CAROL GILLIGAN

Woman's Place in Man's Life Cycle (pp. 835–857)

Paragraphs 1–7: Conceptions of the human life cycle vary depending on the view of the observer. In the social sciences, theories once considered objective now reflect observational bias. Some theorists, including Freud, used the male life cycle as the norm for all human development.

8–10: Chodorow attributes gender differences to women's role as caregivers. Girls associate their identity with connection to others and empathy; boys, with separateness.

11: Separation is crucial for male identity, attachment for female identity. Women's “failure to separate... becomes by definition a failure to develop.”

12–14: Chodorow describes sex differences manifesting themselves in schoolchildren's games. Lever reports that boys' play fosters a stronger respect for rules than does girls' play.

15–16: Lever sees boys' play as superior to girls' play because it develops more traits useful for corporate success. Kohlberg adds that girls' play teaches fewer moral lessons.

17–18: Lever concludes that games teach boys to be independent and competitive and girls to be empathetic and cooperative. By puberty, boys and girls have very different interpersonal orientations. Many girls find the separation process of adolescence problematic.

19–20: Expanding on Freud's ideas, Erikson says that the task of adolescence is to forge an individual identity and that the pre-adolescence stages move the child toward autonomy.

21–24: But, says Erikson, this cycle applies only to males. Females achieve identity only in an intimate relationship (usually marriage). Despite his attention to sex differences, Erikson's focus is the male developmental cycle, which does little to prepare males for intimacy.

25: Sex differences are crucial in determining human behavior, but too often psychologists establish male behavior as the "norm."

26–28: Horner and Sassen found that women fear competition, especially with men, because of a perceived conflict between femininity and success.

29–30: We may be too quick to accept men's preference for competition as the "norm" and women's preference for cooperation as a deviation from the norm.

31–32: Virginia Woolf says that when women's values differ from men's, "masculine values... prevail." Women defer to others, reinforcing relationships as a primary concern.

33–34: Men devalue the care women provide. Women's concern for relationships is a sign of weakness, whereas men's desire for independence is a sign of strength and maturity.

35: Women's knowledge of intimacy and relationships is thought to be "instinctual," but my research shows that women's moral development is an elaboration of that knowledge.

36: When using Kohlberg's six-stage scale to measure moral judgments, many women appear deficient, reaching only the third stage—morality based on helping others. Women cannot move to the stages based on abstract principles of justice unless they enter the public male realm.

37–38: Paradoxically, for Kohlberg, women's caring for others makes them morally deficient. A concept of morality that values female experience would make caring primary.

39–41: A young man's response to an interview question illustrates Kohlberg's concept of morality, which is based on rights, separation, and individuality. A young woman's response illustrates a concept of morality based on responsibility, connection, and relationships.

42–43: The masculine "rights conception" aims to resolve moral issues objectively; the feminine "responsibility conception" stresses the complex, imperfect nature of any resolution.
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CAROL GILLIGAN (b. 1936) is professor of education at Harvard University. She concentrates on issues in psychology and has made important contributions to theories concerning the ways in which women develop differently from men, from childhood to adulthood. In 1997, she received the Heinz Award in the Human Condition. Her work has involved various aspects of psychological development, but one important focus has been the development of the individual’s moral nature. In talking about these issues, she has examined the work of some of the world’s most important psychologists, such as Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), Jean Piaget (1896–1980), Erik Erikson (1902–1994) and her own teacher, Lawrence Kohlberg (1927–1987). As she demonstrates in her discussion, the work of these men in establishing parameters of social and moral development depended almost entirely on studying boys, not girls. Gilligan suggests that the differences in early development between boys and girls makes those observations of limited value.

Gilligan’s book *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development* (1982) was the result of many years of research on the ways in which women treat the relational aspects of life differently from men—in part because of the different ways in which girls and boys are raised. “Woman’s Place in Man’s Life Cycle” is the first chapter in that book; it establishes the need to account appropriately for women’s development by examining how women are socialized in school and at home.

Some of the factors that appear to impede women’s success, Gilligan finds, actually confer strength on them. For example, the nature of boys’ games differs from that of girls’ because boys accept competition—including the need for one party to lose while
another wins — as a natural course, provided the rules are followed carefully. Girls tend to treat rules as more elastic if they interfere with the pleasure of the games. This pattern, according to some male psychologists, tends to make it difficult for women to achieve success in later life. Gilligan, however, explains that this pattern actually helps women succeed on a deeper personal level in ways that men do not normally achieve, especially in mid-life when both sexes better understand the need for intimacy and closeness.

Gilligan's efforts to move psychologists away from using only male-based data for establishing norms of behavior and development seems like common sense. Why, then, did people not consider this previously? One reason is that when Gilligan was formulating her ideas in the 1970s, many feminists felt that establishing key differences between men and women would only fuel the controversy about whether women and men should be treated equally. If there were to be complete fairness in gender relations, they reasoned, the false distinctions that Mary Wollstonecraft and her twentieth-century counterparts felt were holding women back would only be accentuated. Fair treatment of the sexes, they thought, demanded that the sexes be considered as more alike than different.

Gilligan fought against this tide at some risk, but her psychological model eventually won out by helping to promote the view that Simone de Beauvoir supported: avoiding the judging of women by men's standards. In Beauvoir's view, men tend to judge women as the Other, or as not-men, rather than as women with their own natures and identities. Gilligan's efforts moved this discourse on gender to a new level by doing what seems natural and reasonable in retrospect: studying the way girls interact and seeing how that interaction is different from that of boys. As she points out in this piece, children have a very powerful gender sense by age three, and their development along gender lines begins no later than that.

Gilligan's work has pointed out the ways in which boys need to break away from their mothers early on in an effort to model themselves on their fathers or other masculine figures, thereby achieving independence. Girls, on the other hand, see themselves as more like their mothers. In girls' socialization there is greater emphasis on familial continuity, and as a result women develop a sense of connectedness, intimacy, and interdependence that men are less aware of because of their own individual needs.

In addition, by examining these qualities in girls, Gilligan finds that intimacy, concern for others, empathy, and a need for interdependence are not exclusively characteristics of women. Indeed, such qualities are essential to the human condition and have probably aided our biological survival. Although they are sometimes masked by social pressures in early child development, men possess these qualities as well. As one commentator observed, Gilligan "began by posing a deceptively simple question: What are we missing by not listening to half the population?" The answer was a great deal.
more often influenced in their judgments by feelings of affection or hostility” (1925, pp. 257–258).

Thus a problem in theory became cast as a problem in women’s development, and the problem in women’s development was located in their experience of relationships. Nancy Chodorow (1974), attempting to account for “the reproduction within each generation of certain general and nearly universal differences that characterize masculine and feminine personality and roles,” attributes these differences between the sexes not to anatomy but rather to “the fact that women, universally, are largely responsible for early child care.” Because this early social environment differs for and is experienced differently by male and female children, basic sex differences recur in personality development. As a result, “in any given society, feminine personality comes to define itself in relation and connection to other people more than masculine personality does” (pp. 43–44).

In her analysis, Chodorow relies primarily on Robert Stoller’s studies which indicate that 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.” Given that for both sexes the primary caretaker in the first three years of life is typically female, the interpersonal dynamics of gender identity formation are different for boys and girls. Female identity formation takes place in a context of ongoing relationship since “mothers tend to experience their daughters as more like, and continuous with, themselves.” Correspondingly, girls, in identifying themselves as female, experience themselves as like their mothers, thus fusing the experience of attachment with the process of identity formation. In contrast, “mothers experience their sons as a male opposite,” and boys, in defining themselves as masculine, separate their mothers from themselves, thus curtailing “their primary love and sense of empathic tie.” Consequently, male development entails a “more emphatic individuation and a more defensive firming of experienced ego boundaries.” For boys, but not girls, “issues of differentiation have become intertwined with sexual issues” (1978, pp. 150, 166–167).

Writing against the masculine bias of psychoanalytic theory, Chodorow argues that the existence of sex differences in the early experiences of individuation and relationship “does not mean that women have ‘weaker’ ego boundaries than men or are more prone to psychosis.” It means instead that “girls emerge from this period with a basis for ‘empathy’ built into their primary definition of self in a way that boys do not.” Chodorow thus replaces Freud’s negative and derivative description of female psychology with a positive and