Cognitive Development in Adolescence

Psy 313
Lecture 18

Adolescent vs. Middle Childhood Thought

- Reasoning hypothetically - requires generating & mentally testing hypotheses
- Thinking about thinking
  - Metacognition
- Planning ahead
- Thinking beyond conventional limits

Formal Operations

- Think systematically
- Identity development
- Can apply FO thinking to variety of life problems

Limitations of Piaget's Theory

- Formal operations has been the most critiqued
- Limitations:
  - Individual differences in the attainment of formal operations
  - Cultural basis of adolescent cognitive development

Limitations - Individual Differences

- Great range in extent to which people use formal operations
- Many adults use formal operations- inconsistently or not at all
- FOT seen most in adolescents who have had courses in math and science
- Concrete operations are sufficient for most daily tasks and problems

Limitations – Cultural Basis

- FO has universal potential
- Form it takes in each culture varies due to cognition requirements people face
- Great variation in the extent to which adol & adults display FO thought

Adolescent Egocentrism

- Egocentrism
- Imaginary Audience
- Personal Fable

Thinking about Moral Issues



- What is right? What is wrong?
- What principles should I based my behavior on and use to judge the behavior of others?
- How do I balance my responsibilities to others against my own personal rights?
- What does it mean to be a moral person in a world where immoral behavior is so prevalent?
- Why is our society is organized as it is?
- What might be done to improve society and myself?

Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Dev

Three levels, each consisting of 2 stages

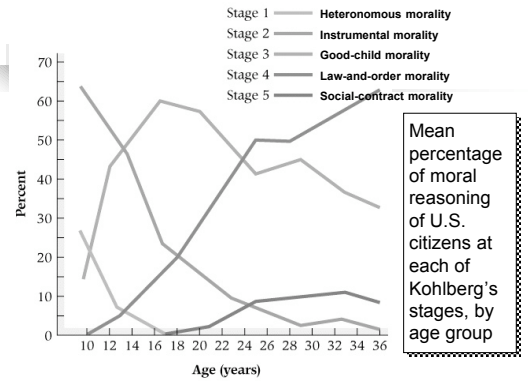
Level/Stage	What Is Right	Why Do Right	Social Perspective
LEVEL II Conventional **STAGE 4 Law-and-order morality (begins to appear during adolescence)**	**Fulfilling agreed-upon duties** **Upholding laws except in extreme cases when in conflict with other duties** **Contributing to society or group**	**Keep the institution going as a whole** **What would happen if everyone did it?** **The imperative of conscience to meet one's defined obligations**	**Perspective of an individual in relation to the social group** **Takes the point of view of the system that defines roles and rules**

Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Dev

Level/Stage	What Is Right	Why Do Right	Social Perspective
LEVEL III Post-conventional **STAGE 5 Social-contract reasoning (does not appear until early adulthood, and then only rarely)**	**Aware people hold a variety of values** **Upholding relative rules because they are social contracts** **Non-relative values (e.g., life, liberty) upheld regard-less of majority opinion**	**Sense of obligation to law because of one's social contract** **Feeling contractual commitment** **Laws based on "greatest good for greatest number"**	**Integrates agree-ment, formal contract, objective impartiality, and due process** **Considers moral and legal points of view, recognizing that these may conflict**

Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Dev

Level/Stage	What Is Right	Why Do Right	Social Perspective
LEVEL III Post-conventional **STAGE 6 Universal ethical principles (an ideal, seen only in extra-ordinary cases)**	**Following self-chosen ethical principles because of universal justice** **When laws violate principles, acting in accordance with the principle**	**A belief in the validity of universal moral principles** **A sense of personal commitment to those principles**	**All social arrangements must derive from a moral point of view** **Persons are ends in themselves and must be treated as such**



Mean percentage of moral reasoning of U.S. citizens at each of Kohlberg's stages, by age group