

Moral Reasoning

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I consider moral reasoning to be the ability to determine right and wrong, and the desire to do what is morally right whether or not anyone is watching. My moral reasoning is based on traditional Christian teaching. Santrock (2009) explained moral reasoning and moral development includes a person's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of what is considered to be standard right and wrong. He considered moral development to encompass two dimensions – intrapersonal and interpersonal.

Santrock (2009) discussed that some researchers argue the difference between moral reasoning and social conventional reasoning. In this discussion he mentioned that moral reasoning is not personal judgments nor arbitrary, but exist apart from social norms and are concepts of justice and ethics. Social conventions however are arbitrary and a means of organizing and controlling social behavior (Santrock, 2009). I disagree slightly with Santrock in regards to moral reasoning not being influenced by social norms.

Moral Reasoning and Gender

Carol Gilligan's research focused on the limitations of Kohlberg's theory which focused on male norms and moral reasoning based on abstract principles and individual rights apart from relationships (Santrock, 2009). Some critics doubt Gilligan's research indicating that girls tend to consider the human relations within their moral reasoning more readily than males. Some researchers have found that there is little gender differences on how males and females use care reasoning with interpersonal dilemmas, and use of justice reasoning for societal dilemmas (Santrock, 2009). Carlo et al (1996) found that females are more likely to internalized and preferred stereotypic reasoning, rejecting approval oriented reasoning which was used more by boys in prosocial moral reasoning. This study indicated that female adolescents utilized more emotional based reasoning such as empathy.

Bussey and Maughan (1982) study results indicated males score higher on the moral reasoning scale than females when male characters are used in the scenario. They also found that males will score lower and match female scores if the scenario utilized a female; the males assume the female in the scenario will utilize reasoning based emotion. The findings included that regardless of the character (male or female) utilized in the scenario, female scores on moral reasoning did not change. However Snarey, Reimer and Kohlberg (1985) did not find any gender difference in moral judgment of Kibbutz adolescents. It seems as though there is no real conclusive evidence as to whether there is a gender differences concerning moral reasoning.

Moral Reasoning and Culture

As discussed previously, moral reasoning is separate from social norms as defined in the American culture; in contrast Indian social rules are on the same level as moral rules which are considered natural world order (Santrock, 2009). Miller, Bersoff, and Harwood (1990) study indicated that Indians hold a broader view of social moral responsibility. Indians viewed responsiveness to a person's need as a moral obligation regardless if the need is minor or life threaten; in contrast, Americans found the obligation only stands if the need is life threatening or involving a child. This study supports my argument at the beginning of this paper that social standards does guide moral reasoning, that there is not a universal moral standard.

Snarey, Reimer and Kohlberg (1985) found one similarity between cultures for moral reasoning – it develops in predictable stages. However they did find some differences as to the subcultures influences of norms on moral choices when dilemmas were concerning father-son scenarios. The findings of research indicate that general moral development is generally the same, while specific choices of certain scenarios may be influenced by some cultural differences.

References

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