

7 Up Analysis

Many theorists have studied both the social and cognitive growth of children as they mature in to young adults. James Marcia and Lev Vygotsky are two Sociocultural theorists who believe that a child's social interactions and cultural background play an integral role in his development as a human being. Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg are two Cognitive-developmental theorists who believe that a child's development is linked to a sequence of stages. Each stage is drastically different, yet builds on the preceding stages. These two theorists also believe that as a child grows, he tries to understand the world by interpreting and responding to experiences.

The social development of Andrew from the *7 UP* video can be explained using Marcia's identity development theory. According to this theory, one's identity development can be broken down into four categories: identity diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and identity achievement. While in identity diffusion, an adolescent has little commitment to his goals or values, and he is not interested in taking on any roles. Identity foreclosure occurs when the child adopts the beliefs and values of those around him without question. Identity moratorium is a time of exploration in a child's life, when no commitment has been made, but does not rule out any possibilities. Identity achievement occurs after moratorium when the individual has made clear commitments to beliefs, values, or an occupation. At age seven, Andrew attends an exclusive pre-prep school in Kensington. At this age, Andrew appears to be somewhere in between the identity foreclosure and diffusion stages. At this time, Andrew has not made any commitments to his career path; however, he does have an idea of his educational path, which is an identity mostly influenced by his parents. When asked where he wants to go

to school after his time at pre-prep, Andrew answers listing schools which lead him to a university. He later states, at age fourteen, that his parents disagreed with his specific educational plans. It is clear that he was influenced mostly by his parents' expectations. Andrew's interests at age seven also place him in a state of foreclosure. For example, Andrew mentions that he enjoys reading the newspaper because he is interested in the stock market, which is most likely an interest of his father's. When reflecting on this at age fourteen, Andrew realizes that he is no longer interested in stocks and shares, but now takes an interest in archeology. At age fourteen, Andrew is comfortably exploring himself in the identity moratorium stage. For example, when asked for which party he would vote, he responds that he is not sure which party he would vote *for*, but knows he would *not* vote for the Labor party. Andrew is also asked if he would like to be rich when he is an adult. Andrew does not say that he would like to be rich, but that he would like to be self-sufficient and not owe anyone anything. One in moratorium would give this answer because it leaves room for possibilities and exploration. An answer from an individual who has reached identity achievement would most likely outline a fixed idea of one's future. According to Marcia, as Andrew continues to explore himself as an individual in the identity moratorium stage, his social surroundings will influence him as he settles into identity achievement.

Jean Piaget's four stages of cognitive development can be used to describe the cognitive development of John, Andrew's friend, from the 7 *UP* video. Piaget believed that as children develop, they constantly adapt to new observations and experiences. He concluded that all children go through four stages of cognitive development. The first stage, the sensorimotor stage, occurs from birth to age 2. In this stage, children learn

though actions, such as touching, looking and hearing. Children in this stage focus mainly on what they are doing or seeing in the moment because they have trouble thinking about things if they are not right in front of them. Piaget's second stage, the preoperational stage, occurs in children between the ages of 2-7. During this stage, children's use of symbols and language accelerates. They are also able to discuss things they have not experienced; however, they are unable to reason or understand abstract principles. The concrete operations stage is the third stage in Piaget's four stages of cognitive development. In this stage, children develop a level of adult-like logic, but their understanding is limited to real-life situations. Children in this stage begin to understand mathematical operations and the principles of conservation, reversibility, and cause and effect. At age 7, John appears to be in this cognitive development stage. For example, the interviewer asks the three boys how they feel about girls. John responds to this question saying girls cause boys to not pay attention to what they are doing. He says this as he recalls a story of his grandmother getting in an accident due to a boy's carelessness while kissing a girl. This response shows that John was able to answer the interviewer's question even though he did not have a personal experience to share how he felt. This response also shows that John understands the basic principle of cause and effect. Because a girl was kissing a boy the boy was unable to pay attention, which resulted in John's grandmother getting in an accident. By basing his judgment of girls on this event alone, John lacks a level of adult-like reasoning, but exhibits growth beyond stages one and two.

The final stage of cognitive development is the formal operations stage, which occurs from age 12 through adulthood. In this final stage, teenagers become capable of

abstract reasoning. They are able to reason about hypothetical ideas, understand proportions, such as fractions or percents, and test a hypothesis by manipulating variables. Teenagers also become capable of thinking of future possibilities. Many teenagers in this stage also have idealistic views about changing the government or other aspects of society. John at age 14 fits nicely in this final cognitive development stage, especially because he has ambitions to become a politician. In fact, John told the interviewer that he is ambitious for fame and political power. The interviewer also asks John if one has to be ruthless to gain political power. John responds saying that to have political power one needs to have strength of mind. The fact that John is able to compare ruthlessness and strength of mind to one another shows his ability to understand these two intangible ideas, and differentiate between the two. John could have simply stated that to be a politician one needs to follow in the footsteps of other successful politicians; however, he recognizes the abstract qualities found in their character instead of just seeing them as a manifestation of those qualities. If John was not at this stage of development, he would not be aware of the intangible qualities successful politicians possess, nor would he be capable of deciding which quality is more important.

The interviewer reveals another hint of John's cognitive development when he asks John what he thinks about strikes. John responds claiming that if he were in power he would do away with strikes and set up a committee where workers could apply to earn higher wages. The committee would have the final say in the workers' pay increase. John's response places his cognitive development again in the fourth stage. First, his response to his thought on strikes shows that he has analyzed this aspect of social policy before and devised a plan that he feels will work better than the current one in use. In his

opinion, this simple change will result in what he think is a better system, but in reality is impractical. His idealistic view about changes to the government's social policy is a characteristic that is typical for his age in the formal operations stage. Another acquired ability in this fourth stage is reasoning about hypothetical ideas. John raises a hypothetical question, "What would happen if we all wanted more money," to support his desire to end strikes. This questions forces us to ask ourselves, "What would keep us all from striking if we all wanted more money?" John's careful placement of this hypothetical question to defend his opinion proves that he has the cognitive ability to think about situations that do not exist in physical reality, thus placing him in Piaget's fourth stage.

As a student who boards at school on a weekly basis, John is in the perfect environment to form a general sense of his identity. John's high achieving social environment pushes him to accelerate in his desired field, which is political science. John told the interviewer that he is ambitious for power and fame and that he wishes to be a politician. This assertive answer places John in Marcia's stage of identity achievement. Because he spends so much time away from home, John is able to form his ideas without pressure from his parents. John seems to be on a path, which leads him to a career in politics. John's social environment and living situation help him find his true identity, according to Marcia's theory.

While John's living situation and school environment help him find his identity, it also leaves him with few opposing views for him to question, since all of his friends share similar backgrounds. John believes that he does not lack anything from this social environment because diversity stems from one's varied interests and not social

background. According to Piaget, John's thinking is egocentric. John's inability to see the world from another person's point of view will be his biggest weakness as a politician in future years. For example, John's idealistic worker committee fix to end strikes leaves very few options for the actual workers he should represent. If John wishes to be a famous and powerful politician, he needs to gain the respect of his constituency. To help John broaden his views, he must broaden his social circle to include females and students of varying socioeconomic status.

When examining the social and cognitive development of a child, external factors must be taken into consideration. After understanding how an environment can shape child development, theories can then act as a basic outline of a child's cognitive and social growth. There is no doubt that Piaget's, and other theorists', contributions to the social and cognitive development of children have helped shape our understandings in the field today.