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Antecedent Variables for Sociomoral Reasoning Development: Evidence from Two Cultural Settings

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This study examined the developmental pattern of sociomoral reasoning in two different cultural settings, focusing on factors assumed to influence the course of growth in this particular domain. The specific hypotheses tested concerned the relationships between operational thinking within Piaget's theory and Kohlberg's conceptualization of sociomoral judgement development. Secondary school and university students from Greece and Nigeria aged 15 to 22 years ($N = 281$) participated in the study. Results indicated that (1) the developmental sequence was similar in the two differing cultural environments, (2) stage endorsement differed significantly in the two samples, and (3) the necessary-but-not-sufficient hypothesis was confirmed in both groups. The possible explanations of the findings are discussed in connection with the basic assumptions of the structural-developmental approach to socio-cognitive growth.

Cette étude examine le développement du raisonnement socio-moral dans deux milieux culturels différents et se concentre sur les facteurs qui sont supposés influencer la croissance dans ce domaine particulier. Les hypothèses qui sont spécifiquement testées touchent à la relation entre la pensée opératoire telle que définie dans la théorie de Piaget et la conceptualisation de Kohlberg du développement du jugement socio-moral. Les sujets ($N = 281$) qui participent à cette étude sont des étudiants des niveaux secondaire et universitaire de Grèce et du Nigéria qui sont âgés entre 15 et 22 ans. Les résultats indiquent que (1) la séquence développementale est similaire dans les deux environnements culturels, (2) l'atteinte des stades diffère dans les deux groupes et (3) l'hypothèse "nécessaire mais non suffisant" est confirmée dans les deux groupes. Les explications possibles de ces résultats sont discutées en relation avec les postulats de base de l'approche structurale-développementale à la croissance socio-cognitive.

INTRODUCTION

Sociomoral judgement constitutes a cross-culturally salient dimension of social-cognitive development, given that notions of morality are crucial to the reasoning and behaviour of people in all cultures. It is, nevertheless, generally assumed (Walker & Moran, 1991, p. 139) that "there are at least superficial content differences across cultures in both the type and range of values, prescriptions and rules regarding moral aspects of behaviour." The conformity to these culture-spe-

cific norms and values had been equated with morality by earlier theorists in social psychology (Brown, 1965). Proponents of the relativist approach to morality argue that the belief in universal moral conceptions reflects a Western form of "moral imperialism," leading to scientific misjudgement and to the imposition of the values of one's own society upon the different, but equally valid, values of another society. The confusion between cultural relativism, i.e. the variability of moral values across societies, with ethical relativism—the normative statement that one should

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