

The development of social cognition: Selman's levels of perspective-taking.

The development of social cognition refers to the concept of the child developing a sense of who they are and how they fit into society. As the child matures it develops an increasing idea of its self-identity. Self in this context refers to a person's self-awareness. The development of self-identity is a complex process that occurs throughout childhood and adolescence.

Self-identity is influenced by various factors, including social interactions, cultural norms, and personal experiences. Self in this context refers to a person's self-awareness. Murphy (1947) proposes that 'the self is the individual as known to the individual.'

Learey (2004) suggests the self is 'a cognitive structure that allows self-reflection and organises information about ourselves.'

As social cognition refers to how an individual becomes aware of how they fit into a social world, Selman (1980) suggests that to understand another person's point of view, we must understand that not everyone thinks the same.

Selman (1970) looked at changes that occurred with age, in children's responses to scenarios in which they were asked to take the role of different people in a social situation.

Selman (1980) proposed that there are different levels of perspective taking in interpersonal interactions. He developed five levels of thinking:

Level 0 is the egocentric viewpoint (3-6 years) where a child can label other people's obvious feelings but do not see the cause of those feelings. **Level 1** is the social informational role taking stage (6-8 years) where children know other people may have different information and may or may not agree with them. **Level 2** is the self-reflective role taking stage (8-10 years) where children can see other people's viewpoints, but not at the same time as their own. **Level 3** is the mutual role taking stage (10-12 years) where children can see the mutual and simultaneous viewpoints of others. **Level 4** is the social and conventional system role taking stage (12-15+ years) where children realise that society has a view and a set of values/ norms that should be obeyed. Selman believed that development through these stages is based on maturity and experience.

However, one limitation of perspective taking is that there is a risk of individual differences, in that, cognitive abilities and empathy levels, can impact the development of perspective taking skills. Therefore, this idea is too reductionist.



Selman's interpersonal dilemmas have become an accepted way of investigating the development of perspective taking. There are similarities with Selman's levels and Piaget's stages, particularly with regard to egocentrism which decreases after the age of seven.

Interpersonal understanding is what Selman measured, where if we can take different roles then we can understand social situations.

Interpersonal negotiation strategies are social skills that we develop in order to deal with social situations, such as asserting our behaviour or managing conflict in a situation. Having an awareness of personal meanings of relationships, helps children reflect on social behaviour in the context of different relationships.

Selman was able to show significant correlations between age and the ability to take different perspectives in social situations. However, correlational research cannot infer cause and effect.

