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**ETHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF DECISION-MAKING BY  
STUDENTS IN SITUATION OF MORAL CHOICE**

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***Abstract***

The article systematizes psychological aspects of a personal moral choice, the conditions of a person's moral freedom, describes the situation of a moral choice. The subject of the study is the ethic characteristics of decision-making by students in a situation of a moral choice. A sample of respondents consists of 168 students. The authors used the immersion method in the situation of a moral choice 'Friend-Guide-2' by E.K. Veselova and S.A. Chernyaeva. The findings of an experiment on studying the main parameters of decision-making in a situation of a moral choice by students are presented in the empirical part of the study. The quantitative and qualitative analyses of the empirical data of the study are carried out. The authors investigated the morality index, indicators of moral orientation, and the motives for reasoning the decision proposed. While interpreting the experimental data, the authors found out some differences in the aspects of girls' and boys' morality (1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year students). The 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year female students showed a lower moral mark than that of the young men. The 1<sup>st</sup> year male students show awareness in keeping moral standards and think about the consequences of their choice. The girls in the sample tend to make a decision spontaneously in a situation of a moral choice. The 4<sup>th</sup> year young men tend to make constructive decisions, formulate recommendations for actions in situations of a moral choice.

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**Keywords:** Decision making, moral choice, moral index, reasons for choice.



## 1. Introduction

The study of a moral choice is specified by the complex nature of current socio-economic and social processes, the transformation of world view orientations and moral values of an individual. At the same time, any meaningful choice for a person implies the manifestation of his/her subject activity.

Any moral choice is characterized by a particular personal meaning. The authors view it as a spiritual and practical situation of personal self-determination with regard to principles, actions and decisions. The person's conscious preference of a particular action pattern based on personal or social moral attitudes reflects his/her willingness to make decisions in case of a choice.

The moral choice of an individual in the context of the morality of an individual is expressed as an integrated interaction of moral consciousness, moral values, moral patterns, attitudes and norms, moral relations and moral feelings, moral behavior, expressed both through actions and in activities of an individual (Bratus, 1994).

The ethic characteristics of personal development are determined not only by its orientation, content and forms of the decision-making process, but also by the goals and means that a person applies in a situation of a moral choice. The moral choice of a person is an invariable value, as it is determined by moral values and experience (Veselova, 2007).

Moral ideas of the world view level of happiness, the meaning of life, a person as the highest value are individualized in a person in the days of one's early youth. That is the time when an individual is getting able to make a moral choice independently.

## 2. Problem Statement

A person influenced by a number of factors (for example, upbringing, life experience, his/her own will to self-improvement) accumulates the achievements of ethic social culture in his/her consciousness and behavior. All that helps a person to act morally in both common and challenging situations. The characteristics of the moral development of an individual are the degree of mastering by a person the moral social experience, as well as the ability to realize values and norms in behavior and in relations with other people.

An individual decision making in a situation of a moral choice is a multiphasic problem studied by J. Greene through the theory of moral judgment of the dual process (Greene, 2015). K. Fincher and P.E. Tetlock believe that the decision-making process is closely related to the individual values, which provide a strong moral foundation for this process (Fincher & Tetlock, 2015). D. Narvaez et al. emphasize the importance of children's experience in moral development and the necessity to form moral abilities in the context of decision making in a situation of choice (Narvaez, Panksepp, Schore, & Gleason, 2013). The theory of moral reasons developed by J. Haidt also focuses on the importance of decision making in situations of moral choice (Haidt, 2003).

Not only moral, but also personal choice depends on the goals that a person, a group or the society faces (Deci & Ryan, 1986). Taking into account the fact that a moral choice is responsibility, the authors can submit for sure that the participant moves forward in his/her moral development to a certain level when getting into the situation of choice (Veselova, 2013).

According to D. Perreault and his colleagues, moral self-determination gives a person emotional stability (Perreault, Mask, Morgan & Blanchard, 2014). The ability to choose, follow his/her own way of development and react flexibly to external factors depends on how well one is focused on the reference points which one can rely on in a situation of choice (Levkova., Plotnikova, Bazhenov, Maslova, & Ivanchenko, 2018).

The study of understanding human behavior from the point of view of one's moral choice, the explanation of people's actions are presented in the works of B.F. Porshnev (Porshnev, 1999), A.I. Titarenko (Titarenko, 1980), E.K. Veselova (Veselova, 2007; Veselova, 2013). The scientists come to the conclusion that only those who have a high level of morality and moral and ethical thinking can analyze the situation and motivate their behavior. People with a high development of morality express a clear understanding of moral norms and stability to act morally. The average level of morality development reflects the knowledge of moral norms, but this knowledge does not always motivate an individual. The low level of it is typical when focusing on external forms of behavior. A distinctive feature of the low level is a reference to other people's opinion and conformism.

Decision making in a situation of a moral choice is an act of purposeful and sensible human activity, associated with responsibility taken for the goal setting and reaching (Leontyev, 2014). Therefore, the authors offer the study of the moral characteristics that determine decision making in the context of moral choice meaningful.

### **3. Research Questions**

A person's life choice assumes the subject's activity in a certain situation. The moral choice of a person is considered by the authors as an assessment of the personal value system and the decision making in favor of one of them in particular situations. More generally, this concept is interpreted as an issue of struggle of light against darkness, a decision made in favor of the nayward or bright side. The moral choice of people in favor of one side or another is a constant value, since a subject can make a completely different decision in regular similar situations, depending on his/her moral values and experience gained (Dubov & Khvostov, 2000).

It becomes necessary to make a moral choice when circumstances make a person choose from several options. Each of them has moral and personally meaningful content, therefore, can be analyzed from the point of good and evil.

A moral choice is often defined as the conscious act of an individual making a decision. But in order to make this decision, it is necessary to have specific objective and subjective backgrounds and conditions of this or that choice, as well as the possibilities of knowing this choice. In addition, the process of choice does not end when the decision has been already made (Fincher & Tetlock, 2015). It is followed by the choice of means to implement the solution, its practical presentation and evaluation of the outcomes. When characterizing a moral choice, almost all objective and subjective components of human behavior become the subject of focus.

The objective conditions of a moral choice are the options for the choice of behavior and the possibility of their realization. Subjective conditions are considered to be the level of individual moral development, as well as the degree of assimilation of the regulatory requirements of a particular moral

system, the development of awareness of duties, conscience, and other moral traits of an individual (Khvostov, 2005).

A moral choice reflects the degree of personal and social moral freedom and can be made only if certain conditions are observed: if there are no external prohibitions and coactions, as well as if there is no influence of moral attitudes, principles, habits, which have become a part of the subconscious of an individual; if there is consciousness and reflection, as well as understanding of possible choices; if there are orientations (ideals and values) of free will, as well as the means allowing to carry out what is put up, and work methods.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the presented research is to review the moral characteristics that influence decision making in a situation of a moral choice with regard to age and gender aspects theoretically and empirically.

#### **5. Research Methods**

The study sample consists of 168 students from Sholom-Aleichem Priamursky State University (the city of Birobidzhan). The representativeness of the research sample is ensured by the fact that the sample included the 1st and 4th year students (boys and girls). Adolescence is sensitive to formation of their own moral guidelines of a personal moral choice.

The subject of the study is the ethic properties of decision-making by students in a situation of a moral choice.

The authors used the immersion method in the situation of a moral choice 'Friend-Guide-2' by E.K. Veselova and S.A. Chernyaeva (Veselova, 2013) for their experimental research.

The theoretical basis of the immersion method in the situation of a moral choice is viewed through Ten Commandments (fundamental rules), which are considered by the authors as the main core of human morality. This list of norms is presented in universal moral norms. The methodology used in the study of the ethic field is based on the study of possible individual behavior in the situations of a moral choice, according to a moral law, and which require the only one (clear-cut) ethical solution from certain ideological points of view.

The immersion methodology in the situation of a moral choice 'Friend-Guide-2' is aimed at studying the state of the morality of a person. The main idea of the method is that the respondents are offered to find a way out of a situation. Each of them can be considered as a situation of a moral choice. The respondents, as it were, living a specific situation and circumstances that are quite real-life, make a moral choice, i.e. the ability to break or adhere to some generally accepted moral standards.

#### **6. Findings**

The respondents who are in a situation of 'psychological immersion, in a situation of a moral choice' analyze moral aspects of the situation of challenge, thereby reflecting their own understanding of the bases of choice and the motives of moral behavior. The experimental findings that the authors obtained are presented in Tables 1 and 2, where data on the 1st and 4th year students, both boys and girls are shown.

**Table 01.** Average indicators of ethic characteristics of 1st year students (methodology ‘Friend-Guide-2’ by E.K. Veselova and S.A. Chernyaeva)

Parameters (scales)	Average indicators of student morality		
	in the whole group	girls	boys
I (morality index)	38.35	33.01	45.12
P (number of positive responses)	15.66	10.33	19.27
U (number of equivocal replies)	9.05	12.32	7.7
O (number of negative replies)	7.31	9.32	5.14
V(will component, constructive solutions)	1.10	0.72	1.46
VM (external motives, duty, social norms, law, consequences)	1.92	1.676	2,21
VNM (internal motives, conscience, heart, feeling of guilt)	1,86	1,92	1.81
NR (moral relativism. ‘Do as you like most or prefer’)	1.46	1.72	1.21
RAC (rationalization- improvement)	0	0	0
A- (negative emotions)	1.82	2.41	1.28
T (unwillingness to influence the actions of the hero of the situation, alienation, everyone decides on his/her own)	1.46	1.21	1.72
F (general advice, excuse)	2.02	2.08	2
E (advice to make a positive choice, but in case of a possibility)	1.11	1.01	1.26
M (advice to eliminate feelings, emotions, isolation)	0	0	0
A+ (positive emotions, approval, praise)	1.52	1.61	1.46

The average value of the morality index (I) among the 4th year students demonstrates the growing importance of moral norms in the regulation of their behavior. Moreover, this indicator among boys is slightly higher than among girls (the difference is 0.93).

The average value of U (the number of equivocal replies) reflects a tendency towards closedness and unwillingness to express their attitude to moral norms. This indicator is expressed among both girls and boys. The average value of negative replies O proves that the fourth-year students do not have a stable position of rejection of moral norms.

Category V (will component, the number of specific decision proposals, constructive solutions) is more frequent in the responses of fourth-year students among the young men’s ones. It reflects the tendency to take constructive decisions in situations of a moral choice.

Category A is expressed more in girls’ replies than in boys’ ones among the 4th year students. Like in the situation with the first-year students, the frequency of negative emotions in the process of consideration transmits affiliated needs, empathic opportunities.

The average value of category T (rejection to influence the actions of the hero of the situation, alienation, ‘everyone decides for himself’) is more common among young men of the fourth year students than girls. This category is often mentioned in the replies. It shows the tendency of respondents’ self-sufficiency, mental ballast, calm and peace, lack of anxiety, as well as unwillingness to take responsibility for the actions of a loved one and to take part in the process of solving difficult situations.

The average value of the A+ category (positive emotions, approval, praise, statements about positive feelings) manifested more frequently among the 4th year female students than young men is a sign of empathy, frankness in relation to others.

Comparing the average indicators of the 1st and 4th year student morality, the authors can see that fourth-year students have a higher index of morality (I) than the freshmen. According to the findings, as students get older, the importance of moral norms in the regulation of behavior and decision-making is noted.

**Table 02.** Average indicators of the characteristics of morality among the 4th year students (methodology ‘Friend-Guide-2’ by E.K. Veselova and S.A. Chernyaeva)

Parameters (scales)	Average indicators of student morality		
	in the whole group	girls	boys
I (morality index)	47.63	47.26	48.01
P (number of positive responses)	19.60	19.46	19.72
U (number of equivocal replies)	8.42	8.32	8.52
O (number of negative replies)	3.01	3.20	2.80
V (will component, constructive solutions)	1.16	0.81	1.52
VM (external motives, duty, social norms, law, consequences)	1.47	1.47	1.47
VNM (internal motives, conscience, heart, feeling of guilt)	1.31	1.29	1.33
NR (moral relativism. ‘Do as you like most or prefer’)	1.16	1.26	1.06
RAC (rationalization- improvement)	0	0	0
A- (negative emotions)	1.52	1.6	1.46
T (unwillingness to influence the actions of the hero of the situation, alienation, everyone decides on his/her own)	1.53	1.3	1.66
F (general advice, excuse)	1.31	1.41	1.21
E (advice to make a positive choice, but in case of a possibility)	1.27	1.47	1.07
M (advice to eliminate feelings, emotions, isolation)	0	0	0
A+ (positive emotions, approval, praise)	1.54	1.34	1.74

The average value of the morality index (I) among the 4th year students demonstrates the growing importance of moral norms in the regulation of their behavior. Moreover, this indicator among boys is slightly higher than among girls (the difference is 0.93).

The average value of U (the number of equivocal replies) reflects a tendency towards closedness and unwillingness to express their attitude to moral norms. This indicator is expressed among both girls and boys. The average value of negative replies O proves that the fourth-year students do not have a stable position of rejection of moral norms.

Category V (will component, the number of specific decision proposals, constructive solutions) is more frequent in the responses of fourth-year students among the young men’s ones. It reflects the tendency to take constructive decisions in situations of a moral choice.

Category A is expressed more in girls' replies than in boys' ones among the 4th year students. Like in the situation with the first-year students, the frequency of negative emotions in the process of consideration transmits affiliated needs, empathic opportunities.

The average value of category T (rejection to influence the actions of the hero of the situation, alienation, 'everyone decides for himself') is more common among young men of the fourth year students than girls. This category is often mentioned in the replies. It shows the tendency of respondents' self-sufficiency, mental ballast, calm and peace, lack of anxiety, as well as unwillingness to take responsibility for the actions of a loved one and to take part in the process of solving difficult situations.

The average value of the A+ category (positive emotions, approval, praise, statements about positive feelings) manifested more frequently among the 4th year girl students than boys is a sign of empathy, frankness in relation to others.

Comparing the average indicators of the 1st and 4th year student morality, the authors can see that fourth-year students have a higher index of morality (I) than the freshmen. According to the findings, as students get older, the importance of moral norms in the regulation of behavior and decision-making is noted.

## 7. Conclusion

The review of ethic characteristics of an individual in the situation of a moral choice among the 1st and 4th year students showed as they get older the importance of moral norms in the regulation of behavior increases.

Moreover, the morality index in a decision-making situation among both the 1st and 4th year men students is higher than that of girls. The first year girl students show a weakening role of moral norms.

The first year men students are aware of the need to accept and follow moral norms, foreseeing the consequences of their choice. The words 'duty', 'consequences', 'law' can often be read in their replies.

The 4th year girl students tend to spontaneous decision-making in situations connected with a moral choice without regard to the opinions of others. Such concepts as 'conscience', 'heart', 'feeling of guilt' often occur in their replies. The 4th year girl students showed a high affiliative need and emotional empathy.

The 4th year men students tend to constructive decision-making. They showed their readiness to give advice and guide in situations of a moral choice. The situations of a moral choice among the 4th year men student sample reflect the importance of managing their life events, as well as empathy and the tolerant attitude to people.

The authors believe that such characteristics of the respondents' moral choice of the sample as the morality index, external and internal motives for justifying the decision are important to the psychological support of personal development of university students.

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