**Kohlberg: The Child as a Moral Philosopher**

**Background and aim:**Kohlberg suggested that we have three levels of moral thinking and within each of these levels there are two related stages.

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| **Level** | **Stage** | **Moral reasoning shown** |
| 1. Pre-conventional | 1. Punishment and obedience | Rules are kept to avoid punishment |
| 2. Instrumental-relativist | ‘Right’ behaviour is brings you rewards |
| 2. Conventional | 3. Good boy-good girl | ‘Good’ behaviour is what pleases others – conformity to goodness |
| 4. Law and order | Doing your duty, obeying laws is important |
| 3. Post-conventional | 5. Social contract | ‘Right’ is what is we all agreed upon |
| 6. Universal principles | Moral action is taken based upon self-chosen principles |

**Method:**a **longitudinal study** over a period of 12 years, where he presented a series of hypothetical moral dilemmas in the form of short stories, such as

* for 10 year olds: “Is it better to save the life of one important person or a lot of unimportant people?”
* and at ages 13, 16, 20 and 24: “Should the doctor ‘mercy kill’ a fatally ill woman requesting death because of her pain?”

**Sample**: 75 young American males aged 10-16 years old at the start of the study and were aged 22-28 by the end. Kohlberg compared the males from the USA to those from Canada, the UK, Mexico, Turkey and Taiwan.

**Results:**Participants progressed through the stages as they got older. Stages were always passed through stage by stage and in the fixed order and the participants never went back to a previous stage.

**Cross-cultural findings**

* Taiwanese boys aged 10-13 tended to give ‘classic’ Stage-2 responses.
* 16 year old Americans had rarely advanced to stage 6
* Middle-class children more advanced than matched lower-class children.
* No significant differences were found in the development of moral thinking between different religions and denominations (Catholics, Protestants).

**Conclusions:**Moral development is invariant, individuals go through the stages one at a time and they are in a fixed order. Some may not reach the final stage. The order of stages is universal across all cultures.

**Evaluation**

**Research Method:**Longitudinal study - see clear changes in moral development over time, but there is subject attrition.

**Validity:** Lacks ecological validity as they had to say what they would do in a hypothetical moral dilemma. Lacks internal validity as participants may want to appear as more moral to impress the researcher – social desirability bias - or respond in a way they think the researcher wants them to – demand characteristics.

**Sampling Bias:** This was a large sample of 75 Americans and their results were compared to different cultures. This is a strength as it gives the study high population validity. However, as only males were used the study is androcentric; we cannot assume that girls’ moral development is the same way as boys’.

**Lee: Chinese & Canadian Children’s Evaluations of Lying**

**Aim:**to test the effect of culture on children’s moral evaluations of lying and truth telling by comparing the judgements of Canadian and Chinese children.

**Sample:**

* 120 Chinese children, equal number of 7, 9 and 11 year olds; 60M and 60F
* 108 Canadian children, 36 = 7 years, 40 = 9 years and 32 were 11years. 58M and 50F

**Method**: It was a laboratory experiment which used an independent measures design. The **IV**s were:

1. social story or the physical story
2. pro-social or anti-social story
3. the age of the children
4. the ethnicity of the children.

**DV**s = the rating given to the story character’s deed and to what the character said

Children were read four scenarios with illustrations: two were prosocial and two were antisocial. An prosocial story with lie-telling story is:

*Here is Alex. Alex’s class had to stay inside at recess time because of bad weather, so Alex decided to tidy up the classroom for his teacher. Question 1: Is what Alex did good or naughty?*

*So Alex cleaned the classroom, and when the teacher returned after recess, she said to her students, “Oh, I see that someone has cleaned the classroom for me.” The teacher then asked Alex, “Do you know who cleaned the classroom?” Alex said to his teacher, “I did not do it.” Question 2: Is what Alex did good or naughty?*

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *\*\*\** | *\*\** | *\** | *o* | *X* | *XX* | *XXX* |
| *Very, very good* | *Very good* | *Good* | *Neither* | *Naughty* | *Very naughty* | *Very, very naughty* |

**Results:**

**Prosocial / Truth-Telling Situations**:

* Children rated the prosocial behaviours similarly.
* Chinese children’s ratings became less positive as age increased.

**Prosocial / Lie-Telling Situations:**

* As age increased Canadian’s ratings became less negative.
* Chinese children’s ratings changed from negative to positive as age increased.

**Antisocial /Truth-Telling Situations:**

* Children from both cultures rated the antisocial behaviours similarly.
* Both cultures rated truth telling in this situation very positively

**Antisocial / Lie-Telling Situations:**

* Both rated lie telling negatively here.
* Negative ratings increased with age, regardless of culture.

**Conclusions:**

* There is a close relationship between cultural and moral judgements.
* Chinese children rate truth telling in prosocial situations less positively and lie telling in the same situations less negatively than Canadian children.

**Evaluation**

**Ethnocentrism:** By conducting cross-cultural research, ethnocentrism was minimised, but Canada is not representative of all western cultures and nor is China representative of non-Western cultures.

**Reliability:**The standardised procedure and scenarios make the study easy to replicate. Also, giving children 4 stories allowed Lee to see whether consistent responses are given in each of the different stories. If so results can be considered to be reliable.

**Validity:**Counterbalancing to reduce order effects, matching age and gender in the different groups and randomly allocating participants to groups all helped to reduce EV and increase internal validity.