

A DEVELOPMENTAL STUDY OF MORAL JUDGMENT OF BRAZILIAN CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

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The present study attempted to replicate Kohlberg's findings on development of moral judgment, with Brazilian 10, 13 and 16 year old subjects. Fifteen boys and 15 girls at each of the three age levels took three of Kohlberg's moral judgment stories. Moral Maturity Scores (MMS) were analysed by means of a 2 X 3 analysis of variance. Factor age was found to be significant ($F'_{1,84} = 3,79, p < .05$) revealing a trend for MMS to increase with age. Factor sex was also found to be significant ($F_{1,84} = 10,58, p < .01$), with girls having higher MMS than boys. An analysis of the percentages of moral statements classified at each stage also confirmed Kohlberg's data. The usage of stages 1 and 2 decreased with age, and usage of stages 4 and 5 increased with age. The main difference from Kohlberg's U.S. findings was that Brazilian subjects at all three age levels were very high on stage 3 ("good-boy" morality) and not as high as expected, especially at age 16, on stage 4 ("law and order" morality). The data obtained with Brazilian subjects resemble those obtained by Kohlberg for Mexican subjects.

O presente estudo teve por objetivo replicar os resultados de Kohlberg a respeito do desenvolvimento do julgamento moral, com sujeitos brasileiros de 10, 13 e 16 anos. Quinze meninos e 15 meninas de cada um dos 3 níveis de idade mencionados responderam às Situações de Julgamento Moral de Kohlberg. Os escores de maturidade de julgamento moral foram analisados por meio de uma análise de variância 2 X 3. O fator "idade" revelou-se significante ($F_{2, 84} = 3,79, p < .05$) revelando tendência dos escores de maturidades moral aumentarem com a idade. O fator sexo também se revelou significante ($F_{1,84} = 10,58, p < .01$), tendo as meninas escores de maturidade moral mais altos do que os meninos. Uma análise das percentagens de afirmações morais classificadas em cada estágio também confirmaram os dados de Kohlberg: o uso de estágios 1 e 2 diminui com a idade e o uso de estágios 4 e 5 aumenta com a idade. A principal diferença entre os dados da amostra brasileira e das norte-americanas estudadas por Kohlberg consistiu em que os sujeitos brasileiros de todos os três níveis de idade saíram-se muito alto no uso de pensamento moral tipo estágio 3 (moralidade do "bom garoto") e não tão alto quanto se esperaria, especialmente para a idade 16 anos, no estágio 4 ("lei e ordem"). Os dados obtidos com sujeitos brasileiros assemelham-se aos obtidos por Kohlberg para sujeitos Mexicanos.

The purpose of this study was to investigate developmental aspects of moral judgement in Brazilian children and adolescents. The theoretical framework for the

study is provided by Kohlberg's cognitive-developmental approach to the study of moral judgment (Kohlberg 1963, 1964, 1969; Kohlberg & Kramer, 1969; Kohlberg & Turiel, 1971).

Kohlberg's approach has a great deal in common with Piaget's theory of cognitive development, and specifically with his work on moral judgment (Piaget, 1932), in that Kohlberg emphasizes sequential stages and the maturation of cognitive structures in the development of moral judgment. Kohlberg differs from Piaget, however, in that he devised a more objective instrument to evaluate maturity of moral judgment and in postulating an universal basis for moral development. Unlike most psychologists and sociologists who believe that moral development is a matter of internalization of cultural values (Freud, learning theorists, Durkheim), Kohlberg stands with Kant and the categorical imperative. To Kohlberg, there are universal moral values (in spite of cultural specificities) and children from all cultures go through the same sequences of stages in the development of moral judgment.

The six stages postulated by Kohlberg are the following:

Level I — Pre-conventional

- Stage 1 — Punishment and obedience orientation
- Stage 2 — Naive Instrumental hedonism

Level II — Conventional

- Stage 3 — "Good-boy" morality of maintaining good relationships and approval of others.
- Stage 4 — Morality of ("Law and order"), authority maintaining morality.

Level III — Post-conventional

- Stage 5 — Morality of contract and democratically accepted law.
- Stage 6 — Morality of self-accepted principles, individual conscience.

Kohlberg reports data showing that the percentage of moral statements classified at the lower stages (1 and 2) decreases with age, whereas the percentage of statements classified at the higher stages increases with age. Kohlberg (1969) and his collaborators also report data for subjects from several cultures (Mexico, Taiwan, Turkey and Yucatan) which corroborate Kohlberg's results with American subjects, although there are slight cultural differences such as those found by Kohlberg between American and lower class subjects.

An earlier study (Biaggio, 1975) compared Brazilian and U.S. college students on Kohlberg's measure of moral judgment. This study revealed only one major difference between the two groups: Americans were significantly higher than Brazilians on usage of Stage 4 thinking ("law and order"). Brazilians were slightly higher on stages 2, 3 and 5, thus making up for the low usage of stage 4. The results were discussed in terms of cultural differences.

In the present study, Kohlberg's moral judgment situations were given to Brazilian 10, 13 and 16 year old subjects.

It was hypothesized that:

- 1) The higher the age level, the higher the level of moral judgment.
- 2) Girls have significantly higher Moral Maturity Scores than boys. (Justification for this hypothesis comes from previous studies that have shown higher conscience indices for girls than for boys — Sears, Maccoby & Levin, 1957; Grinder, 1962; Biaggio, 1967, 1969).

Method

Subjects

The subjects were 15 boys and 15 girls from each of the following age levels: 10, 13 and 16 years of age. Children between 9 years and 6 months, and 10 years and 6 months were considered as 10 year-old, and so forth. All subjects came from public schools in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The socioeconomic level can safely be considered as typically lower-middle class.

Instruments

Three of Kohlberg's Moral Judgment Situations were used (Heinz, Two brothers, and Valjean). These were chosen because they seemed adequate to be used with Brazilian subjects, whereas stories such as "The Korean War" seemed to require adaptation beyond a simple translation. The stories all present moral dilemmas about which the subject must answer several questions. The "Heinz" story appears below.

In Europe, a woman was near death from a very bad disease, a special kind of cancer. There was one drug that the doctor thought might save her. It was a form of radium for which a druggist was charging ten times what the drug cost to make. He paid \$200 for the radium and charged \$2,000 for a small dose of the drug. The sick woman's husband, Heinz, went to everyone he knew to borrow the money, but he could only get together about \$ 1,000, which is half of what it cost. He told the druggist that his wife was dying and asked him to sell it cheaper or let him pay later. But the druggist said, "No, I discovered the drug and I'm going to make money from it". So Heinz got desperate and broke into the man's store to steal the drug for his wife. Should the husband have done that? Why?

The stories were evaluated according to Kohlberg's (1971) Manual for Issue Scoring the Moral Judgment Situations. According to this system, the percentage of moral issues brought up at each stage can be figured out, and a Moral Maturity Score can be obtained by multiplying each percentage by the stage number (1 to 6) and adding up the results. Thus, the Moral Maturity Score can vary between 100 to 600.

The stories were given to the children in a group situation. Each subject received a copy of the stories and questions. A student research assistant read each story and corresponding questions aloud. The subjects were asked to write down their answers.

Results

The means and standard deviations of Moral Maturity Scores of each group are presented in Table 1. Significant differences were found for sex ($F_{1, 84} = 10.58$, $p < .01$) and age ($F_{2, 84} = 3.79$, $p < .05$). Girls were significantly higher than boys on Moral Maturity Scores, and there was a trend for Moral Maturity Scores to increase with age.

The percentage of moral statements at each stage were generally in accordance with Kohlberg's data: Stage 1 and 2 decreased with age, and stages 4, and 5 increased a little with age. We found no instances of Stage 6 responses. The major differences from results with American Subjects lies in Stage 3 usage. Brazilian subjects were very high on Stage 3 ("Good-boy morality"), and not as high as one

TABLE 1
 MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS OF MORAL MATURITY
 SCORE OF BRAZILIAN BOYS AND GIRLS, AGES 10, 13
 AND 16 (n=90).

| Sex | Age | 10 | 13 | 16 |
|-------|-----|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Boys | | $\bar{X} = 231$ | $\bar{X} = 225$ | $\bar{X} = 249$ |
| | | SD = 46.65 | SD = 63.22 | SD = 58.21 |
| Girls | | $\bar{X} = 245$ | $\bar{X} = 267$ | $\bar{X} = 312$ |
| | | SD = 48.96 | SD = 79.17 | SD = 27.2 |

TABLE 2
 ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE ON MORAL MATURITY SCORES
 (SUMMARY TABLE)

| Source | SS | df | MS | F |
|-------------|--------|----|-------|---------|
| Sex | 35839 | 1 | 35839 | 10.58** |
| Age | 25648 | 2 | 12824 | 3.79* |
| Interaction | 13965 | 2 | 6983 | 2.06ns |
| Within | 284451 | 84 | 3386 | |
| Total | 359847 | 89 | | |

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

would expect on Stage 4. The data obtained with Brazilian subjects are somewhat similar to those obtained for Mexican subjects. These data appear in (Tables 3 and figures 1 through 4).

Discussion

The results obtained with Brazilian subjects in the present study seem to confirm, at least partially, Kohlberg's developmental hypothesis. There was a general tendency for Moral Maturity Scores to increase with age, with factor age being significant at the .05 level. The percentage of moral statements at each stage also

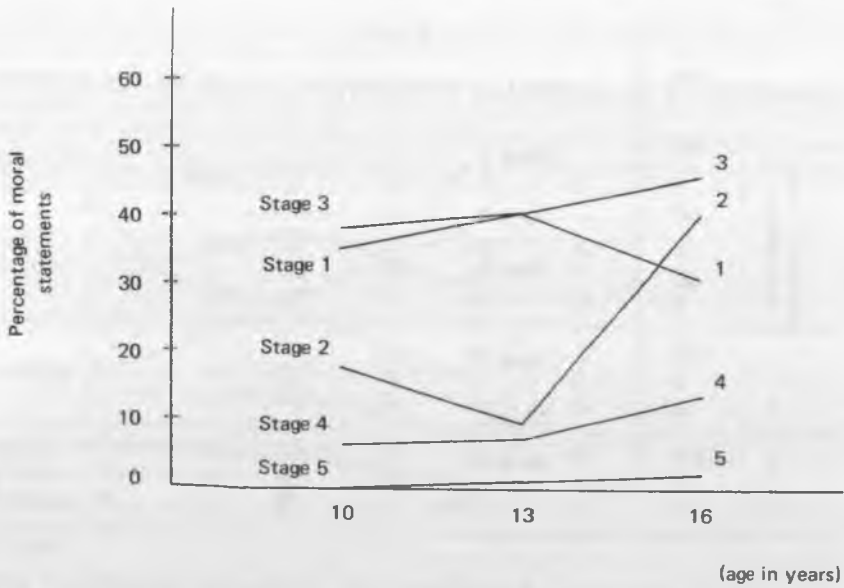


Figure 1. Percentage of moral statements classified at each of the six stages (Brazilian boys, n = 45)

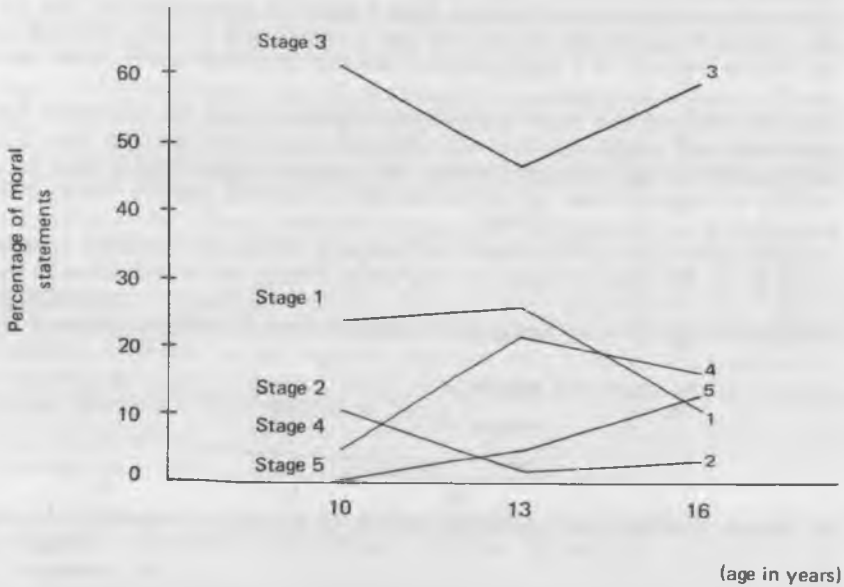


Figure 2. Percentage of moral statements classified at each of the six stages (Brazilian girls, n = 45)

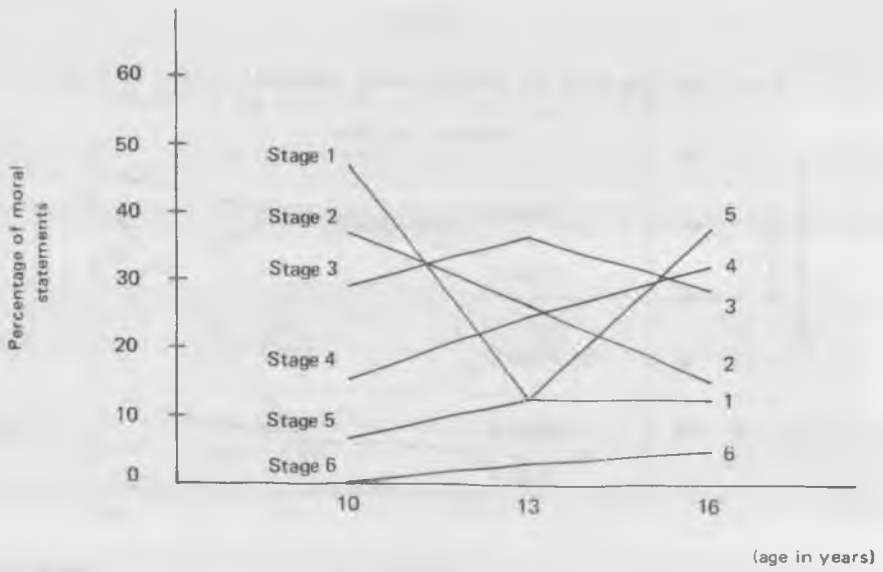


Figure 3. Percentage of moral statements classified at each of the six stages (USA, boys, Kohlberg, 1969)

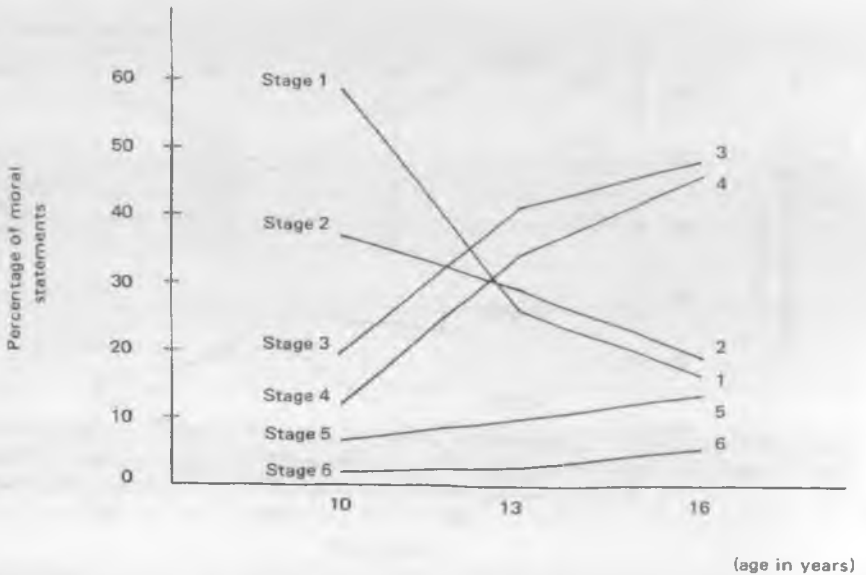


Figure 4. Percentage of moral statements classified at each of the six stages (México, urban boys, Kohlberg, 1969)

TABLE 3

PERCENTAGES OF MORAL STATEMENTS CLASSIFIED AT EACH STAGE

| | AGE | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|-------|-----|----|----|----|----|-----|---|
| BOYS | 10 | 35 | 17 | 40 | 6 | 0 | 0 |
| | 13 | 41 | 10 | 41 | 7 | 1 | 0 |
| | 16 | 27 | 12 | 47 | 12 | 2 | 0 |
| GIRLS | 10 | 23 | 10 | 62 | 5 | .47 | 0 |
| | 13 | 25 | 3 | 47 | 21 | 5 | 0 |
| | 16 | 9 | 4 | 60 | 15 | 12 | 0 |
| BOYS | 10 | 29 | 14 | 51 | 6 | .25 | 0 |
| AND | 13 | 32 | 10 | 44 | 13 | 3 | 0 |
| GIRLS | 16 | 17 | 7 | 53 | 14 | 7 | 0 |

appears to conform to predictions. The lower stages decrease with age, whereas the higher stages increase with age. Sex differences were highly significant, with girls showing higher maturity of moral judgment than boys.

The most interesting finding of our study, in terms of cross-cultural differences was the very high percentage of Stage 3 usage among Brazilian subjects, especially among Brazilian girls. In fact, Stage 3 had the highest percentage of usage at all three age levels, whereas among American subjects Stage 1 is the most used at age 10, Stage 3 is the most used at age 13, and Stage 4 is the most used at age 16. These cultural differences are not surprising to the author, who is very familiar with both the U.S. and the Brazilians cultures. Everyday observations indicate that Americans seem to have a much higher respect for conventional law than Brazilians. The affective quality of Latin Americans, together with some lack of respect for the law make it plausible that Stage 3 should dominate moral judgment of our children and adolescents. However, one should note that the Biaggio (1973) study with Brazilian college students showed an almost equal level of usage of Stages 2, 3, 4, and 5 among Brazilians.

One must also consider that the Brazilian sample was made up of lower-middle class subjects. Different results might be obtained with a sample of upper-middle class subjects. It is also suggested that future studies investigate which cultural factors are responsible for the differences found.

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