

Gender Differences in Moral Judgement and Relevant Factors

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Abstract. People's moral judgment tends to be different, especially among the genders. People may find it hard to understand others because of their different moral standards. As a result, it is meaningful to research on gender differences in moral judgement. There have been numerous studies done in the past decades. Currently, most of this research are based on Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of women and men have a huge difference in utilitarian and level of empathy. As these moral psychologists agree, man tend to be more utilitarian when making moral decisions whereas women tend to be more sensitive, emotional, caring, and show more empathy. This research aims to clarify the gender differences in moral judgement and identify the relevant factors. It was found that each gender has a unique pattern when making moral judgement. Compared to men, women tend to have a higher level in making deontological choices. They have a greater tendency to be easily affected by other emotional factors. Additionally, culture difference plays an important role in affecting people's moral standard. However, it was proven that these differences have a negligible impact in affecting people's moral judgement under the condition of gender difference.

Keywords: Gender, moral judgments, empathy.

1. Introduction

Moral judgement is the term that indicates people's execution to decide whether an action is appropriate or not based on their internal principles. Moral standards are the internal principles that people rely on to make moral judgments. This internal principle varies among individuals, for instance, with having different levels of empathy, reaction to harm, and tolerance to immoral behaviors. As a result of this difference, people may find it hard to understand each other's ideas, motivations, and actions. Many factors, for example, gender differences (biological differentiation of male and female) and ethnic distinction, were said to have contributed to individual differences in moral judgments. Among all the factors, gender difference is one of the most significant and recognizable distinctions that is commonly shown in real life. A classical reflection of gender differences in moral judgment would be choosing gifts: Males tend to choose things that are more useful whereas women tend to take less focus on their use. In a general way, studying and understanding how gender differences affect people's moral judgement is crucial because it is strongly associated with people's relationships and affection for others. With this kind of understanding, people are less likely to feel offended because of the inconsistency of others' moral standards with them. In a more scholarly way, the investigation of how gender difference has affected people's moral judgment enables researchers to have a better understanding of how human's moral standard develops and works.

Currently, there are numerous types of research about gender differences and moral judgment. Among all various theories, one consensus that these scholars have on the gender difference is that although in a broad term, the gender differences between males and females are relatively small. However, in some more specific content, the gender difference is significant and undeniable. According to research done by Janet Shibley Hyde, domains in which gender differences are small, only include aspects like mathematics performance, reward sensitivity, relation aggression, and some personal dimensions [1]. Lawrence Kohlberg's theory served as a fundamental theory in the aspect of personal dimensions such as differences in making judgments. As mentioned by Theo Linda Dawson, who conducted several experiments to prove Kohlberg's theory, men and women have a huge difference in the level of empathy and utilitarianism [2]. In moral judgement, women tend to be more sensitive, emotional, and caring and show more empathy. Men, on the other hand, generally

have a tendency to be more rational and utilitarian. The data collected in most existing research about gender differences are mainly from Caucasians and Asians.

Although the gender differences between men and female are relatively subtle in a general way, their personality differences can be clearly identified as opposite. While males tend to think in a relatively more rational way, females tend to be more sensitive and emotional. However, an important element in the correlation between gender differences and moral judgments is not clearly identified in the previous research. The process of explaining “how” gender difference impacted people’s moral judgement is frequently ignored in previous research. Thus, this review essay may review several research pieces directly about experiments correlating to gender’s impact on moral judgement, and then analyze these materials through different perspectives. By implementing personal analysis of the research, the gap of “how” may be complemented. Also, the current research, which mostly consists of Caucasians and Asians, has a significantly low percentage of data collected from other ethnicities. Thus, the result accuracy might be reduced by this drawback. In these data, although the cultural difference may affect the result, however, due to the lack of data from ethnicities other than Caucasians and Asians, more data from these ethnicities must be added to the data set in order to maintain the fairness of the result. As a result, this essay is going to integrate data from different research to acquire a more accurate result about gender differences. Moreover, these data will be clearly selected, avoiding other disturbing factors such as age.

2. Patterns of Moral Decisions and Relevant Emotional Factors in Different Genders

2.1. Gender Differences in Moral Decision Making and Judgement

People of different genders tend to have different patterns when making moral decisions. It was generally understood that women tend to perform better on deontological choices. In research done by Armstrong and other colleagues, the researchers conducted an experiment in order to test the difference in deontological choices among varied genders [3]. According to the research, deontological choices confounded two motivations: harm aversion and action aversion. The research gathered 1965 participants, including 41.5% women and 58.5% men. The age factor is closely controlled, with the mean age 32, and most of them are Asians or Caucasians. This research incorporates a series of tests involving responding to certain moral dilemmas with the researcher’s manipulation of certain mindsets. During the experiment, the participants were asked to respond to 10 moral dilemmas with the researcher’s mindset manipulation. The result reveals a distinct difference in women's and men’s deontology choices. Women have scored significantly higher in deontology because of their relative aversion to action and harm, which conforms with people’s general conception. The gender difference was consistent with the above conclusion, women have been shown more averse to causing harm than men do, which has provided a view of universal moral standards in humans. Interestingly, as an additional finding for this research, both women and men have shown a tendency to avoid actions to prevent harm rather than to perform actions that cause harm. As a result, women’s higher level of harm-avoidant behavior may serve as a crucial factor contributing to their unique pattern in making moral judgement.

Women’s relatively higher sensitivity to causing harm was indicated in further research done by Friesdorf and other colleges [4]. They gathered data from three different datasets with different cultural and gender groups included. These data include 6100 participants, size of 30 to 397, and with more than half of them Caucasian, one-fifth identified as Asians. These data are related to assessments of moral judgments for both incongruent and congruent dilemmas. According to the result, men have shown a tendency of more utilitarian than women unaffected by other variations (culture, age, education level) across samples. On the other hand, women are proven to be relatively more sensitive, in other words, tend to show strong affective reactions to the idea of causing harm. Utilitarian and sensitivity, as the two entirely contradicting features have surprisingly been embodied in two genders, and the distinctive difference in moral judgement is since then undeniable.

While a significant variation in people's moral judgement is proven by Armstrong's research, another research has qualified the previous research's argument. Valerio Capraro and Jonathan Sipple conducted research on gender differences when facing specific moral dilemmas [5]. The experiment contains three moral dilemmas classical moral dilemmas (Trolley Problem, Trapdoor Dilemma, Footbridge Dilemma) involving killing one stranger, with 532 participants included. The participants were asked to decide whether male or female should take the action of killing the stranger. The result has revealed that basically, the variation in choices between genders is extremely negligible, which contradicts the general assumptions about the gender difference in deontological choices. However, as long as the dilemma has such distinctive qualities, such as the Footbridge Dilemmas (a trolley problem containing a barrel down a track that will kill five people unless diverted), the gender difference can be clearly identified. Thus, although women have shown a relatively higher level of deontological choices, the degree of this difference is still questionable. However, considering the difference in data size between the two research, given that Capraro's research contains a significantly smaller range of data sets, the actual gender difference may still tend to be distinctive.

Another factor that results in this contradiction is the perspective of judgement. The research led by Armstrong was centered on people's decisions in dilemmas. However, Capraro's research focus on people's judgement on deciding the problem-solver of the dilemma, which can be easily affected by many factors such as common stereotypes. The accuracy of several common stereotypes associated with gender was studied by Niazi and other colleges [6]. In order to obtain a result with higher accuracy, this researcher sampled 300 Pakistani individuals with an equal number of men and women. During the experiment, both men and women are asked to answer the questionnaire based on their perception of themselves, and then answer the same questionnaire again but on their perception of how a typical member of the other gender will respond based on their stereotypes toward that group. The result has demonstrated a strong inaccuracy in stereotypes toward women and a relatively low inaccuracy toward men. Women are underestimated in their perception and fairness, and men are overestimated in fairness. Due to the cultural limitation in the sample group, the inaccurate stereotypes found in this research may not be universal. However, these demonstrations of common stereotypes have indicated the possible impact it has on people's decision-making. Common gender stereotypes have a great impact on people's choices in specific moral judgement. Particularly in judgement involving judging people, it is hard to identify the ratio of gender differences and common stereotypes in impacting people's choices.

2.2. The Impacts of Emotional Factors and Empathy

Emotional factors serve as an important role in the difference of moral judgement. Ward and other colleges have conducted research centered on men's tendency of more tolerance of questionable behaviors [7]. During the experiment, the participants were randomly assigned certain scenarios and then rated how morally wrong they considered certain actions. It was found that women have a relatively low tolerance toward immoral actions, possibly due to their higher level of making deontological choices. The researchers analyzed the result and identified a range of emotional factors that contribute to the gender difference, for example, shame proneness, dispositional guilt, and response to emotion regulation. Femininity and masculinity are two classical stereotypes that people once thought contributed to gender variation in moral judgement. However, these two factors were proven to be unrelated to the gender variation in moral judgement. Possibly, because they are concepts that come from gender stereotypes derived from biological features. As gender stereotypes are proven to be inaccurate, femininity and masculinity are then eliminated from the factors that affect gender differences in moral judgement. According to the research findings, women have a significantly higher level of regret compared to men. Since regret is an emotional state related to people's sense of guilt, and guilt is strongly related to people's sense toward the victims, it is logical to attribute women's higher level of regret to their higher sensitivity.

Mentioned sense, Baez and other colleges have conducted two large-scale studies evaluating the sex difference in empathy (the capacity to understand or feel what another person is experiencing)

[8]. The researchers examined the sex difference that emerged in the sample and investigated the relationship between empathy and moral judgement. During the experiment, the participants were tasked to receive and react to different kinds of stimuli in 11 different scenarios, 4 intentional ones (such as someone beating another), 4 accidental ones (such as someone accidentally stepping on others' feet), and 3 neutral scenarios (such as people talking normally with each other). As the result shows, women tend to have higher accuracy in understanding the intention of accidental harm and other scenarios related to sensitivity and understanding. Additionally, all of the empathy rating in women for intentional harm are significantly higher than in men., which also means that women is more easily to be affected by emotional factors. Though the impact of empathy on moral judgment is undeniable, it is still a question of whether it is positive or negative. As a result, even though women have shown a higher level of sensitivity, it is still hard to clearly recognize the impact it has on moral judgment in different genders.

3. The Role of Culture

The role of culture is a considerable factor that could contribute to the deviation of results associated with different moral judgments over genders. Arutyunova and other colleagues conducted research associated with the role of gender, age, and belief in guiding moral judgement [9]. The researchers prepared 32 scenarios in total, with them all about a protagonist sacrificing one person to save five people. The experiment requires the participants to make choices based on the given moral scenarios. The result has proven the existence of principles across sociocultural groups. For example, in both Russian and Western cultures, compared to women, men have displayed a tendency of utilitarian. Although this research aims to investigate both gender, age, and belief simultaneously, only the effect of gender in guiding moral judgement, which can eventually lead to the formation of gender-specific behaviors (also known as the behavior pattern), is directly shown. This result suggests that the impact of culture is not making any difference in the moral judgement of people who have the same gender. Furthermore, it is reasonable to infer that age and belief might not impact people's moral judgement because it is irrelevant to the result of the experiment.

Similar to the research reviewed previously, Yachun Qian and other colleges conducted another research target on the cultural differences between Japanese and Chinese [10]. The researcher gathered 211 Japanese and 200 Chinese participants and asked them to complete a battery of 24 moral dilemma tests for research using the CNI model. Surprisingly, men's tendency of utilitarian is not demonstrated. According to the result, both men in Chinese and Japanese culture have demonstrated a preference for inaction. In addition, in both Japanese and Chinese cultures, people are recognized as conservative, in which they have a preference for inaction regardless of gender though there are exceptions (Chinese men have shown a preference for action). The influence of gender is directly shown in this research regarding the formation of gender-specific behaviors. Both results in the two experiments have demonstrated the negligible role of culture in affecting moral judgments in different genders. Moreover, the result of gender differences impacted by culture in moral judgment generally conforms when the factor of culture is eliminated.

4. Conclusion

Different genders tend to have unique patterns when making moral judgments. It has been supported that women have a higher level in making deontological choices. However, it is a debatable topic whether women have a significantly higher moral standard when making deontological choices. Stereotyping is also an important factor in impacting people's pattern of moral judgement although they are not always accurate. Emotional factors and empathy also play an important role in shaping gender differences in moral judgement. Compared to men, women have a greater tendency to be sensitive, empathetic, or affected by these emotional factors. Culture is another noticeable factor that could influence gender differences in moral judgment. While culture has a distinct impact on moral

standards, surprisingly, the gender difference in moral judgment generally conforms with the general theory.

There are several limitations of previous research. First, due to the limited resources gathered, the discussion perspective is limited and not comprehensive enough. Though this review paper talked about the pattern that different genders differences in making moral judgment and the cultural factors that could impact the decision-making, it lacks the rebuttal of counterarguments, which is crucial in strengthening the argument present in the essay. Thus, future research about counterarguments should be done to eliminate the possible defects of the current theory. Second, the positive impact of empathy on moral judgment is still a questionable concept in moral psychologists. When mentioned empathy, the paper lacked a further discussion of the positivity of empathetic behaviors, which is an important part of clarifying the concept of empathy. In the future, more research about empathy should be done in order to confirm the concept of empathy and to give a comprehensive explanation of empathy. Third, this research is qualitative research. Its credibility may be reduced due to the lack of precise data from different research reviewed, in addition, to a lack of analysis and classification of results from different research reviewed. More collection and analysis of data must be done in the future. Last, the test scope of gender in this research is only about the two biological distinctive genders (male and female), other gender such as transgenders are not included. As a result, further research about gender differences in other genders excluding males and females should be done in the future to consummate the current theory.

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