Kohlberg's six stages of moral development

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Introduction

This presentation explores the plight of Alison, a young woman torn between her artistic aspirations and familial duties. Employing Kohlberg's stages of moral development, alongside theories of individual and family life cycle, we analyze her ethical considerations and decision-making processes. This integrated approach sheds light on the tensions between personal ambitions and responsibilities, illustrating the complex interplay of moral development and familial influences on Alison's journey toward self-actualization and ethical maturity.

Scenario

A young adolescent woman, Alison, is caught between doing what her family wants and following her own dreams of becoming a psychology-informed artist. She believes in the power of learning and creativity, but her parents would rather have her stay at home to help rather than go to school. The young adolescent woman is strong-willed, loyal, passionate, and caring with a strong personal code of ethics that is intersectional and non-gender biased.

Stage #1: Obedience and Punishment Orientation

DESCRIPTION

- Instinctual following of rules set forth by authority figures, doing so without questioning or thinking about their own morals or values.
- Alison likely feels forced to conform to their family's expectations and sacrifice their own personal aspirations to avoid conflict and punishment avoidance.

RATIONALE

- Decisions based on cultural and familial pressures.
- Family obligations are prioritized over personal aspirations due to developmental age and search for personal identity.
- Survivalist and/or self-preservation approach.

Stage #2: Individualism and Exchange

DESCRIPTION

- Instinct to look out for one's self interest whilst balancing obligations.
- Negotiation of newly acquired autonomy.
- Alison learns to balance her personal wishes and desires with those of their family's demands. Still punishment avoidant, they understand do good, get something good.

RATIONALE

- Believes their own desires are valid and deserve to take up space but fears denial of their wishes.
- Decides to position their desires as beneficial to the family so as to receive affirmation of their reasoning.
- Sequesters prefered gender norms to continue validating obligations.

Stage #3: Good Interpersonal Relationships

DESCRIPTION

- Values interpersonal relationships built on trust, empathy, loyalty.
- Actions and reasoning seek to maintain homeostasis within relationships.
- Alison moves back to sacrificing their aspirations and individuality for the sake of relationships with others

RATIONALE

- Societal and familial expectations must be met in order to maintain positive relationships devoid of conflict.
- Sacrificing aspects of aspirations and identity to ensure relationships remain intact to satisfy basic needs.

Stage #4: Law and Order Morality

DESCRIPTION

- Moral reasoning incorporates social order and law, responsibility, and authority.
- Maintaining interpersonal relationship for the common good means adhering to law and order morality.
- Alison prioritizes expectations, demands, obligations, responsibilities as assigned to them at the sacrifice of their self-actualization.

RATIONALE

- Strong adherence to gender norms at sacrifice of internal homeostasis as prioritization of authority is maintained.
- Prioritization of societal expectations as governed by authority figures.
- Homeostasis with the community and family system is safest option for self-preservation.

Stage #5: Social Contract and Individual Rights

DESCRIPTION

- Advanced moral reasoning regarding societal rules vs individual rights.
- Self-advocacy becomes stronger as understanding of constructs grows.
- Alison reclaims autonomy, challenging societal norms while balancing relationships.

RATIONALE

- Seeks to break constructs within society that limit personal freedom.
- Desire for autonomy and choice in personal narrative.
- Desire to better balance personal objectives with respect to cultural heritage.

Stage #6: Universal Principles

DESCRIPTION

- Universal ethical principles dominate moral reasoning through justice, dignity, and equity.
- Alison transcends beyond their desire to pursue a life outside of gender norms and advocate for others to have the same freedom and autonomy which respects their heritage and individuality.

RATIONALE

- Gender nonconforming ideals take precedent in the context of furthering equitable lives.
- Childhood was restricted to societal gender norms, restricting their ability to pursue the greater good of existence.
- Morality extends beyond the self and their desire to advocate for such transcends their own self.

Theories of Individual and Family Development Across the Lifespan

- Cognitive and moral development are interconnected, advancing in tandem as per Piaget and Kohlberg, with Erikson’s framework situating this advancement within a lifelong social context
- Moral reasoning is rooted in Piaget’s cognitive stages and blossoms amidst social experiences, a concept expanded upon by Kohlberg
- Erikson's theory provides a lens through which to view the formation of one's moral compass across varied social mileposts, reflecting a socially constructed approach to development

Spiritual Development

- Alison's upbringing in an ultra-conservative Christian household, emphasizing traditional gender roles, presents a significant barrier to their identity and role within the family.
- Amidst these challenges, Alison draws on the Christian principle of "love thy neighbor as yourself" to cultivate empathy, compassion, and a sense of interconnectedness, showcasing resilience and a morally grounded perspective.

Conclusion

- Alison's ethical odyssey: personal dreams versus societal expectations.
- Navigating gender norms, Alison’s ethical growth champions empathy and justice.
- Alison's maturation balances personal autonomy with societal ethics, mirroring Piaget, Erikson, and Kohlberg's frameworks.

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