

ETHICAL PERSPECTIVES IN ADOLESCENCE: RELATIVISM AND IDEALISM

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Abstract

In explaining the individual variations in moral judgment, ethics positions were taken into account. One important factor is the possibility of rejecting universal moral rules in favor of relativism; another dimension is idealism, the assumption that positive effects can be obtained always by using right, proper actions. Our paper aims to explore gender and age differences in relativism and idealism and also the relation between adolescents' attitudes toward values and their ethical perspectives. A set of measures were administered to 100 adolescents, 50 girls and 50 boys, aged between 15 and 19 years: Ethics Position Questionnaire (Forsyth, 1980), Proactive Attitude (Schwarzer, 1999), and a task which consisted of establishing a hierarchic differentiation among 17 values-traits. The results showed small but not statistically significant gender differences in relativism and idealism. The correlations between relativism, idealism and proactive attitude were also not significant. The ethical perspectives were related to minor variations regarding the importance accorded to social values, the sense of duty being central for the exceptionists. The findings are discussed in relation to gender roles content and the validity of the ethics position theory assumptions.

Keywords: idealism; relativism; ethics position; moral judgment; adolescence

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