Women and Men, Morality and Ethics

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One of today's most important trends is the increased participation of women in the work force, particularly of women holding management positions in business. This trend has generated research interest in numerous issues concerning the impact of women on business practices. One such issue is whether there is a gender difference in ethical decision making. Do men and women differ in their moral reasoning and judgments? If so, what are the implications for ethical conduct in the work environment?

Carol Gilligan, a Harvard psychologist, has become widely recognized for her research suggesting that men and women differ in how they solve moral dilemmas. Men, she contends, are likely to consider moral issues in terms of justice, rules, and individual rights. Women, on the other hand, tend to consider such issues in terms of relationships, caring, and compassion. In her best-selling book *In a Different Voice* (1982), Gilligan explains that:

> When one begins with the study of women and derives developmental constructs from their lives, the outline of a moral conception different from that of [men] begins to emerge and informs a different description of development. In this conception, the moral problem arises from conflicting responsibilities rather than from competing rights and requires for its resolution a mode of thinking that is contextual and narrative rather than formal and abstract. This conception of morality as concerned with the activity of care centers moral development around the understanding of responsibility and relationships, just as the conception of morality as fairness ties moral development to the understanding of rights and rules.

How do men and women in management differ in moral reasoning and ethical decision making?

Gilligan's research is an extension of gender socialization theory. Tracing back to the work of Freud, this theory holds that gender identity, the core of personality, becomes established as early as age three through the mother-child relationship and is thereafter irreversible and unchanging. Sex differences of infancy are reinforced through the pattern of childhood games, "the crucible of social development." Whereas traditional boys' games teach respect for rules and fairness, traditional girls' games teach respect for inclusion and avoiding hurt. Gender socialization theory predicts that as adults the sexes will bring different ethical values to their work roles, differentially shaping their work-related decisions.

Attempts to validate this prediction through empirical research in the context of business ethics have produced conflicting results. Ford and Richardson (1994) reviewed the literature of business ethics studies and concluded that sex was reported on more often than any other single variable. Seven studies revealed that "females are likely to act more ethically then males, at least in some situations"; seven others found that "sex had no impact on ethical beliefs." One possible explanation that could account for this inconsistency is offered in Betz, O'Connell, and Shepard (1989):

> According to the "structural" approach, differences between men and women, due to early socialization and other role requirements (e.g., wife, mother), will be overridden by the rewards and costs associated with occupational roles. . . . The structural approach predicts that women will become more like men under similar occupational conditions.

Another possible explanation is that most gender-based ethical research has focused on the issue of which sex has higher ethics. Often the question posed has been, "Are women more ethical than men?" Earlier research by this author (Dawson 1992) indicated that although female business students appear to have higher ethical standards than males in situations involving relationships with others, they do not in situations involving only one's personal conscience (such as padding an expense account). If it is true that ethical attitudes and behavior for both men and women are situation-specific, inconsistency is inevitable in studies that attempt to rate quantitatively which sex is more ethical.

It may be more relevant and fruitful to focus on understanding better the qualitative differences between the sexes across various dimensions of ethical attitudes and conduct. To paraphrase Gilligan, it may be more useful to listen to the voices of men and women in business as they explain how they come to ethical decisions. The more we understand the differences in moral reasoning that characterize the sexes, the better we can appreciate women's impact on ethical decision making in organizations. Such was the objective of the research reported here. Male and female managers in marketing and sales were confronted with six scenarios involving possible ethical issues, and were asked to make a decision in each and explain their reasoning.

Linda Klebe Trevino (1992) explains the tradition in prior ethics research of using scenarios, or vignettes, to probe moral reasoning, as well as to predict behavior:

> The research has been concerned with discovering people's moral judgment strategies by presenting them with hypothetical moral dilemmas, and then asking them to judge what is right and wrong and to explain their justification. Their explanations and justifications are then used to characterize how they reason about moral dilemmas. Theory and research have also linked moral judgment

Figure 1
Scenario 1: "Break Promise?"

You are the manager of a local toy store. The hottest Christmas toy of the year is the new "Peter Panda" stuffed animal. The toy is in great demand and almost impossible to find. You have received your one and only shipment of 12, and they are all promised to people who previously stopped in to place a deposit and reserve one. A woman comes by the store and pleads with you, saying that her six-year-old daughter is in the hospital very ill, and that "Peter Panda" is the one toy she has her heart set on. Would you sell her one, knowing that you will then have to break your promise and refund the deposit to one of the other customers? (There is no way you will be able to get an extra toy in time).

Decisions	*Would sell*	*Would not sell*	*Unsure*
Males	28%	66%	6%
Females	57%	28%	15%
(Chi square = 8.865 ; p < .05)			

Male voices

- "The sale should definitely be refused."
- "Definitely not. I made a promise to 12 customers, and if I were to renege on it, it would speak about my lack of integrity."
- "No. If you expect customer loyalty, there has to be vendor loyalty."
- "Not honoring the promise to the original customers wouldn't be fair."
- "No, obligations are obligations. The people who came in first are entitled to their purchase regardless of their motivations for desiring the item."
- "I would feel bad turning her down, but technically the 12 toys in stock have already been sold."
- "I would only sell to this woman on condition that I called the hospital to verify her story."
- "No. In the first place, how can I be sure she's telling the truth?"

Female voices

- "I would suggest that the woman write a note explaining the situation, which I would then show to the other customers."
- "Absolutely yes. This may be the girl's last Christmas."
- "First, I would try to find out the situation of the other 12 customers."
- "I would definitely get her the toy. I would begin by calling all the other customers to explain the situation."
- "I would work hard to find her one, calling the manufacturer and each of the other customers, but if nothing worked I would still sell her one."
- "I would sell her one, and then I would lie to one of the other customers about a mix-up."
- "Yes, I would sell her one. Then I would make it up to one of the other customers by offering something else their child wanted at a big discount, or even free if necessary."

to moral action. How people think is related to what they do.

Six scenarios were developed, covering a range of possible ethical dilemmas that might arise in the sales profession. Inasmuch as this research was not intended to measure some standard of ethical attitude or conduct, but rather to illuminate processes of moral reasoning, scenarios were intentionally crafted to make the ethical issues difficult and ambiguous. Each scenario required respondents to choose the specific decision they would make: "yes" (I would ____), "no" (I would not ____), or "unsure." Subjects were then asked to explain or justify their decision. Each scenario was printed on a separate page, leaving the remaining space (approximately 3/4 of a page) for the narrative explanation.

The need for a relatively small sample was dictated by practicality and the need for consistency in interpreting narrative responses. The sample consisted of members of a professional organization of marketing and sales managers to whom the instrument was explained and distributed at a regional meeting. Subjects were asked to complete the instrument later and return it in a provided envelope. Of 110 copies distributed, 88 were returned (48 male and 40 female), for a response rate of 80 percent. Based on background data supplied by respondents, the sample represented an age range of 26 to 62, managerial experience levels from 2 years to 36 years, and management levels from field supervisor to vice president. All were in marketing or sales.

One danger in research of this type is that respondents may indicate decisions they believe to be socially desirable, or perhaps "politically correct." To reduce this tendency, it was stressed in the explanation that there were no right or wrong answers, frankness was important, and anonymity would be maintained.

Tabulations were made of respondent decisions. The Chi-square statistic was calculated to determine the statistical significance of gender differences (the percentage of males and females who "would _____" or "would not _____," or were "unsure"). Because analysis of narrative explanations unavoidably introduces subjectivity of judgment on the part of the analyst, the narratives were read independently by the author and two graduate teaching assistants to achieve a measure of objectivity. Each reader read all male and female narratives for one scenario at a time, making notations of any common themes or reasoning approaches they believed substantially differentiated between male and female explanations. These independent assessments were then compared and discussed to arrive at a consensus of the major differences between the reasoning processes of males and females.

The findings are presented in the discussion of each of the scenarios that follows. Accompanying figures contain the complete scenarios, tabulations of decisions, and excerpts from the narrative responses that illustrate prevalent themes.

Scenario 1: "Break Promise?"

As the manager of a toy store at holiday time, would you break a promise to a previous customer and sell a toy in scarce supply to a woman who claimed her child was very ill? Such was the dilemma respondents faced in the first scenario, the results of which are displayed in **Figure 1**.

The "correct" ethical choice in the situation described was intentionally very arguable. The scenario was intended to be a test of Gilligan's belief that men exemplify a moral orientation of "rights and rules," whereas women exemplify one of "compassion and caring." A logical hypothesis would be that women would be more likely to break their prior promise out of overriding sym-

Figure 2
Scenario 2: "Take Plan?"

You are a salesperson for Omega Computers. One of your major competitors is Dynamark Computers. You are attending a trade association meeting, and you notice that the marketing director of Dynamark is carrying a stack of copies of Dynamark's marketing plan for the next year. After this person has left the room, you notice that one of the copies has inadvertently been left on the table. It would be easy for you to pick up this copy without being observed, which would give you important intelligence about your competitor's plans. Would you take the copy?

Decision:	*Would take*	*Would not take*	*Unsure*
Males	63%	32%	5%
Females	57%	34%	9%
(Chi square = 1.076; p = ns)			

Male voices

- "I certainly would do it—what's wrong with gaining a little intelligence about a competitor?"
- "Yes! Don't you think they would do it to me?"
- "Yes, without hesitation, question, or guilt."
- "Absolutely yes—any opportunity as valuable as this simply cannot be passed up."
- "Yes. Selling is a cutthroat business, and survival is by any means."
- "No, because how can I be that sure that no one will see me do it?"

Female voices

- "Yes, but I would only glance at it and not read it through."
- "Yes. It is the other person's fault—he or she should have been more careful."
- "I think I would do it, honestly. I think it would not be unethical as long as I told no one else and only used the information for myself."
- "I would hate myself for doing it, but, yes, I would be too tempted not to."
- "Yes, and I would rationalize it as being their fault."
- "I would not take it. However, I would look at it there. Otherwise, how could I be so sure of what it was or who it belonged to?"

pathy for the ill child, whereas men would be likely to hold to their original commitment out of fairness. Results supported this hypothesis, with twice as many women as men deciding that they would sell to the woman—a statistically significant difference. Moreover, it is apparent that women found the ethical dilemma more troubling than men, because nearly three times as many women were unsure.

The reader panel concluded that these gender differences figured in the narrative responses:

- Men tended to "solve" the dilemma in brief, declarative answers, while women wrote at much greater length.
- Women worked harder than men to devise imaginative ways to try to resolve the problem to the satisfaction of all parties.
- Many more men than women questioned the honesty of the mother of the ill child.

Scenario 2: "Take Plan?"

The second scenario presented respondents with a straightforward issue of personal honesty. As a salesperson attending a trade show, you have the opportunity to pick up an important document inadvertently left behind by a competitor. As shown in **Figure 2**, there were no significant differences in responses of males and females, with more than half of each sex indicating they would take the document.

These gender differences were observed in the narrative explanations:

- Females went to greater lengths to justify or rationalize a "yes" decision.
- Females were more inclined to blame the individual who misplaced the document.
- Females often made a point of exactly how they would examine the document, implying that

Figure 3
Scenario 3: "Tell About Product?"

You are a salesperson in the medical supplies field, selling to physicians and hospitals. Your product line includes prosthetic devices, such as artificial limb replacements. As a product expert, sometimes you are asked to be present during surgical operations to provide advice and guidance in the proper fitting of your products. A surgeon you have worked with in the past has asked for your advice concerning knee surgery he will be performing on a professional athlete. You have an appropriate prosthetic product that would be suitable, but you also happen to know that a competitor has just developed a new state-of-the-art device that you believe would perform much better for this particular condition. Would you tell the surgeon about the competitor's product?

Decision:	*Would tell*	*Would not tell*	*Unsure*
Males	54%	42%	4%
Females	80%	12%	8%
(Chi square = 7.214; $p < .05$)			

Male voices

- "I would tell the surgeon; he would think better of me, and this could increase further sales potential."
- "No. I work for a particular firm, and it is not my job to sell another company's products."
- "The only question would be, will my product perform adequately? Since the answer is yes, I am under no obligation to mention the product of some other firm."
- "I would mention the other product, simply because it would enhance my credibility with the surgeon and no doubt lead to increased sales in the future."
- "No, I would concentrate on my job, which is selling my company's product. If there is something better out there, it is the responsibility of the surgeon or athlete to find it."
- "I would mention the other product in passing, because I believe it would work to my advantage to appear to be a trustworthy salesperson."
- "I would simply present my product, which is what I am being paid to do, and then the decision is the surgeon's to make."
- "Yes—I would hope that my honesty would pay off in the long run."

Female voices

- "I would absolutely tell the surgeon. I would rather lose the sale than have the athlete lose his career."
- "Whether I end up making the sale or not, I could never feel good about myself again if I did not share this knowledge with the surgeon."
- "Absolutely yes. It would be completely unethical not to tell the surgeon."
- "Of course I would inform the surgeon. It is only right for the athlete that he have this information."
- "I think I might say, 'I'm glad you are choosing our product over X's new device,' and thus give him a hint. Then, if he picked up on this, I would certainly tell him what I know about it."
- "I would definitely provide the surgeon with this information—it is someone's life and health we are talking about."
- "I would ask if he had any questions about other suppliers or other companies. If he asked an appropriate question, I would then tell him honestly what I knew about the other product."
- "Yes, I certainly would tell the surgeon all I know. In the field of medicine, there is no room for unethical behavior."

Figure 4
Scenario 4: "Consult Psychologist?"

You sell corporate financial products, such as pension plans and group health insurance. You are currently negotiating with Paul Scott, treasurer of a *Fortune* 500 firm, for a sale that could be in the millions of dollars. You feel you are in a strong position to make the sale, but two competitors are also negotiating with Scott, and it could go either way. You have become friendly with Scott, and over lunch one day he confided in you that he has recently been under treatment for manic depression. It so happens that in your office there is a staff psychologist who does employee counseling. The thought has occurred to you that such a trained professional might be able to coach you on how to act with and relate to a personality such as Scott's, so as to persuade and influence him most effectively. Would you consult the psychologist?

Decision:	*Would consult*	*Would not consult*	*Unsure*
Males	84%	12%	4%
Females	32%	62%	6%
(Chi square = 14.674; p < .01)			

Male voices

- "Yes, I would seek such advice. I use many behavioral techniques in dealing with customers, and as long as I don't lie to them or cheat them, there is no ethical issue involved."
- "Yes, as long as I believe in my product, seeking professional advice as to how to sell it better is not unethical; indeed, the customer will benefit from my helping him to make the right choice."
- "It is perfectly ethical to do whatever you have to do to sell a product you believe in. Manipulation is only wrong when you manipulate someone not to act in their best interest."
- "Yes, when I train salespeople part of it is how to learn to deal with different customer types—and that is all this situation comes down to."
- "I would do it in a second for an account this important. There is nothing unethical in using a trained professional to help consummate a sale."
- "Yes. Actually, I would be acting in his best interests by doing this."
- "What is wrong about simply learning how best to handle a customer? I fail to see an ethical issue."
- "Absolutely I would do it—it would probably be an excellent training experience for future situations."

Female voices

- "How cruel and degrading it would be to even consider doing such a thing!"
- "Absolutely not—I would never play with a person's mental health."
- "I certainly would not do it, nor ever countenance anyone working for me doing it."
- "It would be totally unethical to use information you acquired in confidence for your own selfish gain."
- "It is not only unethical, it is perhaps illegal—or if it isn't, it should be."
- "No, never. It would never even cross my mind to do such a ruthless, uncaring thing."
- "No, I definitely would not. The very thought of doing this is outrageous."
- "Messing with a person's mind just to make a sale? Really!"

this made a moral difference, whereas none of the males did.

- Many more males than females who said "no" gave as their reason the fear that they might be observed.

Scenario 3: "Tell About Product?"

Scenario 3 placed respondents in the role of a medical supplies salesperson who knows that a competitor has a superior product and who must decide whether to share this knowledge with a surgeon about to perform an operation. This scenario involved powerful relational issues including trust and credibility, as well as the health and future career of the patient. As indicated in **Figure 3**, women were significantly more likely to disclose the information.

Narrative responses revealed clear gender differences in the reasoning of the decisions:

- Relatively few males discussed the dilemma in ethical terms, while most females did.
- Males were more likely to offer the self-serving justification that disclosing the information would enhance their credibility and increase future sales potential.
- Males more commonly stressed the belief that their primary obligation is to sell the product of the company they work for.
- Females were more likely to conceive of indirect ways, such as "hints," to provide the information.

Scenario 4: "Consult Psychologist?"

If a salesperson is dealing with an important prospect who is manic depressive, would it be ethical to seek the advice of a psychologist for coaching on how to persuade and influence him? This scenario involved strong relational content, focusing on such possible issues as breaching a confidence and tampering with a person's mental health. **Figure 4** shows that many more males than females said they would do so.

Narrative responses were deemed by the readers to show these major gender differences:

- Many more females than males discussed the situation in terms of possible ethical issues.
- Males were much more inclined to offer some rationalization as to how the prospect would actually benefit.
- Most of the men's responses were expressed in matter-of-fact terms, while many females employed passionate and emotionally charged language, often registering a tone of outrage at the very suggestion.

Figure 5
Scenario 5: "Provide Gift?"

As a sales representative for Northstar Sporting Goods, you have been assigned an important account, the Downeast store chain. Downeast's purchasing manager has quickly made it clear that he expects special favors; he has hinted broadly that a new set of golf clubs would please him. You can sneak such a set—worth about $800—out of the warehouse without anyone knowing, but it would violate your company's policy that gifts to customers should not exceed $50 in value. If you ask your sales manager, the "gift" will no doubt be forbidden. At the same time, if you lose this account, no matter what the reason, it is bound to hurt your career. Would you provide the gift?

Decision:	*Would provide*	*Would not provide*	*Unsure*
Males	54%	37%	9%
Females	12%	78%	10%

(Chi square = 12.558; $p < .01$)

Male voices

- "I would certainly do it. This is no big deal. Who in their right mind would risk losing an important account for a paltry $800?"
- "Come on, give the man the clubs—these things happen all the time."
- "The ethical answer is, of course, 'no.' That said, of course I would give the man what he wants. I'd be glad that's all he wants."
- "Is this any different than paying $1,000s to get your product on the store shelf? I can't imagine that management would refuse the request, but if that assumption were true then I would quickly provide the clubs on my own."
- "I'd expect to be fired if I were stupid enough to refuse this small request."
- "I would not attempt to take the clubs, as this would be too dangerous, but I would pay for them out of my own pocket and keep the man happy."
- "I would arrange to sell him the clubs at a super discount, and thus skirt the company rule and keep the account."

Female voices

- "If you give in to this demand, what will he ask for next? This is a highly improper basis on which to begin servicing a new account."
- "Absolutely not! It would be both unethical and illegal."
- "This is out and out bribery that is being proposed, and the gentleman's demand should be firmly refused and reported to management without delay."
- "I would simply tell him that we do not do business this way."
- "I would love to be faced with such a 'request'—because what I would do is arrange to have this dishonest purchasing agent caught in the act of accepting a bribe, and then see him be fired."
- "No! You cannot let a purchasing agent push you around this way."
- "I would never get involved in anything like this—it is completely unethical and illegal."
- "Would I steal and bribe simply to keep an account? Absolutely not."
- "There is no way I would ever give in to this kind of pressure. I might end up losing my job, but at least I would keep my self-respect."
- "I have met these types before—give in now, and they'll own you for life."

Scenario 5: "Provide Gift?"

This scenario fell into the category of a classic situation in selling. The purchasing agent of an important account wants an expensive gift; to provide it would violate company policy, while not providing it could lose the account. **Figure 5** shows that males were more than four times as sure they would provide the gift than were females.

The reader panel found these gender differences in the narrative responses:

- Males who would provide the gift generally gave pragmatic explanations that it was necessary to keep the account.
- Males who would refuse the gift generally gave equally pragmatic explanations, such as the danger of being caught stealing.
- Females were much more inclined to stress the moral issues involved.
- Many more females than males perceived the situation as one of exploitation.

Scenario 6: "Hire Handicapped?"

You are hiring for an open sales position, and the best qualified candidate is a man who has suffered a terrible disfigurement as the result of a heroic action. But you fear that customers may be repelled by his appearance. Would you hire him anyway? **Figure 6** shows that more women than men would do so, but that the difference was not statistically significant.

Narrative responses showed notable differences between men and women in the reasoning underlying their decisions:

- Males tended to dismiss somewhat perfunctorily the applicant's misfortune, arguing that sales performance was the only real issue.
- Females often made inferences about the candidate's good character that they deemed relevant to their decision.
- Many female "negatives" went to great lengths to describe how they would find the person another position that did not involve sales contact.
- Many female "positives" suggested steps they would take to ease the burden on the candidate, such as calling customers in advance.
- Many females discussed feelings—the candidate's or others'—arguing that these should be the determinant of such a decision.

Figure 6
Scenario 6: "Hire Handicapped?"

As the sales manager for an office equipment firm, you are considering three candidates for an open sales position. The best qualified in terms of background and experience happens to be an individual who recently suffered severe facial disfigurement and the loss of both hands in rescuing a motorist from a burning car. You are concerned that potential customers might be made extremely uncomfortable by this candidate's appearance. You have a possible legal "out" under equal opportunity laws insofar as the handicap could be construed as interfering with the person's ability to perform all aspects of the job, i.e., carrying bulky demonstration units into prospects' offices. Would you offer the job to the handicapped person?

Decision:	*Would offer*	*Would not offer*	*Unsure*
Males	33%	59%	8%
Females	41%	48%	11%

(Chi square = 1.773; p = ns)

Male voices

- "I admire the man greatly, but what does it have to do with being able to produce sales?"
- "I would feel very sorry for this person, but you can't hire someone out of a feeling of pity."
- "He is to be admired, but there are just too many strikes against him for this position."
- "I have compassion for any handicapped person, but the real question is, can he be effective in this job? Given the circumstances described, I believe that he could not."
- "I would have to base my decision purely on objective factors, of which experience is only one. Frankly, I would not take the risk."
- "I would not be doing my job if I let my personal feelings get in the way of a decision that is best for the company."
- "I would not hire him, because I think the concerns about customer reactions are justified. To be blunt, it is just not worth the trouble it would cause."
- "What happened to this person is a tragedy, but from now on it is not sensible for him to pursue a career in personal selling—I would have to turn to one of the other candidates."

Female voices

- "We should be glad as a company that we have the opportunity to hire such a man."
- "I would definitely hire this man. He has demonstrated his excellent character already—the others have not."
- "A person like this deserves every opportunity to show that he can do the job—and I would certainly give him that opportunity."
- "I would hire him in a minute—he has shown that he is a man of outstanding character. In fact, I would hire him if he were the least qualified (in background and experience) of the three."
- "I would not hire him, simply because I would never want to expose a person like this to a feeling 'of failure or inadequacy.'"
- "For his sake, I would not want to put him in a position of possible rejection, so I would not hire him for the sales job, but I would find another comparable position for him in the firm."
- "No, because it would be cruel and unfeeling to mislead him into believing that his appearance will not cause any problems with customers."

• Many males took pains to explain why feelings should not affect decisions.

This study presented 48 male and 42 female managers with six scenarios that involved possible ethical issues and required essentially a "yes" or "no" decision. Four of the six scenarios produced statistically significant differences in the decisions rendered by the two sexes in identical situations. This result strongly supports the contention of gender socialization theory that men and women bring different ethical standards and values to the work environment. The result appears to refute the theory that gender socialization differences are overridden by the costs and rewards of the work environment.

The analysis of male and female voices explaining and justifying their decisions suggests strongly that men and women differ considerably in their moral reasoning processes, irrespective of whatever decisions they ultimately may make in given circumstances. Based on the analysis and illustrated in **Figure 7**, a general profile may be drawn as to how men and women are likely to differ in dealing with ethical situations in the work environment.

Given the widespread perception that the ethical standards of the business community are declining, the greater infusion of women at management levels takes on added significance. Yet it would be simplistic to say that women's influence will lead to higher ethical levels. If women are compassionate and men are fair, who is more ethical? If women managers reach ethical decisions with greater concern for relationships and feelings and less concern for rights and rules, it is a matter of individual opinion whether that raises ethical standards. What seems more certain is that women's increasing influence in organizations will bring about differences in how ethical problems are perceived and resolved.

Figure 7
Male and Female Differences in Moral Reasoning

In solving ethical dilemmas, females are likely to:

- Primarily respect feelings
- Ask "Who will be hurt?"
- Avoid being judgmental
- Search for compromise
- Seek solutions that minimize hurt
- Rely on communication
- Believe in contextual relativism
- Be guided by emotion
- Challenge authority

In solving ethical dilemmas, males are likely to:

- Primarily respect rights
- Ask "Who is right?"
- Value decisiveness
- Make unambiguous decisions
- Seek solutions that are objectively fair
- Rely on rules
- Believe in blind impartiality
- Be guided by logic
- Accept authority

Women's special traits could readily be seen as improving the ethical climate of a firm in numerous ways: more sensitive and caring treatment of customers, more creative approaches to problem solving, more effective relationship building, creating greater trust in interpersonal affairs, more supportive and understanding supervisory styles. At the same time, some female proclivities might be construed as dysfunctional to traditional corporate mores. For example, women could be viewed as less decisive, slower to make decisions, or naive. Very likely the most satisfactory result for firms will come from a blending of the best traits of each sex.

With the goal of raising levels of corporate ethics, women's voices should be celebrated as another positive product of diversity in organizations. To make their voices heard more clearly, several recommendations come to mind. First, when companies draft codes of ethics, women's views should be included. This study has reinforced earlier studies showing that women often perceive ethical issues in policies or practices where men do not. Second, when firms have recurring ethical problem situations, group discussions should be organized to include men and women for the purpose of working together on more creative solutions as to how the problems can best be solved. Third, training programs and career-long professional development programs should include role-playing of hypothetical ethical situations by both sexes so that each can learn from the other, through demonstration and discussion, the values of different modes of moral reasoning. ❐

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