

Teaching Kohlberg's Levels of Moral Development: Using Jojo Rabbit to Highlight the Journey

This is a classroom exercise that uses the movie Jojo Rabbit to introduce and apply Kohlberg's three levels of moral development – preconventional, conventional, and principled. The movie follows a 10-year-old boy in Nazi Germany who processes the war with the aid of his imaginary friend Adolph Hitler. The boy develops his own understanding of Nazi Germany based on his own experiences and principles and leaves society's norms and laws behind. The movie is charming and uplifting and is appropriate for classroom use. The exercise is interesting and student feedback is positive.

Film, ethics, Kohlberg

Introduction

This exercise uses the movie Jojo Rabbit to teach Kohlberg's stages of moral development. We use this exercise when teaching Kohlberg's stages of moral development as part of the ethics chapter in our junior level principles of management classes. The exercise may also be used in a dedicated ethics course or an organizational behavior course where one may choose to go into additional depth on each of Kohlberg's stages and dig deeper into the movie. This exercise may be conducted in a face-to-face class, or an online class over Zoom. It could also be done in a fully on-line class though, in our opinion, it would suffer from the loss of the richness of back and forth discussion.

Management Teaching Review and Journal of Management Education are replete with examples of using film in the classroom. We propose the use of the film Jojo Rabbit (2019) because it is easy to see a 10-year-old boy's journey through each of Kohlberg's three levels of moral development. This uplifting film deals gently with the horrors that the young boy (Jojo) must endure and is, in our view, appropriate for public review. The film won Best Writing Adapted Screenplay at the Academy Awards in 2020 and was nominated for Best Supporting Actress (Scarlett Johansson), Best Production Design (Vincent), Best Picture (Winstanley, Neal, Waititi), Best Film Editing (Eagles), and Best Costume Design (Rubeo).

Theoretical Foundation/Teaching Implications

Students have a great deal of experience learning through multimedia and have even come to expect that least a portion of their course work will include video or other media rather than simply oral representations of management concepts. Additionally, the use of film in the

classroom generally garners positive student evaluations (Champoux, 1999). Teaching ethics is particularly fertile ground for the use of film given the frequent emphasis on personal decision making and ethics, and the ability of film to place a student in the shoes of a character. Teaching Kohlberg's levels of moral development can be brought to life through the use of film.

Kohlberg's model of moral development classifies people on their level of moral judgment. According to Kohlberg, people go through three levels of moral development with two stages at each level. The first level is preconventional and posits that people make decisions based on concrete rewards and punishments and immediate self-interest. Punishment and obedience is the first stage of the preconventional level with right and wrong defined by what one gets punished for. The second stage has an instrumental orientation wherein, while behavior is determined by consequences, the focus is on rewards or satisfying personal needs rather than on punishment.

The second level of moral development is the conventional level. At the conventional level, the emphasis shifts from a self-interest to relationships with other people and with society. Stage three (the first of two stages at the conventional level) is frequently called a Good boy / Nice girl orientation wherein people make decisions on the basis of social approval with the objective of being thought of as a "good person." Stage four is a law and order orientation. Behavior is determined by social rules and norms which are thought to be inflexible and unchangeable. The person's perspective has enlarged beyond a desire to be thought of as good person and now encompasses societal norms. Inherent in this is that the individual believes that maintaining rules and laws that preserve social order is good.

The third level of moral development is the principled level where in the individual moves beyond society's norms and rules. Stage five is a social contract orientation and

recognizes that society's rules are merely social agreements that can be changed if necessary.

Stage six, the universal ethical principle orientation, is the highest stage of functioning.

Appropriate action is driven by one's self-chosen ethical principles and inner conscience.

According to Kohlberg, some individuals will never reach this level of abstraction and universal application.

Learning objectives

A 20 to 30-minute exercise is adequate time to explore Kohlberg's three levels of moral development – preconventional, conventional, and principled. Additional time will likely be required to explore the nuances associated with each of the six stages. The current version of this exercise is designed to help students understand the application of Kohlberg's three levels without adding the complexity of two stages per level. We believe this is an appropriate depth of treatment for one of many concepts in the ethics chapter of a principles of management class. Instructors may wish to expand the exercise to include all six stages if, for instance, they were teaching an entire course in ethics. We intend to expand this exercise in the future.

In completing this activity, students should be able to:

LO 1) Identify Kohlberg's levels of moral development. (Bloom's taxonomy: Remember – descriptive verbs include list, memorize, state)

LO 2) Explain the differences between the different levels of moral development. (Bloom's taxonomy: Understand – descriptive verbs include classify, describe, explain)

LO 3) Associate the scenes from the movie to specific levels of moral development (Bloom's taxonomy: Apply – descriptive verbs include demonstrate, use, interpret; and Bloom's taxonomy: Analyze – descriptive verbs include differentiate, organize, distinguish)

LO 4) Trace Jojo Rabbit's journey through each of the three levels of moral development
(Bloom's taxonomy: Evaluate – descriptive verbs include argue, defend, judge, select)

Exercise overview

This exercise overview is based upon our treatment of Kohlberg's level of moral development in our classroom of management principles students. We give a presentation of Kohlberg's levels of moral development with a total of three PowerPoint slides – one for each of the three levels. We then hand out a set of discussion questions designed to meet the learning objectives shown above. As students are reviewing the discussion questions in preparation for the clips, we pull up the movie trailer, clips, or DVD. The professor may wish to use one of the many Jojo Rabbit movie trailers available on Youtube.com. While an extensive array of movie clips may be beneficial in providing comprehensive coverage of the material, the movie trailer titled: *Jojo Rabbit Extended Trailer (NEW, 2019) Scarlett Johansson, Taika Waititi* provides sufficient material for coverage of the three levels of moral development. It does so in approximately three minutes and thirty seconds.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TA1ZTrMm_L0

Discussion questions:

1. What are Kohlberg's three levels of moral development? (LO 1)

This is an easy and factual question designed to warm up students for the discussion come. In a hybrid or online format it may be shown as three multiple choice questions that for instance, pop up in the middle of the clip.

2. What do each of the three levels of moral development mean? (LO 2)

This is, again, a relatively easy question designed to ensure understanding of each of the

three levels prior to engaging in their application. In a hybrid or online format it may be shown as three multiple choice questions that, for instance, pop up in the middle of the clip.

3. Associate a scene from the movie with each level of moral development and distinguish between each of the levels and each of the scenes. (LO 3)

This may take a few minutes in the exercise and may necessitate showing the clip or clips again. Students will debate among themselves the meaning of each of the scenes and how the scenes apply to the three different levels of moral development. If conversation is initially slow, we ask the students to turn to one another and discuss the matter to spur their thinking.

4. Regard the set of clips/movie as a whole. Discuss Jojo Rabbit's journey through Kohlberg's three levels of moral development and the changes in his outlook. Did the other characters in the movie embark on a similar journey? Was there a particular moment when Jojo Rabbit moved to a higher level? Did Jojo Rabbit reach the principled level? Please justify your thinking. (LO 4)

This question spurs widespread discussion. Most students are able to trace Jojo Rabbit's journey through each of the three levels of moral development. They may disagree regarding when specific jumps occurred. If discussion does not start immediately, we often tell the students to turn to their classmates and discuss the topic among themselves to help spur their own thinking.

Session description

We will give a short review of Kohlberg's three levels of moral development. Following that we will show a few short clips from movie Jojo Rabbit. We will provide the discussion

questions we use in our classes at the start of the session and lead a subsequent attendee discussion. The session will take 30 minutes or less

We welcome feedback from the participants regarding any aspect of the exercise. We look forward to incorporating that feedback into our courses and into a subsequent manuscript submission to Management Teaching Review. We have just recently developed this exercise and it, as well as the manuscript, is a work in progress. We appreciate the opportunity for feedback at the MOBTS conference.

References

- Champoux, J. E., (1999). Film as a teaching resource. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 8 (2), 206-217.
- Kohlberg, L., Candee, D., (1984). The relationship of moral judgement to moral action. In *Morality, Moral Behavior, and Moral Development* ed. W.M. Kurtines and J.L. Gerwitz (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1984.