

UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

MORAL DEVELOPMENT, EGO DEVELOPMENT, AND  
SEX ROLE DIFFERENCES IN ADOLESCENCE

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	ii
Abstract.....	iv
List of Tables.....	vii
List of Figures.....	viii
Introduction.....	1
Cognitive Developmental and Social Learning Approaches to Socialization.....	1
Moral Development.....	6
Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development.....	7
Moral development, Logical development and Social Perspective taking.....	11
Kohlberg's Methodology in Assessing Moral Judgment Development.....	15
Rest's Assessment of Moral Judgment Development.....	17
Ego Development.....	19
Loevinger's Model of Ego Development.....	20
Assessment of Ego Development.....	25
Ego Development, Social Perspective Taking and Moral Development.....	26
Review of Moral and Ego Development Research.....	28
Sex Role Socialization.....	30
Sex Differences in Ego and Moral Development.....	37
Socioeconomic Status and Socialization.....	39
SES and Sex Role Differences.....	40
SES and Moral and Ego Development.....	43
Rationale and Hypothesis.....	44
Method.....	51
Subjects.....	51
Instruments.....	52
Moral Development.....	52
Ego Development.....	55
Procedure.....	61
Results.....	64
Inter-rater Reliability.....	64
Cognitive Developmental and Social Learning Perspectives of Ego and Moral Development.....	65

Moral Development.....	71
Age.....	71
Sex Differences.....	73
Grade and Sex Differences.....	73
SES Differences.....	75
Grade and SES.....	75
Grade and Sex and SES.....	76
Ego Development.....	79
Grade.....	79
Sex Differences.....	79
Grade and Sex.....	80
SES Differences.....	83
Grade and SES.....	83
Multiple Regression Analyses.....	86
Discussion.....	88
Moral Development.....	92
Grade.....	92
Sex Differences.....	93
SES Differences.....	94
Ego Development.....	96
Grade.....	96
Sex Differences.....	97
SES Differences.....	98
Regression Analysis.....	100
Conclusions and Implications.....	102
Appendices	
A.....	107
B.....	120
C.....	122
D.....	123
E.....	124
F.....	125
G.....	126
H.....	127
I.....	128
J.....	129
K.....	130
L.....	131
M.....	132
References.....	133

## ABSTRACT

### MORAL DEVELOPMENT, EGO DEVELOPMENT AND SEX DIFFERENCES IN ADOLESCENCE

The relationship between moral development, measured by the Defining Issues Test (Rest, 1974) and ego development assessed by Loevinger's (1970) Sentence Completion Test was examined in order to clarify the differential emphasis of cognitive developmental and social learning approaches to the role of cognitive symbolic processes as causal mechanisms in socialization. According to social learning theory, behaviour in one facet of socialization is considered to develop independently of other behaviours, and no fixed relationship was predicted between the pattern of moral development and ego functioning. Conversely, cognitive developmental theory assumes a parallel development in various facets of social-cognitive functioning, and a concurrent relationship was predicted between moral development and ego level.

In view of methodological difficulties inherent in research with Kohlberg's moral interview technique, this study examined the relationship between ego development and a cognitive measure of moral capacity, the DIT. In addition, two determinants of socialization, sex and socioeconomic status (SES), defined in terms of the expectations and role-taking opportunities generated as personal self-categorizations, were examined in moral and in ego development.

The subjects were 559 rural junior and senior high school and first year university students. The designs included: a one-way ANOVA with ego level the independent and moral P-score the dependent variables, and

a MANOVA with grade, sex and SES as predictors of ego level and moral P-score, to test the hypotheses.

A concurrent relationship between moral capacity and ego development was established in support of the cognitive developmental interpretation. At each successive ego level an increment in P-score was observed. Significant differences occurred between the preconformist, conformist, transitional I-3/4, conscientious and the post-conscientious ego levels. Chi square analysis performed on the frequency distribution of subjects' moral stage-type by ego level was significant.

Subsequent analyses evaluated grade, sex and SES in relation to moral and ego development. The developmental trend was supported in moral development. Sex differences were not found although females demonstrated higher moral scores at all grade levels except grade 11. There was directional support for high-SES students and moral capacity. An unexpected finding was that low-SES older adolescents evidenced the highest moral development. This was explained in terms of cognitive rendering engendered in upwardly mobile older adolescents.

In ego functioning, the developmental trend was confirmed. Females demonstrated precocious ego development in comparison with males. At each grade, girls were one ego level in advance of the boys. SES differences were not supported. However, during the high school years, high-SES students demonstrated higher ego functioning than medium-SES and low-SES students whereas at the university level low-SES students showed the most advanced ego development.

Regression equations computed for both ego level and moral development

with grade, sex and SES as predictors indicated that these variables operate differently in the moral and ego dimensions. In moral development the largest proportion of variance was accounted for by grade (4.91%,  $p < .0001$ ), followed by sex (1.4%,  $p < .006$ ) and SES (.64%,  $p < .06$ ). Conversely, the most variability in ego development was due to sex (6.84%,  $p < .0001$ ), followed by grade (.82%,  $p < .03$ ) and SES (.37%,  $p < .55$ ). Ego development was the most potent predictor of moral capacity during adolescence. It accounted for 19.98% of the moral variability.



## LIST OF TABLES

Table	page
1. Kohlberg's stages of moral reasoning.....	8
2. Loevinger's levels of ego development.....	21
3. Ego level as a function of modal moral stage.....	68
4. Ego development level as a function of grade.....	70
5. Ego development level as a function of grade and sex.....	84

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	page
1. Moral P score as a function of ego level.....	66
2. Moral P score as a function of grade.....	72
3. Moral P score as a function of grade and sex.....	74
4. Moral P score as a function of grade and SES.....	77
5. Ego development as a function of grade.....	78
6. Ego development as a function of grade and sex.....	81
7. Distribution of TPRs by grade and sex.....	82
8. Ego development as a function of grade and SES.....	85

## Chapter I

### Introduction

This section is a review of the theoretical and empirical literature upon which the study is based. The main assumptions of cognitive developmental and social learning approaches to socialization are evaluated. Two aspects of social cognition, moral development and ego development are outlined as processes of socialization and the methodology for these constructs is reviewed in terms of theory and empirical research. According to theoretical assumptions, social perspective taking is evaluated as a necessary but not sufficient ability in both moral and ego constructs. The self-categorizations, expectations and role taking experiences provided by a person's sex role and socioeconomic status are considered as determinants of socialization in the processes of moral development and ego development. Finally, the rationale and the hypotheses for this study are presented.

#### Cognitive Developmental and Social Learning

##### Approaches to Socialization

"Cognitive developmental" is a label that refers to an approach rather than to a theory. It includes a set of assumptions and research strategies employed in a number of specific theories of cognitive and social development. These include the theories of: J. M. Baldwin (1906); J. Dewey (1930); G. H. Mead (1934); Piaget (1948); Loevinger (1966); Kohlberg (1966, 1968, 1969); and Selman (1976). The basic assumption of cognitive developmental theories apply for the development of ways of

thinking about both physical and social objects.

The cognitive developmental approach to socialization assumes a parallel development in logical thinking and in social cognition. The development of logical thought has been well articulated in the work of Piaget, his colleagues, and disciples. On the other hand, social cognition is elaborated in terms of its many facets, including moral development, ego development, social perspective taking, and the development of gender identity. Although the logical component in social cognition is recognized, the interrelationships between the facets of social cognition warrant attention. According to Kohlberg, "In addition to the level of social development due to general cognitive development (the g factor in mental maturity tests), there is a farther unity of development due to a common factor of ego maturity" (1969, p. 349). This study is addressed to the study of this "common social component" in social cognition and its function in the socialization process.

The cognitive developmental approach to socialization is concerned with consistency, balance or equilibrium, and dissonance reduction. It assumes that the individual's behaviour has an organizational pattern of its own. And it is this organizational pattern which regulates behaviour.

This involves the notion of cognitive structure which refers to rules for processing information or for connecting experienced events. Connections are formed by an active process which involves, in part, selective attention, information gathering strategies, and similar mechanisms. The process of relating particular events depends upon prior general modes of interpretation developed by the individual. The

most general modes of interpretation are "categories of experience". These categories are modes of relating applicable to any experienced events. They include relations of causality, substantiality, space, time, quantity, and logic as well as social constructs.

According to the cognitive developmental position, an individual's cognitive social structure or "categorization of experience" determines his/her attitudes, values, or basic perception of the elements of social reality. Thus, the cognitive developmental perspective places heavy emphasis on the causal role of cognition and categorization as the basic determinants of socialization phenomena.

The social learning approach to socialization is based on observational learning. This refers to any interpersonal modelling situation through which observers learn and adopt the attributes and actions of other people. Contemporary accounts of observational learning assign a prominent role to representational mediators that are assumed to be acquired on the basis of a contiguity learning process (Bandura, 1969).

In contrast to traditional associational theory (Gerwitz, 1969), the social learning perspective emphasizes observational and cognitive mediational processes. This is illustrated in an account of the complex behavioural repertoires that individuals acquire with little or no tuition. Individuals learn complex patterns of behaviour by combining and integrating responses observed in a variety of models. Frequently, this learning is accomplished in situations in which cues provided by others are the only reliable eliciting stimuli.

According to Bandura, the ability to observe and then to produce

or reproduce a sequence of behaviour requires selective attention, retention and rehearsal, adequate duplication of the model, and a motivational component to justify the imitative act in terms of external, internal, or vicarious rewards. An individual is able to observe a variety of models in numerous situations. Although the reinforcing consequences of a behaviour are important, these consequences may be associated with alternative behaviours through vicarious and symbolic reinforcement. In addition, the consequences of a behaviour depend on many moderating conditions. Some of these determinants of behavioural consequences include: the type of behaviour, the situation in which it occurs, the person's age, status, and other attributes as well as qualities of the social agents who evaluate him/her.

In early socialization, external contingent reinforcement may be important. Later, however, an individual's self-reactions and self-evaluations become prominent in behavioural acquisitions. In other words, individuals are able to regulate their own behaviour in terms of person-environmental interactions.

Contemporary social learning theory is similar to the cognitive developmental perspective in that it acknowledges the role of cognitive-representational processes in the acquisition of complex behaviour. Although social learning theory emphasizes reinforcement, it does not rely upon it exclusively.

In contrast, the basic difference between these two approaches to socialization involve the heavy emphasis that the cognitive developmental perspective places on the causal role of cognitions, categorizations, or

structure. The main question is not levied at the existence of cognitive structure but at how adequately these structures in themselves account for socialization phenomena.

According to the social learning theory, an individual's social cognitions, structure, or categorizations do not necessarily parallel his other behaviours, nor do they cause them. On the other hand, cognitive developmentalists assume that an individual's cognitive structure or categorizations are the primary causal agents which direct behaviour, generate behavioural change and thereby underlie or are reflected in all of the individual's behaviour in the person-environmental interaction.

Cognitive developmental and social learning explanations of social learning phenomena differ in terms of the emphasis placed upon cognitive processes as determinants of socialization. Cognitive developmentalists consider social cognitions or categorizations as primary causal agents whereas social learning proponents advocate the operation of cognitive processes in relation to social-environmental contingencies. In order to determine which explanation is more accurate, two facets of social cognition, ego development and moral reasoning, were examined in an adolescent sample.

According to cognitive developmental assumptions, an individual's level of ego functioning and moral reasoning capacity is expected to reflect the same basic level of cognitive competence or structural organization. According to social learning theory, an individual's social cognitions or categorizations do not necessarily parallel his other behaviours. From this perspective ego development and social moral

reasoning would be expected to develop independently. In other words, no fixed pattern of development is predicted between ego development and moral development.

### Moral Development

The cognitive conceptualization of moral development (Kohlberg, 1963; 1969) has provided a powerful paradigm in the study of moralization. Following Piaget's (1932) dicotomous formulation of moral judgment development, which terminates at approximately twelve years of age, Kohlberg's model extends the scope of moral reasoning into the adult years in terms of his six stage model.

Moral judgment development refers to the reasoning utilized when solving a moral conflict situation. This is a specific domain of cognitive functioning which involves a justice structure or schema as well as logical and social-emotional components (to be discussed at the end of this section). According to Kohlberg (1975), each moral stage contains elements of the basic moral domains defined by moral philosophers. And all of these moral domains are structurally integrated in the moral stage sequence. Specifically, each stage of moral development defines the criteria (or categories) by which an individual evaluates a moral dilemma.

Kohlberg's model includes six stages of moral judgment, each characterized by a more integrated type of moral reasoning. Ideally, an individual progresses through each successive stage until stage six may



be achieved during adulthood. However, a person may stabilize at a particular level of moral development and thereby cease to progress along the continuum of moral reasoning. According to Kohlberg, most adults are functioning at the stage 4, conventional level of moral reasoning.

#### Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development

Kohlberg's model presents a description of moral judgment development as well as a typology of individual differences in moral reasoning capacity. The moral schema and defining stage characteristics are presented in Table 1.

The six moral stages are grouped into three major levels: pre-conventional (Stages 1 and 2), conventional (Stages 3 and 4), and post-conventional (Stages 5 and 6). Each level may be viewed as a different relationship between the self and social rules and expectations. At the pre-conventional level social rules and expectations are totally external to the individual whereas at the conventional level they have been internalized and at the post-conventional level they are differentiated and defined according to self-chosen principles (Kohlberg, 1976, p.33). There are two stages within each of the three moral levels with the second stage more organized and advanced in terms of the level's orientation.

At the pre-conventional level the basis of moral judgment resides in external quasiphysical happenings. The individual applies cultural standards of right and wrong without analyzing their meaning. The first stage is oriented to punishment and obedience. Behaviour is evaluated

TABLE 1

## KOHLEBERG'S SIX STAGES OF MORAL REASONING

## LEVEL 1: PREMORAL (AGES 4 TO 10 YEARS)

Emphasis in this level is on external control. The standards are those of others, and they are observed either to avoid punishment or to reap rewards.

- Stage 1. Punishment and obedience orientation. "What will happen to me?" Children obey rules of others to avoid punishment.
- Stage 2. Instrumental purpose and exchange. "You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours". They conform to rules out of self-interest and consideration for what others can do for them in return.

## LEVEL II: MORALITY OF CONVENTIONAL ROLE CONFORMITY (AGES 10 TO 13)

Children now want to please other people. They still observe the standards of others, but they have internalized these standards to some extent. Now they want to be considered "good" by those persons whose opinions count. They are now able to take the roles of authority figures well enough to decide whether some action is "good" by their standards.

- Stage 3. Maintaining mutual relations, approval of others, the golden rule. "Am I a good girl (boy)?" Children want to please and help others, can judge the intentions of others, and develop their own ideas of what a good person is.
- Stage 4. Social system and conscience. "What if everybody did it?" People are concerned with doing their duty, showing respect for higher authority, and maintaining the social order.

## LEVEL III: MORALITY OF SELF-ACCEPTED MORAL PRINCIPLES (AGE 13, OR NOT UNTIL YOUNG ADULTHOOD, OR NEVER)

This level marks the attainment of true morality. For the first time, the individual acknowledges the possibility of conflict between two socially accepted standards, and tries to decide between them. The control of conduct is now internal, both in the standards observed and in the reasoning about right and wrong. Types 5 and 6 may be alternate methods of the highest level of reasoning.

- Stage 5. Morality of contract, of individual rights, and of democratically accepted law. People think in rational terms, valuing the will of the majority and the welfare of society. They generally see these values best supported by adherence to the law. While they recognize that there are times when there is a conflict between human need and the law, they believe that it is better for society in the long run if they obey the law.
- Stage 6. Morality of universal ethical principles. People do what they as individuals think right, regardless of legal restrictions or the opinions of others. They act in accordance with internalized standards, knowing that they would condemn themselves

if they did not.

Source: Papalia & Olds. A Child's World. New York:McGraw-Hill, 1979,  
p. 364.

in terms of physical consequences, that is, reward and punishment. Avoidance of punishment and unquestioning deference to power are valued in their own right.

The second stage is oriented to instrumental relativism. Right action consists of satisfying one's own needs and occasionally those of others. There are elements of fairness, reciprocity and equal sharing, but these are always interpreted pragmatically, for example, "You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours".

At the conventional level maintaining the expectations and standards of one's family, group, or nation is the ideal, regardless of immediate consequences. This attitude involves not only conformity to personal expectations and social order but, loyalty to it, actively maintaining, supporting, and justifying the order, and identifying with the persons or groups involved in it.

The third stage is interpersonal concordance or the "good boy - nice girl" orientation. Behaviour is evaluated in terms of what pleases, helps, or is approved by others and intentionality is deemed critical. There is considerable conformity to stereotyped images of the majority or "natural" behaviour.

In the fourth stage, the law and order orientation, authority, fixed laws, and the maintenance of social stability are idealized. Appropriate behaviour involves doing one's duty, showing respect for authority, and maintaining the given social order for its own sake.

At the principled level, the group is no longer paramount. There is an effort to define values and principles that have validity and

application apart from one's identification with or membership in socially defined groups. One's conscience becomes the basis of action.

Stage five is the social-contract, legalistic or utilitarian orientation. Appropriate behaviour is defined in terms of individual rights and standards which have been agreed upon by the whole society. There is awareness of the relativism of personal values and opinions. Thus, consensual agreement is based upon procedural rules. The law is viewed as a changeable set of principles that should yield to what people perceive as the common good. Outside the legal realm, free agreement and contract are binding elements of obligation.

Stage six is the universal ethical principle orientation. Appropriate behaviour is arrived at through an appeal to logical comprehensiveness, universality, and consistency. These principles are abstract and ethical, pertaining to a wide variety of circumstances. These are universal principles of justice or reciprocity, equality of human rights, and respect for the dignity of human beings as individual persons.

#### Moral development, logical development and social perspective taking

As indicated above, a moral judgment stage refers to the reasoning capacities an individual employs when solving a moral conflict dilemma. Each person passes through the moral stages in a fixed sequential fashion. Also, in the process of development an individual passes through the more basic stages of logical reasoning described by Piaget (1967). Research indicates that moral reasoning capacities develop only after logical capacities at corresponding levels of complexity have been