

# Gilligan's Theory of Moral Development

## BACKGROUND

### Reference

Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

### Basic Description

This theory is focused on moral development in women, as Gilligan noticed that most models were based on White males. Gilligan's theory establishes women's moral development through constructed relationships, a conceptualization of morality, and interpretation of morality. While Gilligan's Theory is inspired by Kohlberg's Theory, Gilligan focused on care and building relationships as Kohlberg focused on justice (Gilligan, 1982).

### So What?

This model undermined dominant social group thought that women are inferior to men in terms of development and challenged the unchecked limitations of male oriented research (Gilligan, 1982).

### Method

Gilligan examined responses from 29 women who were facing abortion decisions. She suggested that women's moral development proceeds through a sequence of 3 levels and 2 transitions (Gilligan, 1982).

### Level 1: Individual Survival

#### **KEY WORD: *Selfish***

- "It is all about me"
- Individual solely focused on their needs
- No attention to impact on others

#### 1<sup>st</sup> Transition

Connection and responsibility to others brought on by a moral dilemma where that person needs guidance.

### Level 2: Goodness as Self-Sacrifice

#### **KEY WORD: *Self-Sacrifice***

- "Whatever you say"
- Seeking social acceptance
- Willing to sacrifice own opinion/view

#### 2<sup>nd</sup> Transition

Realizes a balance can be made amongst all members of the group without having to self-sacrifice.

### Level 3: Morality of Nonviolence

#### **KEY WORD: *Balance***

- "I have a choice"
- Individual considers group and individual perspective

## CONCLUSION

### Definition of Terms

Ethic of Care: What makes actions/decisions morally right or wrong

Morality: Principle of right or wrong

### Key Takeaways

1. Individual progresses through model at her own pace based on experience
2. Model solely for women
3. Application to student affairs

### Critiques

- Model is based off an individual identifying their own perception of right and wrong
- Larger sample size should be used to assess the viability of the model
- More research needs to be conducted on ethical and moral development

### Utility/Application

- Create programs that allow for building relationship aspects and care in education
- Expand women development and holistic learning
- Understand differences between men and women moral reasoning on multiple dilemmas
- Foundation for educational curriculum