

Different Voices

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"In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development": Carol Gilligan, Harvard University Press
Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England, 1982, pp 184, 5.95 dollars.

A THEORY is only a representation of truth perceived from a particular point of view. When theorists formulate psychological theories based mostly on observations of men's lives and find that women's experiences do not fit, it is the women who are held at fault, not the theories. Since theory performs the powerful function of validating one's perceptions, when psychological theory negates the truth of women's perceptions, are not the seeds of madness being sown? For society, all perceptions, experiences and behaviour, that fit into a particular predetermined mould, are considered normal, those that do not fit are considered abnormal. Does this then mean that women are by definition abnormal?

A man named Heinz considers whether or not to steal a drug which he cannot afford to buy in order to save the life of his wife. Two eleven-year-olds are asked to resolve this dilemma, which is one in a series devised by Kohlberg to measure moral development in adolescents by presenting a conflict between moral norms and exploring the logic of its resolution. In the standard format of Kohlberg's interviewing procedure, the description of the dilemma itself . . . Heinz's predicament, the wife's disease, the druggist's refusal to lower his price . . . is followed by the question, "Should Heinz steal the drug?" The reasons for and against stealing are then explored through a series of questions that vary and extend the parameters of the dilemma in a way designed to reveal the underlying structure of moral thought.

Jake, at eleven, views the dilemma as a conflict between the values of property and life, discerns the logical priority of life and concludes that Heinz should steal the drug. While taking the law into account and recognising its function in maintaining law and order, (the judge, Jake says, should give Heinz the lightest possible sentence) he also sees the law as man-made and therefore subject to error and change. Both his judgements, regarding what Heinz should do and the law being subject to change, rest on the assumption of agreement, a societal consensus around moral values that allows one to know and expect others to recognise "what is the right thing to do". Since his solution is rationally derived, he assumes that anyone following reason would arrive at the same conclusion, including the judge.

Amy's response to the dilemma is in sharp contrast to Jake's response. She replies in a way that seems evasive and unsure, and thinks that Heinz should not steal but find some other solution such as raising money somehow. According to her, neither should Heinz steal, nor should the wife die. She considers neither property nor law but the effect of theft on the relationship between Heinz and his wife. Even if Heinz saved his wife's life by stealing the drug, he might be sent to jail for it and then wouldn't be able to help his wife if she became sicker. So they should talk it over and find some way to make the money.

Unlike Jake, who is fascinated by the power of logic and considers the moral dilemma to be "sort of a math problem with humans", Amy views the dilemma as a narrative of relationships that extend over time. Her moral judgement is grounded in the belief that "if somebody has something that would keep somebody alive, then it is not right not to give it to them." She considers the problem in the dilemma to arise not from the druggist's assertion of rights but from his failure of response. Just as Jake is confident the judge would agree that stealing is the

right thing for Heinz to do, so Amy is confident that "if Heinz and the druggist had talked it out long enough, they could reach something besides stealing." As he considers the law to have made mistakes, so she considers this drama as a mistake, believing that "the world should just share things more and then people wouldn't have to steal." *Both children thus recognise the need for agreement but see it mediated in different ways . . . he impersonally through systems of logic and law, she through communication in relationship.* Just as he relies on the conventions of logic to deduce the solution to this dilemma, assuming these conventions to be shared, so she relies on a process of communication, assuming connection and believing that her voice will be heard, (emphasis mine).

The differences in the responses of these two children shows that in fact they see very different moral problems in the dilemma. Jake responds to the question "Should Heinz steal the drug" whereas Amy responds to the question "should Heinz steal the drug?" As can be expected these two responses receive different scores on Kohlberg's scale.

Kohlberg's six stages of moral development trace a three level progression; from an egocentric understanding of fairness based on individual need (stages one and two), to a conception of fairness anchored in the shared conventions of societal agreement (stages three and four), and finally to a principled understanding of fairness that rests on the free-standing logic of equality and reciprocity (stages five and six).

While Jake's judgements at eleven are scored as conventional on Kohlberg's scale, a mixture of stages three and four, his ability to bring deductive logic to bear on the solution of moral dilemmas, to differentiate morality from law, and to see how laws can be considered to have mistakes, points toward the principled conception of justice that Kohlberg equates with moral maturity. When considered in the light of Kohlberg's definition of the stages and sequence of moral development, Amy's moral judgements appear to be a full stage lower in maturity than Jake's. Scored as a mixture of stages two and three, her responses seem to reveal a feeling of powerlessness in the world, an inability to think systematically about the concepts of morality or law, a reluctance to challenge authority or to examine the logic of received moral truths, a failure even to conceive of acting directly to save a life or to consider that such an action, if taken, could possibly have an effect.

Asking different questions that arise different conceptions of the moral domain, the two children arrive at answers that fundamentally diverge, and the arrangement of these answers as successive stages on a scale of increasing moral maturity, calibrated by the logic of the boy's responses, misses the different truth revealed in the judgement of the girl. To the question, "What does he see that she does not?" Kohlberg's theory provides a ready response, manifest in the scoring of Jake's judgements a full stage higher than Amy's in moral maturity; to the question, "What does she see that he does not?" Kohlberg's theory has nothing to say. Since most of her responses fall through the sieve of Kohlberg's scoring system, her responses appear from his perspective to lie outside the moral domain.

Yet, the world she knows is a different world from that refracted by Kohlberg's construction of Heinz's dilemma. Her world is a world of relationships and psychological truths where

an awareness of the connection between people gives rise to a recognition of responsibility for one another, a perception of the need for response. Seen in this light, her understanding of morality as arising from the recognition of relationship, her belief in communication as the mode of conflict resolution, and her conviction that the solution to the dilemma will follow from its compelling representation, seem far from naive or cognitively immature. Instead, Amy's judgements contain the insights central to an ethic of care, just as Jake's judgements reflect the logic of the justice approach.

The above extracts represent the basic arguments set forth in Gilligan's book *In a Different Voice*. Her main contribution lies not in revealing sex differences, which she states have been noted throughout psychological literature. The importance of her contribution lies in discerning that these difference represent two entirely different yet cohesive ways of thinking and looking at the world. Consequently *unlike the interpretation offered by most developmental theorists that women's development is deficient because it does not fit into the male pattern, Gilligan interprets the difference as representing two different but equally valid patterns of development.*

Gender identity, the "unchanging core of personality formation" is "with rare exception firmly and irreversibly established for both sexes by the time a child is around three." Despite the fact that for both sexes the "primary caretaker" in the first three years of life is usually female, the interpersonal dynamics of gender formation are different for boys and girls. Since girls experience themselves and are experienced by their mothers as being more "like, and continuous with, themselves," for girls-identity formation is fused with the experience of attachment. In contrast, boys experience themselves and are experienced by their mothers as being different and separate, hence male identity formation entails a "more emphatic individuation and a more defensive firming of experienced ego boundaries."

From here on each sex starts off viewing themselves and others as if through a different lens. Gilligan says, "From the different dynamics of separation and attachment in their gender identity formation through the divergence of identity and intimacy that marks their experience in the adolescent years, male and female voices typically speak of the importance of different truths, the former of the role of separation as it defines and empowers the self, the latter of the ongoing process of attachment that creates and sustains the human community."

In the transition from adolescence to adulthood, while the dilemma itself is the same for both sexes, a conflict between integrity and care, a recognition of the need for intimacy becomes the critical experience for men, while for women it is the experience of choice. Since this conflict is approached from different perspectives by both sexes, it generates the recognition of opposite truths. This gets reflected in two different moral ideologies, "since separation is justified by an ethic of rights while attachment is supported by an ethic of care."

Criticising the one-sidedness of development theory, Gilligan says, "Attachment and separation anchor the cycle of human life, describing the biology of human reproduction and the psychology of human development. The concepts of attachment and separation that depict the nature and sequence of infant development appear in adolescence as identity and intimacy and then in adulthood as love and work."

"This reiterative counterpoint in human experience, however, when moulded into a developmental ordering, tends to disappear in the course of its linear reduction into the equation of development with separation" (emphasis mine).

The real significance of Gilligan's work becomes apparent when we consider how development theory shapes the viewpoint of not just psychologists and psychiatrists, but also the general understanding of female nature as portrayed in humour,

literature, the media. This has serious implications for the way in which women view themselves in relation to society and in turn how society views women in relation to itself.

Since women do not fit into the pattern of male development, they are considered to have a weak sense of self, an inability for clear thought and action, a lack of objectivity . . . This image of womanhood gets reflected in day to day interactions, and for women, becomes a very debilitating image of themselves to live with. "Women's place in man's life cycle has been that of nurturer, caretaker, and helpmate, the weaver of those networks of relationships on which she in turn relies. But while women have thus taken care of men, men have, in their theories of psychological development, as in their economic arrangements, tended to assume or devalue that care. When the focus on individuation and individual achievement extends into adulthood, and maturity is equated with personal autonomy, concern with relationships appears as a weakness of women rather than as human strength."

For all of us, our sense of self depends on a validation of our perceptions from others. When women continually feel that they are not being understood or are somehow not saying the right thing, they become more and more unsure of themselves. "As the interviewer conveys through repetition of questions that the answers Amy gave were not heard or not right, her confidence begins to diminish, and her replies become more constrained and unsure." It is this sense of vulnerability, repeatedly heard in women's voices, that "impedes women from taking a stand, what George Eliot regards as the girl's 'susceptibility' to adverse judgements by others, which stems from her lack of power and consequent inability 'to do something in the world?'"

"Further, in a society where women have an unequal status with men, the above mentioned perceptions of women give men the 'right' to view women as inferior, especially since their views are backed by 'scientific theories' which consider women to be deficient. This also gives men the right to exclude women from direct participation in society, and women are thus forced to see themselves "as subject to a consensus or judgement made and enforced by the men on whose protection and support they depend any by whose names they are known."

According to Gilligan, the notion that virtue for women lies in self-sacrifice has "complicated the course of women's development by pitting the moral issue of goodness against the adult questions of responsibility and choice". For women the ethic of self-sacrifice is directly in conflict with the concept of their rights as individuals. This conflict also surfaces time and again within the women's movement, which has emerged in an effort to raise the collective demands of women and to struggle for their right to choose. Strangely, men, whose moral development is so much focussed on the question of rights, in reacting to the women's movement often revert from the higher stages of maturity to stage one or two of Kohlberg's scale of moral development!

The paradox of women's lives lies in the fact that the "very traits that traditionally have defined the 'goodness' of women, their care for and sensitivity to the need of others, are those that mark them as deficient in moral development." Yet if women were to be equally concerned with separation, autonomy, individuation, and their natural rights, as men are, women would cease to fit into the social roles assigned to them by society. Seen from this viewpoint, women would again appear 'abnormal', and perhaps their own family would take them to psychiatrists who would then attempt to make them 'adjust' better to society.

In this context, Gilligan's assertion of the need to broaden development theory, so that it encompasses the various dimensions of human existence, is a necessary first step. A broadening of development theory would mean incorporating the positive aspects of both male and female development as it exists at present. This would also amount to recognising that both male

(Continued on p. 178)

Socialist Health Review

nounced several military and police doctors had approached the members of ethics committee to report that they had been asked by the authorities to examine or treat prisoners who had been tortured. They also sought assistance from the Association in informing military authorities that they would not become involved in covering up torture.

In a backward bourgeois democracy like India, the flagrant violation of democratic rights of people is a routine affair. Our readers need no introduction on the daily torture of detenus carried out in a small police station to a well maintained torture chamber (like the 'retreat' in Calcutta) all over the country. The women prisoners need a special mention as they, in addition, face sexual abuse. In fact, the rape of a teen age woman triggered off a new wave of protest in the women's movement in recent times.

The democratic rights organisations have done significant work in making torture a political issue. No doubt, doctors have also participated in such organisations. The recent killings of a doctor, who was a prominent human right activist, by the police in Andhra Pradesh shows that individual doctors have played their role, even at the risk of their lives.

However, the medical community as such has much at stake in the system and therefore, its official organisations have consistently shunned responsibility to do anything in this matter.

(Continued from p. 174)

and female development, while complete in certain aspects is also deficient in other aspects. However, such a change would need to be accompanied by an effort at understanding how much of the pattern of human development is a result of socialisation and how much of it is due to 'inherent' or 'innate' human nature. Such an effort is vital, for without it, there is the potential danger of development theory recognising the importance of both male and female perspectives of development, yet drawing a clear distinction between the two patterns and declaring male and female nature as being 'inherently different'. As it is difficult to say different without saying better or worse, women may once again become victims of such a theory. Finally, since theory reflects a given social context, a change in development theory is likely to come about only when social conditions permit a

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They did not have enough courage even to issue a statement when a doctor was killed for his human rights activities. Indeed, they will take a long time to learn from what their counterparts are doing in Chile. Thus, the responsibility is now with voluntary organisations of socially-conscious individuals working in the field of health to show courage, to build public opinion and agitate in the official associations to pressurise the medical community.

Secondly, at the same time, socially-conscious doctors will have to look into the medical aspects of the problem. As Stover and Nightingale suggest in their report, "physicians (particularly psychiatrists) need to become familiar with immediate and long-term physical and psychological effects of torture, for the purpose of diagnosis and treatment. Although research on the after effects of torture and the means of treating these effects is still in its infancy, recent medical research indicates that the major symptoms of torture victims, which sometimes occur years after the torture, include feeling of helplessness, heightened anxiety, impaired memory and inability to concentrate, nightmares and phobias. Publishing research on victims aids in the prevention of torture by informing the public of the pernicious effects of torture on victims; their families and society at large."

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change in our conception of what we consider 'male' and 'female' in the psychological realm.

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(Continued from p. 176)

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