

Theoretical moral reflection is 'a progressive conscious realization of moral activity' (Piaget, 1932/1965, p. 176). In contrast, Kohlberg was concerned with the development of reasoning about morality, then how reasoning becomes more complex, and how such reasoning influences individuals' actions.

Justice and care: are there gender differences in moral reasoning?

Whether men and women differ in their orientation to morality has been a longstanding issue that was resurrected in the debate between Lawrence Kohlberg and Carol Gilligan. Gilligan (1982) described two 'voices' or orientations to morality: one focused on care and the other on justice. She suggested that a focus on care is more common in girls and women and that because women were more likely to use care reasoning, which may be based on interpersonal reasons, their moral reasoning is more likely to be scored at Stage 3 in Kohlberg's stages. Because interpersonal moral reasoning is claimed to be more characteristic of women than men, Kohlberg's theory would be biased against women because they would be scored at Stage 3 on his test.

According to Gilligan, variation in moral orientation is not due to a biological sex difference; it is based on early socialisation depending on differences between boys and girls in their experience of attachment and equality (Gilligan & Wiggins, 1987). Gilligan argued that these different moral orientations arise due to boys and girls having differing experiences of inequality and attachment. They both experience these two dimensions of relationships, but to different degrees. Girls identify with their mothers and therefore are less aware of inequality. Instead, their experience of attachment and connecting with others is more central to their self-definition. On the other hand, it is argued that boys are attached to their mothers but identify with their fathers, so the experience of inequality and a feeling powerless would be more salient for them and thus the need for norms of fairness and justice to try to overcome this (Brown, Tappan, & Gilligan, 1995). Gilligan's developmental explanation, however, appears to presuppose inequality between parents.

A first question concerns whether there are differences in moral orientation (i.e. care vs justice) between men and women. Gilligan and Attanucci (1988) asked participants to discuss a moral dilemma they had experienced in their own life because they argued that moral orientation is best revealed in reasoning about real-life dilemmas. Out of the 80 participants, 55 (or 69%) used both care and justice in discussing the dilemma, and only 31% used only care or justice. Men and women used both care and justice in their reasoning but Gilligan found differences in focus. Using one 'voice' was defined as 75% or more of the considerations individuals raised being representative of the care or justice perspectives, suggesting that they preferred one perspective. Out of the 22 women with a dominant focus, 12 focused on care. In contrast, out of the 31 men with a dominant focus, 30 used justice.

However, in a meta-analysis of studies assessing care and justice reasoning, 73% of studies assessing care orientation and 72% of studies assessing justice orientation found no significant differences between men and women, and the effect size found in the other studies was very small, accounting for only a very small percentage of the variance. Thus, care and justice orientations do not seem to be strongly associated with gender. It seems that most people are likely to use both orientations (Walker, 2006). Walker tested the claim that the care orientation would be associated with lower-stage reasoning than the justice orientation, but in contrast he found that in real-life dilemmas it was actually associated with *higher*-stage reasoning.

A second question concerning Gilligan's claims is whether there are gender differences in the stage of moral reasoning achieved. In his meta-analysis Walker examined 80 studies with 152 samples including a total of 10,637 participants. He found that in most cases (85%) there were no differences between men and women. In the remaining studies, females scored higher than males in 6%, and males scored higher than females in 9%. This is a very small and insignificant effect, accounting for less than a twentieth of 1% of the variance. In those studies in which men scored higher than women there were differences in education and occupation. In studies without such variations in background no gender differences were found, suggesting that any gender differences occasionally found in studies may be due to level of education (Walker, 2006). Based on this meta-analysis there is no empirical evidence that women score lower than men on Kohlberg's test (Walker, 2006). In fact, when women used care reasoning their stage on Kohlberg's test was higher, not lower (Walker, 2006).

Although it is important to consider real-life dilemmas, there is a key methodological problem. If participants are asked to reason about a dilemma they have experienced personally, then, necessarily, they all discuss different dilemmas (e.g. Gilligan & Attanucci, 1988), so perhaps differences in the forms of reasoning they use are due to the fact they are responding to different dilemmas. In fact, there is evidence that reasoning depends on the type of dilemma. Care reasoning is more common regarding dilemmas categorised as personal or relational involving conflicts with people in close ongoing relationships, whereas justice reasoning is more common in response to impersonal or non-relational dilemmas with strangers or institutions. Men and women may encounter or choose to relate different types of dilemma, and this, rather than their moral orientation, may account for gender difference in moral reasoning. There are few or no sex differences in moral orientation on a standard stimulus (i.e. when everyone discusses the same dilemma, like the Heinz problem described above) (Walker, 1995, 2006).

Many have assumed that Gilligan is proposing a feminist perspective. However, some feminists suggest that she is supporting traditional stereotypes of males as being rational and females as being emotive (e.g. Moller Okin, 1996).

Can justice and care stand alone as separate approaches? Consider, for example, moral dilemmas that teachers may encounter when dealing with students. Teachers could take two approaches. One is to make decisions based on caring about particular students.

Another is to impose fixed rules that are applied equally to all the students. Both of these approaches might result in problems. If a teacher has favourite pupils she cares about those favourites, but that is not fair to the rest of the class because the pupils were not all being treated in the same way. On the other hand, simply imposing fixed rules may not actually be fair because this might not take into account the circumstances particular students might face.

Care and justice may be compatible and interdependent, and it may not be necessary to choose between caring and being fair. Piaget wrote about this issue of love and justice long before the debate between Kohlberg and Gilligan. He acknowledged a difference between focusing on either of these dimensions, but argued that 'between the more refined forms of justice, such as equity and love properly so called, there is no longer any real conflict' (Piaget, 1932/1965, p. 324).

A crucially important point to be drawn from this debate is that care is essential in understanding morality and it is central to many of the theories discussed in the next chapter. Caring about others cannot simply be added later in development. The idea that we should care about others cannot be reached through reasoning (Wright, 1982). Instead, caring about others is needed as part of the foundation that structures the relationships in which children develop – a point that was central to Piaget (1932/1965). The ethic of care approach continues to be applied in various areas such as social work and social policy (Hankivsky, 2004).

13.6 SOCIAL-COGNITIVE DOMAIN THEORY

Moral rules are just one of the types of social rules that children encounter in their everyday lives. There are also social conventional rules, such as whether children must formally address their teacher as 'Mrs Smith' or are allowed to use their teacher's first name. Social convention concerns expectations involving modes of dress, forms of address, and eating habits. In contrast to social convention, moral issues involve concepts of welfare, justice, and rights; it concerns inflicting harm, theft, and unequal treatment. Many studies have now shown that young children, sometimes even as young as three, can distinguish between these social domains (Smetana, 2006; Turiel, 1983, 2002, 2015). When children are asked whether a rule can be changed by an authority, they agree that teachers can allow children to call them by their first name, or that a certain day will be designated pyjama day at school, when children can wear pyjamas, altering the usual social convention. Children's answers reflect their judgment that social conventions are arbitrary and can be changed. In contrast, they understand that moral norms are not changeable by authority figures and apply across situations. For example, children believe that teachers cannot announce that on some days children are allowed to hit others; one is obliged to not hit others, regardless of whether the teacher is present or not.