

Gender Differences in Moral Development and Moral Reasoning

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Abstract. Based on Kohlberg's stage theory, this paper reviews the gender and age differences of individuals in moral choice and moral reasoning. Most experimental study did not show significant differences in moral choices at the Kohlberg stage. However, more women have a moral preference for care in moral reasoning. Moreover, women show different moral reasoning for different contexts and give more reactions, which is more flexible and complex. Moreover, older participants placed more emphasis on the morality of justice while younger participants placed more emphasis on the morality of care. Moral reasoning reasoning can become comprehensive and complex with grade level. This paper systematically sorts out the moral differences between men and women by reviewing and summarizing previous empirical research, in order to provide some references for subsequent research. However, previous empirical studies have mostly been based on middle-class samples, so hopefully there will be experiments on a wider sample in the future.

Keywords: Moral reasoning; Moral development; Moral orientation; Gender difference.

1. Introduction

Moral reasoning is the process of making moral judgement in moral dilemma and moral orientation is moral perspective. Several studies have attempted to investigate morality starting from moral reasoning. Piaget [1] pioneered the study of moral judgement. Influenced by Piaget [2], A unified stage model including 3 unchanged and universal level (Pre-Conventional Level, Conventional Level and post-conventional) created by Kohlberg [3]. Each level divided into 2 stages (there 6 stages in total). During the growth, children's moral reasoning will follow Kohlberg model. This model is culturally universal and stage and unchanged in stage sequence. In this framework of theory, many psychologists do several pieces of research. Some of these researches were particularly focusing on gender. It is often considered that men move to a higher stage in Kohlberg's model. Some studies support the Kohlberg's model has gender difference [4-6]. However, some people question in its validity [7-11]. Because the results of their experiments showed no significant gender differences between men and women at the Kohlberg stage.

Subsequently, Gilligan [7-8] pointed out that traditional Kohlberg's measurement, which used to measure Kohlberg's stage and higher score people gained in higher stage, were biased against women. Gilligan's work [8] emphasized the difference on two moral orientations, the morality of care and the morality of justice for further explanation of gender differences. Women are generally considered to be more concerned with caring morality while men are more concerned with justice.

Based on these contradictions, this paper will make a summary of some studies about gender differences in morality from moral reasoning and moral choice and why gender has differences in these aspects. Section 2 will introduce some concept. Section 3 will review relevant literature in order to introduce experiment results on gender differences in moral reasoning and moral choice. Section 4 will suggest some reasons as to why these phenomena occur. Section 5 provides limitation and future direction.

2. Morality

2.1 Morality and Moral Reasoning

Morality is considered a collection of cooperative rules. Because of there are different type of cooperative, morality is divided into seven categories depending on the type of cooperation as following: kinship, mutualism, exchange, hawk, dove, division and possession [12]. These types of morality might combine or conflict. When different principles conflict, a moral dilemma arises. In the experiment of literature which studied in this paper, Heniz moral dilemma are used to measure Kohlberg stage.

Moral reasoning usually is divided into two categories. One is whether a specific act is justified. The second is about whether an existing social practice is justified. The point of studying moral reasoning is to provide a logical way to make the transition from a moral dilemma to support a certain moral judgment.

2.2 Kohlberg's stage theory

Kohlberg [3] created a model, six-stage theory of moral development, to explain moral development, and divided it into 3 levels according to his study, and point out children move to "autonomous morality". In the first stage, children are self-centered and base on submitting to authority and punishment, they see everything as black or white and. In the second stage, their behaviour motivation is for self-satisfaction, occasionally for others satisfaction. It will be a relatively utilitarian stage. Pre-Conventional Level of morality is comprised by these two stages. In the third stage, focus on how to please other. In the next stage, they will follow the regulatory orientation and maintain the society order. Kohlberg emphasized that Conventional level which is comprised by Stage 3 and Stage 4 is more confirming to societal-value and norms. The final level of moral development is moral principal, including people who act in accordance with the principles of universal justice. In Stage 5, there is a social contract that dominates. Laws rules that determine right and wrong define the behaviour of people and responsibility and obligations are premised on contractual rather than personal needs. In the final stage, in Kohlberg's theory, individuals' performance as conflict resolution through universal principles. People have changes in moral perceptions during the formative years, from self-centered focus on rewards and punishments to principled. Progress through the various stage depends on addressing the perceived imbalances. In this theory, increased autonomy and individuation are considered promote more advanced moral thinking. However, Kohlberg point out that high level of development does not guarantee equal levels of moral judgement. Holstein [4] found supporting evidence of moral judgement from level to level, but not stage to stage and only for the first two levels. Jame Rest [5] found although the model is generally supported, some important qualifications still apply. There no clear evidence proves that Stage 6 follow by Stage 5. Moreover, Jame Rest discovered inconclusive evidence that cognitive disequilibrium cause moral growth and stage sequence is unchanged. There have been several revisions in scoring system, and in 1980, Stage 6 has been eliminated. Some studies about Kohlberg's model, girls generally scored lower than boys [9,13-14], and that's means girls stay in a lower level than boys. Girls are more likely stay in stage 3 but boys in stage 4. Bussey and Maugham [9] attributed this to the fact that Stage 4 (emphasis logical and laws) is more typical masculine features.

2.3 Gilligan's Theory of Moral Development

Gilligan question in the universality of the Kohlberg measurement (Scoring is bad for women) and consider that gender related difference is "signify difference in moral reasoning". Although Gilligan agree with stage-like natural of moral development, she presented that women have distinctive-construction seeing moral dilemma in terms of conflicting responsibility, in stark contrast to the abstract 'formal logic' that men display in their explorations of justice and rights. In In a Different Voice [8], Gilligan reported and analyzed two separate interviews with 29 women aged 15-33 of different ethnicities and backgrounds. Gilligan finds that women define morality as a matter of

achieving the duty to care and avoid harm. Gilligan described the stage of women's development to show more complete understanding of interpersonal relationship, pointing out women's moral reasoning is contextual. People criticized Gilligan's theory [8,9] in different aspects. Most of people consider this model has many assurances. There are too much theories rather than experimentation. At the same time, some people support part of her view, for example, moral reasoning of male and female focus on different theme. Women prefer to focus on caring, responsibility to others and interpersonal relationship while man more paying attention on self-rights and logical proof. There also some people believe that it is stereotype like feeling of woman and logical of man.

Belenky and others [15] further proposed a broader concept that men's and women's reasoning on various topics is fundamental different for Gilligan's theory. In conclusion, goals, the emphases, and standard of evaluation in reasoning were considered different in male and female, although the differences won't be absolutely. After interview of both male and female, children, adolescent and adult, Lyons [16] show two mainly orientation factor that impact people make decision in a moral dilemma-justice and caring. Justice emphasis rules and laws in society and conflict of "right or wrong". Caring more focus on people involved, their feeling, relationship and so on. Lyons [16] found male prefer to express justice while female prefer caring. Of course, these different are not absolute. A range of study showed these two orientations are not mutually exclusive. Evidences show people typically use combination of two orientation. People generally consider older more use justice than younger. Women are considered use more caring than men.

Considering only relying on car and justice to judge moral orientation and moral reasoning may be too thin, Glaotti, Kozberg and Farmer [17] through a series of algorithms divided factors that people think about in moral reasoning into 11 themes, including "What Other Think", "Effect on Other", "Situation Specific", "What I Feel", "Effect on Self", "Religious Teaching", "Greater Societal Good", "Legal Issue", "Personal Code Ethics", "Rights of Other", and "Systematic Reasoning". The themes that emphasize emotional feelings, impact on others or on oneself, and emphasize context were classified into feminine themes. As a result, the first five listed above were considered feminine themes and the rest of themes were considered masculine themes because they are non-contextual reasoning, reasoning from established authority, and non-emotional reasoning.

3. Difference in Gender and Ag

3.1 Difference in Kohlberg's Stage Theory

3.1.1 Gender difference

Actually, male and female have no significant difference in Kohlberg's six-stage theory. Many experiments were chosen to be tested using Kohlberg's Heinz experiment. The synopsis of the Heinz dilemma [3] is that Heinz's wife is critically ill and he cannot afford to pay the high cost of the medicine. In order to save her wife's life, should Heinz steal the medicine when drug dealer refuses to lower the price or agree to defer payment. Based on Kohlberg's theory, Donenberg and Hoffman [10] selected 71 students who are Caucasian and middle -class from college community participated. Participants in Year 5 and 6 were in a group of Year 10 and Year 11. Kohlberg's Heinz Dilemma [3] was used to evaluated gender differences in Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development theory and to see if the gender is the main factor affecting the level of response. They use two version Heinz dilemma with two gender to test whether the gender of main character affect participant's moral perception. Participants were asked to describe a moral dilemma they didn't know how to do and what they thought when they make a decision. The results didn't show that age and sex affected the score significantly. There was no significant difference between moral stage age or sex. Galotti, Kozberg and Farmer's experiment [19] had a similar result. In this experience, they invited 186 students, including 8th graders, 11th graders and college sophomores. All of them from southeastern Minnesota. A short form of Defining Issue Test and an experimental procedure similar to the above experiments were used in this experience. The result of this experiences was similar to Donenberg

and Hoffman's experience which is that gender and age won't be protagonist in Kohlberg's stage theory. In these studies, no significant sex difference could be found in Kohlberg measurement might due to participants from the same region have no culture difference and education level difference. As some evidence Baumirind [14] cited, gender difference in Kohlberg measurement can be found if education level, culture and race are not controlled. Bussey and Maugham presented that the reason maybe is stage 3 more femininity and stage 4 more masculine. Kohlberg's theory is challenged, because all his information from the interview with 10- to 16- year-old boys. According to Gilligan's study [8], male could earned higher score because they will do more justice orientation judgement, and justice orientation judgment will be classify in a higher level. Krebs, Vermeulen, Denton and Carpendale [11] interviewed 20 male and 20 female (all participants are adults) with bachelor's degree who from the same schools. All but one of the samples were Caucasian and all of participants are middle class. Years of work and experience of work have no significant difference. Participants finished two short forms about Kohlberg's test. The dilemma with different perspective respectively (including third-person respective and first-person respective). Participants obtained almost identical mean maturity scores on Kohlberg's four dilemmas.

3.1.2 Age difference

Age difference was not be found to affect people's moral stage. However, in Donenberg and Hoffman's study [11], if the main character is male, older girls score is higher than younger. At the same time, they found older girls will reach the highest stage if the main character has the same gender with them.

3.2 Difference in Gilligan's Theory of Moral Development

3.2.1 Gender difference

Thinking model is considered different in different gender and in process of moral reasoning, girls can make more content-based flexibility. Girls are usually though use caring while boys use justice in moral reasoning. Donenberg and Hoffman [10] also asked participants to asked to describe a real-life personal dilemma and to describe what they thought about when making this decision. Among male and female participants, gender differences were found in the amount of justice and care given. Girls more use caring reactions, and more reaction than boys in total. Girls use more caring and frequency of use is higher than boys. In construction of moral dilemma, children more toward to caring. Both boys and girls use care consideration more than justice consideration than they do the resolution of this problem. Participants were using caring instead of justice. Girls and boys focused in different points of moral conflict. A range of reliable experimental evidence that male and female emphasis on different concerns when they think about moral dilemma. In addition to the Donenberg and Hoffman's experiment [10] tests described earlier, in Galotti, Kozeberg and farmer's study [17] participants responded to two surveys. The first was "What issues affect your decision when faced with moral dilemma". The second was a measurement describing the justice and care orientations of moral reasoning, which participants completed based on their own behaviour. Justice and caring used of male almost no differences while that of female have significant difference. It's interesting to see neither age groups (5th -6th graders and 10th- 11th graders) show more justice than caring. Donenberg and Hoffman though this is because of the diminishing of gender stereotypes.

In Donenberg and Hoffman's work [10], if the dilemma involves social rules, including the law, then they will prioritize their social principles as appropriate in resolving the dilemma, the first one of moral reasoning. If the problem involves only interpersonal relationships, caring concern will take precedence over abstract rules. In this study, when it comes to full force and legal issues, girls score higher on the Kohlberg measurement, meaning they are closer to justice. If the problem is a conflict between friends, they will choose a more caring orientation. Galotti, Kozberg and Farmer [17] found that the use of possible feminine themes is higher than the corresponding use of possible masculine themes and female tend to use both kind of themes more. Female will more use more themes in their moral reasoning, indicate either their thinking will be more complex. Female's responds are more

easily to reflect “Effect”. This result is same as that of previous experiments. At the same time, gender differences are not so ubiquitous as people thinking. In 11 themes, 9 themes haven’t shown the difference.

3.2.2 Age difference

Younger considered give more caring than justice in process of moral reasoning. Donenberg and Hoffman’s experiment [10] to test for this, used 3 different version of Selman dilemma (suitable for children and adolescents) show older participants will give more response than younger, but generally gives more care than justice. In Selman dilemma, older participant will give more response than younger and more emphasis morality of justice. Although both girls and boys shift toward justice orientation with age, the older and younger are clearly concern with care more than justice.

In Walker’s study [18], he used and other measurement, no differences were found in moral orientation from primary to high school, but found it in student’s parents. Ford and Lowery [14] created a measurement and only tiny differences in college sophomores were found in their study. In 1989, Galotti [19] also found there almost no difference when college sophomores describe their moral reasoning.

In Galotti, Kozberg and Farmer’s work [18] found the pattern of masculinity will increase with age. Average usage of masculine themes increases with age, and average themes usage increase, which shows that older use more moral reasoning themes, showing either more consideration is given to moral reasoning. Masculine themes were found higher frequency of use. Similar to Gilligan's prediction, the pattern of masculinity is increasing with age. At the same time, the use of female themes does not diminish with age, rather, it maintained a high usage rate in all studies.

4. The Mechanism of Gender Difference

With little difference in culture social education level, the Kohlberg stage is rarely reflected in gender. It maybe because under certain social conditions, children’s social identity and thinking model is similar. The concentration of children's results in similar stages may be due to boys also showed caring in the study that although they used justice more than girls. Boys there was an overall bias toward caring not yet experienced socialization [20]. After socialization, girls and boys will take on the responsibility of “male” and “female” respectively. They may have succumbed to pressure and sacrificed dignity and thus into a more masculine mindset. However, since the gender difference between men and women in experiments [11] which all the participants are adults was not significant, this claim is open to question. Their moral orientation is biased toward to justice. As a result of this, male will earned higher score in Kohlberg measurement which is better score for men. It is also possible that as social stereotypes diminish, men and women no longer take the responsibility of “male” and “female” respectively. People's identity of responsibility slowly tends to be same, especially in middle-class. Or it could just be that the sample's low status just happens to blur gender perception, people's responsibility is consistently shown only in the middle class.

In different study, girls are found to be more resilient. For example, girls reach highest stage in Heniz dilemma with heterosexual main character. They will be more emphasis on justice in problem with legal and rules. If there is a problem with interpersonal relationship. This may be because girls have a greater ability to empathize and thus choice become more flexible in their moral reasoning.

5. Limitations and Prospects

Most of the participants in previous studies were from the middle class. There is no way to know whether people who have higher social status or lower status have gender difference in Kohlberg’s stage measurement. Future research should pay good attention to the situation of different classes, in case the Kohlberg stage is just a difference in class. The impact of education on morality should also be studied, as the level of education of the samples in the studies in this search for literature is similar.

In addition, the apparent of themes, indicates that only relying on caring and justice to judge moral orientation and moral reasoning may be too thin.

6. Summary

Considered as a whole, there were no significant gender or age differences in the Kohlberg test and scoring system. However, according to Gilligan's moral development theory of moral orientation, most relevant experiments demonstrated statistically significant differences in moral reasoning in gender and age. Women will use the morality of care more often than men and their more flexibility in moral reasoning. In women's moral reasoning, they moral dilemmas will be more contextual than men, it also tends to focus on more conflict points than men. The gradual decrease in the moral differences between men and women today may be related to the fact that due to the decrease in gender stereotypes, the distribution of tasks began to be similar. Children's orientation towards care gradually moves towards justice as they grow up, there is also an increasing use of male themes in moral reasoning themes as opposed to female themes. However, in the literature that could be found, only the participants are all middle-class. As a result of this, it is unable to ensure whether higher class or lower class also works like this. This paper reviews previous experimental research literature on differences in moral development and moral reasoning between males and females, to provide some reference for later studies. In addition to this, some limitations of previous experiments have been proposed and will hopefully be examined in the future.

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