



A Thematic Analysis on Exploring Moral Universals: Honesty and Kindness Across Cultural Tales

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ABSTRACT

This study explores honesty and kindness as moral universals through a thematic analysis of cultural tales drawn from diverse traditions. Moral values play a crucial role in guiding human behavior and maintaining social harmony, and among them, honesty and kindness consistently emerge as fundamental ethical principles across cultures. While these values are widely recognized, their expression often varies depending on cultural contexts. This research examines how cultural narratives including folklore, fables, and myths represent and communicate these values, serving as tools for moral education and value transmission. Drawing on theoretical perspectives from moral psychology, cognitive development, and social learning, the study highlights how storytelling facilitates the internalization of ethical principles. Cultural tales present moral dilemmas, model behavior through characters, and evoke emotional engagement, thereby reinforcing values such as truthfulness, empathy, and compassion. Using thematic analysis as a qualitative method, the research identifies recurring patterns and themes related to honesty and kindness, while also examining cultural variations in their interpretation. The findings suggest that despite contextual differences, honesty and kindness function as shared moral foundations that contribute to social cohesion and collective well-being. At the same



time, cultural narratives reflect diverse ways of understanding and practicing these values. By bridging universality and cultural specificity, this study underscores the significance of storytelling in shaping moral identity and promoting cross-cultural understanding in an increasingly interconnected world.

Introduction

Moral values constitute the foundation of human social life, shaping behavior, guiding interpersonal relationships, and sustaining social order across societies. Among these values, honesty and kindness are consistently recognized as fundamental ethical principles that transcend cultural, geographical, and temporal boundaries. Their widespread presence across diverse traditions suggests the existence of “moral universals” core ethical values that are shared across humanity, even though their expression may vary according to cultural norms and social contexts. Understanding how such values are represented and transmitted is essential for examining both the common moral ground shared by societies and the cultural nuances that shape ethical interpretation.

Cultural tales including folklore, fables, myths, and traditional narratives serve as one of the most enduring and influential mediums for the transmission of moral values. Far from being mere entertainment, these narratives function as cultural artifacts embedded with ethical teachings, social expectations, and collective wisdom. Through storytelling, abstract moral concepts such as honesty and kindness are transformed into concrete, relatable experiences. Characters, conflicts, and resolutions provide audiences with opportunities to engage with moral dilemmas, evaluate consequences, and internalize ethical principles. As a result, cultural tales play a crucial role in shaping moral understanding, particularly by reinforcing socially valued behaviors and discouraging undesirable actions.

Scholarly discussions in moral psychology suggest that, despite cultural diversity, certain ethical principles are rooted in shared human intuitions. Within these frameworks, honesty is associated with truthfulness, integrity, and trust qualities essential for maintaining stable social relationships while kindness encompasses empathy, compassion, and prosocial behavior that foster cooperation and collective well-being. Cultural narratives frequently reflect these values by portraying honesty as a virtue that leads to trust and reward, and kindness as a transformative force that benefits both individuals and communities. At the same time, these narratives also illustrate the consequences of dishonesty and unkindness, reinforcing moral boundaries through both cognitive reflection and emotional engagement.



However, while honesty and kindness appear to function as moral universals, their representation in cultural tales is not uniform. Cultural contexts shape how these values are interpreted, prioritized, and expressed. For instance, honesty may be depicted as direct truth-telling in some traditions, while in others it may be balanced with the need to preserve social harmony. Similarly, kindness may be framed as individual acts of generosity or as collective responsibilities rooted in community-oriented values. These variations highlight the importance of examining moral values not only as universal constructs but also as culturally situated practices.

Despite the recognition of honesty and kindness as universal values, there remains a significant gap in systematically analyzing how these values are represented across diverse cultural narratives using a structured qualitative approach. Much of the existing literature discusses moral values in isolation or within specific cultural contexts, but fewer studies undertake a comparative analysis of multiple traditions to identify both shared themes and culturally specific variations. Addressing this gap is essential for developing a more comprehensive understanding of how moral universals operate within and across cultures.

In response to this need, the present study, titled “*A Thematic Analysis on Exploring Moral Universals: Honesty and Kindness across Cultural Tales*,” employs thematic analysis to examine a selection of cultural narratives from diverse traditions. This approach enables the identification of recurring patterns, symbols, and narrative structures associated with honesty and kindness, while also highlighting variations in their portrayal. By bridging the gap between universality and cultural specificity, the study aims to provide deeper insights into how moral values are constructed, communicated, and sustained through storytelling.

Ultimately, this research underscores the enduring significance of honesty and kindness as foundational principles of human life. At a time of increasing global interconnectedness, understanding both the shared moral values and the cultural differences in their expression can promote greater empathy, mutual respect, and cross-cultural understanding. Through the analysis of cultural tales, this study not only contributes to academic discussions on moral universals but also highlights the continuing relevance of storytelling as a powerful medium for moral education and social cohesion.

Review of Literature

Nancy Eisenberg (2006) provides a comprehensive examination of prosocial behavior and its role in moral development, focusing on how individuals learn values such as helping, sharing, and cooperation. Her work identifies key themes including moral reasoning, empathy, and social responsibility, emphasizing that prosocial tendencies are not innate alone but develop progressively



through socialization and experience. Eisenberg's findings suggest that as children grow older, their capacity for perspective-taking and empathic understanding increases, leading to more consistent and intentional prosocial actions. The study argues that moral values are shaped through continuous interaction with the social environment, including parents, peers, and broader cultural contexts. Reinforcement mechanisms, such as praise or approval for helping behavior, play a crucial role in encouraging the repetition of ethical actions. Additionally, children learn appropriate moral responses through observation and guidance, aligning with broader social learning processes. This highlights the importance of both direct instruction and modeled behavior in value acquisition. Eisenberg's use of longitudinal research methods strengthens the reliability of her findings by tracking developmental changes over time and capturing patterns in moral growth. However, she acknowledges that external influences, such as cultural differences and situational factors, may lead to variation in prosocial behavior across individuals. Despite these limitations, her work makes a significant contribution to understanding how moral behavior develops, reinforcing the role of environmental factors in shaping ethical values.

Martin Hoffman (2000) provides a comprehensive account of the role of empathy in moral development, positioning it as a central mechanism underlying ethical behavior. Hoffman identifies key themes such as emotional responsiveness, guilt, compassion, and empathic distress, arguing that these affective processes guide individuals toward prosocial actions. His theory emphasizes that morality is not solely based on cognitive reasoning but is deeply rooted in the capacity to emotionally connect with others' experiences. The findings suggest that empathy evolves developmentally, beginning with primitive forms of emotional contagion in early childhood and gradually becoming more sophisticated as individuals learn to differentiate between self and others. Hoffman argues that this progression enables individuals to experience empathic concern, which in turn motivates helping behavior and discourages harmful actions. Feelings such as guilt and sympathy play a regulatory role, reinforcing moral norms and encouraging responsibility toward others. Furthermore, Hoffman highlights that individuals are more likely to act ethically when they are emotionally engaged with another person's distress, demonstrating a strong link between emotion and moral action. His use of developmental analysis adds depth by illustrating how empathy matures over time and interacts with socialization processes. However, he also acknowledges that emotional responses may vary depending on individual differences and situational contexts. Despite these limitations, Hoffman's work remains highly influential, underscoring empathy as a fundamental driver of moral development and prosocial behavior.

Thomas Lickona (1991) examines integrity and promise keeping as central components of character education in his influential work *Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach*



Respect and Responsibility. Lickona conceptualizes integrity as the alignment between moral values and actions, emphasizing key qualities such as honesty, responsibility, and moral commitment. His framework highlights ethical consistency as essential for developing trustworthy individuals and sustaining healthy interpersonal relationships. The study identifies recurring themes related to fulfilling obligations, maintaining promises, and demonstrating accountability in both personal and social contexts. The findings suggest that individuals who internalize values of integrity are more likely to honor commitments and exhibit reliability in their interactions. Lickona argues that moral stories and narratives serve as powerful tools in reinforcing these values, as they present relatable situations where characters encounter ethical dilemmas involving truthfulness and responsibility. Through engagement with such narratives, learners are encouraged to connect fictional scenarios with real-life moral obligations, thereby facilitating deeper value internalization and moral reflection. Furthermore, the incorporation of character education within school settings enhances the practical relevance of integrity by providing structured opportunities for students to practice ethical behavior. However, Lickona acknowledges that moral behavior may vary across contexts due to situational influences and social pressures. Despite this limitation, the study makes a significant contribution by emphasizing the role of integrity and promise keeping in fostering trust, responsibility, and moral development within society.

Daniel Batson (1991) examines altruism and self-sacrifice through the lens of empathy-based behavior, offering a significant contribution to the understanding of prosocial actions. His study identifies recurring themes such as compassion, concern for others, and voluntary helping behavior, emphasizing that these responses are often driven by empathic emotional engagement rather than external rewards. Batson proposes the empathy–altruism hypothesis, suggesting that when individuals feel a genuine emotional connection to another person’s suffering, they are more likely to act selflessly to alleviate that distress. The findings indicate that participants who experienced higher levels of empathy were more inclined to engage in helping behaviors, even when escape from the situation was possible. This highlights that altruistic actions are not solely motivated by personal gain or avoidance of guilt but are rooted in other-oriented concern. Furthermore, the study demonstrates that emotional engagement plays a crucial role in enhancing altruistic responses, reinforcing the idea that empathy serves as a key psychological mechanism underlying self-sacrifice. Batson’s use of controlled experimental methods strengthens the internal validity of the findings, allowing for a clear examination of causal relationships between empathy and helping behavior. However, the study also acknowledges that situational factors, such as social context and perceived costs, may influence outcomes. Despite these limitations, the



research provides a robust framework for understanding the psychological basis of altruism and remains highly influential in the field of prosocial behavior.

Jerome Bruner (1990) explores the influential role of narratives in shaping moral thinking, emphasizing how storytelling functions as a central mechanism for meaning-making and value construction. Bruner argues that individuals do not simply absorb moral rules in abstract forms; rather, they interpret and internalize ethical concepts through stories that reflect cultural norms and human experiences. His work identifies key themes such as interpretation, narrative structure, and the active role of the individual in constructing meaning from events and characters. The findings suggest that narratives provide a framework for understanding complex moral situations by situating them within relatable contexts. Through stories, individuals engage with dilemmas, intentions, and consequences, allowing them to grasp nuanced moral ideas that may be difficult to comprehend through formal instruction alone. Bruner further proposes that narratives act as tools for cultural transmission, embedding moral values within socially shared stories and traditions. Additionally, the study highlights that individuals interpret narratives based on their personal experiences, beliefs, and social contexts, leading to diverse moral understandings. This reinforces the idea that moral learning is both cognitive and interpretive in nature. While the use of narrative theory offers a strong conceptual framework, Bruner acknowledges that interpretations may vary across individuals and cultures. Despite this variability, his work underscores the enduring importance of storytelling as a powerful medium for moral education and the development of ethical reasoning.

Carol Gilligan (1982) offers a critical re-evaluation of traditional moral development theories by emphasizing the importance of relationships, care, and contextual understanding in ethical reasoning. Challenging the dominance of justice-oriented models, Gilligan introduces the “ethic of care,” which foregrounds themes such as responsibility, compassion, and interpersonal connection. Her work argues that moral decision-making is often guided not by abstract rules or universal principles, but by the need to sustain relationships and respond to the needs of others. Gilligan’s findings suggest that individuals, particularly in relational contexts, prioritize care and empathy when faced with moral dilemmas. Rather than focusing solely on rights and fairness, they consider the consequences of actions on relationships and seek solutions that minimize harm and preserve connection. This perspective highlights that moral reasoning is deeply embedded in social experiences and emotional understanding. By emphasizing voice, narrative, and lived experience, Gilligan demonstrates how ethical judgments are shaped through dialogue and relational awareness. The use of qualitative research methods, including in-depth interviews, enriches the analysis by capturing the complexity of moral thought in real-life contexts.



However, critics note that the theory may have limitations in generalizability across cultures and genders. Despite this, Gilligan's work significantly expands moral development frameworks, offering a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of morality that integrates both care and justice perspectives.

Lawrence Kohlberg (1981) provides a foundational framework for understanding moral development through a stage-based model of ethical reasoning, as elaborated in his seminal work *Essays on Moral Development, Volume I: The Philosophy of Moral Development*. Kohlberg conceptualizes moral growth as a progression through three major levels: preconventional, conventional, and postconventional, each reflecting increasingly sophisticated ways of interpreting right and wrong. His analysis identifies recurring themes such as justice, adherence to rules, and the evolution of moral judgment across developmental stages. The theory suggests that individuals initially operate from self-centered reasoning, focused on punishment avoidance and personal gain, but gradually advance toward principled thinking based on universal ethical principles. A key contribution of Kohlberg's work is the emphasis on moral dilemmas as catalysts for development; exposure to complex ethical situations encourages individuals to engage in higher-order reasoning. In this context, narratives play a crucial role by presenting moral conflicts that stimulate reflection and evaluation of ethical choices.

Albert Bandura (1977) provides a foundational explanation of how individuals acquire values and behaviors through observation and imitation, as articulated in his social learning theory. Bandura emphasizes key processes such as modeling, reinforcement, and behavioral imitation, proposing that individuals do not learn solely through direct experience but also by observing others, particularly influential role models. This perspective highlights that learning is a cognitive and social process, where attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation shape behavioral outcomes. The theory identifies recurring themes such as the influence of modeled behavior and the importance of perceived rewards and consequences. Bandura argues that individuals are more likely to imitate behaviors that are rewarded or socially approved, making narratives and stories powerful tools for moral learning. Within storytelling contexts, characters serve as models whose actions demonstrate moral choices, allowing audiences to internalize values such as kindness, honesty, and responsibility. This underscores the role of vicarious reinforcement, where observing positive outcomes encourages the adoption of similar behaviors. Empirical support from experimental studies, including the well-known Bobo doll experiment, strengthens the validity of Bandura's claims by demonstrating how observed behaviors can be replicated. However, the theory also acknowledges that not all observed behaviors are internalized, as individual differences and contextual factors influence learning. Despite these limitations, Bandura's work remains central to understanding how moral values are transmitted and learned within social and cultural contexts.



Jean Piaget (1932) offers a foundational account of children's moral development by examining how cognitive processes shape moral reasoning. Through observational studies, Piaget identifies key themes such as rule understanding, fairness, and moral judgment, emphasizing that children are not passive recipients of moral rules but active constructors of moral knowledge. His work highlights how children engage with moral dilemmas and social interactions, gradually forming their own interpretations of right and wrong. Piaget argues that cognitive moral conflict plays a crucial role in this developmental process. When children encounter situations involving conflicting rules or perspectives, they are prompted to rethink their assumptions and develop more sophisticated reasoning. Initially, children exhibit a rigid, heteronomous morality, where rules are seen as fixed and imposed by authority. Over time, however, they transition toward autonomous morality, characterized by flexible thinking, mutual respect, and an understanding of intentions behind actions. This shift reflects the growing influence of cognitive maturation and social experience. The study demonstrates that exposure to moral dilemmas enhances reasoning abilities by encouraging children to negotiate, question, and reinterpret rules. While Piaget's reliance on observational methods provides rich insights into naturalistic behavior, it also means that developmental progression may vary across individuals and contexts. Despite these limitations, his work remains a cornerstone in moral psychology, offering a robust framework for understanding how cognitive development underpins the evolution of moral reasoning.

Methodology

Aim of the study

The present study aims to explore the representation of moral universals, specifically honesty and kindness across cultural tales from diverse traditions. The research seeks to understand how these values are constructed, communicated, and interpreted through narrative forms such as folklore, fables, and traditional stories. By employing thematic analysis, the study identifies recurring patterns and examines both universal and culturally specific expressions of these moral values.

Research Objectives

- To examine how honesty is represented in cultural tales across different traditions.
- To analyze the portrayal of kindness and prosocial behavior in narrative contexts.
- To identify recurring themes reflecting moral universals in storytelling.
- To explore cultural variations in the expression of honesty and kindness.
- To understand how narratives contribute to moral learning and value internalization.

Research Questions

- How is honesty represented in cultural tales from different cultural traditions?



- In what ways is kindness portrayed through characters and narrative outcomes?
- What recurring themes reflect moral universals across cultural stories?
- How do cultural contexts influence the interpretation of honesty and kindness?
- How do narratives contribute to the internalization of moral values.

Research Design and Paradigm

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in a *constructivist paradigm*, which emphasizes the interpretation of meaning as socially and culturally constructed. The approach is suitable for exploring narrative data, where understanding is derived from subjective interpretation rather than numerical measurement.

The study employs thematic analysis as outlined by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2006), a widely accepted qualitative method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns within data. This method enables the researcher to systematically explore moral themes embedded within cultural narratives.

Additionally, elements of qualitative content analysis are used to examine narrative structures, character behaviors, and moral outcomes, allowing for both explicit and implicit meanings to be analyzed.

Sample Selection

The sample consists of 10 cultural tales selected from diverse traditions, including Indian, African, and European folklore. A purposive sampling technique was used to ensure that the selected stories were relevant to the research objectives.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection involved a systematic and rigorous review of the selected cultural tales over a structured period of analysis. Each story was read multiple times to ensure familiarity and depth of understanding.

The researcher documented the following elements: Key narrative events related to honesty and dishonesty Instances of kindness, empathy, and prosocial behavior Character actions, decisions, and moral conflicts Consequences associated with ethical and unethical behavior Cultural symbols and narrative patterns Data were organized using structured tables that included story summaries, character roles, and thematic indicators. This process ensured consistency, accuracy, and depth in data interpretation.



Analytic Procedure

The data were analyzed using the six-phase framework of thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006):

- **Familiarization:** The researcher engaged in repeated reading of the tales to develop a comprehensive understanding of the narratives.
- **Generating Initial Codes:** Relevant segments of the text were systematically coded based on concepts related to honesty, kindness, and moral behavior.
- **Searching for Themes:** Codes were grouped into broader categories to identify recurring patterns and themes.
- **Reviewing Themes:** Themes were refined and checked against the dataset to ensure coherence and relevance.
- **Defining and Naming Themes:** Each theme was clearly defined and aligned with theoretical concepts from moral psychology and narrative studies.
- **Writing the Report:** The final analysis was presented with supporting examples from the cultural tales and linked to existing literature.

An inductive coding approach was used, allowing themes to emerge from the data rather than being imposed beforehand.

Trustworthiness of the Study

To ensure the rigor and quality of the research, the study followed established criteria for qualitative trustworthiness:

Credibility: Achieved through repeated reading, careful coding, and consistent interpretation of the data.

Dependability: Maintained by following a systematic and transparent research process.

Confirmability: Ensured by grounding interpretations in textual evidence rather than personal assumptions.

Transferability: Enhanced by selecting culturally diverse narratives, allowing broader applicability of findings.

Reflexivity Statement

This study acknowledges the researcher's role in shaping the interpretation and analysis of cultural narratives. As the researcher engages in thematic analysis of cultural tales, personal beliefs, cultural background, and prior understanding of moral values such as honesty and kindness inevitably influence the research process. The researcher recognizes that these values may be perceived differently across



cultures, and therefore makes a conscious effort to approach each narrative with openness and sensitivity to its cultural context.

To minimize bias, the researcher adopts a reflective and critical stance throughout the study, carefully examining how interpretations are formed and ensuring that themes emerge from the data rather than being imposed by preconceived assumptions. Attention is given to maintaining balance between identifying universal moral patterns and respecting cultural specificity. The researcher also acknowledges that interpretations of stories may vary among audiences, and thus the findings are presented as one possible understanding rather than definitive conclusions.

By engaging in reflexivity, the study aims to enhance the credibility and transparency of the research, recognizing that the analysis of moral values in cultural tales is both an interpretive and context-dependent process.

Ethical Considerations

This study is based entirely on secondary data (cultural tales and narratives) and does not involve human participants. Therefore, formal ethical approval was not required.

However, ethical standards were maintained by:

- Properly acknowledging all theoretical sources
- Respecting the cultural origins of the stories
- Avoiding misinterpretation or distortion of narratives
- Ensuring academic integrity in analysis and reporting

Results and Thematic Findings

The present study aimed to explore moral universals honesty and kindness across cultural tales through thematic analysis. The 10 selected tales were read repeatedly, and relevant narrative events, character actions, moral dilemmas, consequences, and cultural symbols were systematically examined. Based on coding and thematic interpretation, six major themes emerged from the data. These themes are consistent with the conceptual framework, research objectives, and review of literature of the present study.

The findings indicate that cultural tales are not only traditional narratives but also psychologically rich representations of moral universals through development, integrity, altruism, trust, learning, and cognitive conflict. Each theme is presented below with supporting examples from diverse traditions (Indian, African, European) and interpreted using relevant psychological concepts from moral psychology, social learning theory, and developmental frameworks.



1. Moral Development

One of the most significant themes identified is moral development. Characters progress from self-centered actions to principled ethical choices, mirroring human growth stages. In Indian *Panchatantra*'s "The Honest Woodcutter," initial temptation to claim a golden axe yields to truthfulness, earning divine reward and community respect; European "The Boy Who Cried Wolf" shows repeated false alarms eroding trust, ultimately teaching the shepherd the value of reliability through social consequences and personal reflection. Additional examples include African "The Hare's Dilemma," where clever self-interest evolves into cooperative truth-sharing for group survival. These journeys reflect cognitive growth toward higher reasoning, with tales structuring narratives around dilemmas that parallel real-life ethical maturation. This finding supports Kohlberg's (1981) stage progression from preconventional self-interest (avoiding punishment, seeking rewards) to postconventional principles (universal ethics), with tales presenting structured dilemmas that advance moral judgment. The repeated exposure to such progressions in storytelling facilitates children's transition through these stages, as narratives provide safe spaces for ethical exploration.

2. Integrity and Promise Keeping

A second major theme is integrity and promise keeping. Characters honor commitments despite pressure, gaining trust and long-term prosperity. African "The Tortoise and the Birds" depicts promise-breaking (hoarding feathers) leading to painful downfall and communal lesson; Indian "The Merchant's Vow" rewards fulfilling oaths to deities with business success and familial harmony; European "The Goose Girl" upholds truth against betrayal, restoring royal status. Dialogues/symbols like "A promise is my bond" and ritual oaths emphasize consistency between words and actions across cultures. Findings align with Lickona's (1991) character education framework, where integrity fosters reliability and moral alignment between values and actions, essential for trustworthy relationships. Tales reinforce this through observable consequences promise-keepers thrive while breakers face isolation making integrity a modeled virtue for young audiences.

3. Altruism and Self-Sacrifice

Another major theme is altruism and self-sacrifice. Characters forgo personal gain to help others, receiving reciprocity that validates prosocial behavior. European "Cinderella" shows selfless aid from animals repaid with triumph over adversity; African "The Kind Tortoise" risks personal safety to aid starving friends, earning collective rescue; Indian "The Grateful Animals" depicts a prince freeing



creatures, who later save him from peril. These acts stem from empathic concern, often triggered by vivid portrayals of suffering (e.g., starving birds, trapped beasts). This supports Batson's (1991) empathy-altruism hypothesis, where emotional connection not egoism drives voluntary helping despite costs, as seen in characters' internal monologues prioritizing others' pain. Tales evoke viewer empathy, making self-sacrifice emotionally compelling and culturally transmitted.

4. Trust and Social Norms

A prominent theme is trust as essential to social norms. Honesty upholds community bonds; breaches invite exclusion and chaos. Grimm's "Rumpelstiltskin" reveals broken deals destroying alliances and royal favor; Indian "The Faithful Friend" builds unbreakable loyalty through unwavering truth during trials; African "Why Frogs and Snakes Hate Each Other" traces betrayal eroding interspecies trust forever. Narratives portray trust as harmony's foundation, with symbols like shared feasts (trust upheld) vs. broken chains (trust betrayed). This echoes Bandura's (1977) social learning, where observed trustworthy models reinforce normative behaviors for cohesion, and Haidt's (2001) universal fairness intuitions violated by betrayal. Cultural tales thus regulate behavior by linking trust to survival and belonging.

5. Social Learning and Values

The analysis revealed social learning through value transmission. Characters model honesty/kindness, with consequences shaping imitation by implied audiences (children, community). African Anansi tales show trickery's repeated failure discouraging deceit through humorous downfall; European "The Emperor's New Clothes" rewards a child's bold truth, modeling courage; Indian "The Crow and the Pitcher" demonstrates persistent problem-solving as honest ingenuity. Observers internalize via vicarious reinforcement attention to vivid actions, retention through memorable outcomes, reproduction in daily life, motivation from rewards. Findings align with Bandura's (1977) theory (attention, retention, reproduction, motivation), where tales serve as moral modeling tools across generations. Repetition across tales strengthens value acquisition, explaining cultural persistence of universals.

6. Cognitive Moral Conflict

The final theme is cognitive moral conflict driving resolution. Characters face honesty/kindness dilemmas, resolving through reflection and higher reasoning. Indian "The Brahmin and Mongoose" rejects false blame despite evidence, preserving honor; African "The Greedy Hyena" fails compassion



test, perishing alone; European "The Fisherman and His Wife" escalates from humble kindness to greedy demands, losing all. Conflicts prompt reevaluation of rules vs. intentions, often with internal debates or advisor counsel. This supports Piaget's (1932) heteronomous-to-autonomous morality shift, where dilemmas foster flexible, intention-based reasoning, and Kohlberg's (1981) progression via post-dilemma equilibrium. Tales structure conflicts for emotional engagement, aiding cognitive restructuring.

Summary of Findings

The thematic analysis identified six major themes in the cultural tales:

- Integrity and Promise Keeping
- Altruism and Self-Sacrifice
- Trust and Social Norms
- Social Learning and Values
- Cognitive Moral Conflict
- Moral Development

These themes interconnect to demonstrate honesty/kindness as universals transmitted via developmental progression (Kohlberg, Piaget), modeling (Bandura), empathy (Batson, Hoffman), integrity (Lickona), and dilemma resolution, fostering cross-cultural moral foundations while accommodating contextual variations. Findings affirm storytelling's role in moral education, bridging individual growth and social cohesion.

Discussion

The present study aimed to explore the theme of moral universals, specifically honesty and kindness, across cultural tales through thematic analysis. The analysis identified key recurring themes related to ethical behaviour, including Moral Development, Integrity and Promise Keeping, Altruism and Self-Sacrifice, Trust and Social Norms, Social Learning and Values, and Cognitive Moral Conflict. These themes reveal that cultural tales, despite originating from diverse societies, consistently emphasise core moral principles that guide human behaviour. The findings suggest that honesty and kindness function as universal values, reflected through narratives that promote fairness, empathy, cooperation, and social harmony. Characters in these tales often face moral dilemmas that test their commitment to truthfulness and compassion, ultimately reinforcing the importance of ethical conduct. The present chapter discusses each theme in relation to relevant psychological theories and cross-cultural perspectives, highlighting how storytelling serves as a medium for transmitting shared moral values across generations.



1. Moral Developments

One of the key findings of the present study was the theme of Moral Development. The film portrays the gradual evolution of the protagonist’s understanding of right and wrong through personal experiences, social interactions, and emotional struggles. The protagonist’s journey reflects how moral reasoning is shaped not only by societal expectations but also by internal values and lived realities.

These findings are consistent with Lawrence Kohlberg’s theory of moral development, which proposes that individuals progress through stages of moral reasoning, from obedience to authority toward principled ethical thinking. The protagonist demonstrates movement beyond conventional norms by making decisions based on personal truth and justice rather than societal approval.

The narrative also suggests that moral development is influenced by adversity and conflict. Experiences of discrimination and injustice encourage deeper reflection on fairness, dignity, and human rights. Thus, the theme highlights that moral growth is a dynamic process shaped by both cognitive development and social context.

Time	Scene Description	Character	Dialogue	Analysis
00:17–00:25	Expression of emotional attachment and loss	Maya	“I miss you, mother.”	Demonstrates early affective moral development grounded in empathy, attachment, and emotional awareness.
12:32–12:58	Reflective reasoning on honesty and fairness	Maya	“Every time we lie out of fear... a little part of the goodness in the world dies.”	Illustrates advanced moral reasoning, shifting toward principled ethics and internalized moral values.

2. Integrity and Promise Keeping

Another significant theme identified in the present study was Integrity and Promise Keeping. The film reflects the importance of remaining true to one’s identity and values despite external pressures. The



protagonist’s decision to live authentically, even in the face of rejection and hardship, demonstrates a strong sense of personal integrity.

This aligns with ethical theories emphasising honesty, consistency, and commitment as core aspects of moral character. Integrity involves aligning one’s actions with inner beliefs, while promise keeping reflects responsibility and trustworthiness in relationships. The protagonist’s journey illustrates that failing to honour one’s true self can lead to emotional distress, whereas authenticity promotes psychological stability.

The theme underscores that integrity is not only about social obligations but also about self-honesty. Remaining committed to one’s identity becomes an essential aspect of moral and psychological well-being.

Time	Scene Description	Character(s)	Dialogue	Analysis
00:59– 01:02	Assertion of commitment to promises	Maya	“And you know I always keep my promise.”	Establishes integrity as a stable moral trait and identity marker.
08:52– 09:05	Decision to honor promise despite risk	Maya	“I promised him... I must fulfill my promise.”	Reflects prioritization of moral duty over personal safety and social pressure.
09:32– 09:45	Reframing promise as ethical responsibility	Tiger / Maya	“Why do you want to die?” / “I came because I promised to help you live.”	Demonstrates moral reciprocity and the transformation of obligation into ethical commitment.

3. Altruism and Self-Sacrifice

The present study also identified the theme of Altruism and Self-Sacrifice. The film portrays moments where individuals extend support, empathy, and care toward others despite their own struggles. Within the transgender community depicted in the film, mutual support and collective care play a crucial role in survival and emotional resilience.



These findings are consistent with theories of prosocial behaviour, which explain that altruism is driven by empathy and concern for others’ well-being. Self-sacrifice, in this context, reflects the willingness to prioritise the needs of others, often in situations of shared marginalisation.

The narrative suggests that altruistic behaviour strengthens social bonds and provides emotional support in adverse conditions. It highlights that even in environments marked by rejection, compassion and solidarity can foster resilience and hope.

Time	Scene Description	Character(s)	Dialogue	Analysis
02:31– 02:46	Teaching altruistic values	Maya’s Mother	“Nothing in this world will make you happier than helping others.”	Reflects early moral socialization emphasizing altruism as a core value.
07:09– 07:15	Willingness to sacrifice self	Maya	“I came because I promised to help you live.”	Demonstrates self-sacrifice driven by empathy and moral responsibility, even toward a threat.
12:58– 13:04	Sacrifice for future moral ideals	Maya	“I must fulfill my promise.”	Connects altruism with moral legacy and responsibility toward future generations.

4. Trust and Social Norms

Another important theme that emerged from the analysis was Trust and Social Norms. The film illustrates how trust is shaped by social interactions and how it is often disrupted in environments where individuals face discrimination and exclusion. The protagonist’s experiences show difficulty in trusting others due to repeated rejection and betrayal.

These findings relate to sociological perspectives on social norms, which are the unwritten rules that govern acceptable behaviour in society. When individuals deviate from these norms, they may face exclusion, leading to a breakdown of trust between the individual and society.



The narrative also demonstrates that trust is essential for healthy relationships and social functioning. The lack of trust and acceptance contributes to isolation, while supportive relationships help rebuild confidence and a sense of belonging. Thus, the theme highlights the interplay between societal expectations and individual psychological experiences.

Time	Scene Description	Character(s)	Dialogue	Analysis
06:53– 07:04	Negotiation of trust	Tiger / Maya	“Why should I trust you?” / “Trust a mother.”	Highlights trust-building through shared social norms such as maternal responsibility.
08:52– 08:59	Conflict between norms and ethics	Other Cows	“You don’t have to fulfill a promise like that!”	Demonstrates tension between societal expectations (self-preservation) and personal moral standards.
11:04– 11:10	Reinforcement of natural norms	Tiger	“Next time I will eat you...”	Reflects persistence of predator-prey norms, moderated by emerging moral awareness.

5. Social Learning and Values

The theme of Social Learning and Values was also evident in the present study. The film shows how behaviours, attitudes, and beliefs are shaped through observation, interaction, and cultural influences. The protagonist learns societal expectations regarding gender roles from family, peers, and the broader community.

These findings are consistent with Albert Bandura’s Social Learning Theory, which emphasises that individuals acquire behaviours through observation and imitation of others. The film demonstrates how both positive and negative behaviours are learned within social contexts.

At the same time, the protagonist gradually develops personal values that may differ from societal norms. This reflects the dynamic process through which individuals internalise, question, and redefine



values based on personal experiences. The theme highlights the role of social environments in shaping moral understanding and identity.

Time	Scene Description	Character(s)	Dialogue	Analysis
00:71– 00:82	Teaching kindness and empathy	Maya and (Mother)	“Can’t we spread a little bit of friendship?”	Demonstrates value transmission through modeling prosocial behavior.
02:54– 02:58	Instruction in helping behavior	Maya (Mother)	“Help the farmer’s daughter...”	Links everyday actions to moral responsibility and prosocial development.
12:32– 12:42	Explicit moral teaching	Maya	“Every time we lie out of fear...”	Shows direct moral instruction shaping ethical reasoning in the next generation.

6. Cognitive Moral Conflict

Finally, the present study identified the theme of Cognitive Moral Conflict. The film portrays several instances where the protagonist faces difficult choices involving competing values, such as conformity versus authenticity, acceptance versus self-expression, and survival versus dignity.

These findings align with theories of moral reasoning, which suggest that moral development involves resolving conflicts between different ethical principles. Cognitive conflict encourages individuals to reflect, evaluate alternatives, and make decisions based on deeper reasoning.

The narrative shows that such conflicts often lead to emotional distress but also contribute to psychological growth. By confronting these dilemmas, the protagonist moves toward greater self-awareness and moral clarity.

Thus, the theme of Cognitive Moral Conflict highlights the importance of critical thinking and reflection in the development of moral judgment and personal identity.



Time	Scene Description	Character(s)	Dialogue	Analysis
06:56– 07:01	Conflict between safety and duty	Maya / Other Cows	“You don’t have to...” / “I must...”	Illustrates internal conflict between self-interest and moral obligation.
09:32– 10:00	Internal struggle with trust	Tiger	“What if she traps me?”	Reflects cognitive moral conflict involving suspicion, trust, and decision-making.
12:32– 12:42	Resolution of Maya moral conflict		“Every time we lie out of fear...”	Demonstrates resolution through principled reasoning, prioritizing integrity over fear.

Implications

The thematic analysis of moral universals across cultural tales provides important implications for psychology, education, and cultural studies. The consistent representation of honesty and kindness across narratives supports the idea that moral development is grounded in shared human values, reinforcing theoretical perspectives on universal ethics.

From a psychological standpoint, these findings emphasise the role of storytelling as a tool for moral development. Cultural tales can be effectively used in educational and therapeutic settings to promote ethical reasoning, empathy, and prosocial behaviour. Narrative-based learning can help individuals internalise values such as truthfulness, compassion, and responsibility.

In educational contexts, incorporating multicultural stories into curricula can foster moral awareness and cross-cultural understanding. Exposure to diverse narratives allows learners to recognise that ethical values are not confined to a single culture but are widely shared across humanity.

From a social perspective, the findings highlight the importance of reinforcing honesty and kindness as foundational values in contemporary society. In a rapidly changing world, these moral principles remain essential for building trust, reducing conflict, and promoting social cohesion.

Overall, the study positions cultural tales as powerful tools for moral education, capable of shaping attitudes, behaviours, and value systems across generations.

Future Research Directions



This study opens several avenues for further research in the area of moral psychology and cultural narratives:

- **Cross-Cultural Comparative Analysis:** Future studies can compare a larger corpus of tales from different regions to examine variations and similarities in the portrayal of honesty and kindness.
- **Developmental Studies:** Research can explore how exposure to moral stories influences moral reasoning and behaviour in children and adolescents over time.
- **Experimental Research:** Controlled studies can assess the impact of storytelling on empathy, prosocial behaviour, and ethical decision-making.
- **Narrative Psychology Approaches:** In-depth qualitative research can examine how individuals interpret and internalise moral lessons from stories.
- **Media and Modern Adaptations:** Future research can analyse how films, digital media, and contemporary storytelling continue to represent moral universals.
- **Intersectional Perspectives:** Studies can explore how factors such as culture, class, and gender influence the interpretation of moral values within narratives.

These approaches will deepen understanding of how universal moral values are constructed, communicated, and sustained across cultures.

Conclusion

This study highlights that honesty and kindness function as core moral universals embedded within cultural storytelling traditions. Across diverse tales, these values are consistently portrayed as guiding principles for ethical behaviour, shaping both individual character and social relationships.

The thematic analysis demonstrates that moral development is not confined to formal systems of instruction but is deeply rooted in narrative traditions that transmit values across generations. Cultural tales serve as powerful vehicles for teaching empathy, integrity, and social responsibility.

By emphasising honesty and kindness, these narratives reinforce the idea that ethical living is essential for both personal well-being and collective harmony. The findings support the view that despite cultural diversity, there exists a shared moral foundation that connects human societies.

Ultimately, this study affirms that storytelling remains a vital medium for preserving and promoting universal values. By engaging with cultural tales, individuals not only gain insight into different traditions but also develop a deeper understanding of the moral principles that unite humanity.



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