Kimberly Smith Smith 1

Psychology 1010

April 12, 2013

**Lawrence Kohlberg: The Study of Moral Development**.

Lawrence Kohlberg’s work is based on developmental moral behaviors that occur throughout adolescents into adulthood. He has proven that moral development falls within stages of life. There are five stage and the sixth stage ( the theoretical stage) reflecting moral issues which people go through in life and ultimately determines their position on morality and the choices they will make in their lifetime.

Biography: Lawrence Kohlberg was born 1927 in Bronxville, New York. He was very intelligent man, but after high school he did not immediately enter college. Instead, he went to Israel and volunteered his service for their cause. When he returned he enrolled and graduated for the University of Chicago within one year’s time. He was an exceptionally smart student and planned to be a clinical psychologist. He ultimately gave his doctoral dissertation on his “Stage Theory”.

Kohlberg’s research focuses on moral development and how it occurs in stage. The six stages can be broken down into three levels, with very few people reaching the final stage. Kohlberg notes that people will not move on to the next stage of moral development until they have attained the required morality for the

 Smith 2

current stage. Kohlberg’s moral stages begin where Piaget’s research left off. Piaget studied the moral behaviors of younger children all under age 10, who believe that rules are rules and punishment in inevitable. Kohlberg based his study on older children, 10 years of age and older, who view punishment as relative to the situation at hand.

Kohlberg’s original test group consisted of 72 boys’ ages 10, 13, and 16. Later on, his research did include girls, younger children and children from other parts of the United States. They were all given the moral dilemma of the man named Heinz whose wife was dying and he needed to steal to save her life. As mentioned earlier the moral stages are broken down into three levels, two stages being contained within each level.

Level 1- The Pre-conventional level: stages 1 and 2.

Stage 1 this is the pre-moral stage where the most important issue is ones “self”. This stage starts out in infancy and at this age there is no distinguishing between right and wrong.

It is referred to as the obedience and punishment stage. An infant wants to avoid punishment. It is not so much a question of what is right or wrong but rather the consequential punishment for doing wrong or the rewards that propel positive behavior.

Stage 2- Individualism and Exchange stage when children start to behave in whatever manor gets them the most “rewards” or positive feedback. “Self” is the most important focus.

 Smith 3

Instilling good behavior is very important because at this age, it is very easy to spoil a child. They do not have the capacity to comprehend how it is better to “give” than “receive”. A child will only give what is needed without shorting themselves. So if a child is very giving they are thinking at a higher stage, which shows great maturity.

Level 2 Conventional Morality: stages 3 and 4

Stage 3 - Good interpersonal relationships define this stage. The age group starts in middle school all the way through adulthood or (middle-age). It is important to develop relationships with others because it will help them to make moral decisions. Based on the social group and the standards within the social group are important for moral development. Working together or as part of a whole society is a common behavior conformity. In other words being “respectful” will benefit the individual and the community. It all comes down to judgment and conformity with those around you.

Stage 4- Basic Social order and Conforming stage occurs in stage four. A good citizen will uphold and respect the law. A broader understanding of the judicial system and that those in power are usually right and should not be questioned. The importance of abiding the law and doing ones part to be a good citizen enables us to give to the “greater good” of society. This is where most people end up or will not go further in the stages of moral development.

Level 3 the Post conventional and or Principle Morality: stages 5 and 6

 Smith 4

Stage 5- This is the social contract and individual rights stage. Very few people reach this stage. Individuals have legal rights and there are those who feel those rights need to be protected and/ or “justice demands punishment”.

 Society, as a whole, needs to be protected, so these people will enforce the rules of regulation such as incarceration, rehabilitation and to serve and protect members of the society. There are many decisions being made by these individuals that directly determine progression of society and how it affects its members. Religion also plays a significant role in the social values that incorporate morality, social norms and behaviors.

 Stage 6- The universal principles stage, reaching this stage of moral development is rare. It is also referred to as the “theoretic stage”. The types of people who make it to this stage would be Gandhi or Martin Luther King.

 People in general do not reason in this stage so Kohlberg has since dropped this stage. He felt that the interview failed to clearly understand the principle values that make a functional society. These people do not maintain social order rather they define it.

Overall I believe that good moral decisions and behavior starts at infancy in the home and if it is instilled properly and consistently then a child will not have the proper tools of morality. Spoiling a child may damage their ability to “make accommodations for other needs cannot be produced and therefore they will not be able to move on to a higher level of moral “reasoning”.

**Work Cited**

McLeod, S.A. (2011). *Kohlberg – Moral Development.*  Retrieved from

<http://www.simplypsychology.org/kohlberg.html>

Crain, W.C. (1985). *Kohlberg’s Stages of Moral Development. Theories of*

 Development. Prentice -Hall. pp. 118-136. Web. 4 April 2013.

Schacter, Gilbert, Wegner*. Introducing Psychology*. Harvard University.

 Worth Publisher (2011). Print