Navigating the Research University

a guide for first-year students

THIRD EDITION

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Cover Image: Image of University of Washington campus, © Danita Delimont/ Alamy

Illustrations: Britt Andreatta

Library of Congress Control Number: 2010939879

ISBN-13: 978-0-495-91378-8

ISBN-10: 0-495-91378-2

Wadsworth
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Printed in the United States of America
2 3 4 5 6 7 14 13 12 11

HOW YOU'LL CHANGE IN COLLEGE

As the common themes above indicate, the college experience is rich with varied opportunities and challenges. Each student has a unique experience only known to him or her, but elements of it may be shared by a wide range of students who are also attending college for the first time. We now shift our attention to research done on college students that attempts to explain the ways in which students change or develop.

Theories of College Student Development

The experiences of college students have been researched for decades. Scholars have looked at a variety of issues, such as what benefits a college education brings, how and in what ways students develop and mature in college, which kinds of college experiences tend to be positive or negative, and what leads to a person dropping out or leaving college, to name a few. Many of the staff and administrators at your campus have gone to graduate school to learn more about these issues and may have completed a master's or doctoral degree in which they focused on higher education or student development, which is why they hold the positions that they do.

Several theories have emerged over the years that illuminate various aspects of the college experience. Each of them can contribute to your overall understanding of the experience you are having in college as well as help you appreciate the experiences of your peers. Four theories in particular are very useful in exploring the first-year experience: Chickering's Seven Vectors of College Student Development, Perry's Nine Positions of Cognitive Development, Tinto's Model of Institutional Departure, and Kohlberg's Six Stages of Moral Development. These four theories, in combination, provide a well-rounded understanding of the general college experience. As you read them, consider how they relate to your daily life at your university and how they might assist you in maximizing your success, both academically and socially. Note that a few more theories that focus on identity development are discussed in Chapter 7.

CHICKERING'S SEVEN VECTORS OF COLLEGE STUDENT DEVELOPMENT Arthur Chickering researched college students at a variety of schools in the Northeast. He was interested in mapping a holistic view of all the ways in which students develop over the course of their college years. On the basis of this research, he proposed a theory that outlines seven different areas, or vectors (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Although the theory is not linear, Chickering found that students develop simultaneously in the first four vectors and that sufficient development is needed in the fifth vector to be able to fully develop in the last two. See Figure 2.1.

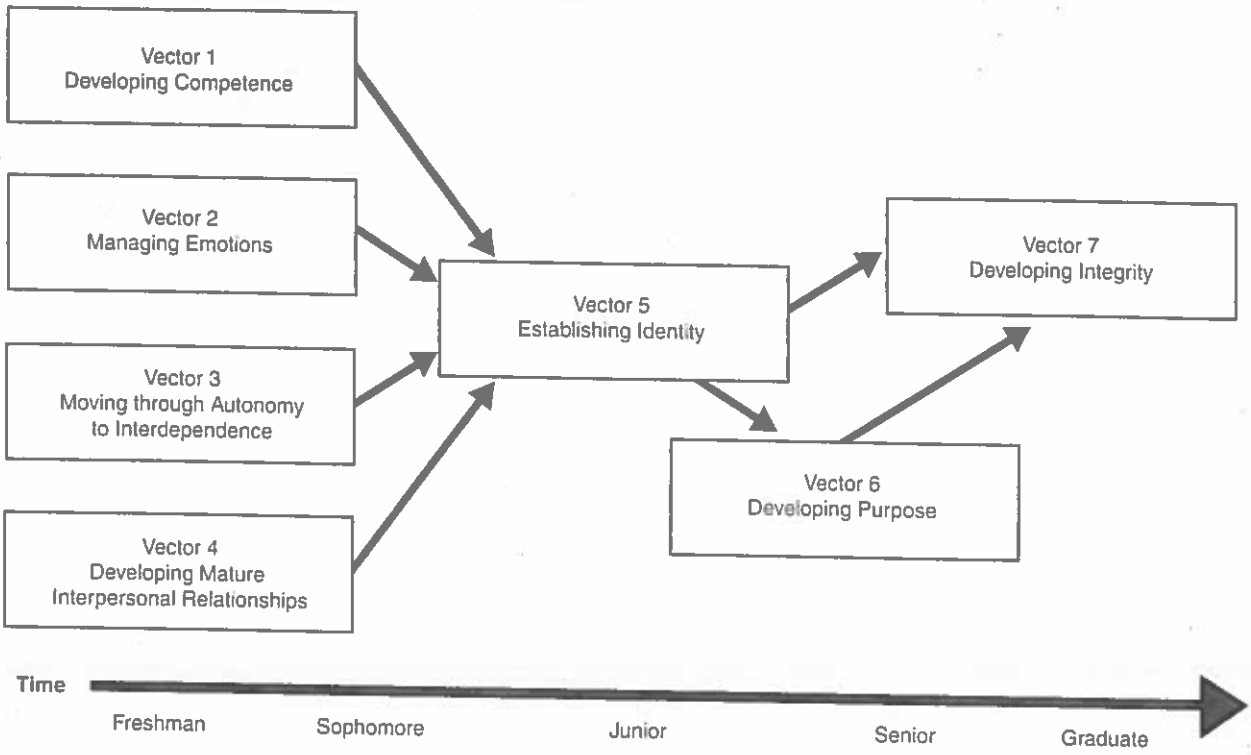
Vector 1: Developing Competence

This vector focuses on developing skills or competence in three areas. The first is intellectual skills, such as critical thinking and writing and the repertoire of skills found in Bloom's Hierarchy. The second is interpersonal skills, which focus on a person's ability to get along with others, and include listening, cooperating, and communicating clearly as well as responding to the needs of others and helping a relationship grow. Finally, manual and physical skills are a measure of basic health and fitness and include athletic and artistic achievements as well as self-discipline.

Vector 2: Managing Emotions

Chickering argues that this vector first focuses on a student experiencing and being able to acknowledge his or her feelings. Once this has been accomplished, the student can look for ways to express (not suppress) those feelings in healthy ways. Chickering would argue that a student who is angry should not suppress that emotion but rather should explore what the anger is about and then find healthy and appropriate ways to express it, such as going for a run or talking to friends. This vector also focuses on becoming comfortable with a whole range of emotions, even those that cause some level of discomfort such as boredom or nervousness, and developing the ability to manage the impulse of wanting instant gratification which directly relates to saying "no" to distracting temptations and choices such as alcohol and other drugs.

FIGURE 2.1 Timeline of Chickering's Seven Vectors of College Student Development



Vector 3: Moving through Autonomy to Interdependence

While students focus a lot on the independence and freedom of college, this vector is really about moving *through* that to another stage of interdependence, that is, realizing that your words and actions have an impact on those around you just as their words and actions have an impact on you. Chickering believes that this vector consists of two types of independence. There is both emotional independence, which is a freedom from the need for continual reassurance or approval, and instrumental independence, or the ability to solve problems in a self-directed way.

Vector 4: Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships

This is a more advanced level than the interpersonal skills achieved in the first vector. There are two aspects here: (1) tolerance or acceptance of differences, and appreciation for those differences, which becomes relevant when interacting with those who are different from you (e.g., racially); and (2) capacity for intimacy in relationships, such as the extent to which you can trust or open up to others. Relationships become an interconnection between equals and therefore have more depth than previous relationships.

Vector 5: Establishing Identity

Chickering argues that one cannot truly succeed at Vector 5 (establishing identity) without significant development in Vectors 1 through 4. He also states that the last two vectors are dependent on success in Vector 5. This vector focuses on the person's self-concept and self-esteem with regard to several aspects of his or her identity. Development here reflects acceptance of and comfort with a variety of personal issues, including body and appearance; gender identity and sexual orientation; sense of self in social, historical, and cultural contexts (i.e., understanding the experiences of cultural groups, such as ethnic or religious, to which you belong); self-concept through roles and lifestyle; sense of self in light of feedback from valued others; overall self-esteem and ability to accept aspects of one's self; and overall personal

stability. All of these require some amount of self-exploration and reflection and depend on the competencies that are developed in the first four vectors. This process takes time and some students have done more self-reflection prior to college than others. Some research actually indicates that establishing identity occurs in the mid-twenties.

Vector 6: Developing Purpose

This vector actually comes later in a person's development and can be achieved only after the identity has been appropriately established. Ironically, however, this is often the first priority for most students and their parents: the idea of choosing a major and a future career. Chickering states that developing purpose focuses on three areas: vocational or career plans (which stem from finding a passion), personal interests in terms of lifestyle, and future commitments for family and other significant relationships. Balancing these three might require compromises.

Vector 7: Developing Integrity

This last vector reflects the person's overall alignment with his or her values and subsequent behaviors. There are three stages, which occur in the following order: (1) humanizing values, or a shift from rigid beliefs to balancing one's own self-interest with the interests of others; (2) personalizing values, or being able to affirm personal values and beliefs while respecting others'; and (3) developing congruence, which means that values and behaviors match (i.e., "walking your talk").

It is important to realize that development in these vectors occurs over several years, and not only in the first year. Although all students are different, the general time frame shown in Figure 2.1 is applicable to most students. Freshmen would be working on the first four vectors during their first and second years at a research university; transfer students would most likely be addressing issues of identity during their first year. See "Point of Interest: Chickering and You." Note that Chickering's research has been criticized for not having a racially representative sample, and as a result, the vectors might not accurately map the development of all groups.

PERRY'S NINE POSITIONS OF COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT William Perry (1970, 1981) explored a completely different side of college students: their **cognitive development.** Essentially, Perry researched in detail the intellectual competence development that Chickering identifies in Vector 1. Perry looked at how people learn and make sense out of information that is presented to them. Unlike Chickering's vectors, Perry's Nine Positions of Cognitive Development are linear, and you must complete one to move on to the next. Students start off wanting to believe that information is very concrete and that experts know the "truth." Perry identified how students move from that belief to one that acknowledges multiple perspectives as well as multiple truths. This requires students to shift, both in their beliefs about what "truth" is and in their perceptions of what experts know and can teach them. Each of Perry's nine positions has unique attributes, but for the purpose of this chapter, we will look at them in three clusters: dualism, relativism discovered, and commitment to relativism.

Dualism

This cluster contains the first three positions that Perry identified. At the beginning of this cluster, students see the world dualistically, meaning that everything can be sorted into dichotomous categories such as good/bad, right/wrong, and better/worse. Authorities are believed to know the "truth" and are always correct, so learning is about gaining the truth from the experts. A student might start this cluster thinking, "My professors know the truth, and I can learn the right answers." As students move through the first three positions, they begin to realize that the "right" answer is not always easy to determine because all authorities do not always agree with one another. At first, a student might discount an authority figure if that person does not seem to know the "right" answer. However, as students have more of these experiences, they begin to adjust their perception of what "truth" means and the role of

POINT OF INTEREST

CHICKERING AND YOU You can be attentive to your own development and actively focus on developing maximally in all areas. Understanding Chickering's model will help you to be more aware of how your college experiences are shaping your development, and you can even guide your own development. Your university will have resources, services, and opportunities aligned with each of the vectors. For example, if you know that you are not comfortable with your body image, one of the primary areas of Vector 5, you can focus some time and energy in that area. Resources and opportunities that might help you include personal counselors (to assist you in accepting your body), nutritionists (to help you make good choices amid a plethora of junk food), and activities such as intramural sports or the recreation center (to assist you in exercising and caring for your body in a healthy way). There are even specialists who can assist with eating disorders and other issues that plague both male and female college students.

I recommend that once a year, you read through Chickering's vectors and rate yourself on a scale of 1–10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "maximized") for how developed you feel in each of the vectors and subvectors. Don't worry if your numbers are lower in your first year or two—they are supposed to be. After doing the assessment, pick a few vectors to work on and seek the experiences and services that will help you do so. Each year, reassess yourself, set new goals, and seek out new opportunities. This process will guarantee that you will make the most of your college experience. It will also give you something concrete to use in your graduate school applications and job interviews in terms of reflecting on your college experience.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Vector 1: Developing Competence										
• Intellectual competence/academic skills										
• Interpersonal skills										
• Making healthy choices										
Vector 2: Managing Emotions										
• Acknowledging emotions										
• Correctly identifying emotions										
• Expressing emotions in a healthy manner										
Vector 3: Autonomy to Interdependence										
• Emotional independence										
• Independence from need for approval										
Vector 4: Mature Interpersonal Relationships										
• Tolerance and acceptance of difference										
• Capacity for intimacy										
Vector 5: Establishing Identity										
• Body and appearance										
• Gender identity										
• Sexual orientation										
• Self in cultural contexts (race, religion)										
• Self-esteem and personal stability										
Vector 6: Developing Purpose										
• Selecting major										
• Choosing career										
• Personal interests and lifestyle plans										
Vector 7: Developing Integrity										
• Balancing self-interests with others'										
• Affirming own values while respecting others'										
• Values and behaviors consistently match										

authority figures. A student might complete this cluster thinking, "Experts know the 'truth,' but different experts might have different perspectives. I can learn the right answer for this particular situation."

Relativism Discovered

This cluster contains the next three positions, where a student makes sense out of increased complexity of information and responds by swinging away from dualism to the other extreme of total relativism, that is, thinking that everything is relative. Students believe that they might have to choose from several experts' opinions and that there is no one "truth" because there are so many variables. The student is now reluctant to evaluate concepts as right/wrong or correct/incorrect, and is in fact wary of authority figures who do, because that does not allow for relativism. Students in this cluster might think, "All knowledge is really contextual, so nobody really knows the 'truth,' and all possibilities are acceptable."

Commitment to Relativism

The final three positions of Perry's model see the student moving back from relativism to a middle ground that allows for commitment to certain views or beliefs as correct or true within a specific context. The student sees that people have to make choices based on what they know, or find new information that is relevant to the current situation. While the "truth" is essentially impossible to learn, a person can make choices based on what is right for him or her in this context while allowing others the right to have different views. In essence, evaluation of concepts as right/wrong or correct/incorrect becomes appropriate as long as it occurs with a certain context and is not indiscriminately applied as was done in the dichotomous phases. A student might think, "I know what my values are, and I think this is what is right for me. However, it is okay if someone else has different values and makes different choices."

Some research indicates that the majority of college students do not move out of the second cluster by graduation. And we certainly all know older adults who have not achieved the stages in the third cluster, so there is still a lot of individual variance with regard to these positions. Note that Perry did his research on male college students attending Ivy League universities, so his sample has been criticized for not being representative of women and people of color.

TINTO'S MODEL OF INSTITUTIONAL DEPARTURE Many universities are worried about a concept called **retention,** which refers to the number of college students who are retained, that is, who continue their education at the same institution through to graduation. This is also known as **persistence.** Universities want to have high retention or persistence rates because they indicate that the school is doing a good job of meeting its students' needs. In fact, if you are reading this book in affiliation with some campus course or program for first-year students, it was most likely developed out of this national concern.

In the 1970s, Vincent Tinto began to research this issue and explored the things that affect a student's decision to stay in or leave college (in other words, to drop out). His research led to the development of a model that describes the factors that affect and influence a student's ultimate decision to depart. Tinto has revised this model over the years, and his current model (1993) is a longitudinal (i.e., over time) look at the influences of the student's background characteristics, intentions and commitments, external commitments, the external community, and institutional experiences involving persistence. See Figure 2.2.

According to Tinto, students arrive at an institution with a certain set of background characteristics, such as family background, skills and abilities, and previous education, in addition to their individual intentions, goals, and institutional commitments. Through a variety of campus experiences over time, both formal and informal, students can become integrated into the academic and social systems of the college. In addition, the student's external commitments and the external community, namely, family and friends, affect the student.

@myU SO HOW DOES THIS AFFECT YOU?

Most K–12 education is aligned with the dualism cluster—students are expected to learn the correct answers from their teachers. At research universities, the focus on the discovery of new knowledge and on thinking critically is more aligned with the last cluster. The college curriculum in general is designed to help students develop along Perry's positions. You will naturally become more relativistic over the course of your four years in college, but it can be a bit challenging at first. Most first-year students experience frustration in their classes because they have been used to thinking and studying in a dualistic way. This has earned them good grades in the past and is the system they know, so it is what many students cling to at the beginning of college. Freshman and sophomore students in particular expect the faculty to know the "right" answers and communicate them clearly so that the students can learn the information for exams. Your adjustment to university-level work will be smoother if you can accept that college will ask you to utilize new and different ways of thinking. Review your current syllabi and identify some lectures, readings, and assignments that indicate that relativistic thought is taught by the instructor and/or expected to be demonstrated by the student.

CLASS	EVIDENCE

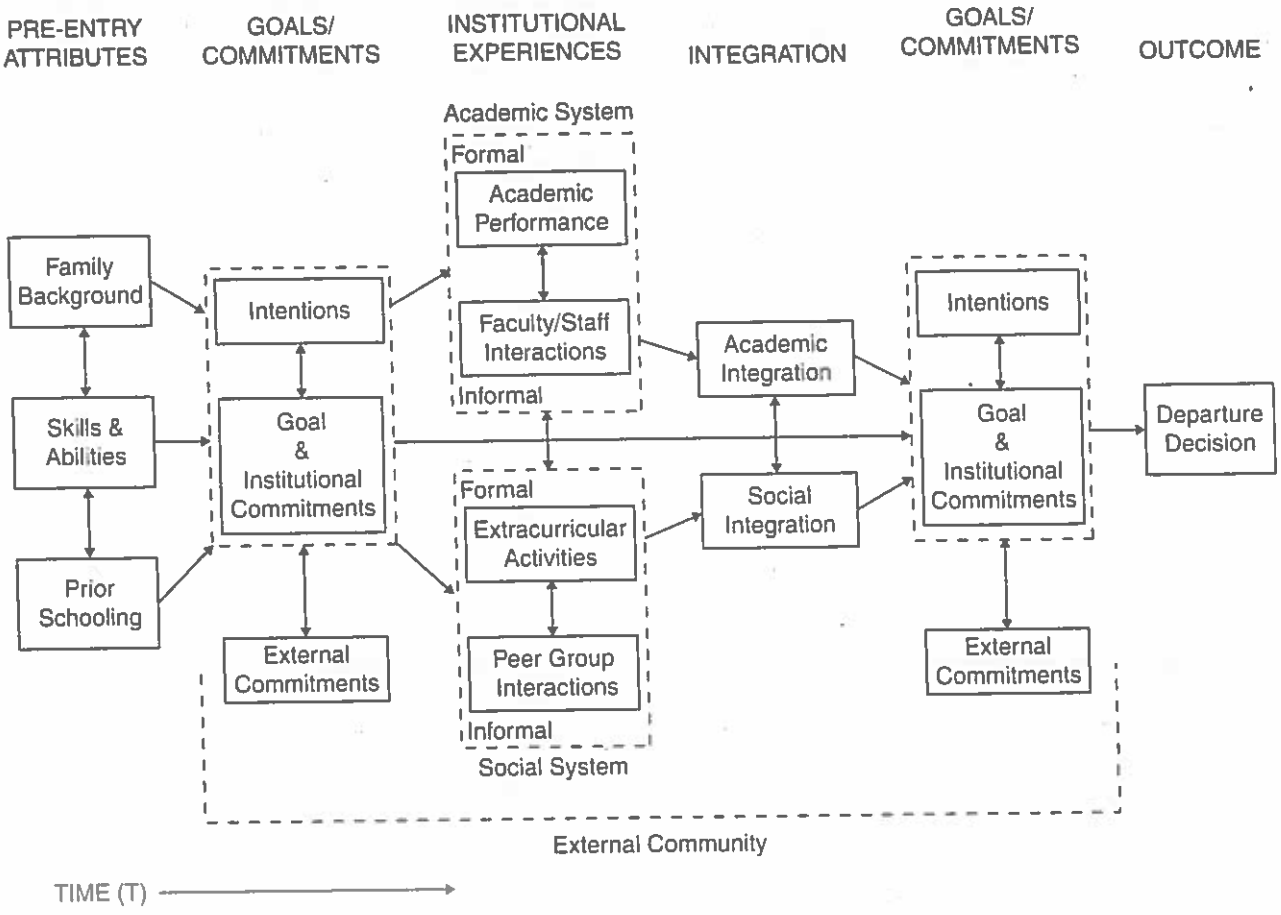
There are many causes of withdrawal and/or dismissal from the college environment. First are individual characteristics, such as the student's skills and abilities, as well as the student's intentions (or goals) and commitments (or motivation/effort)—the goal of earning a college degree and the commitment to doing the work needed to accomplish this goal. This also relates to the desire the student has to attend and graduate from a particular institution. Second, the model focuses on the experiences a student has at an institution, as Tinto believes that they are the most important in terms of influencing a student's decision to stay or leave.

The academic system of the university environment consists of the student's academic performance and his or her interactions with faculty, whereas the social system is formed by cocurricular activities and the student's interactions with his or her peers. Tinto acknowledges that the systems are interconnected and can affect each other: Students might not feel equally comfortable in both systems, and the student's social life can undermine or support his or her academic experience, and vice versa. Full integration into both systems is not required for persistence, but students usually need to meet minimum academic criteria to stay enrolled, such as a minimum GPA or number of credits completed.

The model includes elements of external forces and communities. Forces outside of the campus, including family, home community, state and national organizations, natural disasters, and work commitments, play a role in the decisions of students who depart from college. When the demands from these external sources are greater than those of the academic and social systems, the student can be pulled away from college attendance.

The key of Tinto's model is a concept he coined **integration**, or a student's overall sense of belonging. Tinto found that students need to be sufficiently integrated into both the academic and social systems of the campus in order to stay. Most notably, Tinto's model focuses on the importance of the *student's perception* of his or her own integration, which largely affects

FIGURE 2.2 Tinto's Model of Institutional Departure (1993)



the student's decision to continue or leave. Any campus counselor can share accounts about students who appear to be popular yet feel isolated and alone and therefore are prime candidates for withdrawal. It is clear that only students' perceptions matter in the ultimate evaluation of their integration.

Tinto claims that there are four main categories of experiences that can hinder a student's integration: adjustment, difficulty, incongruence, and isolation. **Adjustment** refers to the time when the student is becoming familiar and comfortable with the new environment. Problems with adjustment usually arise from either the student's inability to separate from his or her previous community or the challenges imposed by the new and often tougher demands of the college environment (both academic and social). **Difficulty** refers to the academic standards of the institution and the student's ability to meet them. This is where students from poorer schools can find themselves unable to compete with their more privileged peers and unable to perform at satisfactory levels. **Incongruence** occurs when the student's needs and interests generally do not match those of the campus, because she or he either does not wish to be in college or is at the "wrong" institution for a variety of reasons, such as academic major, location, or other criteria of importance to the student. Finally, **isolation** refers to the lack of connections and interactions with other members of the campus community. Tinto states that when students are unable to become integrated into both the intellectual and social communities of the college environment, these students leave the institution.

As a result, Tinto states that programs and experiences that address these four categories of experiences can increase students' perceptions of both academic and social integration, and therefore are likely to increase student retention as well. Tinto's model has had a large impact on college campuses around North America. Many have taken his model to heart and intentionally attempt to affect students' integration process by providing programs, courses, counseling, and support so that students feel more integrated, both academically and socially. See "Point of Interest: Tinto and You." Note that a weakness of Tinto's model is that it weights academic and social integration equally. Although both are certainly important, research suggests that students' social experiences have more impact on their ultimate decision to stay or leave a university, as long as they have not been academically dismissed (Andreatta, 1998).

KOHLBERG'S SIX STAGES OF MORAL DEVELOPMENT Our final theory is about how people learn to make and support moral decisions, which relates to Chickering's seventh vector. You will find that as you move away from home, you will be faced with daily opportunities to make choices that have moral implications. These choices range from academic integrity to underage drinking, premarital sex, and treating others equally and respectfully. Moral development is a hallmark of the maturation process as young adults leave home, which is why this next theory is useful in exploring the college student experience.

Lawrence Kohlberg (1976) developed his theory by posing ethical dilemmas to his male subjects and then examining the criteria and justification they used for recommending a specific course of action. His research utilized the Heinz Dilemma, which is a story about Heinz, whose wife is dying from a rare form of cancer. A certain drug can save her, but the scientist who created it refuses to sell it at a price Heinz can afford, even though the scientist is making a substantial profit on it. A series of questions are posed about whether Heinz should steal the drug, and whether or not he should be punished if he does and is caught. After analyzing his subjects' answers, Kohlberg concluded that people have six stages of moral reasoning that are grouped into three levels. See Table 2.2.

Kohlberg found that this model is linear and that everyone goes through the stages in order without skipping one. However, he learned that a person only moves on to the next stage if she or he is faced with some kind of problem that cannot be adequately addressed by his or her current moral reasoning. If a challenge is not presented, a person can stay in a certain stage for many years, if not a lifetime. Also, people can only conceive of the next stage but not beyond because they do not have the perceptions or beliefs that would support considering more complex moral questions.

The first two stages comprise the **pre-conventional morality** level. Stage 1 is the punishment-obedience orientation. In this first stage, a person only sees something as morally wrong if there is a punishment attached to it. Further, actions are seen as more or less wrong based on the punishments associated with them. This person believes that everyone holds the same view and there is no room for multiple or different perspectives. A person decides to "do right" only out of fear of punishment. For example, a person in this stage would argue that Heinz should not steal the drug because it is against the law and he could go to prison.

Stage 2 is called the instrumental relativist orientation. There is recognition now that everyone might have different needs and that sometimes these needs are in conflict. In this stage, a person focuses on self-interests and only does what serves him or her the most. Rules are followed when they meet the person's needs or are considered fair or equal. If a person in this stage considers others, it is only in the form of equal exchange, that is, "I'll do something for you if you do something for me." In this stage, the Heinz Dilemma could be addressed by arguing either that Heinz should steal the drug because he would be happier if his wife lived, or that he should not steal the drug because he could suffer in prison.

POINT OF INTEREST

TINTO AND YOU This model suggests that your feelings about college will fluctuate many times throughout the year and will depend on the kinds of experiences you are having academically and socially. If those experiences become more negative than positive, you might begin to feel that you don't belong or don't want to stay. Just knowing that there will be days that you love your campus and days that you don't can help you get through the more difficult ones. It's also important to look at what, specifically, is contributing to the bad days so that you can address those issues and improve your own integration and persistence.

I suggest that you assess yourself in each area of Tinto's model so that you know which areas might need your attention. Take some time to consider the topics in the table below, and rate yourself in each area on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "not at all" or "very poor," and 5 being "very much" or "very strong."

	1	2	3	4	5
Extent that your family background supports your university success					
Extent to which your prior schooling prepared you for success at your university					
Your overall academic skills and abilities like critical thinking, math, analytical writing, etc.					
The strength of your commitment to earning a college degree					
Your level of commitment to graduating from your current university					
The quality of your academic experiences at your university					
Your sense of integration or belonging to the academic system at your university					
The quality of your social experiences at your university					
Your sense of integration or belonging to the social system at your university					
The level of external commitments/communities that detract from your university experience					
The extent to which you want to leave this university					

When you identify an area that could be improved, actively work on it. You can contribute to your own success by working to increase your own integration. For example, academically, a student could visit office hours to interact with faculty, meet with an academic advisor, and use services that help increase study skills. Socially, a student could attend various campus events, join a campus club, and meet with a counselor. It's important to get help if you are struggling. There are many staff and faculty who are trained in student transition issues and can help you assess what's not working, help you develop a plan, and support you in achieving it. These folks are paid to help you, so take advantage of their assistance.

TABLE 2.2 KOHLBERG'S STAGES OF MORAL DEVELOPMENT

	STAGE AND ORIENTATION	WHAT IS RIGHT	REASONS FOR DOING RIGHT
Level One: Pre-Conventional Morality	1 Punishment-Obedience	Obeying rules and laws.	I do not want to be punished.
	2 Instrumental Relativist	Meeting own needs.	I have to worry about me and let others worry about themselves.
Level Two: Conventional Morality	3 Good Boy–Nice Girl	Meeting others' expectations of what is good and right.	I care about others and I want them to think highly of me.
	4 Law and Order	Obeying rules and laws. Contributing to society.	The good of society is more important than my own needs.
Level Three: Post-Conventional Morality	5 Social Contract	Honoring human rights. Laws should reflect the greatest good for the most people.	When in conflict, I will place human rights over laws.
	6 Universal Ethical Principle	Honoring universal human principles of justice, equality, and autonomy.	I only do what is just, and I will not abide by an unjust law.

The level of **conventional morality** includes Stages 3 and 4. Stage 3 is known as the good boy–nice girl orientation. This stage brings in the view of society and a person's desire to conform to social expectations. In other words, people like to be seen as "good" and "nice" by others. The focus shifts to examining the impact a choice will have on interpersonal relationships, and the concept of the Golden Rule (do unto others as you would have them do unto you) is illustrative of this focus. The Heinz Dilemma illustrates that there is more than one society norm to address; it could be argued that Heinz should save his wife because he is a "good" husband, and it could also be argued that Heinz should not steal the drug because he is not a "bad" person or a criminal.

Stage 4 is titled the law and order orientation. In this stage, society plays an even more central role in that laws, rules, and social norms are seen as crucial for creating a functioning society. Now, instead of considering interpersonal relationships, a person looks at contributing to the greater benefit of society as more important than individual needs. If a person goes against societal rules, then he or she should be accountable for his or her actions. As such, a person in this stage would argue either that Heinz should not steal the drug, since people cannot break laws just because they have needs, or that he should steal the drug but then accept the punishment for doing so and go to prison.

The final two stages make up the level of **post-conventional morality**, also known as the principled level. Stage 5, the social contract orientation, introduces the concept that society's rules should benefit the most people, and that rules and laws are a social contract entered into by people for the greatest good of the majority. If rules are no longer serving the majority of

society, they should be changed. The belief in a democratic government is based in this stage and is responsive to the needs of the people. However, an individual's needs may still be in conflict with the greater good, and this stage allows for an individual to view his or her own needs before society's. Although this sounds similar to Stage 2, the difference is that the individual's needs in Stage 5 are seen as part of human rights and are justified in this light. The concept of the Platinum Rule fits here—do unto others as they would want done unto them. A person in this stage could argue either that Heinz should steal the medicine because the right to life is more important than the law, or that he should not steal the medicine because the scientist deserves to make a profit.

Finally, Stage 6 is known as the universal ethical principle orientation. This stage focuses on the overarching human rights principles upon which laws or rules are built. If there is a conflict between the principles and the laws, the principles take precedence. Universal ethical principles include justice, equality, and respect for individual autonomy. A person in this stage would make moral choices based on whether the action supported these ethical principles, rather than laws. In fact, a moral person would not abide an unjust law because it violates the more important principle of justice. As a result, at this stage one could argue that Heinz should steal the medicine because saving a human life is more important than financial gain. Alternatively, one could argue that Heinz should not steal the medicine because doing so might deny the medicine to others whose lives are equally as valuable as his wife's.

Interestingly, Kohlberg could not find people in his research who consistently operated from Stage 6, which suggests that few people actually achieve this level of moral reasoning. In addition, Kohlberg's work has been criticized for overemphasizing justice as a moral value when other values, such as caring, are significant as well. Further, Kohlberg's sample did not include women, begging the question of whether women's ways of making moral decisions differ from those of men.

RELATED MATERIALS

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