# Gender Perspectives: The Key to Understanding Equality and Justice
Marjaneh M. Fooladi and Itsuko Dohi

Marjaneh M. Fooladi, Associate Nursing Professor, The University of Texas At El Paso, School of Nursing
Itsuko Dohi, Professor, Department of Psychology, Kobe Shoin Women's University, Japan

## Abstract

Admitting the truth of the women's struggle for equality in the modern world requires a closer look at the gendered concepts of equality and justice. The global view of equality and justice could be better understood by differentiating how men and women experience life between self and others. In childhood our view of gender equality is simple and self-centered. As children we claim "everything is mine." Then we reach late adolescence into adulthood and begin to differentiate self from others. At this point the knowing of equality and justice changes according to gender. Males begin to compare, compete, and avoid compromise while females communicate their desire to comply, compromise and search for companionship. Women's identity is fully embedded in intimacy and relationship between self and others and men are capable of separating self from others. Men are capable of physical engagement void of emotional intimacy. Hence, our deeper understanding of gender paradigm and the world view of equality and justice may be the key to resolving the current state of world affair where most policies are authored by men as women are entrapped in poverty, illiteracy and economic deprivation.

## Gendered Equality and Justice

Since the modern approach has offered minimal solution to the current social problems involving women and the recent literature seem devoid of cultural competence, we may examine and retrieve the old wisdom of moral development with hope to find a solution for today's human suffering. Here, author will explore theoretical viewpoints by Crain, Erikson, Gilligan and Kohlberg and others to increase our gendered understanding of equality and justice. We will highlight globe perspectives on the human need for social interaction and emphasize cultural interpretation of human desire for justice, fairness and compassion.

Nearly a half century ago (Erikson 1964) identified gender variations in conceptual understanding of equality and justice and later, (Gilligan 1993) echoed this sentiment by sharing vast differences in men and women's views of equality, justice, fairness, assuming responsibility to care for others, maintaining a harmonious relationship, avoiding conflicts, negotiating and compromising. The past theories of human development help to successfully examine and revise public policies aimed to benefit men and women around the globe. No public policy should be written without first exploring the essential ingredients such as cultural value systems and public

perceptions of the policies. Most importantly, recognition and understanding of gender role construct must be considered before crossing any of the cultural lines in an effort to help improve justice and equality within that culture. In every society public policies are designed and written to reflect a masculine interpretation of the laws. Few countries around the globe have developed social policies by considering feminine perspectives and life experiences. The authors will attempt to highlight the social problem and convey where some solution may be found.

**Women's Perceptions on Gender Equality**

To no one's surprise, historically women have perceived violence rooted in inequality and the desire to dominate, while men have considered violence as "the necessary evil" to defend "what is theirs". However, today, the gender gap is closing as more women are in agreement with the male version of equality and justice and by majority have chosen to remain silent, join forces and train with men to defend "what is theirs". Hence, our discussion on women's struggle for equality and justice continues. And the select few good intentioned women who have tried to awaken our consciousness in favor of global equality and justice are often driven by career responsibilities, upward mobility, pending tenure, getting published and less informed about gender culture and social constructs leading to misfortune for women.

(Gilligan, 1993) In a Different Voice asks who are the men and women in favor of equality and justice for all. For centuries men have been blamed for many of social ills and now, author asks who has silenced the women's voices? Isn't true that women, especially the empowered and educated Western women have chosen their own silence? And if men are to be blamed for the women's suffering and social inequalities, shouldn't women carry some burden of the responsibility as they are a major player in raising the family and nurturing sons who potentially grow up to become brutal men? In fact, (Vaillant 1977) disagreed with Erikson's

view and wrote how irresponsible mother are when they love their children until the age 2 and quickly despair about taking their nurturing any further. He criticized mothers and wrote the responsibility for raising children is different from growing crops.

Does equality and justice begin at home and do women play a major role in showing their children what is fair? Should women take a closer look and see how boys and girls are treated unfairly at home? Are we teaching parents to be gender neutral at home? We read about girls cleaning house and boys doing home work. Is it the mother or father who assigns domestic duties her daughter and school opportunities to her son? Here we have a great opportunity to learn cultural views of gender roles. If our efforts are in contrast with cultural values no planted seed will take roots and the first unit of society will continue treating boys different from girls. But, as long as the seeds of equality and justice as perceived in that culture are planted at home, the society would have a chance to replant what has been growing. Considering rare and unique exceptions we must admit that gender equality has not reached millions of homes in developed countries.

The 2005 target goal set by UNICEF was written to promote gender equality and empower women. The organization aimed to eliminate gender disparity in education at all levels by 2015 and advance the human rights for women and children as two-thirds of the 799 millions illiterates around the world are women and girls ages 15 and over. Inadequate nutrition, learning and safety protection in over 67 countries have kept 85% of girls out of school. Using developmental theory we know that a child's earliest years are the most critical times to develop skills such as language acquisition, social competence, coping and the ability to think and learn. The basic needs such as adequate nutrition, nurturing, health care and psychosocial stimulation are essential for a child's growth and development. Because of gender culture in many parts of

the world, young girls are raised to care for the family and boys are taught the breadwinning aspects of life. Therefore, girls are receiving poor diet, health care and education. An estimated 60-100 million women in the world live without male authored social supports compromise their pain and suffering by favoring sons (**UNISCEF** 2005 Progress for Children report,..).

(Gilligan 1993) wrote, leaving the childhood behind and entering adulthood for women means relinquishing the period of self-absorbed expression in order to protect, preserve, engage and establish relationships and assume responsibility. As men focus on separation and avoid attachment, women continue to seek connection as a measure of their ability to give, help and nurture. The ideology of separation for men justifies the "ethic of rights" while attachment for women supports the "ethic of caring".

The morality of "rights" is centered on equality, fairness and understanding. The "ethic of rights" supports equal respect and balance between self and others. The "ethic of responsibility" is also embedded in equality and recognition of needs and rests on compassion and care. Young adults search for identity and intimacy (men physical and women emotional) as male and female voices find different truths. Can knowledge provide an absolute right or wrong answer to the understanding of truth? Once self is separated from others, men find the absolute truth and fairness within the concept of equality and reciprocity. Therefore, the awareness of multiple truths surface and the direction of equality give rise to an "ethic of generosity and care".

According to (Gilligan 1993) men view separation as an empowering state of freedom and the expression of attachment is a paralyzing entrapment in caring and compromise. Adult life encompasses the dilemma of love and work and one may wonder if care could be defined as not hurting others? Both men and women assume responsibility and make moral judgments from masculine and feminine perspectives which guides their decision making process.

**The Morality of Gender Equality**

Kohlberg expanded on Piaget's stages of moral judgment and the development of moral reasoning. He focused his works on the thinking of the great moral philosophers. Although few people may ever begin to think about moral issues like Socrates, Kant, or Martin Luther King, nonetheless Kohlberg has provided us with a challenging vision of what moral and ethical development may entail. Considering that Kohlberg mainly studied male children, his stages of moral development are briefly stated here. In stage 1 Kohlberg refers to children who think of what is right based on what the authority says is right and doing the right thing to children means obeying the authority and avoiding punishment. At stage 2, children have learned that there is no single authority and they are able to see the different sides of any issue and learn that everything is relative and one is free to pursue one's own interests but it is more useful to make a deal and exchange favors with others. At stage 3, there is greater emphasize on being a good person and helpful toward relatives. At stage 4, the young adult develops more concern toward obeying the laws to maintain society as a whole. At both stages 3 and 4, adolescents think as members of the society with its conventional values, norms, and expectations. At stage 5 the basic rights and democracy for everyone are emphasized and at stage 6 the focus is placed on the principles which define equality and justice. At stages 5 and 6 adults shift their concerns from maintaining a society for it own sake, into the good principles and values for a better society (Crain 1980, 1985 a, 1985 b, 1992). Recognizing that gender differences were not examined closely, one should use caution when considering Kohlberg's view of human development.

**Western Interpretation of Gender Equality**

(Kohlberg and Gilligan, 1993) battled the gender issues and the discovery of self, only, to give a glimpse of their views through Western lenses unrecognized by multitudes of men and women around the world. For instance, morality and ethics embedded in the religious teachings of Judeo-Christian societies would be differently interpreted among the Muslims, Buddhists and those who believe in no higher power. Thus, which information should we concentrate on when we consider justice and equality for women? If a Muslim or Buddhist woman is content within the limitations and boundaries of her life, do we have the right to use the Western frame of mind and consider her life in struggle as it may seem painted with gender-inequality from Western perspective and try to educate her with our belief system that "she deserves better"?

As long as men all over the world are the authors and interpreters of the social laws and the Western model is used to define equality and justice, we would continue to find women around the world who have a different pursuit of happiness and dreams. Just because industrial countries have a higher success in enforcing their laws and more women are able to achieve education, financial independence, and rely on the legal protection, should that be translated as women in the western world are free of struggles for inequality and justice?

Men are capable of compromise once they understand the gender appropriate concept of gender equality and justice. Then the logic of moral values, intimacy, relationship, attachment and care may begin to form. However, literature warns men against the feminization of society. The need for human compassion requires real human emotion but the masculine social definitions of equality and justice seem void of this important element for practical purposes. Being set in the belief that there is only one way to define equality and justice—the Western way—has fractured the human social structure for standing apart and alone. Equality is a two-edge sword which cuts both ways and wars ensue as history has attested repeatedly. Equality

without wisdom, liberation without maturity and equal power without compassion can lead to democratic dictatorship and dominance where women and children suffer the most.

**Gendered Morality and Equality toward Fixed Domains**

The application of morality and ethics often lead to equality and justice. But these concepts are gendered and the ideal equality should be examined from gender perspectives. It is important to observe that women live in the private domain and men remain in the public domain. Similarly, women socialize and accept intimacy and companionship as part of their moral fiber. For women equality is interpreted based on "feminine" principles and the discussion of equality and justice is used to determine gender equality according to the feminine view of morality. Hence, feminine moral principles from a private and personal domain translate into a higher level of equality and justice for all and that is the place where women feel at home.

Men are socialized to compete and avoid compromise using their "masculine" moral standards. For men equality follows masculine principles of individual's ability and effort. The public domain for men addresses the principle of "need" for gender equality rather than morality and ethics of equality and justice. The public domain based on masculine principles of equality defines the comfort zone for men as they are eager to stay in the zone (Dohi and Hirokawa, 2004).

According to (Ui 2002) in a research study by (Reichle and Gefke 1998 ) 31 Japanese female college students were surveyed and interviewed to assess their views on the presence and absence of gender equality. Researchers found female students used different criterion compared to males, specifically regarding public, private and personal domains. For instance, the female criterion for public domain included: 1) equal opportunity, 2) the principle of individual ability

effort, and 3) the principle of need. For private domain the criterion consisted of: 1) the principle of traits for men and women, and 2) procedural justice (discussion). For personal domain criterion used were: 1) the principle of equality and 2) procedural justice (based on one's decision). The same interview and survey was later administered to assess 246 female university students and researchers found the same conclusion. The study results for Japanese students showed that women find it necessary to remain in the private and personal domain to "feel" the gender equality (Ui 2005).

**Generational Chain of Gendered Parenting**

Compared to the North American and other industrial nations, child rearing of Japanese mothers and fathers are gender-based. Mothers raise their daughters according to the self-perceived feminine moral standards despite the fact that they were brought up to accept and follow the male version of equality and justice. For instance, today, a Japanese mother recognizes that Japanese society is unprepared to accept an economically independent woman and yet she defies the norm and skillfully raises her daughter with a blend of traditional values and modern necessities. She teaches her daughter how to be cheerful and mysterious while pursuing her education towards a professional career. She teaches her how to maintain a home, love and respect her husband and accept nothing less from him.

This recent evolution has made the Japanese mother dependent on daughter for emotional support. The main reason is the lack of open communication, companionship, spending quality time and sharing life experiences among the Japanese couples. The same mother, who raised her daughter to be independent and a perfect wife, now, is silently suffering from loneliness and lack of companionship. (Watanabe 1997) studied parent-child bonding and dependency and used a

questionnaire to assess a group of junior and senior high school and university students. The study results showed the evidence of strongest bonding and dependency between mother and daughter compared to mother-son, father-daughter and father-son. In addition, (Takagi and Kashiwagi 2000) reported bonding and attachment between mother and daughter in Japan to be at the consciousness level which can be described as a strong attachment in body, mind and spirit. Although mothers expect their daughters to be kind to their spouse, they also desire to have mother-daughter time to communicate and do housekeeping together.

**In Summary**

The Western view and culturally insensitive experience of temporary justice can be more harmful to families with the hope of a better future. The good and misdirected intention may result in mistrust and more devastation to the family. In parts, Western theories of human development have universal application where women seek attachment and build their lives with a sense of self around others. After the adolescent age, women enter a period of selfless giving, relationship building and caring for others. Once they reach middle age, the adolescent energy of "unfinished business" returns. Often the empty nest syndrome is followed by the plan to achieve a new identity through furthering their education, becoming an entrepreneur and fulfilling dormant dreams. Mid-life for a woman reflects an interaction between thoughts and a meaningful life. At this age women are good candidates to get involved in social issues and development of public policies to eliminate social disparity for women with cultural awareness. An "ethic of justice" stems from the premise of equality—everyone should be treated the same, and the "ethic of care" reveals the premise of nonviolence—no one should be hurt (Gilligan, 1993). We can only envision a world of justice and equality—no wars, no destruction and peace for everyone.

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