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Postformal and Postconventional Reasoning in Educationally Advanced Adults

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ABSTRACT. The structural correspondence between postconventional sociomoral reasoning and postformal operational skills was examined to determine whether Stage 5 moral reasoning can be considered a hard stage in the Piagetian sense, as Kohlberg, Levine, and Hewer (1983) maintained. Also examined was the notion that adults' fields of educational specialization differentially affect their level of moral reasoning. Secondary school teachers ($N = 100$) completed the Sociomoral Reflection Objective Measure (SROM; Gibbs et al., 1984) and a battery of cognitive tasks (Commons, Richards, & Kuhn, 1982; Richards & Commons, 1984). Subjects who were classified as Stage 5 with the SROM were also given the Sociomoral Reflection Measure (Gibbs, Widaman, & Colby, 1982a, 1982b). Higher modes of sociomoral reasoning were positively associated with certain aspects of postformal operational thinking, supporting Kohlberg's claim. Although more subjects with science backgrounds than with humanities backgrounds were classified as Stage 5(4) or Stage 5 moral reasoners, the difference was not statistically significant.

STRUCTURAL THEORIES OF SOCIOMORAL REASONING (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987, Gilligan & Kohlberg, 1978; Kohlberg, 1969, 1973; Piaget, 1932/1968), have specified a number of antecedent variables that contribute to the development of moral judgment. Evidence has now been accumulated regarding two key antecedent variables, namely, cognitive functioning (in the Piagetian paradigm) and social perspective-taking (Cauble, 1976; Keasey, 1975; Kuhn, Langer, Kohlberg, & Haan, 1977; Lee, 1971; Tomlinson-Keasey & Keasey, 1974; Walker, 1980, 1983, 1986; Walker & Richards, 1979).

Empirical findings with regard to the cognitive prerequisites lend support to the assumption that several features of the concrete operational system

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