

The impact of gender on moral decision-making essay

[Business](#), [Decision Making](#)



The Impact of Gender on Moral Decision-Making The purpose of this study is to measure decision-making in hypothetical scenarios that require moral judgment and determine if there is a difference between men and women. Some scenarios will include situations in which a respondent could choose to take a morally questionable action that would be personally beneficial. Other scenarios will include situations in which the respondent can take morally commendable action that would not result in personal gain.

Thus, this research will provide information about the likelihood of intentionally behaving in an immoral, as well as a proactively virtuous, fashion. As the following review of the literature indicates, previous scientific study does not support hypothesizing one gender is inherently more moral than the other. Various philosophers have developed theories of morality, many of which discuss the relationships among morality, happiness, and the soul.

These are difficult concepts to operationalize and study scientifically. Scientific study of morality is inherently affected by the bias of the study investigator. To some degree the researcher's own perception of what is "right" or "wrong" affects the content of the study protocol and the variables being studied.

Few validated tools for the measurement of morality exist. Rather, sections of comprehensive personality tests are often isolated and used to determine an individual's morality as evidenced by character traits such as honesty. Alternately, study participants are provided with hypothetical scenarios and

are asked how they would respond or the degree to which they feel a specific action would be considered ethical or unethical.

These approaches demonstrate the bias of the researcher in defining and operationalizing an “ethical” response to a test question or situation, even when the test is based on a defined moral theory. Tests of an individual’s morality are often criticized as being too arbitrary and may incorrectly characterize the individual. And, results are further complicated by the tendency of an individual to provide a socially desirable response rather than answering honestly. The most widely used measure of morality is the Moral Judgment Test developed by Lind, which has been translated into numerous languages and validated across cultures (Lind, 2005). Yet, evidence of its use in controlled scientific trials among English-speaking subjects is limited (Gross, 1996; Lerkiatbundit, Utaipan, Laohawiriyanon, & Teo, 2006; Lind, 2005). The methodology utilized in morality studies varies greatly, making comparability of the results garnered from unique protocols and data collection tools difficult.

This likely affects the discrepancies in the findings of studies of gender and morality. The following provides examples of the differences in studies of gender and morality. Children’s attitudes toward aggression, both physical and relational (psychological), were evaluated. Gender differences in moral judgments of aggression were observed, with girls rating physical and relational aggression as more wrong and also deeming relational aggression as more wrong than boys did (Murray-Close, 2006). A study of moral orientation among medical students was performed in order to determine if a

scale could be developed to assess the likelihood of ethical behavior in the provision of healthcare services. The study found women had higher community-influenced morality scores than did male respondents (Bore, Munro, Kerridge, & Powis, 2005). Another study utilizing a cohort of medical healthcare practitioners found no gender differences in ethical reasoning between males and females (Kuhse, Singer, Rickard, Cannold, & van Dyk, 1997). A meta-analysis of gender differences in moral orientation reported a marginal tendency for females to exhibit higher care orientation than males, and for males to practice greater justice orientation (Jaffee & Hyde, 2000).

These results were not, however, statistically significant. In a singular study in which subjects were presented with moral dilemmas to which they had to provide a solution that reflected various degrees of justice and care, a greater propensity toward care morality among women was supported by the findings (Agerström, 2006). A study of gender differences in perceptions of ethical practice in business settings found women more likely to perceive specific hypothetical business practices as unethical (Franke, Crown, & Spake, 1997). However, these differences lessened with greater real-world work experience.

In another example, a study of college students' perceptions of the morality of animal testing found females to be far less accepting of animal research than men (Wuensch, 1998). Thus, the literature does not provide strong evidence for gender differences in morality as defined in this study.

Outcomes vary by protocol, the topic being studied, and the ages of the study participants. This study will focus on adult decision-making in

hypothetical scenarios requiring morally-sensitive choices.

Methodology Study recruitment will ensure that there are a comparable number of men and women enrolled in the study. There will be a minimum of 25 men and 25 women. Since sex is a fixed variable, participants cannot be randomized into study groups.

All participants will complete an informed consent document prior to participation. There are no exclusionary criteria for the study. Participants will provide demographic information on forms that are each linked to a unique subject identification number.

Data collection forms will carry this participant id number, but will not identify the respondent by name in an effort to promote anonymity and candor. Demographic variables to be collected include participant gender, age, ethnicity, and religious affiliation. Upon completion of the demographic data sheet, participants will receive a packet containing the test materials. Four scenarios will describe a situation in which the respondent can respond in a morally virtuous manner. Each scenario will specify that there will be no measurable gain by choosing that action and it would not be acknowledged by outside parties. The scenarios will depict the following situations: an opportunity to provide physical assistance to an elderly stranger in need, making a charitable donation to a worthy cause, providing a valuable service for which there would be no compensation, and accurate representation of one's work history and experience on a job application. Subjects will rate the likelihood that they would perform the morally desirable action. Responses

will be recorded using a 5-point Likert Scale with responses ranging from 1 = Not at all likely to 5 = Extremely likely.

The other four scenarios in the questionnaire will depict scenarios in which the respondent has the opportunity to commit a morally questionable act that would result in personal gain without fear of legal repercussions or detection by another individual. The scenarios will depict the following situations: lying to a professor to gain a deadline extension for a homework assignment, failing to return (and keeping) lost money to the known rightful owner, cheating on a romantic partner, and committing perjury in a court of law in order to aid a relative. Subjects will rate the likelihood that they would perform the morally questionable action. Responses will be recorded using a 5-point Likert Scale with responses ranging from 1 = Extremely likely to 5 = Not at all likely. Thus, the coding for the scale is reversed between the two types of scenarios.

Participants will be instructed to attend to the differences in scales among the different scenarios. A final morality score will be calculated using the numerical data from the Likert scale responses. Scores may range from 8 to 40, with higher scores representing greater morality in decision-making, or a Morality Score. Mean scores between men and women will be assessed using a Student's T-test, provided data is normally distributed. Additionally, morality sub-scores will be calculated for scenarios depicting the opportunity to perform morally virtuous or morally questionable acts and an association with gender will be examined. Gender differences in responses to individual scenarios will also be reported.

The data to be collected in this research proposal will add valuable information to the scientific literature regarding gender differences in morality. References Agerström J., Archer, T. (2006). Moral reasoning: The influence of affective personality, dilemma content and gender. *Social Behavior and Personality*, 34(10), 1259-1276.

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Wuensch, K., Poteat, M. G. (1998). Evaluating the morality of animal research: Effects of ethical ideology, gender, and purpose. . *Journal of Social Behavior ; Personality*, 13(1), 139-150. *Med Educ*.

2005 Mar; 39(3): 266-75. Selection of medical students according to their moral orientation. Bore M, Munro D, Kerridge I, Powis D. Faculty of Health, University of Newcastle, Callaghan, New South Wales, Australia. *Miles*.

: Consideration has been given to the use of tests of moral reasoning in the selection procedure for medical students. We argue that moral orientation, rather than moral reasoning, might be more efficacious in minimising the likelihood of inappropriate ethical behaviour in medicine. A conceptualisation and measure of moral orientation are presented, together with findings from 11 samples of medical school applicants and students. AIM: To provide empirical evidence for the reliability and validity of a measure of moral orientation and to explore gender, age, cultural and educational influences on moral orientation.

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METHODS: A questionnaire designed to measure a libertarian-dual-communitarian dimension of moral orientation was completed by 7864 medical school applicants and students in Australia, Israel, Fiji, New Zealand, Scotland and England and by 84 Australian psychology students between 1997 and 2001. **RESULTS:** Older respondents produced marginally higher (more communitarian) moral orientation scores, as did women compared to men. Minor but significant ($P < 0.05$) cultural differences were found. The Israeli samples produced higher mean moral orientation scores, while the Australian psychology student sample produced a lower (more libertarian) mean score relative to all other samples. No significant change in moral orientation score was observed after 1 year in a sample of Australian medical school students ($n = 59$), although some differences observed between 5 cohorts of Australian medical students (Years 1-5; $n = 234$) did reach significance. Moral orientation scores were found to be significantly correlated with a number of personality measures, providing evidence of construct validity.

In all samples moral orientation significantly predicted the moral decisions made in response to the hypothetical dilemmas embedded in the measurement instrument. **DISCUSSION:** The results provide support for the conceptualisation of a libertarian-dual-communitarian dimension of moral orientation and demonstrate the psychometric properties of the measurement instrument. A number of questions concerning the use of such tests in selection procedures are considered. *Psychol Bull.* 2000 Sep; 126(5): 703-26.

Gender differences in moral orientation: a meta-analysis. Jaffee S, Hyde JS. Department of Psychology, University of Wisconsin-Madison 53706, USA. C. Gilligan's (1982) critique of L. Kohlberg's theory of moral reasoning and her assertion that two modes of moral reasoning (justice and care) exist have been the subject of debate within the field of psychology for more than 15 years. This meta-analysis was conducted to review quantitatively the work on gender differences in moral orientation.

The meta-analysis revealed small differences in the care orientation favoring females ($d = -.28$) and small differences in the justice orientation favoring males ($d = .19$). Together, the moderator variables accounted for 16% of the variance in the effect sizes for care reasoning and 17% of the variance in the effect sizes for justice reasoning. These findings do not offer strong support for the claim that the care orientation is used predominantly by women and that the justice orientation is used predominantly by men. *J Appl Psychol.* 1997 Dec; 82(6): 920-34. Gender differences in ethical perceptions of business practices: a social role theory perspective.

Franke GR, Crown DF, Spake DF. University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa 35487-0225, USA. study presents a meta-analysis of research on gender differences in perceptions of ethical decision making. Data from more than 20,000 respondents in 66 samples show that women are more likely than men to perceive specific hypothetical business practices as unethical.

As suggested by social role theory (A. H. Eagly, 1987), the gender difference observed in precareer (student) samples declines as the work experience of

samples increases. Social role theory also accounts for greater gender differences in nonmonetary issues than in monetary issues.

T. M. Jones's (1991) issue-contingent model of moral intensity helps explain why gender differences vary across types of behavior. Contrary to expectations, differences are not influenced by the sex of the actor or the target of the behavior and do not depend on whether the behavior involves personal relationships or action vs.

inaction. *J Med Ethics*. 1997 Aug; 23(4): 226-32.

Partial and impartial ethical reasoning in health care professionals. Kuhse H, Singer P, Rickard M, Cannold L, van Dyk J. Centre for Human Bioethics, Monash University, Victoria, Australia. **OBJECTIVES:** To determine the relationship between ethical reasoning and gender and occupation among a group of male and female nurses and doctors. **DESIGN:** Partialist and impartialist forms of ethical reasoning were defined and singled out as being central to the difference between what is known as the "care" moral orientation (Gilligan) and the "justice" orientation (Kohlberg). A structured questionnaire based on four hypothetical moral dilemmas involving combinations of (health care) professional, non-professional, life-threatening and non-life-threatening situations, was piloted and then mailed to a randomly selected sample of doctors and nurses.

SETTING: 400 doctors from Victoria, and 200 doctors and 400 nurses from New South Wales. **RESULTS:** 178 doctors and 122 nurses returned completed questionnaires. 115 doctors were male, 61 female; 50 nurses were male and

72 were female. It was hypothesised that there would be an association between feminine subjects and partialist reasoning and masculine subjects and impartialist reasoning. It was also hypothesised that nurses would adopt a partialist approach to reasoning and doctors an impartialist approach. No relationship between any of these variables was observed.

Title Evaluating the morality of animal research: Effects of ethical ideology, gender, and purpose. Abstract 315 college students (aged 17-38 yrs) were asked to pretend that they were serving on a university research committee hearing a complaint against animal research being conducted by a member of the university faculty. Five different research scenarios were used: Testing cosmetics, basic theory testing, agricultural (meat production) research, veterinary research, and medical research. Ss were asked to rate how justified they thought the research was and to decide whether or not the research should be halted. An ethical inventory was used to measure Ss' idealism and relativism. Idealism was negatively associated and relativism positively associated with support for animal research. Women were much less accepting of animal research than were men.

Support for the cosmetic, theoretical, and agricultural research projects was significantly less than that for the medical research, which was the only research scenario to receive over 50% support (54%). (PsycINFO Database Record (c) 2006 APA, all rights reserved) Authors Wuensch, Karl L.; Poteat, G. Michael Affiliations Wuensch, Karl L.: East Carolina U, Dept of Psychology, Greenville, NC, US Source Journal of Social Behavior ; Personality. 13(1), Mar

1998, 139-150. Title Moral reasoning: The influence of affective personality, dilemma content and gender.

Abstract This study examined the influence of affective personality, perfectionism, gender, arousal and dilemma content on moral reasoning. 264 participants were presented with moral dilemmas to which they had to provide a solution that reflected various degrees of justice and care. The results indicated that a) affective personality had an effect on moral reasoning, b) female participants reported higher levels of care morality than did male participants, c) gender interacted with perfectionism in the production of moral standpoints, d) dilemma content exerted a strong effect on the participants' use of moral strategy.

It was concluded that although moral reasoning appears to be governed primarily by the dilemma content at hand, an individual's moral solutions are influenced by gender and affective state. (PsycINFO Database Record (c) 2007 APA, all rights reserved) Authors Agerström, Jens; Möller, Kristiina; Archer, Trevor Affiliations Agerström, Jens: Department of Psychology, Lund University, Lund, Sweden Möller, Kristiina: Department of Psychology, Vaxjo University, Vaxjo, Sweden Archer, Trevor: Department of Psychology, Goteborg University, Sweden Source Social Behavior and Personality. 2006 Vol 34(10) 1259-1276 Title Children's Moral Reasoning Regarding Physical and Relational Aggression. Abstract Elementary school children's moral reasoning concerning physical and relational aggression was explored. Fourth and fifth graders rated physical aggression as more wrong and harmful than relational aggression but tended to adopt a moral orientation

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about both forms of aggression. Gender differences in moral judgments of aggression were observed, with girls rating physical and relational aggression as more wrong and relational aggression as more harmful than boys.

In addition, girls were more likely to adopt a moral orientation when judging physical and relational aggression and girls more often judged relational aggression than physical aggression from the moral domain. Finally, moral reasoning about aggression was associated with physically and relationally aggressive behavior. Considered together, the results indicate that children tend to adopt a moral orientation about aggression, but that they nonetheless differentiate between physical and relational aggression in their moral judgments. (PsycINFO Database Record (c) 2006 APA, all rights reserved)Authors Murray-Close, Dianna; Crick, Nicki R.

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