

Example of Kohlberg's moral development name: in stitutional affiliation research paper...

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Moral development over an individual's lifespan remains a major topic of interest for psychologists. There are many theories that have been developed over time but one of the most well-known was developed by Lawrence Kohlberg. Kohlberg expanded the work of Jean Piaget and modified it to explain moral reasoning and how it develops. While Piaget described a process of moral development that occurred in only two stages, Kohlberg's theory grew to include six stages within three different levels. Kohlberg proposed three these six stages and three levels that moral reasoning was a process that continued through an individual's life.

Level 1 of Kohlberg's Moral Development is Preconventional Morality. It contains two stages. The first stage is Obedience and Punishment. This marks the earliest formation of moral development and is typically seen in young children though adults are also able to express this reasoning. In the first stage the individual sees rules as unchanging and absolute. Obeying the rules becomes a top priority because it is the only way to not be punished. The second stage of Level 1 is called Individualism and Exchange. Children begin to account for their own points of view. They also begin to judge actions based on intent as well as how the action serves the individual. Reciprocity begins to be an option but only if the individual's needs are also being met.

Kohlberg's second level is Conventional Morality. It contains stages 3 and 4. Stage 3 is Interpersonal Relationships. Sometimes referred to as the "good boy-good girl" orientation, this stage focuses on the individual adjusting morals and living up to societal rules and expectations. In this stage there is an emphasis placed on being nice and polite, while the individual begins to

consider how their choices may potentially influence relationships. Stage 4 is Maintaining Social Order. This stage in moral development sees the individual passing judgment on society as a whole. They begin to focus on the mass as a singular opinion. The focus is placed on preserving order by following rules and respecting authority figures (1998).

The third level of Kohlberg's Moral Development is Postconventional Morality, which houses stages 5 and 6. Stage 5 is Social Contract and Individual Rights. This stage focuses on the individual understanding differing opinions and values of those around them. They begin to understand that laws and rules are an important part of maintaining a civil society but that the members of society should all concur about the laws decided upon. Stage 6 of Kohlberg's Theory is Universal Principle. The final level of Kohlberg's moral reasoning is centered around universal ethical principles as well as abstract reasoning. During this stage individuals begin following principles of justice they may have internalized, even if these principles may conflict with the rules and laws that govern society.

Through his work, Lawrence Kohlberg made many significant contributions to our understanding of moral development. For example, as he expanded upon Jean Piaget's findings and moral theories he began creating the "Moral Development" field within psychology. Though Piaget began studying moral development prior to Kohlberg it was Kohlberg who lit a spark under the subject and created a field for psychologists to compile information and create theories of their own. It was a place where the moral development theories could finally be respected and taken seriously (2011). Kohlberg also began to change the way we look at moral structure by suggesting that

because humans are communicative and base consequences off of reasoning they have adopted through communication, moral development is not about a praise and punishment but what we perceive to be good and bad. It was previously thought that morals were absolute; there was a right and a wrong. Stage 1 of Kohlberg's theory represents this reasoning.

Children see rules as absolute while breaking one will result in punishment. As they develop they begin to internalize their own moral principles and they will follow them whether or not their moral code follows the rules they once thought were absolute. Kohlberg's theory allowed us to see that moral development evolves throughout our life and we are able to, through our own reasoning and communication, form our own opinions about what is right and what is wrong (1998). Something else Kohlberg contributed to our understanding of moral development was his Moral Development Theory itself. It expanded in areas that Jean Piaget did not and gave us a basis for understanding how an individual's mind works over time when constructing what is right and what is wrong. Kohlberg was the first psychologist to recognize that morality has a development that paralleled cognitive ability, lasting an individual's entire life and continually changing until finally reaching resolution with universal principle.

Despite the groundbreaking work that Kohlberg managed with his theory of moral development there were still some limitations to it. For example, Kohlberg's theory does dictate how an individual spends their lives using the stages to figure out moral reasoning but these stages do not tell us if figuring out this moral reasoning will lead to moral behavior (2011). A person may understand the difference between right and wrong or good and bad

but this is not something that might stop them from acting out of accordance with what is considered genuinely good. Most murders do not commit that crime because they believe murder is just; they murder for a variety of other reasons. Killing a person is their only way to escape; they are committing another crime and need to eliminate witnesses, etc. The act of taking a life is universally known as being wrong but it does not stop people from being murdered. Kohlberg's theory concerns moral thinking but does not assess the actual actions that will follow.

Another limitation to Kohlberg's theory is that the entire system of moral reasoning is based around justice. This is not an accurate basis for moral research because justice is not the only factor impacting morality (2011).

Other factors, such as kindness and compassion play important roles in moral reasoning but they are never assessed in any of Kohlberg's stages.

Fellow psychologists and critics have pointed out that justice is overemphasized when making moral or immoral choices. The idea that justice is the only thing driving our moral compass makes it sound as though we are driven only by the rights and wrongs of society. Kohlberg's final stage does grant us the allowance of an internalized morality that we will follow regardless of society's rules but gives no reference to where else we learn these moral principles outside of the justice system.

A third limitation to Kohlberg's theory is that it overemphasizes individualism and western culture. Kohlberg's theory is not a theory of the people but only a theory of the western people. The Western philosophy is indoctrinated with a highly individualistic culture that encourages thinking for yourself.

Kohlberg's theory culminates around the individual creating their own,

internalized principles to live by. Regardless of if they were forged from the lessons of the justice system, the theory still encourages and expects individuality. Therefore this theory would not be widely accepted in Eastern cultures where individualism is not accepted as widely. Eastern cultures also place great emphasis on the importance of the community sticking together. This may engrain a different outlook in Eastern populations that Kohlberg's model cannot account for. The theory is limited only to describing individuals in cultures where being an individual is acceptable.

Carol Gilligan is a psychologist whose work has proved to be problematic for Lawrence Kohlberg. Gilligan also studies moral development but focuses on gender differences in moral reasoning. She has introduced a feminist perspective to the field. Her basis for research includes the resolution of sexual encounters, abortion decisions, and perception of violence. Previously Kohlberg's research had shown that the average female was placed at stage three in her moral development, which is Interpersonal Relationships, or good girl/boy. He placed most average males at stage four, or Maintaining Social Order. He also stated that males were more likely than females to move on to the postconventional stages. Gilligan quickly suggested that Kohlberg had it wrong. She thought that the results were gender biased, not that women were less mature than men, because she discovered that men and women follow different moral voices. Women place care, interpersonal relationships, and responsibility to people in a higher place of importance in their lives (2000). Men usually base their social organization on a hierarchy and concede to a morality of rights. Gilligan used different developmental stages for females and males to accurately separate the genders and their

moral voices to better judge how morally developed they were. She is quick to claim that one system is not better than the other but that the integration of each gender's voice makes the stages fairer.

Kohlberg is a pioneer in the field of psychology. Though Jean Piaget first began experimenting with moral development it was Lawrence Kohlberg who expanded her work, creating an entire theory. He postulated that moral development takes place throughout a person's entire life. He also realized that, as creatures of communication, there is more to our moral development than deciding right from wrong; there is an entire justice system that needs to be taken into account. Unfortunately, like many pioneers before him, Kohlberg did not get his theory correct on the first try as criticism arose. Kohlberg's theory only accounts for reasoning, not behavior. He failed to assess an individual's behavior depending on what stage of moral reasoning they are in. He also failed to assess why, if one person claims to know right from wrong, still commits wrong acts. Kohlberg also failed to take into account any variables outside of societal justice that might play a role in moral development. He also did not account for the entire Eastern world, as he centered his theory in individuality. Carol Gilligan soon followed up on Kohlberg's theory by separating the genders based on their own moral voices in order to help us realize our full moral potential as human beings. Psychology is always a give and take; Kohlberg started the field of Moral Development so discussion like this could take place and with each new theory we are one step closer to figuring out all moral development has to offer. Despite his shortcomings we owe what we know about moral development to Lawrence Kohlberg.

References

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