

Chapter 15: Cognitive Development In Adolescence

What physical changes do adolescents experience?

Adolescence is a time of considerable physical and psychological growth and change!

ADOLESCENCE is the developmental stage between childhood and adulthood.

- ☞ The age at which adolescence begins and ends is imprecise, partly because society is unclear about the roles of people in this stage (no longer children, not yet adults)

Cognitive Development increases markedly during adolescence!

~Teens begin to use formal operations to solve problems during this period of their growth.

Piaget's approach to cognitive development has had a significant influence on developmental psychologists.

- ☞ **FORMAL OPERATIONS PERIOD** is the stage during which people develop the ability to think abstractly.

- Piaget asserted that children enter this stage at the beginning of adolescence

STAGE	AGE	DESCRIPTION
Sensorimotor	birth to 18 months or 2 years	knowing by sensing and acting
Preoperational	approximately 2 to 7 years	concept formation, symbolic reasoning
Concrete operations	approximately 7 to 11 years	logical operations on concrete objects and events
Formal operations	beginning at 12 years and beyond	abstracts, analogies, metaphors, hypothetical reasoning

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Piaget's approach

to cognitive development, continued

- ✓ Full capabilities of using principles of logic unfold gradually, throughout early adolescence (approximately ages 12 to 15).
- ✓ Not everyone achieves formal operational skills (some studies estimate that 25 percent — 50 % of college students do not).
- ✓ Social values/ culture also influence the achievement of these skills
 - Isolation, level of formal education, level of scientific sophistication in the community


Egocentrism in Adolescent Thinking

Developmental Psychologist David Elkind argues that the adolescent period fosters adolescent egocentrism

- ✓ **ADOLESCENT EGOCENTRISM** *is a stage of self-absorption where the world is seen only from one's own perspective.*
- ✓ Thus adolescents are highly critical of authority figures, unwilling to accept criticism, and quick to find fault with others.
- ✓ Adolescent egocentrism helps explain why teens often think they're the focus of everyone's attention!

Adolescent egocentrism leads to two distortions:

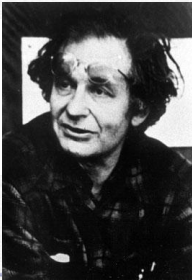
- **IMAGINARY AUDIENCE**, where adolescents think they are the focus of everyone else's attention.
 - Constructing elaborate scenarios about other's thoughts/intentions
- **PERSONAL FABLES**, the belief that the adolescent is unique and exceptional and shared by no one else
 - No one understands me
 - Risk taking behavior



Lawrence Kohlberg

Born: 1927, Bronxville, NY
 Died: 1987, Boston, MA
 committed suicide
 Education: PhD, U. of Chicago

Accomplishments: Major contributor to the field of moral development and reasoning; Published major work in 1981, *Essays on Moral Development*.




Morals in Middle Childhood

Moral Dilemmas

- Cancer drug question
 - Should you steal the drug?

Kohlberg asserts that the way that children answer this question reveals central aspects about their morality and sense of justice.

- Information about stage or moral development
- Information about cognitive developmental level



Kohlberg's stages of moral reasoning

See table on pg. 450 of text:

- ☞ Preconventional Morality is where people follow unvarying rules based on rewards and punishments
 - Stage 1: Obedience and punishment
 - Stage 2: Reward

(Kohlberg's stages of moral reasoning, continued)

- ☞ Conventional Morality is where people approach problems in terms of their own position as good, responsible members of society.
 - Stage 3: "Good Boy" morality
 - Interested in maintaining the respect of others
 - Stage 4: Authority and social order
 - Conform to societies rules.
- ☞ Postconventional Morality is where universal moral principles are invoked and considered broader than the rules of a particular society.
 - Stages 5 & 6

Some key points related to Kohlberg's theory

- ☞ Kohlberg assessed people's moral reasoning using moral dilemmas.
- ☞ According to Kohlberg, people move through these stages in a fixed order.
- ☞ Middle childhood is at stage 1 & 2, the *preconventional stage*, because of the *limits of children's cognitive abilities*.

Criticisms of Kohlberg's theory

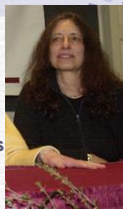
- There is a difference between *moral judgment* and *moral behavior*.
- The theory is based on data from males
 - From western cultures

Moral Development in Girls Carol Gilligan's theory of moral development

- Carol Gilligan suggests that the way boys and girls are raised in our own society leads to differences in moral reasoning.
- Kohlberg's theory is inadequate and places girls' moral reasoning at a lower level than boys'.
- Boys view morality primarily in terms of justice and fairness.
- Girls see morality in terms of responsibility and compassion toward individuals and a willingness to sacrifice for relationships.

Carol Gilligan

Born: 1937- New York
Current: Professor of Gender Studies
Harvard University
Education Ph.D., Harvard University



Achievements: Challenged Lawrence Kohlberg's theories of moral development on the basis of gender bias; Pioneer in the research on moral development of women; One of Time Magazine's 25 most influential people of 1996.

→ Gilligan sees morality in girls developing in 3 stages.

- *Orientation toward individual survival* - where females concentrate on what is practical and best for them.
- *Goodness as self-sacrifice* - where females think they must sacrifice their own wishes to what others want.
- *Morality of nonviolence* - women come to see hurting anyone as immoral, including themselves.

~The highest levels of morality are represented by compassionate concern for the welfare of others

Criticisms of Gilligan's theory

- Theory is based on moral decisions in an actual real life situation. Findings may not apply in ALL situations.
- Data was collected on women ONLY.
- Gilligan also never published her data in peer-reviewed journals.
