What To Teach in Moral Education: Lessons From Research On Age and Sex Differences in Adult Moral Reasoning

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Research on moral reasoning in adults has developed largely on the basis of studies involving students in the age range 18-25 years. Until recently, this research also was characterized by a disproportionate use of male subjects. Over a period of five years, the authors and their colleagues conducted a series of studies aimed at clarifying the nature of sex differences and age differences in the moral reasoning of adults in three broad age groupings — under 25, 35-50, and over 60. This paper attempts to summarize the major conclusions from this body of research and to use it as the basis for suggesting changes in both the content and the teaching methodology used in programs of moral education for both adults and children.

Jusqu'a récemment, la recherche portant sur le développement du jugement moral chez les adultes s'est faite à partir de populations d'étudiants dont l'âge variait entre 18 et 25 ans. Les femmes y sont généralement peu représentées. Au cours des cinq dernières années, les auteurs et leurs collègues ont mené une série de recherches dans le but de clarifier l'impact des facteurs d'âge et de différentiation sexuelle dans le raisonnement morla, à partir d'un groupe d'hommes et de femmes de moins de 25 ans, de 35-50 ans, et de 60 ans et plus. Cet article se propose d'abord de présenter les conclusions de cet ensemble de recherches, puis à partir de ces indications, de suggérer des changements de méthodologie et de contenus dans les programmes d'éducation morale destinés aux adultes et aux enfants.

Introduction

If one were to try to catalogue the sources which could be consulted by moral education specialists developing curriculum materials or activities, the list would be very long indeed. Over the last twenty years, however, one very strong influence has been research and theory in the area of moral development, especially work related to the cognitive developmental theory of Lawrence Kohlberg (e.g., Kohlberg, 1963, 1976, 1984). His stage theory and the dilemmas used to measure individual development have dominated both research in moral development and practice in moral education since the 1960's. It is reasonable, then, that researchers in the field of moral development should attempt to discuss the implications of their research for the practice of moral education. In this paper we will discuss directions for moral education that seem consistent with the findings of a recently completed series of studies on age and sex differences in adult moral reasoning.

Although most research and discussion of moral education has focussed on school-age children (though early intervention work was based on adult prisoners

(e.g. Kohlberg, Scharf & Hickey, 1972)), we wish to argue that the results of studies of moral reasoning in adults should also be of interest to moral educators for three reasons:

1) Much of the development that is described in Kohlberg's theory begins in adolescence and continues into adulthood.
2) Responsible adult reasoning is undoubtedly a goal of school-based moral education programs.
3) The growing importance of "lifelong learning" may mean that more opportunities to provide adult moral education exist than was the case in the recent past (although it should be noted that moral education in the context of adult study of religion has a long history).

To give the reader a better understanding of the context of our comments, we begin by reviewing briefly the issues that led to our research on sex differences and age differences in moral reasoning. We then provide a summary of some of our more important findings and also, consider the implications of our findings for both adult and school-based moral education.

Sex Differences

Kohlberg's original research (see Kohlberg, 1964, for a review) included only male subjects, but his theory was a general model of the development of moral reasoning. Early studies (e.g., Holstein, 1976) reported the existence of a sex difference in stage attainment, men more frequently being classified as Stage 4 and women more often classified as Stage 3. Observation of these findings and the results of her own interviews with women led Gilligan (1977) to argue that the measurement methods used by Kohlberg were influenced by male considerations of what constitutes morality. She speculated that men and women have "different voices" in speaking about morality: Men's moral reasoning tends to centre on issues of justice or fairness (focusing on individual rights) while women's moral reasoning is more attuned to care and compassion (focusing on personal responsibility and the consequences of moral choices). Because of the strong emphasis on justice issues in the Kohlberg dilemmas, Gilligan considered the apparent difference in stage attainment to be the result of sex bias in the measurement of moral development.

The finding of sex differences in average or typical stage attainment was not, however, a universal finding (e.g., Rest, 1979). Moreover, Gilligan's research included only female subjects and used different questions from those posed by Kohlberg, making direct comparisons impossible. In a review of later research, Walker (1984) judged that the evidence could not support the conclusion that sex differences in stage attainment exist if the most recent Kohlberg scoring system were used and the educational attainment of the subjects were held constant. Still, the issue is not completely resolved since Walker's methodology has been

challenged (Baumrind, 1986; Walker, 1986).

Whether or not differences exist in the stage attainment of men and women, Gilligan's hypothesis about different styles of reasoning (different voices) deserves serious consideration. A study by Golding & Laidlaw, (1979) supported the idea that women's moral judgements are influenced by considerations of care but this work used only female subjects. For research to determine whether or not sex differences exist, it would be necessary to measure both male and female subjects with the same set of questions and the same scoring system. We believed it would be possible to do so within the Kohlberg scoring system, since there is the possibility of examining the "elements" of moral reasoning that reflect the individual's ethical theory. Kohlberg has described three major orientations based on these elements — fairness/justice, utilitarian, and perfectionist/ideal self. Since the perfectionist orientation is defined to include not only a quest for self-improvement but also a desire to aid others in improving themselves, it seemed to us to capture some sense of the caring orientation Gilligan ascribes to women, while fairness/justice is the orientation she ascribes to men. We therefore used these element scores as a means of also examining sex differences in the moral orientations of our subjects in addition to the procedures recommended by Gilligan (1982) & Lyons (1983).

Age Patterns

It has been shown that cognitive abilities and judgements generally decrease in efficiency with age in subjects past middle age (Salthouse, 1982). Specifically, Bielby and Papalia (1975) found that the average moral stage level of the oldest group of subjects in their study was lower than that of the younger adults and similar to that of teenagers. However, age differences in performance on cognitive measures is small or nonexistent in groups of subjects that have similar educational attainments (Denny & Thissen, 1983). Other researchers (e.g., Labouvie-Vief, 1980, 1982) interpret old age as a period in which new, sophisticated cognitive structures may develop. Along those lines, Kohlberg (1973) argued that some individuals may advance to new levels of ethical thinking in old age and speculated (Kohlberg & Power, 1981) that the "meta-philosophical" reflectivity of some older people could justify the extension of his stage system to include a transcendental seventh stage.

A decline in cognitive functioning in the domain of moral reasoning seemed to us to be inconsistent with the image of the "elder" in many societies. It also seemed that the question of age differences in stage attainment might be insufficiently precise: might not the moral orientations discussed above be a useful tool for a more detailed analysis? We were aware that stage theories of development generally involve two distinct processes, stage change and consolidation of the cognitive structures of the new stage (e.g., Kohlberg & Mayer, 1972). We wondered whether Kohlberg's concept of philosophical reflectivity might be interpreted as a form of consolidation. Finally, we wondered whether any age differences that

might exist would be the same for men and women. If different moral orientations dominated the reasoning of each sex, was it possible that different patterns of age-related change would accompany those different orientations?

Summary of the Research Program

Research Methods

The studies reported in this section are based on data collected from adult volunteers over a five year period beginning in 1980. The design was cross-sectional, comparing the responses of male and female subjects in three age ranges on a variety of moral reasoning measures.[1] In initiating the study, we were concerned about a number of lacunae in the existing moral development research, particularly with respect to sex differences. First, most of the research on moral development was based on studies of adolescents and young adults. Second, there had been much speculation about sex differences in moral development, but we were unable to locate research that directly compared male and female samples using identical measurement techniques and methods. Third, many of the studies that focused on women's reasoning relied on very small samples. We sought to remedy these problems by gathering data on male and female adults in three age ranges — under 25, 30-50, and over 60.

All of our studies involved 10 or more subjects in each age/sex category so that total samples were always 60 or more subjects. The subjects were volunteers; many were university students; others, particularly in the two older groups, were recruited through civic groups or church organizations. These sampling procedures resulted in a pool of subjects who were better educated than the norm and possibly, because of their religious and civic commitments, more concerned about issues of morality. Subjects were interviewed individually and their responses recorded and transcribed for later scoring. The scorer was trained in the Kohlberg system at Harvard and showed very high interrater reliability with scorers on the staff at Harvard. Whenever possible, the scorer knew nothing of the specific hypotheses being tested. Subjects were paid a small honorarium ($15.00) since the full assessment package took two hours or more.[2] This review will be limited to a general sketch of the research program and a presentation of the results that seem to have the most applicability to education.

One of our concerns as we undertook the study was the major difference in the measurement techniques employed by Kohlberg and Gilligan. The former used hypothetical dilemmas structured to pit one moral value against another (e.g., Kohlberg, 1976). The latter asked subjects to talk about moral dilemmas they had actually encountered in their lives. (For example, in Gilligan's (1982) research, the subjects were women who had made personal decisions about whether or not to have an abortion — clearly an issue with limited, and different, applicability to men.) We wondered whether the differences Gilligan and others saw in women's reasoning could be a result of the kinds of real-life moral

dilemmas they had dealt with, whether men and women would recall different kinds of personal moral problems, whether older subjects might respond differently simply because they had had more time to encounter moral problems, and whether older subjects' experience of life might alter their entire perception of the measurement situation. For example, both of us had encountered mature students who would, after hearing a lecture on Kohlberg's theory, spontaneously discuss such real life moral dilemmas as euthanasia for a parent. We therefore planned to get responses to both real-life and hypothetical types of dilemmas from subjects in one of our studies.

Results — Sex Differences

Since level of education has been shown to correlate significantly with scores on Kohlberg's Moral Judgment Interview (MJI) (e.g., Bielby & Papalia, 1975), we covaried education level in our analyses. Consistent with Walker's (1984) review of the literature, we did not find sex differences in stage attainment as measured by the Weighted Average Score (WAS) from the MJI in any of our studies.

We used the Kohlberg element scores as an indication of moral judgement orientation. While we did not find any consistent overall sex differences in our subjects' uses of the different elements, we did find that among those subjects whose protocols included some reasoning at the highest of Kohlberg's levels — the principled level — women made significantly more use of the *perfectionist elements than did men. We also found that women made less use of the fairness elements. This result does not support Gilligan's view that men and women develop according to different patterns, but it is consistent with the distinction she makes between men's focus on rights and women's focus on responsibility if we restrict that difference to those whose moral reasoning is relatively mature. Since Gilligan's subjects were highly educated residents of the Cambridge area, it is possible that there was a sampling bias in her study that over-represented subjects capable of making some use of principled thought. In another group of subjects we found that, given the opportunity to ask for additional information, women at the higher stages of moral development want to know more about the consequences of a decision for those involved. Men and lower stage women did not show this pattern so clearly. For example, when asked to judge whether a dilemma was or was not an example of a moral problem, men who use principled level thinking judged the Kohlberg "rights-oriented" dilemmas as better examples than did men who use lower stage reasoning. On the other hand, women who used higher stage reasoning judged the "altruism" or "caring" dilemmas to be better examples of moral problems. It appears, then, that a morality of care based on responsibility may be characteristic of advanced moral reasoning in women while issues of rights and justice characterize advanced moral reasoning in men. These are, of course, group trends; our data do not preclude the possibility of individuals of either sex developing advanced moral reasoning based on any of the Kohlberg elements. It must also be noted that these conclusions are restricted

to reasoning about hypothetical moral dilemmas of the type used by Kohlberg. We will comment on real-life moral dilemmas in a later section.

We also examined the role of sexual self-concept (sex role identity) in relation to moral reasoning. We found a significant positive correlation between MJI stage attainment and self-reports that were higher on attributes stereotypically associated with the opposite sex (using the Personal Attributes Questionnaire of Spence and Helmreich, 1978). Further, we found that men's use of the perfectionist elements was negatively related to their score on masculinity and that women's use of those elements was positively correlated with the degree of difference between their masculinity and their femininity scores. Thus it seems that while one's actual biological sex is not related to the level of moral reasoning one attains, the tendency toward less sex-stereotypical self perceptions is linked to the development of advanced moral reasoning. It also seems that the way in which an individual thinks about moral problems (the elements he or she uses) is related to sexual self-perception.

Results — Age Differences

We did not find lower average scores on measures of moral reasoning for older adults as compared to middle-aged adults. Neither the MJI nor a slightly modified version of Rest's Defining Issues Test (DIT), (Rest, 1979) showed our subjects over 60 to be significantly lower in performance than the 30-50 year olds. We did find somewhat lower MJI (but not DIT) scores in a group of young men (18 -24), but this finding may reflect a sampling bias. The young men in that study were enrolled in courses at a predominantly women's university which might mean that some sort of unidentified self-selection process was at work. The fact that this group's scores were lower than is customarily found in studies of their peers also suggests that this particular group was in some way atypical. Still, a qualitative analysis of reasoning across our studies revealed that use of principled reasoning (Kohlberg's most advanced stage) was rare among this youngest adult group and more common in the samples of middle-aged and older adults.

To analyze orientation differences further, in one study we asked subjects to respond to a story-pair task similar to the one used by Piaget in his 1932 studies of children's moral reasoning. Subjects were asked to indicate which of two stories represented a character whose behaviour was "worse." In each story pair, one involved a character who violated someone's rights and one involved a character whose behavior caused harmful consequences. A sample of the story pairs is:

1) Rights Violation:
   Dr. Jones believes that a patient of his, Mr. Adams, requires a particular heart operation. However Dr. Jones is afraid that if he tells Mr. Adams about the dangers involved, Mr. Adams will refuse the operation. So he doesn't tell him all the details. Fortunately the operation goes well and

there are no complications. Later Mr. Adams discovers what happened and he is angry that information was withheld.

2) Negative Consequences:
   Dr. Gray has a policy of keeping his patients informed about their condition. One of his patients, Mr. Ross, is a very anxious person who will worry a great deal about the information Dr. Gray has to give concerning his heart condition. When he is told, it causes a serious deterioration in his condition and sets his recovery back a long time. Dr. Gray knew Mr. Ross was a real worrier and might be upset but felt he had to follow his policy.

We then examined the subjects' justifications for their choices, looking for evidence of use of consequence-oriented reasoning and for evidence of rights-oriented reasoning. We found that the oldest subjects used rights-oriented reasoning somewhat less frequently than the subjects in the two younger groups (48% of the reasons cited vs. 68% for middle and 70% for younger groups). Although this is consistent with the idea that there is a decline, with age, in use of the justice element in moral reasoning (e.g., Murphy & Gilligan, 1980), it is important to remember that our samples were cross-sectional, not longitudinal, and the data were not obtained with the MJI. In summary, the only substantial age trend we found in levels of moral reasoning was greater use of principled reasoning among more mature adults. We found only modest and inconsistent age differences in moral reasoning orientations in these adult samples.

One reason for our using two different measures of stage of moral reasoning is that the two approaches assess different facets of reasoning (e.g., Rest, 1983). The MJI requires subjects to generate their own reasoning about the dilemmas presented while the DIT permits subjects to choose among statements that are prototypical of different stages of moral development. Although the two measures tend to correlate around .50 with one another, it is often noted that DIT scores for individuals tend to be higher than MJI scores. This is often referred to as a performance/production deficit and taken to mean that individuals understand and prefer moral reasoning at a level higher than that which they are able to produce independently. While we found a correlation between the MJI and the DIT of .40, close to the norm, for our overall sample, we also examined the correlations separately by age group. We found essentially no correlation between these two measures in the youngest group, a .37 correlation for the middle group, and a .70 correlation for the oldest group. Examination of the data suggested that this difference reflected a notable absence of the performance/production deficit in our oldest group. This may be taken to mean that mature adults are no longer engaged in the process of growth toward a higher stage of reasoning, but it also may suggest that they are better able to articulate the highest stage of moral reasoning that they are capable of understanding. Perhaps this phenomenon is what has contributed to the perception of elders as wise — that they can fully and consistently explain their reasoning about moral problems while younger people,

engaged in the process of growth, struggle between the reasoning they are striving toward and the reasoning they can currently produce (cf. Dittman-Kohli & Baltes, 1984).

Hypothetical vs. Real-life Moral Dilemmas

In some of our studies subjects were asked not only to respond to Kohlberg's hypothetical dilemmas but also to discuss a personal experience that they felt required a moral decision. We found that men and women subjects tended to discuss different types of problems and that the stage scores for personally recalled stories were, on average, somewhat lower than those on hypothetical dilemmas. Clearly, these findings suggest that it is inappropriate to build theories of moral reasoning around conclusions about sex differences that have been derived from the contrast between results obtained using hypothetical dilemmas for male subjects and results obtained using real life dilemmas for female subjects.

Implications for Teaching

The studies reviewed in the previous section were conducted as basic research in the general area of developmental psychology, but the authors are also interested in how findings of research in psychology may influence the practice of educators. Much of what follows consists of informed speculation that reflects our thinking about what the findings reported here might mean to people involved in moral education with either adults or children. In many cases, it might be possible to submit these suggestions to empirical examination and we hope that this will, in fact, happen. Practitioners in the helping professions, however, must often make decisions on the basis of the best information available at the moment and cannot wait for research to provide answers, especially since the answers remain tentative under the best of conditions. We offer this analysis, then, not only with the expectation that it will suggest further research, but also with the hope that it will serve those involved in moral education by functioning as a catalyst for more productive thinking about the needs of learners and the dynamics of individual differences.

Adult Learners

As noted earlier, it is unusual to regard moral education as a component of adult education, yet many of the adult subjects in our studies were individuals who were actively involved in church programs, including such programs as Bible Study and Catechetics. Certainly, those interested in moral education would hasten to point out that moral education and religious education are not synonymous, but few would claim that religious education is unconcerned with moral issues. In fact, one might describe religious education as having two major concerns — faith and morals. Likewise, the popularity of self-improvement courses for adults

suggests that many individuals continue to be concerned about their own personal development throughout their lives. Discussions of moral dilemmas may well be an appropriate focus for some such courses. In presenting some of the above results to a "senior citizens''' group enrolled in an introductory psychology course, one of the authors has found the participants to be particularly enlivened by the opportunity to talk about the ways in which they perceived their own moral reasoning to change as they matured. It seems, then, that while we may not offer courses labeled "moral education" for adult learners, for many, the process of moral education continues throughout adulthood. What do the results of these investigations imply about that process? It may be useful to separate the implications into two groups — implications for method and implications for content.

First of all, those involved in adult moral education should perhaps recognize that their students may have very different personal goals depending on their age. Young and middle-aged adults may be interested in hastening their own development. They may wish to resolve conflicts between competing moral values or to struggle with concepts or reasoning they have heard but do not fully understand. They may be striving for growth or advancement. Older adults are likely to be less driven. They may want to apply or explain what they already understand and they may seem complacent in their acceptance of some already-worked-out system for moral decision making. They may even seem adamant in their resistance to alternate views or different solutions to a problem. Adult educators are accustomed to respecting the aims and wishes of their students, but this resistance to change may seem to be resistance to learning, which we have come to associate with change. It may be useful for us to regard the process of moral education for older adults as a process of overlearning — rehearsal and mastery. So doing should help us to avoid devaluing the progress that is being made when adults come to a more complete, more satisfying, more consolidated personal system for moral reasoning. We might then find that our thoughts on methods of moral education differ in the context of overlearning. For example, the discussion of moral dilemmas is probably the most prevalent technique in moral education. It has become fairly standard to arrange such discussions in ways that maximize individuals' exposure to higher stage thinking, e.g., by assuring that there is heterogeneity in the measured stages (MJI scores) of participants and insuring that the higher stages of reasoning are well represented in the course of discussions. The intent of these procedures is to encourage development toward higher stages of reasoning. For older learners, we ought to consider whether such procedures would have the same effect or whether the divergence of opinion might lead only to confusion and frustration. If overlearning is the process that describes the later stages of adult moral development then it may be more profitable to engage older learners in discussions with individuals whose stage of reasoning is comparable to their own. It might even be profitable to consider mixed age groups in which the older subjects serve as resource people who explain their reasoning to younger people who are struggling to attain that level of reasoning. Such a procedure not only

respects the achievements made by older adults, but is also consistent with the role that "elders" have played in many societies.

With respect to the content of adult moral education, perhaps our most fruitful suggestion is that learners be informed that the evidence from research on adults (reported above) suggests that this is one area of cognitive functioning in which a decline with age may not occur and that, in the absence of disease or senility, moral reasoning may continue to develop throughout the lifetime. In recognition of the sex and age differences in orientation to moral reasoning, it would be wise to structure discussions so that the perfectionist, self-improvement, elements of moral reasoning get approximately the same amount of attention as the fairness or rights elements. Such a procedure would also be consistent with Walker's (1986b) finding that most individuals use different orientations frequently. Adult learners might also profitably be engaged in discussions of how they perceive the differences in men's and women's thinking about moral problems as well as discussions about how they have perceived changes in their own reasoning over time. Along these lines, it should be remembered that there is some evidence that men and women seem to respond somewhat differently when asked for personal moral dilemmas. Women are more likely to discuss relationship issues, suggesting that these issues may be of greater concern in their lives. There is nothing in our research, however, which suggests that there is particular merit in defining moral reasoning in a way that restricts its content to either the hypothetical or to the real, to relationship problems or to impersonal problems. Likewise, we have no reason to believe that there is virtue in perceiving questions of fairness or justice to be better representatives of the domain of moral reasoning than questions of responsibility, compassion or altruism. If we are to engage learners fully in a process of moral education, it is important that we strive to work with questions that allow individuals to identify their own moral concerns in the contexts we provide. This could mean taking pains to develop discussion questions or role plays that are open to multiple interpretations or it could mean insuring that we use a variety of questions (and/or role plays and/or materials) that represents the diversity covered by individual differences. That is, we should include hypothetical and real dilemmas as well as issues of justice and issues of responsibility in all of the possible combinations.

Finally, adult educators should recognize that we are far from fully understanding the processes of moral reasoning or how those processes differ for people of differing ages, sexes, social or cultural backgrounds, education levels and so on. This recognition should lead them to be cautious in their assertions, open to new or different ideas and interpretations, and respectful of the insights of the people with whom they work.

Moral Education In Schools

Deriving implications for the moral education of elementary and secondary school children from research based on adult subjects is an even more speculative

venture than deriving implications for adult education. Moreover, other writers have argued that the question of sex differences in moral reasoning is essentially an adult issue (e.g., Baumrind, 1986). However, educational objectives often reflect our intention to move children in the direction of some desirable end achieved in adulthood (cf. Kohlberg & Mayer, 1972). The value of algebra, for example, lies in part in its usefulness in solving a wide variety of problems in the real world of business and industry. The entire social studies curriculum can be justified by the need to encourage the development of an informed and active electorate. Advocates of "traditional values" are, in essence, saying that some model of a moral adult (honest, loyal, trustworthy, pious) implies a set of values that must be taught directly to children. It is reasonable, therefore, that our understanding of adult moral reasoning and development ought to have bearing on how (method) and what (content) we teach children.

Again, the methods of moral education consist largely of presenting a problem (orally, in a reading, a role play, a film, etc.) followed by discussion of the issues involved in coming to some solution of the problem. Children are encouraged to listen closely for ideas that seem "good" to them and to try to understand the reasoning of others. They are also encouraged to express and defend their own ideas. Such discussions may themselves become foci of moral reflection as the teacher and students attempt to assure that those who wish to speak may and, at the same time, attempt to encourage full participation. The results of our studies leave us little to say about this method, but it is worth reiterating that older people may be particularly good at explaining and applying their own stage of moral reasoning. Older people in the community might then be valuable participants in the moral education discussions of children since they would be more consistent models of a given stage of reasoning than would a child or adolescent who is simultaneously struggling to comprehend a still higher stage of reasoning. If this technique is to be successful, the teacher should take care to insure that the children understand that older people are to be treated with respect, and that this may mean that the children should be less vigorous in their defense of their own views when an older person takes part in the discussion.

Our findings yield more possibilities with respect to the content of moral education with children. All of the suggestions that pertained to adult moral education content would also apply here. That is, there should be a concerted effort to represent the full scope of the domain of moral reasoning. For example, even though our results do not address the question of what age and sex effects exist in the school age population, the differences that exist in adulthood may be seen as defining the domain. Whether or not twelve-year-olds respond differently to hypothetical vs. real moral problems, the fact that this distinction seems to play a role in determining adult responses to moral problems suggests that there is value in providing students with the opportunity to consider both kinds of questions. It may also suggest that there would be value in asking students whether and how this distinction affected their decisions. Likewise, it may be useful to ask students about the differences between problems that focus on

justice issues and problems that focus on issues of responsibility. Such a discussion might help students to perceive the difference between moral obligation and moral choice.

Since age and sex discrimination have become significant moral and legal issues, the findings we have reported acquire a kind of moral content of their own. That is, if we are to treat one another fairly, without regard to age or sex, we must know the ways in which age and sex do contribute to real differences among individuals. Gilligan's observation that a justice-oriented measure of moral reasoning might under-represent the moral development of women is an example of the ways in which being ''fair'' might mean respecting differences rather than ''treating every one the same.'' Teachers should therefore attempt to notice whether there are consistent differences in the kinds of comments made by female and male students during discussions of moral issues. The findings reported here for adults may help to sensitize teachers to the kinds of differences that may exist. If such differences should appear, the individual teacher will have to deal with the question of how to respond to them. Depending on the circumstances, it may be wise to say nothing (e.g., if the teacher judged that the boys in the class would seize the opportunity to claim superiority) or it may be better to point out and discuss the differences. In any case, the objective ought to be for students to understand and appreciate the thinking of their classmates of both sexes. It may well be that the greatest success in achieving this objective could result from the teachers taking an active role in paraphrasing and repeating student comments to insure that they were understood by students of both sexes or by asking a student of the opposite sex to paraphrase any sex-stereotypical positions when they are voiced. No matter what strategy is employed, the teacher must take care to avoid creating the impression that either sex has a claim to the moral high ground; if sex differences in reasoning about a problem become the focus of a discussion, it may become necessary for the teacher to remind the students that viewpoints can differ without one being better than the other.

A particular problem may arise if teachers attempt to include the discussion of real life moral dilemmas as part of the moral education program. Parents and others may consider the discussion of family matters in the classroom to be an invasion of privacy. If students raised such matters in the context of a discussion of an hypothetical dilemma, it is unlikely that any concerns would be expressed. If, however, the teacher were to request that students discuss a moral problem that they or someone they knew had encountered, the request might be perceived as intrusive. There is also the possibility that a child who chose to discuss such an issue in class, for example, an older sister's decision to have an abortion, might be subject to ridicule by insensitive peers outside of class. A compromise might be to ask students to write about personal experiences with moral problems. This would allow the possibility of their using pseudonyms for the main characters in the story, for the whole matter to remain confidential between teacher and student, and for the development of hypothetical dilemmas that reflected the real life experiences of the students without actually involving any one student as a

protagonist in the dilemma.

Throughout our research, we have found a general interest and enthusiasm for producing and discussing examples of personal moral problems. This may be one of the most important educational contributions to be derived from research on Gilligan's ideas. It seems, then, that it would be interesting to ask students to write stories in which one or more characters struggle with a moral problem — "Write a story about a person who has a problem in his or her life and can't decide what is the right thing to do. You don't have to decide the answer for this person, but your story should describe the problem in detail and make clear what choices have to be made." This procedure is not only respectful of any individual differences that may exist in students' understanding of what constitutes a moral problem, it also capitalizes on the students' own experiences, imaginations and interests. Solving the dilemmas presented in these stories could become the focus of future moral discussions or writing projects. A "published" collection of the completed stories might also serve as an instructive writing project.

Conclusion

In an extended series of studies of adult moral reasoning, we have found patterns of age and sex differences that suggest that the development of moral reasoning is more varied and complex than was previously thought. For the most part, the findings reported here have been consistent across multiple samples of adult subjects, so it is reasonable to expect that further research will continue to confirm the importance of individual and group differences in the development of moral reasoning. Professionals engaged in any kind of adult moral education should be aware of these differences and consider whether the suggestions provided here are applicable to their situation. While our research has not directly examined variations in school-age populations, teachers of children could benefit from a better understanding of the adult end of the developmental spectrum. Such teachers might draw very different implications from these data than we have, but our suggestions for modifications in the content and method of school-based moral education should provide a basis for initial discussions about the future of moral education.

Notes

1. The research was funded by a three year strategic programs grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.
2. Further details about the research methods we used and the samples we studied are readily available elsewhere (Pratt, Bradford, and Norris, submitted manuscript, Pratt, Golding and Hunter, 1983, 1984; Pratt, Golding, Hunter and Sampson, in press; Pratt, Golding and Kerig, 1987).

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