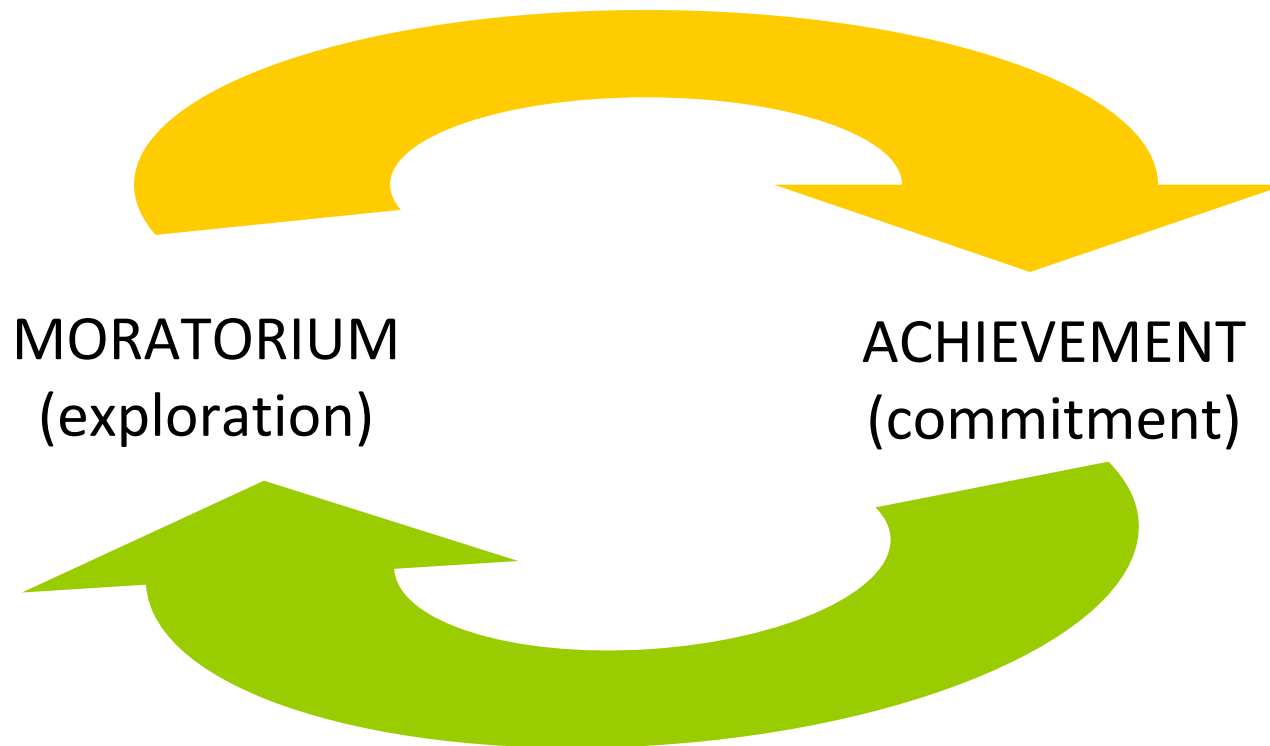
- ✓ Parenting style (Newman & Murray, 1983), goals, and practices



# Ego identity: MAMA cycles

(Marcia, 1980; Slugoski et al., 1984)

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# Decisional/Behavioral autonomy

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- Three dimensions of autonomy:
  - ✓ emotional (Steinberg & Silverberg, 1987)
  - ✓ behavioral (Zimmer-Gembeck, 2001)
  - ✓ values (Fleming, 2005)
- Behavioral autonomy refers to adolescent's orientation, freedom and ability to:
  - ✓ make decisions independently
  - ✓ set goals
  - ✓ regulate one's own behavior
  - ✓ depend on himself/herself
  - ✓ become a self-governed person.
- Privileges and responsibilities.

# Locus of control

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The generalized expectancies and beliefs for control of reinforcement. These generalized expectancies can predict people's behavior across similar situations (Rotter, 1966, 1982).



# Just world beliefs

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- People want to and have to believe they live in a just world where they get what they deserve or, conversely, deserve what they get (Lerner & Miller, 1978).
- Functions of JWB (Dalbert, 1991, 2001; Furnham, 2003):
  - ✓ they endow individuals with the confidence that they will be treated fairly by others,
  - ✓ they provide a conceptual framework which makes it possible for people to interpret the events of their personal life in a meaningful way,
  - ✓ they are indicative of the personal obligation to behave fairly.

# Parenting

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- **Parenting goals** directly affect the cognitive and emotional aspects of parents' behavior (e.g., Sorrentino & Higgins, 1986).
- **Parenting style** (Barber, 1996; Baumrind, 1971, 1989; Leung & Kwan, 1998)
  - Dimensions: responsiveness-warmth, demandingness-control.
  - Types: authoritarian, authoritative, permissive, neglectful.
- **Parenting practices** (e.g., child-rearing, religiosity)

# Research questions and hypotheses

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- Moral schemas are expected to be related with individual attributes of adolescents.
  - **Post-conventional schema:**
    - (+) identity exploration, behavioral autonomy, internal locus of control;
    - (–) identity commitment, just world beliefs.
  - **Maintaining norms schema:**
    - (+) identity commitment, just world beliefs;
    - (–) identity exploration.
  - **Personal interest schema:**
    - (+) identity commitment, external locus of control;
    - (–) identity exploration.

# Research questions and hypotheses

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- In addition, moral schemas of adolescents are expected to be related with family/parenting properties.
  - **Post-conventional schema:**
    - (+) authoritative parenting style;
    - (-) just world beliefs of parents.
  - **Maintaining norms schema:**
    - (+) religious practices.
  - **Personal interest schema:**
    - (+) compliance as a parenting goal, authoritarian parenting style.

# Characteristics of the sample

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- N = 369 families (i.e., adolescents and their mothers) residing in the wider Athens metropolitan area.
- Adolescent gender:
  - 155 boys
  - 214 girls
- Adolescent school grade:
  - 121 4<sup>th</sup> high school (about 15 years of age)
  - 131 5<sup>th</sup> high school (about 16 years of age)
  - 117 6<sup>th</sup> high school (about 17 years of age)



# Measures

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## Adolescents



## Mothers



- ✓ Moral judgments
- ✓ Just world beliefs

- ✓ Psychological identity
- ✓ Behavioral autonomy
- ✓ Locus of control

- ✓ Parenting goals
- ✓ Parenting style
- ✓ Religious practices

# Measures for adolescents and their mothers

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- **The Defining Issues Test (DIT, short version; Rest, 1975, 1986):**
  - Three stories each presenting a moral dilemma.
  - Measures three moral schemas:
    - ✓ Personal interest (9 items,  $\alpha_{\text{adol}}=.60$ ,  $\alpha_{\text{moth}}=.61$ )
    - ✓ Maintaining norms (6 items,  $\alpha_{\text{adol}}=.62$ ,  $\alpha_{\text{moth}}=.67$ )
    - ✓ Post-conventional (10 items,  $\alpha_{\text{adol}}=.57$ ,  $\alpha_{\text{moth}}=.62$ )
- **Belief in a Just World (Dalbert, 1993, 1999, 2001):**
  - ✓ Just family climate (4 items,  $\alpha_{\text{adol}}=.84$ ,  $\alpha_{\text{moth}}=.75$ )
  - ✓ Personal beliefs in a just world (3 items,  $\alpha_{\text{adol}}=.66$ ,  $\alpha_{\text{moth}}=.75$ )
  - ✓ General beliefs in a just world (4 items,  $\alpha_{\text{adol}}=.51$ ,  $\alpha_{\text{moth}}=.59$ )

## Measures for adolescents

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- **Ego Identity Process Questionnaire (EIPQ; Balisteri et al., 1995):**
  - ✓ Identity exploration (12 items,  $\alpha=.61$ )
  - ✓ Identity commitment (15 items,  $\alpha=.77$ )
- **Perspectives on Adolescent Decision Making Questionnaire (PADM; Bosma et al., 1996):**
  - ✓ Adolescent decision making (14 items, KR20=.84)
  - ✓ Parental control (14 items, KR20=.61)
  - ✓ Parent-adolescent conflicts (14 items, KR20=.74)
  - ✓ Subjective norm (14 items, KR20=.76)
- **Internality, Powerful Others and Chance Scales (Levenson, 1981):**
  - ✓ Internality (8 items,  $\alpha=.63$ )
  - ✓ Powerful others (7 items,  $\alpha=.71$ )
  - ✓ Chance (7 items,  $\alpha=.74$ )

## Measures for mothers

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Scales adjusted from the *Maryland Adolescent Development in Context* longitudinal study, (J. Eccles, University of Michigan)

### ■ Parenting Goals:

- ✓ Autonomy (5 items,  $\alpha=.74$ )
- ✓ Interpersonal relationships (2 items,  $r=.38$ )
- ✓ Compliance (2 items,  $r=.37$ )

### ■ Parenting Style:

- ✓ Authoritative (7 items,  $KR20=.67$ )
- ✓ Authoritarian (6 items,  $KR20=.75$ )

### ■ Religious practices:

- ✓ 5 items,  $\alpha=.83$

# Findings

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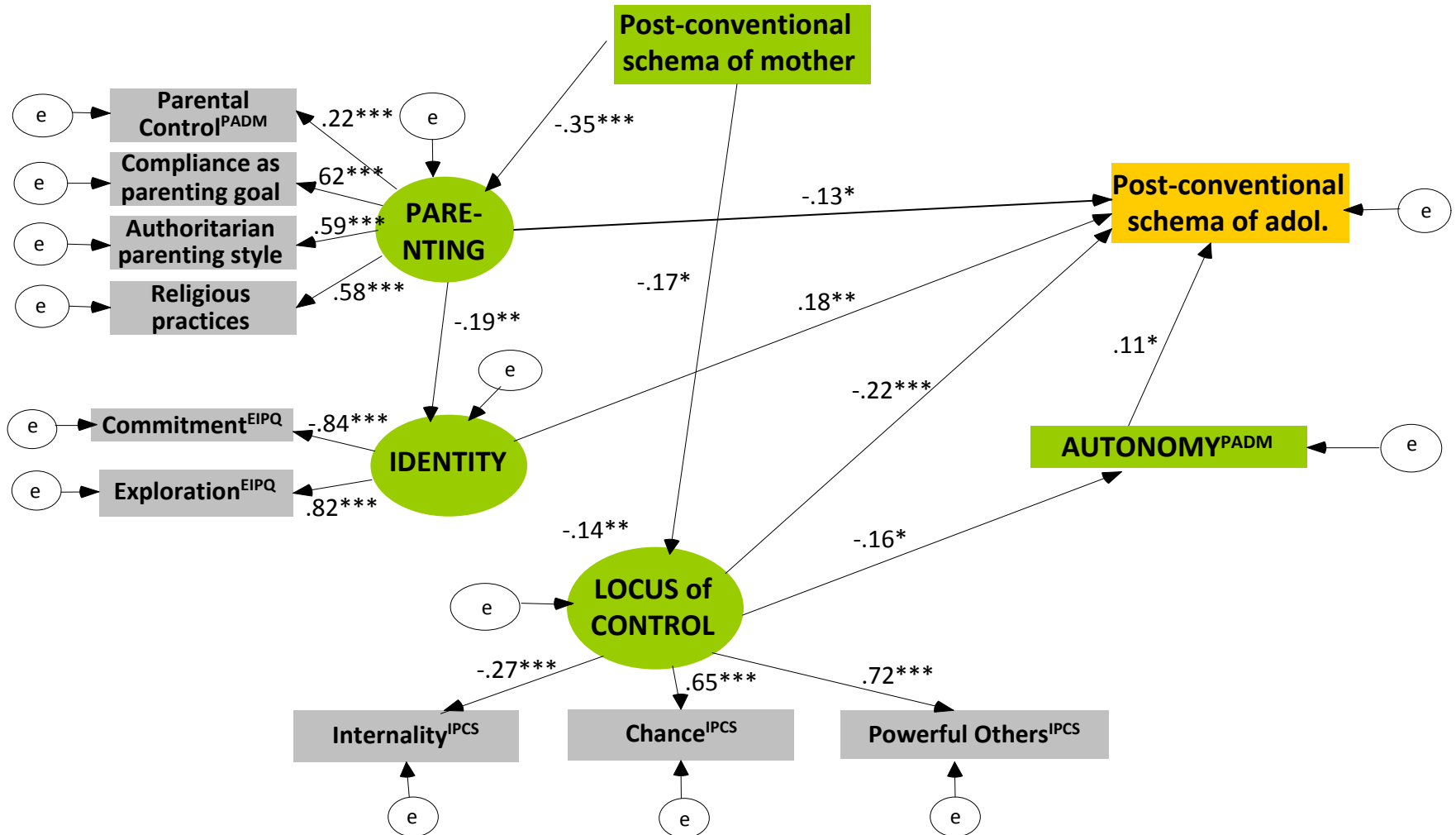
- Variable-focused analyses
  - ✓ correlations and regressions
  - ✓ structural equation model
- Person-focused analyses
  - ✓ cluster
  - ✓ multiple analysis of correspondence

# Individual and family predictors of adolescent moral schemas (beta's significant at $p < .05$ )

Personal Interest (DV)	Maintaining norms (DV)	Post-conventional (DV)
		Female gender (+.11)
Identity exploration (-.21)	Identity exploration (-.15)	Identity exploration (+.21)
Powerful others (+.14)		Powerful others (-.13)
		Adolescent's Decision making (+.17)
Mother's Personal interest (+.19)	Mother's Maintaining norms (+.20)	Mother's Post-conventional schema (+.11)
Authoritative parenting (-.10)		Authoritative parenting (+.12)
Interpersonal relationships as parenting goal (+.13)		
Total $R^2 = .12$	Total $R^2 = .06$	Total $R^2 = .14$

# Structural equation model for the relationships of adolescent post-conventional schema with individual and family attributes

$\chi^2(48)=65.20, p=.050, CMIN/df=1.36, GFI=0.97, CFI=0.97, RMSEA=0.031$



# Clusters of adolescents

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## Moral schemas

- ✓ Personal interest (34%)
- ✓ Maintaining norms (15%)
- ✓ Post-conventional (51%)

## Locus of control

- ✓ Internal (74%)
- ✓ External (26%)

## Identity status

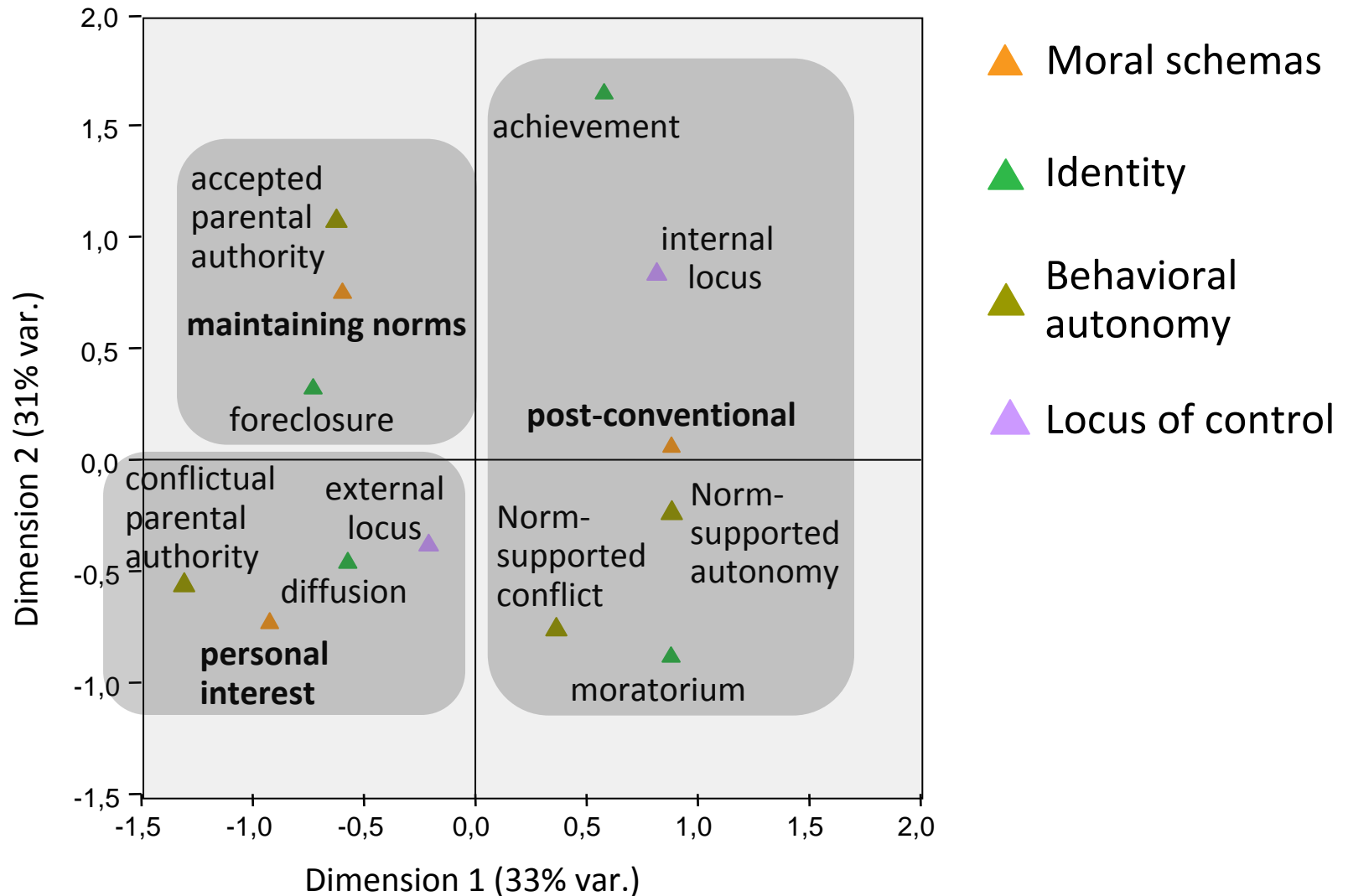
- ✓ Diffusion (15%)
- ✓ Foreclosure (36%)
- ✓ Moratorium (39%)
- ✓ Achievement (10%)

## Behavioral autonomy

- ✓ Accepted parental authority (21%)
- ✓ Conflictual parental authority (9%)
- ✓ Norm-supported conflict (18%)
- ✓ Norm-supported autonomy (52%)



# Multiple analysis of correspondence of adolescent moral schemas and individual attributes



# Clusters of mothers

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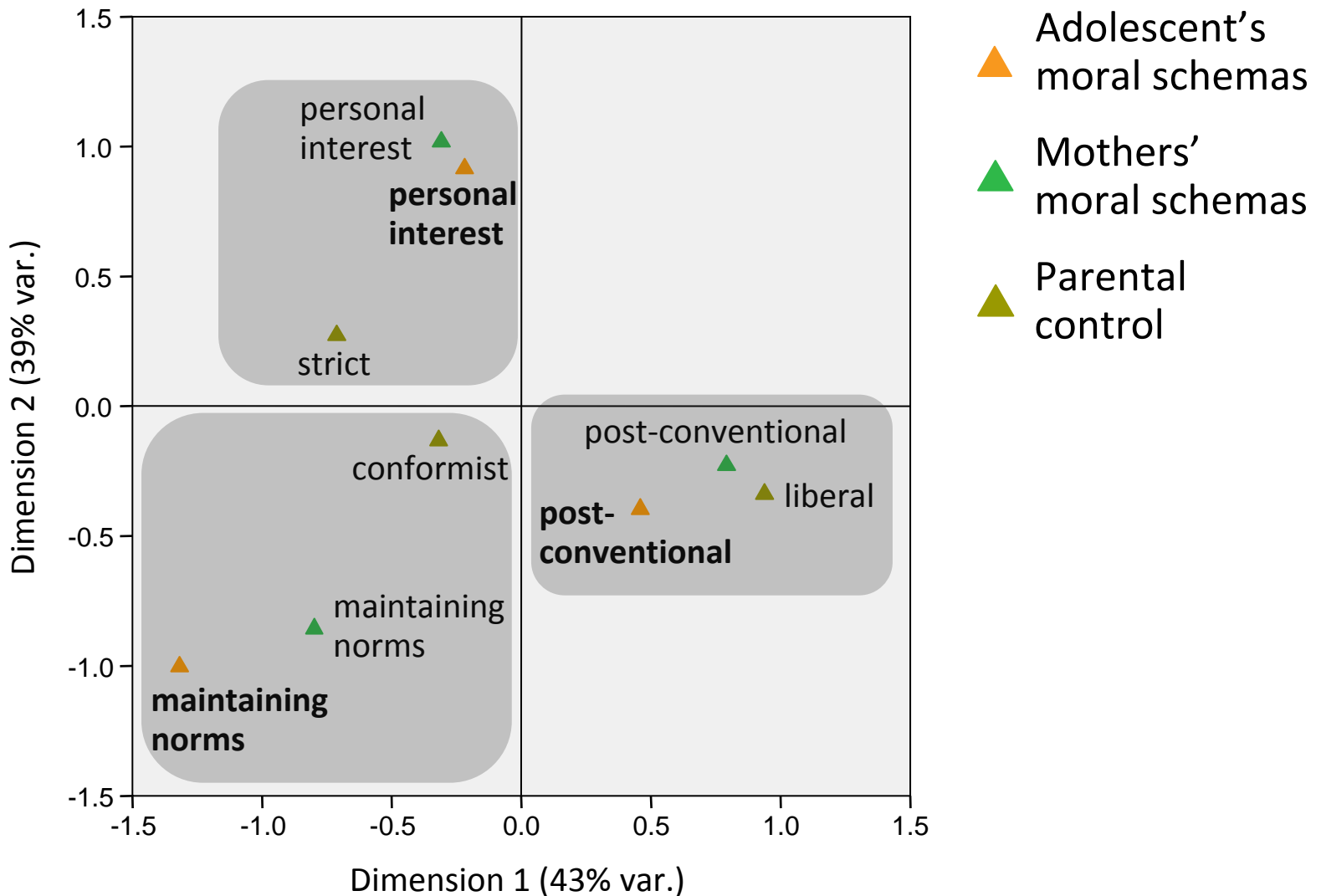
## **Moral schemas**

- ✓ Personal interest (30%)
- ✓ Maintaining norms (29%)
- ✓ Post-conventional (41%)

## **Parental control**

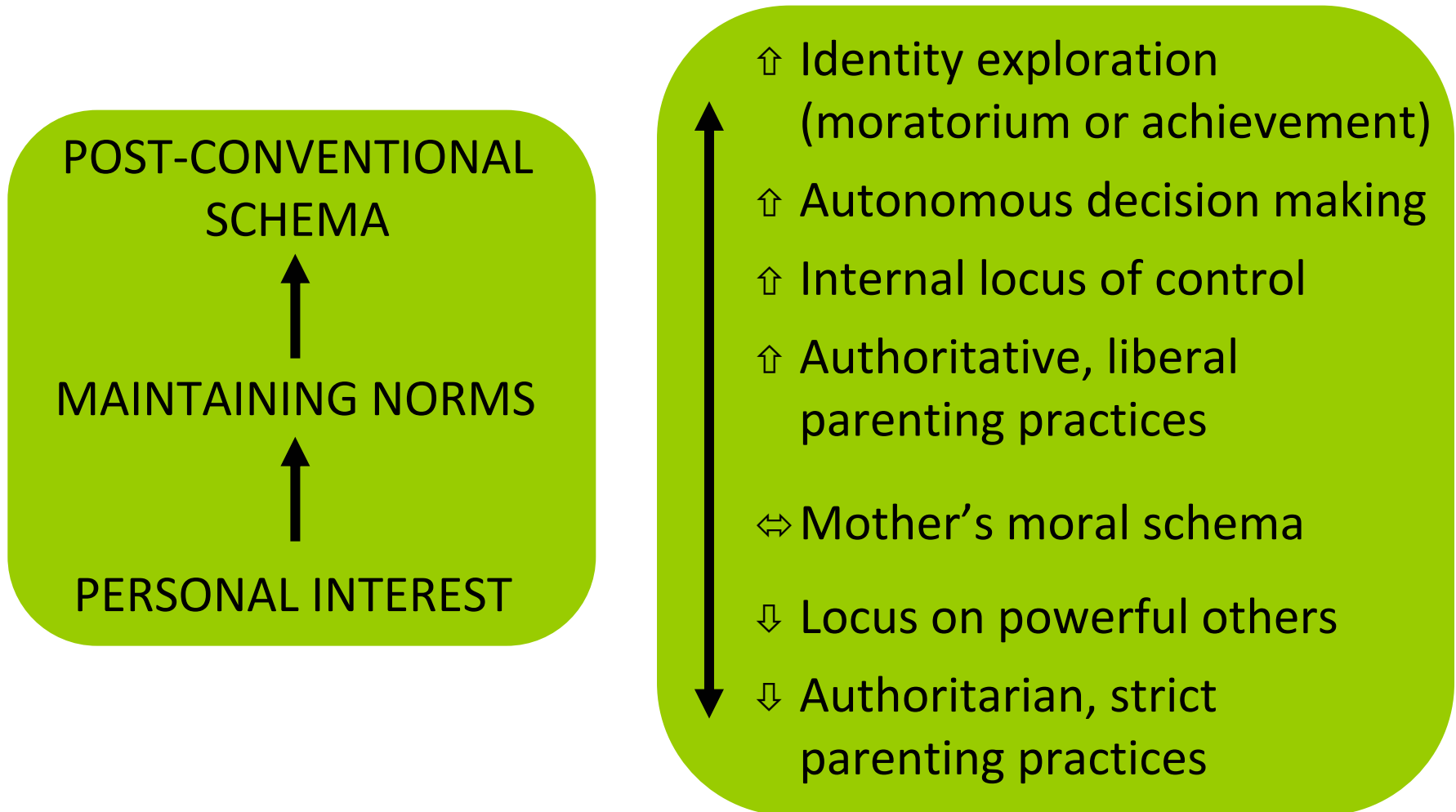
- ✓ Conformist (45%)
- ✓ Liberal (27%)
- ✓ Strict (28%)

# Multiple analysis of correspondence of adolescent moral schemas and family attributes



# Discussion and conclusions

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## Moral schemas and individual factors

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- **Identity exploration** may function at higher levels of moral reasoning. Although morality and identity formation are not directly related in Rest's model, cognitive changes in the development of moral reasoning are an important element of Ego (Côté, 1997; Kroger, 2004; Rest et al., 2000).
- Increasing **personal autonomy** is a prerequisite for moral decisions that are independent from complying to significant others (Fleming, 2005; Rest et al., 1999; Steinberg, 1999).
- Only in post-conventional schema the moral judgments are based on **internalized criteria**, which are not influenced from external reinforcement (Skinner et al., 1998).

## Moral schemas and family factors

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- Moral judgments are actively constructed from reciprocal and/or vertical interactions between parents and adolescents. Children change their moral judgments in directions modeled by adults (Smetana & Turiel, 2006; Turiel, 2002).
- Authoritarian **parenting style** may be ineffective in facilitating moral maturity because it fails to provide information that can be used to construct generalizable moral concepts (Allen et al., 2000; Kochanska, 1997; Smetana, 1997, 2006).
- The maintaining norms moral schema is in line with **religious ideologies** that supply strong, clear norms and with **religious practices** that discourage questioning of their authority (Narvaez et al., 1999; Thoma, 2006; Rest et al., 1999).

## Limitations and future directions

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- Focus on only one component of the moral functioning, i.e. moral schemas. Can be extended to other components, e.g. moral motivation or moral sensitivity.
- Limited age range of adolescents.
- A cross-sectional study cannot establish causal relationships. Longitudinal studies may identify developmental sequence and trajectories of moral reasoning.
- Cross-cultural surveys to study the role of sociocultural context (e.g., cultural values, child-rearing practices).
- Data collection from fathers!
- Development of moral education programs in order to deal with the “acting” vs. “thinking” gap.



Thank you for your attention!

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