

Gender and Moral Reasoning: A Study of a Nigeria Adult Sample

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Abstract: The study investigated the influence of gender on moral reasoning in an adult population using the philosophical-psychological component paradigm of Boyce and Jensen. 354 women and 391 men drawn from five occupations responded to Moral Content Test (MCT). Statistical analysis of data using t-independent test revealed no significant difference between the sexes on each of the nine ethical considerations that make up the normative ethics of teleology and deontology. Findings refute Gilligan's postulation about the unique moral voice of women and corroborated no significant difference between the sexes on moral reasoning.

Key words: Gender, moral, reason, influence, investigation

INTRODUCTION

The idea that gender may influence moral reasoning was suggested by Gilligan^[1]. She had criticised Kohlberg's^[2,3] cognitive developmental theory of moral reasoning on being androcentric on two grounds; first, on the ground that the empirical study carried out to support the theory was done on a male sample and second, on the ground that the theory suggested that females operate at lower levels of moral development than their male counterpart. On the basis of above criticism Gilligan^[1] posited that women have a different moral voice distinct from the male voice. The female moral voice, to Gilligan, is as valid as the male voice. She posited that women operate on the ethic of care while men operate on the abstract ethic of justice when making moral decision. The former ethic is characterised, to Gilligan, by a self conceived as being connected to and interdependent on others, a sensitivity not to injure or endanger, a concern for wellbeing of self and others and the urge to be in harmony with others. The latter ethic is characterised by a detached, objective and individualistic self with orientation towards rights and abstract and impartial principles Walker, deVries and Trevethan^[4].

Gilligan's position has been the basis on which recent studies were carried out to investigate the existence or otherwise of differences in moral reasoning between women and men, thus testing the validity of this theory.

Walker^[5,6] has done a comprehensive review and meta-analysis of studies that have attempted to compare male and female on moral reasoning, using the Kohlbergian paradigm. No consistent evidence was revealed to demonstrate that women scored lower than

men. Rather than finding consistency in gender difference in moral reasoning within the Kohlbergian model, what Walker^[7,6] observed was that gender accounted for less than one-twentieth of one percent of the variance in moral reasoning scores.

In a study done with a Nigeria sample and with a moral model different from the Kohlbergian paradigm, Mundy-Castle and Bundy^[8] did not also report a significant difference in male and female research participant's scores on moral reasoning. Male and female participants did not differ significantly in their endorsement of self-centred, society-centred and person-centred ethics, except on one of the eighteen moral dilemmas employed. It should be noted that Mundy-Castle and Bundy's model of moral reasoning is a process and not stage-oriented like that of Kohlberg. Using the process paradigm to study moral reasoning on environmental pollution Adebayo^[9] compared men and women on three important ethics; self-centredness, society-centredness and environment-centredness with a view to finding out whether women would be more environment-centred than men. Findings revealed no significant sex difference on the three ethics in reasoning about environmental pollution.

Walker's^[5,6], Mundy-Castle and Bundy's^[8] and Adebayo's^[9] studies suggest that gender may not be a factor in moral reasoning. This suggestion cannot be carried far when other recent studies like Gump, Bakar and Samuel^[10], Indick, Kim, Oelberger and Semino^[11] and Erie^[12] are considered.

Gump *et al.*^[10] attempted to corroborate Gilligan's thesis on the existence of distinct moral voice for women. They asked research participants to read hypothetical situations and afterwards they were made to respond to

statements pertaining to the dilemma through their rating of the statement according to how important they perceived each idea to be in making a decision about the dilemma.

Gump *et al.*^[10] focused on the measurement of justice and care-based decisions to see if there were gender differences in the two ethics. They found that females scored significantly higher on the care-based scale than males. Females did not, however, differ, significantly from males on the justice scale. This finding gives partial support to Gilligan's theoretical claims that women have a different moral voice. It also supports Walker's^[6] claim that women are not significantly different from men in moral reasoning along the Kohlbergian paradigm; women it seems are as just as men and are more caring than men in their moral reasoning.

Indick *et al.*^[11] in another study corroborated the findings of Gump *et al.*^[10]. They first posited the existence of two types of moral reasoning; consequential and nonconsequential. Consequential moral reasonings are moral decisions based on the consequence of acts in defining good. Nonconsequential reasoning are those based on moral principles and rules. Indick *et al.*^[11] hypothesised that there would be a significant difference between male and female research participants. Using undergraduates as research participants and asking them to respond to three hypothetical moral dilemmas they observed that men significantly endorsed consequential responses more often than women, thus corroborating Gilligan's thesis. In a follow-up study by Erie^[12] using the same methodological and theoretical approach findings did not support Indick *et al.*^[11].

Erie^[12] hypothesised that women would significantly choose non-consequential responses to moral dilemmas more often than men. Using seventy undergraduates with equal number of males and females and making them to respond to Gender Differences in Moral Judgement: Is Nonconsequential Reasoning a Factor? Developed by Indick *et al.*^[11] findings revealed that gender was not significant predictor or moral judgement.

It is this seeming indecisiveness of research findings on the role of gender in moral reasoning that has warranted the conception of the present study. Here the objective is to employ another paradigm, the philosophical-psychological model of moral reasoning Boyce and Jensen^[13] which posited the existence of two normative ethics and between which individuals swing in moral reasoning. These ethics are teleology and deontology; the former referring to a moral reasoning orientation that defines an act as either good or bad according to the consequences of the act and the latter

which defines an act as good or otherwise according to the nature of the act. These two normative ethics seem to be equivalent to Indick's *et al.*^[11] consequential and nonconsequential reasoning. Thus teleology is an equivalent of consequential reasoning while deontology is an equivalent of nonconsequential reasoning.

The present study also intends to use working adults as research participants. Most studies that have attempted a comparison of men and women on moral reasoning have been biased towards adolescents in their sampling. Findings from this population may not be generalisable to adult population whose moral reasoning pattern may be qualitatively different Peatling,^[14]

Hypothesis: There will be significant difference in the mean scores of men and women on teleological and deontological ethical considerations, males significantly scoring higher on the former while female significantly scoring higher on the latter.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants: These were 745 adults drawn from among five occupations; medicine (one hundred nurses and 49 medical doctors), teaching (149 secondary school teachers), banking (149 bankers), police (149 police officer not below the rank of seargent and civil service (149 civil servants not below grade level 07). They were drawn from Ibadan, Ado-Ekiti and Ilorin. 391 of the sample were men while 354 were women, with an average age of 35.8.

Instrument: Moral Content Test (MCT) developed by Boyce and Jensen^[13] was used. The instrument was developed based on the philosophical-psychological component theory of moral reasoning as propounded by them Boyce and Jensen^[13]. MCT is capable of tapping the normative ethics of teleology and deontology. It measures nine important teleological and deontological considerations; namely, egoism, hedonism, nonhedonism, rule-utilitarianism, act-utilitarianism, utilitarianism, deontology, rule-orientation and act-orientation. MCT has been found to be a reliable and valid measure of moral reasoning Boyce and Jensen^[13]. Adebayo^[15] reported the following discriminant validity coefficients for each of the nine ethical considerations when 43 subjects' scores were correlated with their scores on Psychopathic Deviate Scale of Hartharway and Mckinley^[16]; -.48 (egoism), -.22 (hedonism), -.28 (nonhedonism), .13 (rule-utilitarianism)-, .15 (act-utilitarianism)-, .09 (deontology), -.08 (rule-orientation), -.19 (act-orientation), -.17 (utilitarianism).

Table 1: Means, standard deviation and t-test analysis of scores of research participants on the nine ethical considerations in terms of gender.

Ethical consideration	Male		Female		t	Pat. 05
	X	S	X	S		
Egoism	24.50	15.59	24.49	15.57	.01	n. s
Hedonism	32.77	11.24	32.42	11.54	.35	n. s
Nonhedonism	36.47	10.75	36.82	11.07	.44	n. s
Rule-utilitarianism	36.90	18.20	39.94	18.53	.25	n. s
Act-utilitarianism	24.64	20.01	24.18	21.06	.30	n. s
Utilitarianism	45.51	12.41	45.53	12.42	.02	n. s
Deontology	52.10	16.08	51.73	17.22	.30	n. s
Ruel-orientation	50.54	10.03	50.53	19.90	.00	n. s
Act-orientation	40.44	17.90	39.75	18.56	.52	n. s

Number: Male = 391, Female = 354, df = 733

Procedure: A purposive random sampling technique was used. This made it possible to reach a target of 745 respondents made up of equal number of research participants drawn from five occupational groups. Of this number 391 were male while 354 were female. The sample was drawn from 15 secondary schools, 15 government ministries, three police command and four government hospitals in Ado-Ekiti, Ilorin and Ibadan. “The Lucky-dip” technique was used to select the banks, the schools and the ministries. Except for the medical group the same-technique was also used to select respondents after their consent had first been secured.

Research design: The study was a survey research attempting to investigate the influence of sex on moral reasoning in an adult population. In order to be able to compare male and female participants’ scores on each of the nine ethical considerations measured by MCT two independent group design was used.

Statistical technique: Series of students’ t-independent test were computed to test for difference in the mean scores of male and female research participants on each of the nine ethical considerations.

RESULTS

Table 1 above depicts the mean scores of men and women on the nine ethical considerations and statistical analyses of the mean scores revealed that the hypothesis for the present study is not supported. No significant difference was observed between men and women on the nine ethical consideration.

DISCUSSION

The hypothesis of the present study that significant difference would exist between male and female on teleological and deontological ethical considerations was informed by Gilligan’s^[1] theoretical postulations and the

findings of Gump *et al.*^[10,11]. Present findings as depicted on Table 1, however revealed that men and women did not differ significantly on all the nine ethical considerations. This suggests that gender is not a good predictor of moral reasoning among adult Nigerians.

Findings of the present study have examples in the literature. Walker^[5,6] in his review of past studies designed to compare the sexes on moral reasoning concluded that there was no significant difference to demonstrate that females scored lower than males on moral reasoning within the Kohlbergian model.

Furthermore, Mundy-Castel and Bundy^[8] did not find significant difference between male and female on self-centred, society-centred and person-centred ethical reasoning. Similarly Adebayo^[9] did not report significant difference on the moral reasoning of male and female on environmental pollution. Erie^[12] did not also find gender as a significant predictor of moral reasoning.

What all this suggests is that whatever the theoretical model employed, studies including the present, have not confirmed the validity of Gilligan’s theoretical claim that women have a different moral voice.

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