Gender, Life Experiences, and Moral Judgment Development: A Process-Oriented Approach

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to reexamine the issue of gender differences in moral development from a process-oriented perspective. We hypothesized that life experiences and value orientations toward those experiences would exert differential influences on the processes (but not necessarily the outcomes) of moral development for women and men. Ss were 52 men and 50 women (mean adult age = 26.8 years) who were tested over a 10-year period spanning from high school (1973) to young adulthood (1983). We used path analysis (using ordinary least squares regression) to estimate the effects of education experiences, occupational experiences, and marriage on Ss' moral judgment development (assessed using Rest's, 1979, Defining Issues Test). Although we found no significant outcome differences between women's and men's adult levels of moral development, education, or occupational attainment, we did find that the processes linking education, occupation, and marriage to adult moral development differed for men and women. We interpreted these results as reflecting the influence of contemporary patterns of sex role socialization on adult processes of moral development.

A critical issue in the area of moral development research was raised by Gilligan's (1977, 1982) claims of gender bias in Kohlberg's
theory and measurement of moral development (e.g., 1969, 1976). These charges were based on earlier studies that reported a sex difference favoring men over women in moral reasoning scores (Haan, Langer, & Kohlberg, 1976; Holstein, 1976; Kohlberg & Kramer, 1969). It was argued that, because existing (Kohlbergian) measures of moral judgment focused solely on the male-oriented justice perspective, the female-oriented care perspective of moral judgment was downgraded in the scoring system, resulting in the appearance of female inferiority in moral development.

Despite the intuitive appeal of these claims, their empirical support has been difficult to establish (Brabeck, 1983). Comprehensive reviews of moral development literature have revealed few consistent gender differences in modal stage scores using Kohlberg's production measure of moral judgment (Lifton, 1985; Walker, 1984, 1986b) or in eventual attainment of principled moral reasoning using Rest's Defining Issues Test (DIT), a comprehension/preference measure of moral judgment based on Kohlberg's theory (Rest, 1979, 1986; Thoma, 1986). Similarly inconclusive results have been reported in tests of differences in moral orientation (Ford & Lowery, 1986; Gibbs, Arnold, & Burkhart, 1984; Rothbart, Hanley, & Albert, 1986; Walker, de Vries, & Trevethan, 1987). Although differences have been reported in the consistency of men's and women's respective use of justice and care orientations, both orientations have been found to characterize both men's and women's thinking about moral issues.

Thus, despite more than a decade of empirical studies that have attempted to demonstrate gender differences in moral judgment development, few reliable differences have been reported. This lack of significant findings may simply mean that there are, in fact, no differences in women's and men's moral development. Alternatively, past research may not have looked in the right places. In the present study, we propose an alternative approach to the study of the relation between gender and moral judgment development that is not dependent on gender differences in moral development outcomes that are static representations of an individual's current reasoning. Rather, our approach is an attempt to view moral development as a dynamic social process that may be differentially affected by the socialization and life experiences of the individual. We propose to explore gender differences in the ways in which different life experiences contribute to, or detract from, men's and women's moral judgment development.

This approach is consistent with Deaux's (1984) analysis of gender research in the past decade. She noted that approaches focusing on sex as a subject or personality variable have made important, but limited, contributions to researchers' understanding of the relation between gender and social behavior. Furthermore, Deaux concluded that advances in this area would require a conceptual shift away from static views of gender and toward a process-oriented approach that treats gender-related phenomena as part of the larger social interactional context in which they occur.

The idea that different types of life experiences can affect the process of moral development is not new. Kohlberg (1969) initially proposed that role taking and conceptual conflict in interpersonal settings formed the basis of sociomoral experiences that made important contributions to the development of moral reasoning. Subsequent studies have confirmed the link between life experiences such as education and occupation and rate of moral development (e.g., Colby, Kohlberg, Gibbs, & Lieberman, 1983; Rest, 1979, 1986; Walker, 1986a). Further research into the nature of the effects of these variables found that global value orientations toward both education and occupation were significant predictors of moral judgment development (Deemer, 1986; Rest, 1986).

In the present study, we used path analysis (using ordinary least squares regression) to estimate the
effects of educational experiences, occupational experiences, and marriage on women's and men's moral judgment development over a 10-year period between high school and early adulthood. We hypothesized that, to the extent that behavioral and psychological expectancies associated with the interpersonal life experiences of women and men are influenced by gender stereotypes and reinforced by traditional patterns of sex role socialization (cf. Deaux, 1984), these experiences would differ in the contributions they would make to male and female models of moral judgment development. In the following sections, we suggest ways in which women and men might differ in the process of moral judgment development in each of these three life experiences.

**Education**

The fact that formal education plays a substantial role in moral judgment development is well-documented (Colby et al., 1983; Rest, 1986) and has been theoretically linked to general intellectual stimulation as well as to exposure to and reflection on social and moral issues in formal and informal interpersonal settings (Rest & Thoma, 1985). Colby et al. (1983) also pointed out that the effects of education cannot be explained as simple reflections of IQ or socioeconomic status, because the correlation between education and moral judgment (in their longitudinal sample at age 28) was still significant with both IQ and socioeconomic status partialed out.

Walker (1986a) has reported that, although education was a significant predictor for both sexes, it was more strongly correlated with men's moral development than with women's moral development. In addition, Baumrind (1986) found that, among those who earned graduate degrees, men used significantly more postconventional reasoning than did women. In contrast, among those who did not pursue higher education, men scored lower in moral reasoning than did women with similarly low levels of education. These findings led us to predict that educational experiences would have a stronger effect on men's moral development than they would on women's moral development.

**Occupation**

A second major focus in the life experiences of young adults is work. Because higher status occupations are often characterized by increased autonomy that may afford opportunities to participate in decision making and conflict resolution, they may be more likely than lower status occupations to facilitate the development of higher justice perspectives. That is, taking into consideration the rights and welfare of diverse groups of individuals who may be affected by one's judgments could be conducive to the development of higher sociomoral perspectives characteristic of principled moral reasoning. A moderate relation has, in fact, been reported between occupational status and moral development (Colby et al., 1983). We expected, however, that the effects of status on moral judgment would be mediated by the extent to which subjects identified with and were involved in the work experience. Those subjects whose careers provided a sense of identity and personal fulfillment were expected to reap the greatest benefits (in terms of moral development) from the work experience.

Although no studies to date have examined whether there are gender differences in the impact of occupational experiences on moral development, research into the relation between work experiences and psychological functioning has revealed some gender differences relevant to our study. Mortimer, Finch, and Maruyama (1988) found that, among young adults (aged 20–33 years), the stability of women's income and work experiences (i.e., the likelihood of working for the same employer), assessed longitudinally over a 4-year period (between 1973–1977), was lower than men's. These findings suggest that occupational experiences may be less central to the life experiences of younger women and thus would have a weaker impact on women's moral judgment development than on men's.
Marriage

The final aspect of the life experiences of young adults that we chose to include in our model was marriage. Although this factor has not been examined in previous studies, there are sound theoretical reasons for including it in the present study. Because of the intimate interpersonal nature of the marriage relationship, marriage can be expected to afford many unique opportunities for role taking and conflict resolution in situations of joint decision making (requiring the adoption of perspectives of other family members to arrive at just solutions to family problems) that would be expected to exert an influence on the process of moral development. Moreover, marriage is an experience that is particularly relevant to the issue of how stereotypic expectancies about sex roles may contribute to gender differences in the process of moral development. Many studies have reported that husbands generally have greater power in the marital relationship than wives (although this pattern seems to be somewhat moderated in relationships in which husbands and wives approach equality in earning power; Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Duncan & Duncan, 1978; England & Farkas, 1986) and that wives typically perform the majority of routine household chores regardless of whether they also work outside of the home (Nyquist, Slivkin, Spence, & Helmreich, 1985; Pleck, 1985). These findings suggest that married women (especially those who work outside the home) might not only have less time and opportunity to explore new roles and pursue personal development, but also may experience marriage as a state of reduced autonomy in which their opportunities to engage in joint decision making and conflict resolution are to some degree suppressed within the relationship. We therefore predicted that marriage would contribute less to women's moral development than it would to men's moral development.

Theoretical Model

Our theoretical model of moral judgment development is diagrammed in Figure 1. The model includes variables that measure education-related experiences (high school academic orientation, dedication to educational goals, and educational attainment), variables that measured occupation-related experiences (dedication to career goals, occupational attainment, and career fulfillment), and marriage. The model also includes a measure of high school moral judgment, which provided a baseline for estimating the contributions of prior moral judgment development to the life experiences and attitudes of young adulthood and allowed us to be able to separate these effects from those hypothesized to exist between the variables of interest and moral judgment development a decade after high school. The specification of the structural model was based on a logical reconstruction of the life processes measured by the model that took into account the meaning and approximate timing of the variables.

Figure 1. General theoretical model of moral judgment development. (P1 = moral judgment in adolescence, EdAtt = educational attainment, OccAtt = occupational attainment, FullOcc = fulfilling career, P2 = moral judgment in young adulthood.)

On the basis of reports of significant levels of stability in individual differences in moral reasoning between the mid- to late-teen years and the late twenties (Colby et al., 1983), we predicted that moral judgment in adolescence (P1) would exert a moderate direct influence on moral judgment in young adulthood (P2). We also expected to find a correlation between P1 and high school academic orientation.
because earlier studies have reported a moderate but significant relation between school achievement measures and the DIT (Rest, 1979). The path linking educational experiences to adult moral judgment development began with high school academic orientation. We predicted that those who were academically involved in high school would be more likely to be dedicated to the pursuit of higher education. Dedication and hard work in college were expected to predict educational attainment, which was hypothesized to make a direct contribution to moral judgment development in adulthood. The path linking occupational experiences to adult moral judgment development began with dedication to career goals and educational attainment, which were expected to predict occupational attainment. We did not, however, expect to find a direct path between occupational attainment and moral judgment development; rather, we predicted that occupational status effects would be indirectly linked to moral development through career fulfillment, a measure of meaningful involvement in one's work. Finally, we predicted that the opportunities for role taking and conflict resolution within the intimate interpersonal settings afforded by the marriage relationship would exert a direct influence on moral judgment development.

This general model served as a guide in our separate analyses of the male and female models. These models were expected to differ in accordance with the gender hypotheses described earlier. In general, we expected that moral judgment development would be more strongly determined by all three life experiences—education, occupation, and marriage—in the male model than they would be in the female model.

**Method**

**Subjects**

The 102 participants in this study were a subsample of Rest's (1979) longitudinal sample drawn from a mixture of urban and rural midwestern communities. The original sample consisted of 237 individuals, of whom approximately half were men and half were women. The severe reduction in sample size over the 10-year period occurred for a number of reasons: Identification numbers could not be linked with the name of the participant or high school testing data was unusable (53 cases), the participant could not be located (60 cases), a mutually agreeable interview time could not be arranged (10 cases), or the person declined to participate (12 cases). At the time of the initial contact, individuals were offered either $25 or a selection of books, which they received on completion of all testing materials.

The 52 men and 50 women in our study were first tested as high school students in the years 1972–1974 and were recontacted in 1983. They represented a roughly even distribution of gender across a diversity of educational backgrounds: 10 had no formal education beyond high school (5 men, 5 women), 17 attended technical school (9 men, 8 women), 22 completed fewer than 2 years of college (10 men, 12 women), 11 completed 2 or more years of college (5 men, 6 women), 28 were college graduates (15 men, 13 women), and 14 attended graduate school (8 men, 6 women). Forty-nine individuals were currently married (29 men, 20 women); 5 of these were remarried following an earlier divorce (2 men, 3 women). Of those who were classified as unmarried, 6 were divorced (4 men, 2 women).

**Procedure**

Participants were contacted by phone. If they agreed to participate they were sent a letter that explained the rationale and procedures of the experiment and a formal consent form. Before they were to be interviewed, participants were also mailed a packet of materials to complete and return to the interviewer. The packet included the DIT (Rest, 1979; see the next section for a description of this questionnaire) and a complete time-line questionnaire requesting information about influential individuals, living arrangements, and major life events throughout the period between 1972–1974 and 1983. They then participated in an extensive, structured interview concerning major life experiences from the time of high
school through young adulthood.

The interviewers (one woman, one man) were blind to any hypotheses about sex and to the participants' DIT scores. The interview was guided by an interview script that had been pilot-tested on 4 men and 4 women with diverse educational backgrounds (2 graduate students, 3 college seniors, 2 individuals with fewer than 2 years of college, and 1 individual who did not continue in formal education beyond high school).

We developed a coding manual with detailed descriptions of codes for the variables to be rated. Deborah Kay Deemer was primarily responsible for transcribing and coding the interviews. To establish reliability, a female college student who was blind to all hypotheses and to the participants' DIT scores was asked to independently score 24 transcribed interviews. These interviews were randomly selected from the total sample and then previewed by one of the authors to ensure that they included an adequate range of levels-of-experience codes and DIT scores, as well as a balanced demographic representation of the sample. No changes in the randomly drawn sample were necessary to ensure this diversity. We used two indexes for assessing agreement in coding: raw interrater percent agreement and Cohen's kappa. For the variables of high school academic orientation, dedication to education/career, and career fulfillment the interrater agreements were 90%, 79%, and 88%, respectively; Cohen's kappas were .85, .67, and .80, respectively.

Measurement of Variables

Moral judgment measurement: P1 and P2. [1]

The DIT was developed by Rest (1979) as an objective measure of moral judgment. This instrument is based on Kohlberg's (1969) cognitive developmental theory of moral development and consists of six hypothetical dilemmas. The subject is asked first to decide on an appropriate solution to the dilemma and then to rate the importance of 12 issue statements in resolving the dilemma. The majority of these statements represent Kohlberg's six stages of moral development; the remainder serve as reliability checks. Finally, the subject is asked to rank the 4 most important statements. The DIT score used in the present research is the P-score, which is the weighted sum of the ranked principled (i.e., Stage 5 or 6) choices made by the subject across the six DIT dilemmas. Alternative ways to combine the data from the six dilemmas have been examined with hundreds of data sets. The weighted sum of principled choices was found to be most generalizable across data sets. Rest (1979) reported internal consistency and test–retest reliabilities for the DIT in the high 0.70s and low 0.80s. P1 was the DIT P-score assessed in the first interview wave (1972–1974); P2 was the DIT P-score assessed in 1983. P1 scores ranged from 4 to 40; P2 scores ranged from 6 to 48.

Career fulfillment. [2]

This variable reflected a judgment about the extent to which subjects were invested in meaningful work that provided a sense of career identity. Career identity was defined as “awareness of one's capabilities and interests, and movement toward the utilization of these in the career” (Deemer, 1986, p. 22). Responses were coded on a scale ranging from 5 to 1, on which

5 = individuals who had identified a career that they found challenging and meaningful; their career meant something to them that was part of their identity.

4 = individuals who had made a commitment to a career field but were currently in transition between school and work or still in school.

3 = individuals who had no career identity, never planned to have a career, or were unable to succeed
in their field; they worked to earn a living but were not invested in or did not identify with their work.

2 = individuals who suffered from job insecurity characterized by prolonged unemployment or work in fields that were constantly under the threat of layoffs.

1 = individuals who did no meaningful work or who had no independent income.

**Occupational attainment.**

This was a measure of the participant's 1983 occupation, scaled according to the Duncan Socioeconomic Index.

**Educational attainment.**

This variable was scored on a six-item scale representing the highest level of education attained by 1983. Values were assigned as follows: 6 = graduate school, 5 = college graduate, 4 = 2 or more years of college, 3 = fewer than 2 years of college, 2 = technical school, 1 = no formal education beyond high school.

**Dedication to education/career.**

This variable focused on the years after high school and was a combination of two scored interview items, “educational orientation” for college students only and “career orientation” for those who did not attend college and who were just beginning their occupational careers. The two items were not available separately for this research. In both interview questions, participants were asked how actively they were involved in pursuing their work or educational goals. College students were asked how much time and effort they devoted to educational pursuits. Those who did not attend college were asked how strongly motivated they were to do well in their work. Both items were measured and were rated on a scale ranging from 3 to 1, on which

3 = individuals who worked hard at their studies or career goals, professed a desire to learn or advance in a career, and chose friends who were serious students or who were career oriented.

2 = individuals who were less involved in the pursuit of educational or career goals and chose more modest goals that did not reflect a strong desire for advancement.

1 = individuals who were confused about educational or career goals, were not invested in developing a career or in the academic side of college life, and chose friends that reflected these values.

**Academic orientation.**

This was an interview item that asked to what extent the person was invested in the academic aspects of high school. The concept behind this question was similar to that for dedication but was measured for the high school years. The item was scored on a 3-point scale, on which

3 = individuals who got good grades, studied hard, cared about school, and enjoyed reading.

2 = individuals who did their school work and were satisfied with average grades, but for whom academics took a backseat to athletics, a job, or social activities.

1 = individuals who reported little or no concern for academics in high school, made below average grades, disliked reading, and were only interested in jobs, athletics, and parties.
Statistical Procedures

We performed a basic simultaneous equations analysis (path analysis) using ordinary least squares regression. The analysis was conducted in two stages: (a) estimation of the theoretical model and (b) subsequent empirical testing of postulated theoretical relations in the manner suggested by Heise (1969) and Reis (1982).

For overidentified models, as is the case here, testing is done in two steps: (a) postulated paths are tested for significance, and (b) omitted paths are tested for nonsignificance. The latter test is based on the implicit assertion that every omitted path between an endogenous variable and a causally prior variable is mediated by the other variables in the system. The accuracy of such assertions can be tested for each endogenous variable by simply comparing the $R^2$'s of the theoretically specified model with those produced by reentering omitted paths. Those variables that significantly increase the $R^2$ must be represented in the final model with direct paths. We report the final models, along with the direct and indirect effects estimated using Wolfe and Ethington's (1985) GEMINI program.

Results

Means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations for both subsamples are reported in Table 1. Although we present this information primarily as background for the main analyses, there were some gender differences worth noting. The means of the two high school variables, moral judgment development (P1) and academic orientation, were significantly lower for women than for men. The P1 mean for women was more than 3 points lower than that for men, $t(100) = 1.98, p < .05$ (two-tailed), and the mean academic orientation for women was less than half of that for men, $t(100) = 2.55, p < .02$ (two-tailed). These differences are especially interesting in light of the fact that there were no gender differences in the educational, occupational, or moral judgment attainments assessed in 1983, and men and women did not differ significantly in any of the global value orientations or in marital status.

Table 1 Means, Standard Deviations, and Zero-Order Correlations for Female (Above the Diagonal) and Male (Below the Diagonal) Subsamples

Table 2 presents the standardized direct and indirect coefficients for the female and male models. Those coefficients that made a significant contribution to either model are included. The $t$ test for significant subsample differences is reported in Wilson (1980). All tests for significant differences between sub-samples were conducted with the metric coefficients. They are not included in the table because the standardized coefficients are more readily interpretable and reflect all the differences found with metric coefficients.
An examination of the coefficients of determination confirms our general expectation that the female model of moral judgment development would be less determined than the male model. The female model explains 46% of the variation in P2, whereas the male model explains 52%; omitting P1 (which was included primarily as a baseline referent) from the equation leaves $R^2$s of .41 and .50 for women and men, respectively. Although these results are in the predicted direction, they are not significantly different.

We did, however, find evidence that the life experiences of men and women differ significantly in their effects on moral judgment development. The total number of estimated direct effects was 15, and 6 of the effects in the female and male models differed at $p < .05$, with another 4 effects differing at $p < .10$. Thus, two thirds of the effects in the two models were different. The differences in the direct effects also produced several significantly different indirect effects. The processes linking education, occupation, and marriage to moral development are illustrated in Figures 2 and 3, which present the final models for women and men, respectively. In these models we have excised the insignificant effects that were included in Table 2 for purposes of statistical comparison of the two subsamples. Thus, this final reestimation of coefficients included only those effects that were significant within each model, rather than across the two models. We decided to include those paths in the models that were significant at the $p < .10$ level because of the relatively small sample sizes. In the following sections, we discuss each of the three processes as they relate to each model.
Education and Moral Judgment Development

Our model predicted that P1 would be correlated with academic orientation in high school and that academic orientation would influence a sense of dedication to educational goals. Dedication was expected to promote educational attainment, which was expected to make a significant contribution to adult moral judgment development. The male model conformed nicely to these predictions. P1 and academic orientation were correlated, and both were significant predictors of dedication (although the latter variable was by far the stronger of the two). P1 also had a direct effect on men's P2 scores. Dedication was subsequently a strong determinant of men's educational attainment, and educational attainment made a significant contribution to their moral development. Thus, dedication to goals played an important indirect role in men's moral judgment development through educational attainment (as well as through career fulfillment).

In the female model, P1 was also correlated with academic orientation, but the latter variable failed to produce any significant influence on either dedication to educational goals or educational attainment. However, P1 did exert a strong direct effect on women's educational attainment, as well as the most powerful direct effect on P2 in the female model. In addition, dedication was not significantly related to education in the female model and was not determined by high school academic orientation. It was, however, a direct predictor of women's moral judgment development. Thus, although educational attainment and P1 played a similar direct role in women's and men's moral judgment development, there were large significant differences favoring men in the direct effects of academic orientation on dedication to goals and of dedication to goals on educational attainment. Furthermore, the indirect effects of high school academic orientation and dedication on P2 were also significantly higher for men.

Occupation and Moral Judgment Development

We expected both educational attainment and dedication to the pursuit of career goals to contribute to occupational attainment. Attaining higher status in one's career was expected to afford more opportunities to find meaning and fulfillment in one's work experiences that would lead to moral judgment development. Although educational attainment had a significant effect on both men's and women's occupational attainment, this relation was significantly stronger for women. Having a fulfilling career also operated in an entirely different manner for women and men. For women, career dedication did predict occupational attainment, which led to career fulfillment, but neither occupational attainment nor career fulfillment was linked to women's moral judgment development. For men, dedication to career goals did not affect their occupational attainment, but it did have a direct effect on their career fulfillment (along with academic orientation and marriage). More important, having a meaningful career did produce the expected strong effect on P2 in the male model. In sum, although career issues were not directly related to women's moral judgment development, having a fulfilling career was the most powerful predictor of men's moral judgment development.

Marriage and Moral Judgment Development

The final major prediction in the model was that marriage would exert a direct influence on moral judgment development. We found, however, that women with a strong high school academic orientation were less likely to marry, and that marriage exerted a significant negative effect on women's P2 scores even after controlling for the effects of P1, dedication, educational attainment, occupational attainment, and fulfilling career. In contrast, marriage had no appreciable effect on men's moral judgment development.

Discussion
These findings clearly indicate that, although women and men did not differ in adult levels of moral judgment development, they nevertheless differed substantially in the processes that determined moral judgment development in adulthood. Specifically, we found that educational attainment was a predictor of moral development for both sexes, but that dedication to educational goals and high school academic orientation were important determinants of educational attainment only for men. Dedication and academic orientation were unrelated to educational attainment for women, but dedication had a direct effect on their moral judgment development. Although career fulfillment was the most powerful predictor of moral development in the male model, neither occupational attainment nor career fulfillment was related to women's moral development. Finally, whereas marriage detracted from women's moral judgment development and women with high academic orientations were less likely to marry, marriage had an insignificant effect on men's moral judgment development. We address each of these findings in the following paragraphs.

The first major difference involves the processes that worked through education to determine moral judgment development. Our prediction that educational attainment would exert a stronger influence on men's moral development than it would on women's was not supported. One possible reason why we failed to replicate earlier studies' findings of a gender difference is that subjects in those studies were from older cohorts than were our subjects. (The median ages for the Baumrind, 1986, sample were 38 years for women and 41 years for men; the mean age of the Walker, 1986a, sample was 39 years and ranged from 23 to 84 years of age.) Because of changes in traditional patterns of gender segregation in higher education that have taken place during the decade over which our cohort was studied (Wilson & Boldizar, in press), the women and men in our sample may have had greater opportunities for equal participation and representation in all aspects of the educational experience than did earlier cohorts, thus explaining the lack of a significant gender difference in the impact of educational attainment on moral judgment development.

However, the subjective value orientations toward education did reveal several gender differences. For example, the extent to which men reported that they were involved in and dedicated to educational goals had an indirect effect on their moral judgment development (primarily through their educational attainment and career fulfillment), whereas women's reported dedication to goals had a direct effect on their moral judgment development but bore no relation at all to their educational attainment. This configuration of results suggests that men's subjective academic orientations toward educational experiences afforded them opportunities for advancement within institutional settings, and these gains made important contributions to men's moral development. On the other hand, the process of women's moral development appears to have been a direct function of hard work and involvement in educational and career goals, independent of any opportunities for advancement these values might have afforded.

The second major difference is found in the processes linking occupational experiences to moral judgment development. As hypothesized, occupational attainment was not directly related to moral development in either model. Also as expected, the extent to which men were identified with, and found meaning and fulfillment in, their occupation was the most powerful direct predictor of their moral development. However, contrary to expectations, career fulfillment was not dependent on occupational status for men, and dedication was the strongest predictor of men's career fulfillment. For women, dedication and hard work predicted occupational status, which in turn led to career fulfillment; however, unlike men, finding meaning and fulfillment in their career did not lead to moral development.

We have no ready explanation for the lack of a relation between occupational attainment and career fulfillment in the male model. However, our hypothesis that younger women's higher levels of job instability (perhaps due to young women's attempts to balance work with home, family responsibilities, or both) would
lead to weaker effects of work on women's moral judgment development was generally confirmed. The different configuration of results in the two models indicates that, although women and men may not differ in objective measures of work experiences, the subjective factors that contribute to men's and women's perceptions of career fulfillment hold different meanings (with different implications for moral judgment development) for men and women. Future research will need to focus on more specific work-value indicators to explain these gender differences in the role of occupational experiences in moral development.

One problem in the interpretation of these results is that our measures of work experiences and moral development were assessed concurrently. Although the model hypothesizes that occupational experiences predict moral development, it is also quite possible that moral development leads to more opportunities for career advancement or to the choice of more meaningful or fulfilling careers. Our data indicate that high school moral development (P1) did have a significant impact on occupational attainment, but occupational attainment was not related to adult moral development (P2) in either model. On the other hand, whereas P1 and career fulfillment were only weakly related (in both models), the relation between career fulfillment and P2 was extremely powerful in the male model. It therefore seems likely that it was the perceived level of career fulfillment that affected men's adult moral judgment development rather than the reverse. Kohn and Schooler (1983) have also addressed the issue of reciprocal effects between various job characteristics (e.g., substantive complexity and occupational self-direction) and personality measures (e.g., authoritarian conservatism and self-esteem). They found that the effects of jobs on personality were more likely to be contemporaneous, whereas personality effects on job situations were more likely to be longterm consequences (i.e., lagged effects over a 10-year period). These findings suggest that, in our relatively young adult sample, the more reasonable causal direction is from work experiences to moral development; however, in an older, more work-experienced sample, a reciprocal influence may also be found. This hypothesis will be interesting to test in future longitudinal studies that include older working adults.

Finally, the third major difference between the male and female models of development is in the relation between marriage and moral judgment development. Our data indicate that although marriage did not affect men's moral development, it had a direct negative effect on women's moral development. It is noteworthy that marriage did not detract from women's educational attainment, lower their occupational attainment, or serve as an obstacle to finding a fulfilling career. We also found that women who had a strong academic orientation in high school were less likely to marry. Although the latter finding was not surprising, and is consistent with the stereotype that achievement-oriented women are less likely to pursue traditional female roles associated with early marriage, the former findings were not what we expected.

Clearly, a great deal more research is needed to pinpoint the exact mechanisms through which marriage detracts from women's moral judgment development. Given the relatively youthful age of our sample, age of marriage is one possibility that should be explored. Because the average marriage age of women in our sample was 21.3 years (and 21.6 years for men, both ages below the 1980 averages of 22.1 years for women and 24.6 years for men; Hacker, 1983), the married women in our sample may have had relatively limited opportunities to independently establish their own identities and life-styles before they became immersed in the gender role expectations of the marital relationship. Thus, the extent to which women have independently experienced a variety of social roles in which they have opportunities to engage in joint decision making and role taking prior to marrying may determine whether marriage detracts from the process of their moral judgment development. This hypothesis is consistent with Haan, Smith, and Block's (1968) finding that living independently, rather than with parents or in residences, in conjunction with higher levels of political and social activity, were significantly correlated with college students' moral reasoning scores.

Another issue related to sex role expectancies within the marriage relationship is that of bearing and...
raising children. Approximately 65% of the married women in our sample were mothers (and 59% of the married men were fathers). Research suggests that wives are expected to take primary responsibility for child rearing associated with this period in the family cycle (England & Farkas, 1986). Domestic power typically becomes more patriarchal with parenthood (Cowan, 1978; especially as women are more likely to be financially dependent on their husbands at this time), and even the most egalitarian couples tend to revert to traditional gender roles on the arrival of the first child (LaRossa & LaRossa, 1981). The fact that women are expected to take major responsibility for caring for children (in addition to other traditional duties) can also contribute to lower levels of involvement in social and career roles outside of the family (Rossi, 1983).

Because the majority of first marriages occur during the time span examined in our study, early adulthood appears to be a period of particular vulnerability for married women's potential moral judgment development. Indeed, it is notable that some of the most convincing examples of gender differences in modal stage scores of moral development have exclusively examined intact married couples (e.g., Baumrind, 1986; Haan et al., 1976; Holstein, 1976). The models developed in this study point to at least one reason why the differences reported in these studies should not be dismissed.

We have emphasized the strong probability that the age of our sample, as well as the relatively small sample size, restricts the generalizability of specific findings. It is also important to interpret these results in light of the fact that we used Rest's (1979) DIT as our measure of moral judgment. Although its reliability and validity are well established, the DIT is a comprehension/preference measure, in contrast to Kohlberg's production (interview) measure of moral judgment. This difference has been related to a pattern of gender differences on the DIT that, although weak, has consistently favored women (Thoma, 1986). This may have limited the probability that we would find support for a gender bias in moral judgment outcomes that favored men. On the other hand, if we therefore consider the DIT a more conservative means of assessing gender differences in moral judgment development, our finding that marriage significantly detracted from women's development takes on even greater importance.

Despite these caveats, we believe that the process-oriented approach to the study of gender differences in moral judgment development provides a means of resolving some of the controversy that has surrounded this issue. Although we did not test for gender differences in the process of developing a care orientation to moral dilemmas, our findings support Gilligan's (1982) general contention that developmental theories must work to understand and incorporate the life experiences and perspectives of women as well as those of men. At the same time, we also found support for the positions of Rest (1986) and Walker (1984)—among others—who have argued that women's moral development can be adequately assessed on a Kohlbergian-derived measure. We demonstrated that, although women are not morally inferior to men when assessed on these measures, their experiences make contributions to their development that are very different from those of men. It is perhaps those specific experiences that make negative contributions to women's development on Kohlbergian-derived measures (such as marriage) that may be more amenable to measurement on a care-oriented Gilligan-derived measure.

References


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1The distinction we make between outcomes and processes of moral development is not intended to parallel the content/structure distinction that has been a controversial focus of much moral development research (cf. Nisan, 1984). Rather, we use these terms to call attention to the fact that whereas outcomes are static measurements that differentiate between levels of adult development at a single point in time, processes are the unique configurations of dynamic social and psychological experiences that underlie these differences (or similarities) in developmental endpoints. [Context Link]

2The magnitude of indirect effects is estimated by multiplying the coefficients of an indirect causal chain (such as x-a-b-y) and adding that result to the results of similar multiplications for any other alternative
causal sequences (such as x-a-c-y). The result is the total indirect effect, and adding that amount to the direct effect yields the “total” effect. The examination of indirect effects focuses our attention on the “systemic” quality of our theorizing and on the interrelations or processes existing between variables as a complementary perspective to a focus on the final outcome, the dependent variable. [Context Link]

Interpretations of subsample differences should usually be made using the metric coefficients, as the standardized coefficients are subject to bias resulting from any significant differences in variable variances across populations. [Context Link]

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