Cognitive and behavioural frequencies of justice and care on moral dilemmas between males and females

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Abstract

Moral reasoning refers to individuals' cognitive, emotional and behavioural understandings regarding everyday practices and relationships with others. Moral reasoning touches upon personal beliefs of human interaction the way these are cultivated through mores, principles and values in given societies. The objective of this empirical research was to question males' and females' moral orientations on justice and care. To this aim, participants were distributed dilemmas in a form of stories in which they were asked to offer their personal consideration. It was found that male participants have responded in relation to a justice-based orientation, while females to a care-based one. The interpretation of the findings showed that males tend to reply on moral dilemmas in association with the moral reasoning of justice, whereas females in association with care.

Keywords: moral reasoning, dilemmas, justice, care.

Introduction

According to Tangney & Dearing (2004), the idea of moral reasoning is concerned with the appearance of dilemmas in everyday life. Researchers are interested in discussing moral reasoning by focusing on how people think, feel or react on moral dilemmas (Paxton et al., 2012). They argue (Piaget, 1952; Ford & Lowery, 1986; Gilligan & Attanucci 1988; Kagan & Lamb, 1990; Killen & Hart, 1995; Crandall et al., 1999; Nunner-Winkler, 2008) that people are guided by self-regarded aspects about how they should behave on given circumstances. The issues claimed, not only refer to why people decide to do things of moral content in their lives, but also how they decide to do it. Among the more sophisticated moral developmentalists, Arnold (1989) and Blasi (1980) consider that it is a link between moral thinking and moral action (Petrovich, 2011). Although, as it is understood, there are various appreciations about moral reasoning, they nonetheless converge at similar points, such as the connection between moral reasoning and behavioural choices (Blasi, 1980; Bazerman & Gino, 2012), as well as moral reasoning and altruistic behaviour in relation to evolutionary explanations of group selection in human societies (Varvatsoulias, 2013; 2014).

Kohlberg's cognitive-developmental theory on moral reasoning (1969, 1984) was presented with research on male participants. According to his estimate, there are three stages concerned with the development of moral reasoning. He named (1984) the first as 'pre-conventional' (0-9yrs), based on avoidance of punishment and reward gaining. He called (1984)

the second 'conventional' (9-20+yrs), referring to gaining or avoiding approval, as well as to the dipole of duty and guilt. The third stage was called from him (1984) 'post-conventional' (20-…yrs), in relation to how one understands the right or wrong along with personal moral foundations, whether these refer to social or cultural criteria. Kohlberg's account on moral reasoning is acknowledged that laid the foundations of an understanding of moral orientation as mature and non-mature, regarding the forms they are associated with (Gibbs, 2014).

Following Kohlberg, Gilligan (1982) pointed out a different understanding on moral reasoning which was referred to both genders. She considered that males tend to understand moral reasoning in relation to justice, whilst females in relation to care (Skoe, 2010). Although the understanding on the 'ethic of justice' was first referred by Kohlberg (1969), Gilligan was basically influenced by Walker (1984), who thought of gender differences in moral reasoning as modest as inexistent; for, according to his research (1984), little evidence was found to support the opposite as true (Walker, 2013). To Kohlberg's 'ethic of justice', Gilligan (1982) introduced the 'ethic of care'. She could not 'bear' the 'male theorists' of 'male moral reasoning', which included women as well. Gilligan (1982) 'revolted' against the idea that females are 'deficient in moral development', contending that in previous experiments, participants were only or mainly males (Rummery & Fine, 2012).

Although, at first sight, there seems to be a different methodological as well as theoretical background, both, Kohlberg and Gilligan, launch their research from similar starting points. The difference is that Gilligan's one is presumably concerned with differing gender frameworks in tendencies of moral directions (Crandall et al., 1999; Proios, 2014). According to Tagney & Dearing (2004), Gilligan's description of the ethic of care, implies that her discernment can be called 'theory of moral reasoning', in contrast to Kohlberg's consideration of 'feelings of sympathy and concern appreciation', for she construes the cognitive-behavioural elements as interpreting different developmental orientations in moral reasoning (Graham et al., 2012). Gilligan & Attanucci (1988) revised the method set by Kohlberg (1984) and proposed a follow-up orientation between male and female moral reasoning, the main argument of which was that both men and women use justice and care in their everyday practices when dealing with issues of morality in their social interactions (Cam et al., 2012).

The rational of this study is that Kohlberg raised the issue of moral reasoning by using standardized dilemmas on only males, whilst Gilligan & Attanucci raised the same issue on both genders without the use of standardized dilemmas. The hypothesis for this study is that gender differences, in response to moral dilemmas, are found to exhibiting a moral orientation towards justice-based reasoning for men, whereas towards care for women.

Method

Participants
Three hundred and twenty-seven participants were recruited for this type of study. Participants came from a relevant demographic background similar to the researcher's (Greeks living in London). Their responses collected to form the analysis. Participants' age range was 17 to 58 years.

Design
The current study was designed to examine the two categorical variables of gender and moral orientation. A 2x2 Chi-Square (χ^2) analysis was employed for the reason to compare an actual observation following the occurrence and/or distribution of an event (in this case that event was the 'distribution of dilemmas') (McQueen & Knussen, 2006). The design was an association

between moral reasoning and gender. It was a within-participants design. The IV (independent variable) was 'gender' and the DV (dependent variable) was 'frequencies on justice and care'.

Materials

Three moral dilemmas were presented to participants each one containing four standard questions to be answered (Appendix 1).

Procedure

Participants were interviewed at home. It was explained to them that the experimenter was interested in what people consider, when they face moral dilemmas. The dilemmas were presented to them one at a time and in random order. After participants have read each dilemma, were asked if they had any query; if they understood them clearly, whilst also, asked to answer each dilemma one by one, by responding in every question of it, whether briefly or in full. Participants were also encouraged not to answer 'Yes' or 'No' or 'I don't know', so their answers not to have a limited value. They were asked to answer honestly and that there was no right or wrong answer. According to ethical considerations, they were told their responses will be recorded and the reason for that is the experimenter to be able to recall what participants have said. They were also told that their responses will be treated anonymously and they can withdraw from the interview at any time. After completion of the interview participants were thanked for their time, they have been debriefed about the study and asked if there were any questions left unanswered.

When the interviews were completed, were transcribed in detail, so to be ready for content analysis. Content analysis of both interviews consisted of highlighting any statement in the participants' answer that seemed to be indicative with the understanding of moral orientation. The highlighted statements were coded as 'Justice' (J) or 'Care' (C), according to the criteria provided by Lyons (1983) (Appendix 2).

The highlighted statements measured through using inter-rater reliability to ensure that the data have not been influenced by personal interpretation or knowledge of the hypothesis. In inter-rater reliability there was kept 'blind' the gender of each participant and were rated as 'agree' or 'disagree' by another fellow student researcher. After the inter-rater reliability measures, the responses of each dilemma were coded whether as indicative of justice (justice predominant in coding) or care (care predominant in coding) or both (justice-care), i.e. neither predominant. After the responses were coded, were put in the SPSS, in order to be edited for chi-square analysis.

Results

The overall frequency of dilemmas coded as justice, care or justice-care mixtures for both genders were collated and put to the SPSS.
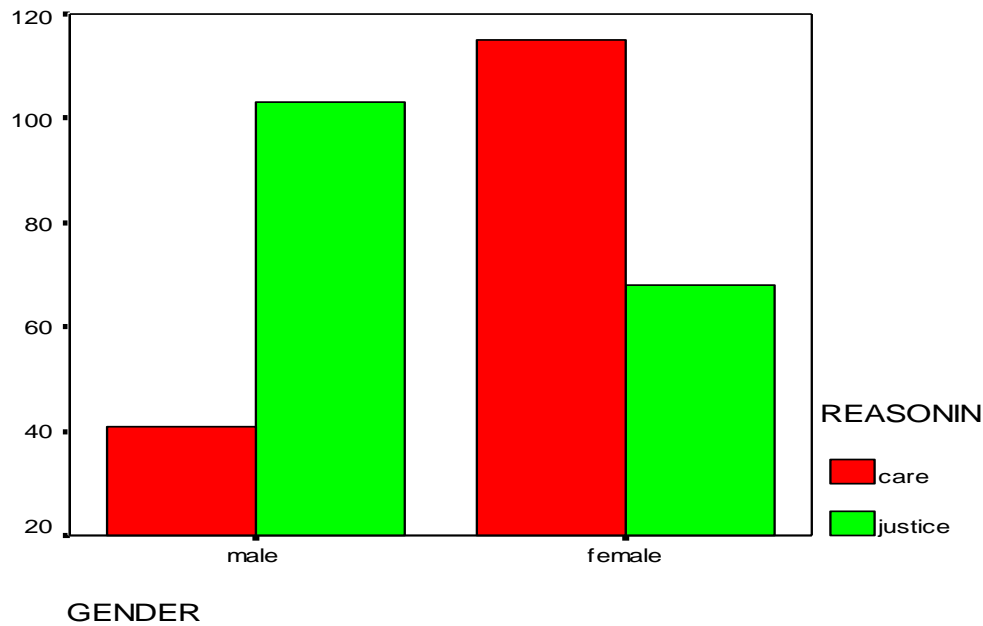
Descriptive statistics

Table 1

	Justice-based orientation	Care-based orientation
Males	103	41
Females	68	115

Total number of participants was 327. Males have scored 103 for 'justice' and 41 for 'care', whilst females scored 68 for 'justice' and 115 for 'care'.

Table 2

GENDER

In relation to both tables, the scores as they appear in both genders support the hypothesis tested. Males tend to score higher in 'justice', whereas females higher in 'care'.

Inferential statistics

There was employed a 2X2 chi-square (χ^2) analysis to discover whether there was a significant association between gender and moral reasoning.

Table 3

	Value	Degrees of Freedom	Cramer's V
Chi-square	38.158	1	.342

This suggested χ^2 (df(1), n=327)=38.158 (38.16), p<.001, Cramer's V=.342.
This means that there is a significant relationship between moral reasoning and gender.

The hypothesis is two-tailed. Cramer's V analysis (.342) has showed that the strength of the effect size for χ^2 is medium. Although 12% is a relatively small chance, the relationship between moral orientation and men and women is significant, meaning that the hypothesis is supported.

Discussion

The results support the hypothesis predicted. Males tend to react on moral dilemmas through justice-based orientations, while females through care-based ones (Juújårvi et al., 2010). The hypothesis is two tailed and its direction medium. The strength of it implies that there is a significant association between moral reasoning and gender. The results show that the hypothesis examined fits with the theory of moral reasoning in relation to genders. Males exhibit justice on moral dilemmas, whereas females exhibit care. Gilligan's and Attanucci's (1988) revision on Kohlberg's male-oriented moral reasoning is maintained.

An alternative explanation of the results, in connection with Kaufman's argument (1989), shows that females are influenced by the way they respond on moral dilemmas, i.e. in view to emotions and moral ethics; whilst males tend to behave according to demand characteristics, such as the social balance, the social understanding of fairness and justification and the idea of social upheaval if common-sense rules are not obeyed.

A possible weakness of the results is the looseness of using qualitative data to subjective opinions. In other words, as Gilligan (1977) argues, a precarious relationship between subjectivity and data is in use, when these are collected from friends or an environment which is of a similar background with the experimenter's, i.e. people of similar beliefs, people of similar understanding of morality, people of similar demonstration of knowledge on academic issues or moral dilemmas (Abramson, 2012).

An improvement, according to Kaufman (1989), could be to be examined in such a study wider ranges of ages –divided by different decades, ethnic backgrounds, different cultural understandings, in relation to the moral orientation or reasoning, as well as different family and demographic backgrounds, such as upbringing in urban or rural areas, different educational status, single mothers, people whom the parents have passed away during their childhood, or divorced couples. According to Hogg & Vaughan (2005), there could also be examined different classifications on the aspect of 'moral dilemma', focused on differing social statuses, on considerations of prejudice and discrimination, along with the social framework, within which the individual lives, plus taking into account the factor of a low to moderate income of a family's earnings (Sinno et al., 2014).

Eisenberg (1986) claims that, future studies should ask to revise the understanding of moral orientation on the ethics of justice and care. Although, Eisenberg et al., (1989) argue that Gilligan's assertion that women are inclined to rely more heavily on an ethic of care, implies some consideration of feelings of sympathy and concern, she nevertheless does not take into account the aspect of moral decision which is related to behaviour, as well as to the emotions of a person. Tangney & Dearing (2004) consider the latter as an integral part to understanding moral reasoning. Otherwise, Gilligan's theory, Tangney & Dearing posit, seems to be a general interpretation of how males and females feel about moral dilemmas with no appreciation of reasons, such as why the individuals are emotionally directed to weigh across either of justice or care (Rynes et al., 2012).

In relation to that, Baumrind (1986) and Walker (1986) have argued that a mere understanding on moral reasoning should not only be focused on gender differences of justice and care, but also in the nature and the substantive content of the prerequisites that preface them, such as attributes for and/or against pro-social/anti-social behaviour. In explaining the latter, Walker (1984) contends that there is actually little evidence about gender differences in the level of moral reasoning. According to Walker's account, that little evidence lacks any systematic consideration about moral emotion (Malti & Krettenauer, 2013).

Tangney and Dearing (2004), by expanding Walker's consideration on moral emotion, argue that there are two main issues which should be included in the discussion on moral reasoning among genders. The first is the issue of motivation, which they claim 'it has been ignored up today' (p. 133). The other issue relates to the 'critical loss of information about potentially competing motives operative in a given situation' (pp. 133-134). The latter questions whether there is a potential weight of empathy associated with shame, when moral dilemmas appear and people are called to form or justify an opinion.

In order to have a theory on moral reasoning which will examine and also interpret the aspect of emotional involvement in a moral dilemma, Blasi (1980) points out that such an orientation should be considered in relation to an individual's moral decisions and behaviour. According to Blasi (1980) there are three broad factors which include the understanding of emotional involvement in a moral dilemma: the moral standards, the moral background and the moral orientation of an individual. Moral standards, Blasi argues, refer to moral norms and

conventions. Moral background discusses, for Blasi, the acquisition and expression of accepted rules and ethical directions in an environment. Moral orientation represents, according to Blasi's account, an individual's knowledge on the culturally defined social information(Kang & Glassman, 2010). According to Skoe & Gooden (1993), the research on moral reasoning has been largely processed today. Tavris (1992) postulates that, the understanding of Kohlberg and particularly the understanding of Gilligan and Attanucci's expands the knowledge about the ethics of justice and care.

Conclusion

The research, replicated in this study, gives weight to the methodological criticism, both Gilligan and Attanucci have addressed, in respect to gender differences, i.e. males exhibit a justice orientation on moral dilemmas, while females a care-based one. However, according to White & Manolis (1997), there is an immediate need today these ethics to be expanded towards a systematic integration of how people tend to reason at higher levels of moral thought through a range of moral cognitive and moral emotional factors. In such a direction, a study on moral behaviour should not only be examined as an understanding of morality, but fervently more as a universal aspect of the human behaviour within given societies and intercultural settings.

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Appendix 1

A.

Betty, in her late thirties, has been married to Erik for several years. They have two children, 8 and 10 years old. Throughout the marriage Betty has been at home, looking after the house and the children. For the last few years Betty has felt increasingly unhappy in the marriage relationship. She finds her husband demanding, self-centred and insensitive as well as uninterested in her needs and feelings. Betty has several times tried to communicate her unhappiness and frustration to her husband, but he continually ignores and rejects her attempts. Betty has become very attracted to another man, Steven, a single teacher. Recently, Steven has asked Betty for a more intimate, committed relationship. Imagine you are Betty:
What are the conflicts for you in this situation?
What would you do?
Do you think that is the right thing to do?
How do you know?

B.

William, a 26 year old man, had decided to live on his own after having shared an apartment with a flatmate for the last three years. He finds that he is much happier living alone as he now has more privacy and independence and gets more work and studying done. One day his father, whom he has not seen for a long while as they do not get along too well, arrives at the doorstep with two large suitcases, saying that he is lonely and wants to live with William. Imagine you are William:
What are the conflicts for you in this situation?
What would you do?
Do you think that is the right thing to do?
How do you know?

C.

Sartre [1957] tells of a student whose brother had been killed in the German offensive of 1940. The student wanted to avenge his brother and to fight forces that he regarded as evil. But the student's mother was living with him, and he was her one consolation in life. Imagine you are that student:

What are the conflicts for you in this situation?
What would you do?
Do you think that is the right thing to do?
How do you know?

Appendix 2

Justice-Based Criteria for identifying moral reasoning
1.   REASON and LOGIC
2.   EXPLICIT PRINCIPLES
3.   IMPARTIALITY
4.   FAIRNESS
5.   AUTONOMY
6.   RIGHTS/OBLIGATIONS
7.   GOVERNS RELATIONS AMONG EQUALS
8.   COMPETITION (CONFLICTING INTERESTS)
9.   SELF-RELIANCE

Care-Based Criteria for identifying moral reasoning

1.   EMOTIONS
2.   RESPONSIVENESS TO SITUATIONS
3.   PARTIALITY
4.   COMPASSION, SYMPATHY OR EMPATHY
5.   INTER-CONNECTEDNESS
6.   RESPONSIBILITIES
7.   GOVERNS RELATIONS AMONG UNEQUALS
8.   COOPERATION (COMMON INTERESTS)
9.   TRUST