

ABSTRACT

An Investigation of the Trinidadian
Secondary School Students' Concept of Justice

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This study attempts to determine the perceptions of the concept of justice held by a sample of Trinidadian adolescents and to discover whether these perceptions can provide indicators of their level of moral development in the hierarchical scheme proposed by Kohlberg (1958) or whether some other perspective on moral development would be more appropriate for describing their level of moral development.

The relationship between any differences found in the perceptions of justice and differences in sex, religion, socio-economic status and geographical provenance was also examined.

"Justice" as a concept was selected for examination in view of its centrality to the area of moral development and to the claim by Kohlberg and several of the adherents to his views that moral development is universally structured in a hierarchical and sequent-

ially ordered fashion. In addition, it represents an ideal which all societies strive to achieve.

A qualitative approach was used to develop a semi-structured interview schedule which formed the basis for discussions on 9 moral issues with 32 randomly selected secondary school students. A questionnaire based on the interview data was also administered to 432 students. Responses were categorised according to similarities in the patterns of reasoning. Frequencies and modal classes were compared to the sample characteristics and a selection of question variables.

Eight categories of justice perceptions were identified. Wide variations in perceptions of justice and patterns of moral reasoning appear to be associated with the nature of the issues discussed and not with the sample characteristics as previous studies seemed to suggest. The results of this study support the contention that universality is an untenable notion and that the methodology used by Kohlberg is faulty in being value loaded in favour of the cultural environment of initial development of his hypothesis.