

POST-JUNGIAN ANALYTICAL PSYCHOLOGY AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO GENDER DIFFERENCES IN MORAL DEVELOPMENT ¹

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ABSTRACT. Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development was accused of androcentrism and sexism by Carol Gilligan, who argued that women start from a moral reasoning framework distinct from men, the Ethics of Care. However, in justifying why gender differences exist, Gilligan drew on Psychoanalysis, which led her to psychic determinism and gender binarism. Therefore, by means of a literature review, this article proposes a new, emancipatorily feminist interpretation of these differences, based on post-Jungian Analytical Psychology. Gilligan's justification was revisited and compared to Jungian, and especially post-Jungian, prerogatives, and the latter can be supported by research that infer there is no gender predominance in moral structures. This article, on the one hand, criticizes Gilligan's initial position, which at the time was interpreted as essentialist, but acknowledges her own theoretical evolution: in her later studies, the author refined her ideas, confronting and dismantling this essentialist trap that had been created around her work. On the other hand, it recovers the contribution of post-Jungian psychology and offers an alternative to Gilligan's psychoanalytic foundation, it concludes that the Ethics of Justice and the Ethics of Care can compose the moral heritage of men and women, without distinction or relation of predominance according to gender, thus pointing to the need for using this approach in the field of Moral Psychology.

Keywords: Moral development; gender differences; analytical psychology.

PSICOLOGIA ANALÍTICA PÓS-JUNGUIANA COMO ALTERNATIVA ÀS DIFERENÇAS DE GÊNERO NO DESENVOLVIMENTO MORAL

RESUMO. A teoria do desenvolvimento moral de Lawrence Kolberg foi acusada de androcentrismo e sexismo por Carol Gilligan, que argumentou que as mulheres partem de uma estrutura de raciocínio moral distinta dos homens: a ética do cuidado. Contudo, ao justificar o porquê das diferenças de gênero, Gilligan subsidiou-se na Psicanálise, a qual a levou ao determinismo psíquico e ao binarismo de gênero. Diante disso, por meio de revisão bibliográfica, este artigo propõe uma nova interpretação emancipatoriamente feminista sobre essas diferenças, com base na Psicologia Analítica pós-junguiana. Revisitou-se a justificativa de Gilligan, comparando-a às prerrogativas junguianas, em especial pós-junguianas, e essa última pode ser amparada por pesquisas que inferem não haver predominância de gênero nas estruturas morais. Este artigo, por um lado, critica o posicionamento inicial de Gilligan, que na época foi interpretado como essencialista, mas reconhecendo sua própria evolução teórica: em seus estudos posteriores, a autora refinou suas ideias, enfrentando e desfazendo a armadilha essencialista que se criou em torno de sua obra. Por

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outro lado, resgatando a contribuição da Psicologia pós-junguiana e oferecendo uma alternativa à fundamentação na Psicanálise por Gilligan, conclui que a Ética da Justiça e a Ética do Cuidado podem compor o patrimônio moral de homens e mulheres, sem distinção ou relação de predominância segundo o gênero, apontando assim para a necessidade de utilizar-se dessa abordagem no campo da Psicologia Moral.

Palavras-chave: Desenvolvimento moral; diferenças de gênero; psicologia analítica.

PSICOLOGÍA ANALÍTICA POST-JUNGUIANA COMO ALTERNATIVA A LAS DIFERENCIAS DE GÉNERO EN DESARROLLO MORAL

RESUMEN. La teoría del desarrollo moral de Lawrence Kolberg ha sido acusada de androcentrismo y sexismo por Carol Gilligan, quien argumentó que las mujeres parten de una estructura de razonamiento moral distinta a la de los hombres: la ética del cuidado. Sin embargo, al justificar las razones de las diferencias de género, Gilligan se basó en el psicoanálisis, lo que la condujo al determinismo psíquico y al binarismo de género. Por lo tanto, a través de una revisión bibliográfica, este artículo propone una nueva interpretación feminista emancipadora de estas diferencias, basada en la Psicología analítica postjunguiana. Se revisó la justificación de Gilligan, comparándola con las prerrogativas junguianas, especialmente las postjunguianas, y estas últimas pueden sustentarse en investigaciones que sugieren que no existe predominio de género en las estructuras morales. Este artículo, por un lado, critica la postura inicial de Gilligan, que en su momento se interpretó como esencialista, pero reconoce su propia evolución teórica: en sus estudios posteriores, la autora refinó sus ideas, confrontando y desmantelando la trampa esencialista que se había tendido en torno a su obra. Por otro lado, recupera la contribución de la psicología postjunguiana y ofrece una alternativa a la fundamentación psicoanalítica de Gilligan, concluye que la ética de la justicia y la ética del cuidado pueden formar parte del patrimonio moral de hombres y mujeres, sin distinción ni relación de predominio según el género, señalando así la necesidad de utilizar este enfoque en el campo de la Psicología Moral.

Palabras-clave: Desarrollo moral; diferencias de género; psicología analítica.

Introduction

In her pioneering and groundbreaking work portrayed in the book *In a Different Voice* (Gilligan, 1982), Carol Gilligan criticized some psychological theories of development for maintaining a masculine bias. She accused these theories of being androcentric and sexist⁸. Important for moral and feminist/gender studies, this work was based on three studies developed by the author in the 1970s with predominantly female participants.

The main theory denounced was the theory of moral development by Lawrence Kohlberg (2017), an author with whom Gilligan worked for years. Gilligan argued that Kohlberg's theory was inadequate for evaluating women because they start from a moral reasoning structure that prioritizes care and well-being, or the ethics of care. Men, on the other hand, start from a structure of justice, or the ethics of justice, to which the theory would be exclusively directed.

However, in attempting to justify these differences in moral development between genders—that is, arguing about the supposedly divergent paths taken by women and men—Gilligan relied on Nancy Chodorow's (1991) interpretation of psychoanalysis. Among the theories she accuses of being androcentric and sexist are Freud's theories of psychoanalysis. According to Gilligan, Freud deserves recognition for asserting that the male experience is the norm for theorizing about morality. Thus, controversially, Gilligan bases her work on the psychoanalytic framework and on Chodorow's

⁸ Sexism is discrimination based on gender differences between men and women, while androcentrism underlies sexism, "[...] consisting of considering men as the center of the universe and the only ones capable of governing, determining laws, and establishing justice" (Ribeiro & Pátaro, 2015, p. 158), and which leads to sexism and other forms of discrimination.

reading of Freud's work. Considered a fragmented reading and an interpretation that was still forming⁹, both led Gilligan to psychic determinism and gender binarism.

Gilligan's (1982) interpretation of gender differences reinforces the male-female binary, as it posits that women possess innate characteristics and, further, that, according to psychoanalysis, these are a destiny, generating an essentialist understanding. However, her theorizing, at least that which stems exclusively from her 1982 book, leaves room for interpretation that could lead to critical analysis of gender inequalities and the inclusion of gender diversity. Therefore, this article uses a literature review to propose a new interpretation of gender differences in moral development based on Jungian analytical psychology. This interpretation aligns with a feminist emancipatory project.

The text of the article is organized according to the sequence of the discussion. First, the criticisms that Gilligan made of psychological theories of development are presented. The focus is on the interpretations of gender differences generated by Piaget's and Kohlberg's theories of moral development, as well as the author's argument about the ethics of care and her interpretation of gender differences.

Next, we revisit Gilligan's justification for moral development occurring differently in men and women, which is based on psychoanalysis for this purpose. The author utilizes Nancy Chodorow's (1991) ideas about the influence of parental relationships and the Oedipus Complex on gender identity formation as the cause of the observed differences.

Finally, this interpretation is compared to the Jungian analytical prerogative (Jung, 2016, 2017). However, the early formulations of Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) also proved problematic when proposing a new interpretation of gender differences that is coherent with a feminist emancipatory project that competes with Gilligan's, filling the gaps she left, since, like the author, he falls into the essentialism of gender binarism. This problem can only be resolved by considering more recent interpretations of this aspect of Jung's theory (McKenzie, 2006; Moraes, 2017; Aufranc, 2018). These interpretations revise the theory by removing the cultural biases and rigid patterns associated with the concepts of *anima* and *animus*.

According to the Jungian understanding of *anima* and *animus*, aspects of the collective unconscious of humanity, this article contributes to the interpretation that the feminine and masculine inhabit both genders within the human psyche. This new interpretation, provided by a revision of analytical psychology, offers an alternative to the approaches proposed by Piaget, Kohlberg, and Gilligan. It suggests that there is no gender distinction or predominance in the structures of justice and care in moral reasoning. Furthermore, this interpretation is supported by Moral Development Psychology research (Derry, 1989; Sengupta et al., 1994; Kuhnen, 2015), which emphasizes that there are no gender differences in moral reasoning structures.

Androcentrism and sexism in psychological theories: Carol Gilligan and the ethics of care

Over the past ten years, I have heard people talk about morality [...], in the last five years, I have begun to hear a distinction in these voices, two ways of talking about moral problems, relating the self to the other [...]. Against the backdrop of psychological descriptions of identity and moral development that I have interpreted and taught for many years, the voices of women sounded distinct. I then began to observe recurring problems in interpreting women's development, associating these issues with the consistent exclusion of women from critical theoretical studies in psychological research (Gilligan, 1982, p. 11).

With these words, North American psychologist Carol Gilligan begins her discussion of a different voice in morality. She has become a reference point for morality and feminism, and gender studies.

In a Different Voice portrayed a pioneering, disruptive research work that would later serve as a vanguard for the emergence of a feminist intellectual current, the Difference Feminism. Although she was not initially attentive to the gender variable, Gilligan (1982) investigated, in three studies: 1)

⁹ Várias das ideias lançadas em *Uma voz diferente* foram revisadas e expandidas por Gilligan (2023) ao longo dos anos, adicionando *insights* inéditos à paisagem de seu pensamento que faltavam ou ainda não estavam totalmente elaborados em 1982.

the conception of morality in adults; 2) moral development; and 3) the role of moral conflict in this development, starting from the Kohlbergian approach.

Kohlberg (2017) revisits the work of the Swiss epistemologist Jean Piaget (1994) in the fields of cognition and morality, using it as a basis to propose a continuation of what Piaget (1994) outlines in the book *The Moral Judgment of the Child*, published in 1932: the New York author proposes that the trajectory of moral development, in the same way as in the Piagetian model of cognitive development, occurs through the evolution of stages.

In his book, Piaget (1994, p. 23) researched the genesis and development of moral judgment: “[...] all morality consists of a system of rules, and the essence of all morality must be sought in the respect that the individual acquires for these rules [...]”, which results in an understanding of moral tendencies toward heteronomy and autonomy. Years later, Lawrence Kohlberg continued this study by Piaget.

Even though he agreed with Piaget, Kohlberg (2017) believes that the path of moral development is longer and more complex than his predecessor proposed. Moral development is based on justifying different points of view and occurs in a qualitative, hierarchical progression, such as from heteronomy to autonomy in Piaget’s understanding. It is also presented distributed, and more precisely, in three levels and six stages, in which the type of reasoning of a higher stage includes the reasoning of a lower stage.

According to Kohlberg (2017), the first moral level is called pre-conventional, consisting of stages 1 and 2, in which moral value is found in external factors, in the power of whoever introduces the rule, through punishments and rewards. The second level, the conventional one, referring to stages 3 and 4, expresses conformity to the rules and seeks to maintain the existing social order. The third and final level, the post-conventional level, concerns stages 5 and 6, in which the law or prevailing discourse is considered legitimate only when it fulfills its duty to guarantee people’s rights. This breaks with the socio-legal context and is based on the awareness of rights constituted in universalizable ethical principles. Thus, the structure of morality centers on justice (Silva, 2020, 2021).

During the period when Gilligan began collaborating with Kohlberg on research, she started addressing real moral dilemmas. Due to the North American context of the early 1970s, she used abortion as the theme of these dilemmas. In her own words:

“[...] in 1973, the year the U.S. Supreme Court legalized abortion, giving women a decisive voice in a choice the court now deemed legitimate. I resumed my studies, focusing on the decision of whether to continue or terminate a pregnancy. I was totally blind to gender at the time, but what started as a study involving men became a study involving women”.

Gilligan (1982) concluded that women were excluded from studies and research in the field of developmental psychology conducted up to that point. For her, the authors and their respective theories maintained a masculinizing bias, that is, they assumed the male experience as the rule (androcentrism) and any difference that appeared between women and men in the trajectory of development was “[...] generally considered as signifying a problem in the development of women” (sexism) (Gilligan, 1982, p. 11).

In the book, the author discusses three studies she conducted with predominantly female samples, one of which involved pregnant women on the topic of abortion. Gilligan (1982) warns that Kohlberg’s theory is inadequate for evaluating women because they start from a moral reasoning structure that prioritizes the care and well-being of others. She calls this structure the *Ethics of Care*. Men, on the other hand, start from a structure of justice, which is what Kohlberg’s theory is geared toward. Thus, the problem lies in the theory, not in women.

The fact is that Kohlberg’s research revealed that women perform worse than men in development. Gilligan attributes this finding to a methodological and theoretical problem in the theory. Methodologically, the author’s initial research samples consisted of an entirely male audience (84 white, middle-class boys aged 10, 13, and 16 years) from his doctoral thesis. Theoretically, the theory elaborates on an inferior performance on the part of women.

Gilligan's criticisms were revolutionary for the time, influencing research in psychology and other fields. These criticisms were adopted by feminist theories, which were becoming institutionalized in universities during that period, beginning in the 1970s. Gilligan's theory, originating from *In a Different Voice*, was interpreted as a feminist standpoint (or perspectivist) theory and appropriated by a group of feminists who used it as a main reference for proposing *Difference Feminism*. This intellectual current "[...] defends the existence of differences between men and women but assumes that feminist characteristics are of superior value, including societal value" (Nogueira, 2017, p. 34).

Building on her critiques, the theory of care, or the theory of the ethics of care, was developed by Gilligan (2011, 2023) and other authors, including Joan Tronto (2018) and Eva Skoe (2016), who supported her ideas about women's development. Forty years after the publication of *In a Different Voice*, Gilligan's ideas remain relevant and are discussed in scientific research both nationally and internationally (Silva, 2020, 2021).

However, the justification and explanation that Gilligan (1982) provided for men and women taking different paths remained controversial and problematic in the literature. Among the main points criticized in the author's work is the relationship she establishes with psychoanalysis and the gender differences that will be discussed below.

Immersing in Gilligan's Argument: Psychoanalysis and Gender Differences

According to Freud (2016), the Oedipus Complex develops when a child enters the phallic stage of psychosexual development and realizes that they are subject to various prohibitions. In boys, the Oedipus complex develops through object investment in the mother, and their relationship with the father becomes one of identification. The father becomes an obstacle to the boy's incestuous desires for the mother, causing the identification relationship to become hostile. The boy desires to eliminate the father and take his place with the mother. The Oedipus complex concludes with the establishment of the law and the formation of the psychic instance superego. Out of fear of castration, the boy abandons his incestuous desires and identifies with the father's law:

[...] the authority of the father or parents is introjected into the ego, and there forms the core of the superego, which assumes the father's severity and perpetuates his prohibition against incest, thus defending the ego from the return of libidinal cathexis (Freud, 2016, p. 104).

This issue led Freud to realize that his binary and oppositional thinking was no longer valid, which is why he sought new ways of thinking about female sexuality that were not based on the male model.

Like Freud, Nancy Chodorow (1991) explains that the formation of identity and personality occurs during the early years of childhood. From a psychoanalytic perspective, then, childhood parental relationships and the Oedipus complex are the main factors influencing gender differences¹⁰. These differences "[...] in personality formation, which, according to Chodorow, emerge in mid-childhood in studies of children's games" (Gilligan, 1982, p. 19). It is important to note that Chodorow is a North American psychoanalyst who, although basing her work on Freudian theory, follows her own path, clearly influenced by the North American interpretation of psychoanalysis.

However, in *A Different Voice*, before relying on psychoanalytic assertions to justify her interpretation of gender differences in moral development, Gilligan (1982) strongly criticizes Freud's theory. When addressing the "[...] tendency of developmental theorists to project the masculine image" (p. 16), the author puts Freud at the top of the list, highlighting that he "[...] elaborated his theory of psychosexual development around the experiences of the male child that culminate in the Oedipus complex[...]" The female version of the Oedipus complex, the Electra complex, "[...] seems frightening to women" (p. 16).

¹⁰ It is worth noting that Freud's orthodox psychoanalysis does not necessarily work with the notion of gender.

The Electra complex¹¹ refers to the corresponding phenomenon of the Oedipus complex, which girls experience in the phallic psychosexual phase. In this case, girls' first object of desire (object investment) is not the father but the mother. As with boys, this desire later turns to the father. Ultimately, it ends with the establishment of the prohibitive law of incest and the formation of the superego in the child's psychic apparatus.

In the 1920s, Freud struggled to resolve the contradictions presented to his theory by differences in female anatomy and the different configuration of girls' early family relationships. After attempting to adjust women to his masculine conception, seeing them as envious of the missing member, he came, on the contrary, to recognize a difference in the development of the strength and persistence of women's pre-Oedipal attachments to their mothers. He considered this difference in women's development as responsible for what he saw as a failure in women's development (Gilligan, 1982, pp. 16-17).

For Gilligan (1982, p. 17), Freud, in indicating the formation of the Superego as a consequence of the fear and anxiety of castration, considered women as "[...] deprived by nature of the impetus for a complete Oedipal resolution. Consequently, the superego of women was impaired; it was never as inexorable, impersonal, or independent of its emotional origins as it is in men." Based on this observation that women's Oedipal level is different from men's, Gilligan (1982, pp. 257–258) cites Freud (1925), who concludes that women "[...] show less sense of justice than men, are less prone to submit to life's great demands, and are more frequently influenced by feelings of affection or hostility."

After characterizing Freud's assertions about women's development and criticizing them, Gilligan (1982) resorts to Nancy Chodorow's (1991) rereading of psychoanalysis to support her argument. She attempts to justify and explain the differences in moral development between genders, as well as the path women supposedly take that leads them to the ethics of care at the expense of men's development and their ethics of justice.

Gilligan (1982, p. 17) points out that Chodorow (1991), in his analyses, argues that gender identity, a constitutive aspect of personality formation, is "[...] with rare exception, firmly and irreversibly established for both sexes by the time a child is about three years old." Thus, as highlighted, parental relationships in childhood, notably the Oedipus complex, determine how men and women will behave throughout life, clearly assuming gender differences as destiny.

According to Chodorow (1991), the interpersonal dynamics of gender identity formation differ for boys and girls because children of both genders have only one gender as their primary caregiver during the first three years of life: the female figure, usually the mother. Thus, identity formation occurs through the child's relationship with their caregiver, in which:

[...] mothers tend to see their daughters as similar to themselves and inseparable from them. Therefore, when girls identify as feminine, they feel like their mothers, merging the experience of attachment with the process of identity formation. Conversely, *mothers experience their sons as the masculine opposite*. Boys who define themselves as masculine separate themselves from their mothers, diminishing *their primary love and sense of empathic bond* (Gilligan, 1982, pp. 17-18, emphasis added).

Citing Chodorow (1991), Gilligan (1982) again warns about the male bias in psychoanalytic theory and interprets gender differences in early post-Oedipal childhood experiences not as detrimental to women's development, but, on the contrary, "[...] girls emerge from this period with a basis for 'empathy' embedded in their primary definition of the self, in a way that does not happen with boys" (Gilligan, 1982, p. 18). Therefore, girls would have a psychic apparatus that is more conducive to feeling the needs or feelings of others as their own and to thinking that someone else is feeling the needs or feelings of another. Furthermore, girls:

¹¹ Although the author adopts this designation in the name of Freudian psychoanalysis, it is not found in Freud's original texts.

[...] do not define themselves in terms of the negation of pre-Oedipal relational modes to the same degree as boys do. Therefore, regression to these modes tends not to seem as threatening to their egos. From a very early age, then, girls who are cared for by a person of the same gender come to feel less differentiated than boys. They feel more continuous and related to the external object world. They are also oriented differently towards their inner object world (Gilligan, 1982, p. 18).

Following this interpretation, relationships are, in fact, experienced differently by women and men. In the formation of boys' gender identity, separation from the mother – or the female figure who fulfills this role – as seen in the Oedipus complex, is fundamental to masculinity, whereas in girls it does not depend on separation from the mother: “[...] since masculinity is defined through separation while femininity is defined through attachment, male gender identity is threatened by intimacy, while female gender identity is threatened by separation” (Gilligan, 1982, p. 18).

It is from this that men tend to have more difficulties with interpersonal relationships than women, in line with Freud's observation about women's *impaired* sense of justice. As Montenegro (2003, p. 500) explains:

The fact that during this phase [up to three years old] the child's closest contact is primarily with women provides a unique interpersonal dynamic. Simply put, it can be said that girls, feeling more identified with their mothers, experience feelings of closeness with them, which fosters the development of a gender identity that merges attachment with personal identity. As for boys, the experience of closeness with their mothers, or with the closest female figure, on the contrary, leads them to define their gender identity by separating themselves from their mothers, thus diminishing the emphasis on empathic bonding and increasing feelings of differentiation.

Gilligan's (1982) interpretation, based on Chodorow (1991), regarding gender differences, however, has been criticized by authors in the field of Psychology of Moral Development (Lourenço, 2006) as well as by feminist and gender studies (Montenegro, 2003; Nogueira, 2017). Therefore, the justification and explanation provided by Gilligan for what she empirically observed remained controversial and problematic.

Two of these closely linked controversies refer to 1) gender binarism (essentialism), into which Gilligan inevitably falls when postulating *innate* female characteristics based on a criticized theory, and she does so based on a theory that she herself criticizes, even if from a reinterpretation that does not contest this first controversy; and, consequently, to 2) psychic determinism (innatism), failing to develop her own critique of the foundations of psychology of moral development.

Regarding the use of Psychoanalysis, Lourenço (2006, p. 206, author's emphasis) points out that:

It is not without a hint of irony that [she] used a stereotype that has long been denounced for appealing to meaningless differences between men and women, contrasting the *expressive* status of women with the *instrumental* status of men.

This controversy is evident when we observe that Gilligan (1982) criticizes Kohlberg's determinism and masculinizing bias but uses psychoanalysis to justify her criticisms of the author and her empirical findings, even though psychoanalysis is also deterministic and masculinizing.

Furthermore, since Gilligan's interpretation is associated with the thought of Difference Feminism, her argument that women are more inclined toward care, while men are inclined toward reason – and therefore have distinct structures of moral reasoning – was considered as essentialist: it points to the existence of masculine and feminine essences, that is, primary, natural, universal or immutable ways of being a man and being a woman. For this reason, the author's interpretation, at least as it was understood in 1982, and Difference Feminism, with which it was associated, are rejected by other feminist theoretical strands, especially current ones, based on post-structuralism and intersectional perspectives, such as Black Feminism (Nogueira, 2017). Thus, while Gilligan's critique is indeed committed to a feminist emancipatory project and denounces the androcentrism and sexism of psychology and its theories, it opens the door to interpretations that differ from her original intention and allow for the dissemination of essentialist ideas about morality and gender.

Regarding psychic determinism, Montenegro (2003) points out that Gilligan, by extensively referencing the arguments of psychoanalysis, whether from Nancy Chodorow's reinterpretation of psychoanalysis, distanced herself from elaborating her own critique of the foundations of the psychology of moral development. Even from Chodorow's feminist perspective (1991), the explanation of women's supposed greater tendency toward care is almost *natural*. Therefore, also because it is based on psychoanalysis, her interpretation has enabled the dissemination of essentialist explanations that overvalue care or altruism in women, even though that was not Gilligan's initial intention.

Thus, the Kantian reason/emotion dichotomy was maintained and presented there as justice/care, but, unlike Kohlberg, valuing care "[...] for the benefit of women. The dichotomy remained unaltered because its foundations were not questioned, using as a possibility for analysis the incorporation of aspects of the psychoanalytic understanding of the phenomenon of difference" (Montenegro, 2003, p. 500). Therefore, it is evident that the reading is fragile and the interpretation is incomplete, and that this was a problematic theoretical choice for what she intends to propose and defend.

It is important to note that, although Gilligan did not elaborate on this critique of the foundations of the very theories she criticizes in 1982, she does so in the years following *In a Different Voice*. Silva (2020, 2021) emphasizes that this is not properly reported in the literature, which is limited to what is discussed in her 1982 book. This gives the false impression that the author's thinking has not evolved since then. In her most recent book, *In a Human Voice*, published 40 years after her most famous work, Gilligan (2023) reflects on the evolution of her thinking over the past four decades, "[...] clarifying what was not said and what was missing from her work when it was first published in 1982" (Silva, 2025, p. 3).

Most of these subsequent studies stemmed from the *10-year Harvard Project on Women's Psychology and Girls' Development*, a research program led by Gilligan (2023) that prompted her to reevaluate her views on various issues, including gender differences and the alleged essentialism of her ideas. Although she clarified in the introduction to her 1982 book that "[...] the different voice I define is characterized not by gender, but by subject matter" (Gilligan, 1982, p. 12), her work was perceived as a *feminine* voice. This perception was common at the time, despite her intention to present a *human* voice. Thus, controversially, her work was incorporated into the very power structure she sought to question: "[...] setting myself up for a trap that it has taken me years to extricate myself from" (Gilligan, 2023, p. 107).

Based on the *10-year Harvard Project*, which studied girls transitioning to adolescence, the author describes this period as a turning point: confronted with a patriarchal culture that bifurcates human qualities as either masculine or feminine and hierarchizes them, girls are forced to relinquish their authentic identity, leading to the silencing of their own voices and doubting their own knowledge (Silva, 2025). Thus,

[...] patriarchy leads human beings to separate from parts of themselves. Following a process, *which borrows from psychoanalysis*, called dissociation, women and men detach from attributes (which are common to both) according to what is expected of their gender: for example, women are oriented toward care, and men are oriented toward justice (Silva, 2025, p. 2, emphasis added).

Gilligan (2023) acknowledges that her thinking was incomplete at that time and she was only able to escape this trap by incorporating insights from her research with girls: "[...] it is not about saying that girls and boys are different, but that girls and boys need to present themselves in certain ways to be considered real men and women" (Silva, 2025, p. 3).

Although Gilligan has updated her 1982 interpretation (Gilligan, 2023), even resorting to psychoanalysis, or even if other more recent readings and revisions of psychoanalysis may also *update* this interpretation – revisions that have even been undertaken within feminist and gender studies in the psychoanalytic approach (Butler, 2017) –, the present text proposes to work with an interpretation based on analytical psychology, also because it shows great potential in light of findings that diverge from those of Piaget, Kohlberg and Gilligan (Derry, 1989; Sengupta et al., 1994; Kuhnen, 2015).

Post-Jungian Analytical Psychology as an alternative to understanding gender differences

This final section proposes a new interpretation of gender differences in moral development that competes with Gilligan's psychoanalytic approach, drawing on Jungian (Jung, 2016, 2017) and post-Jungian (Mckenzie, 2006; Moraes, 2017; Aufranc, 2018) analytical psychology.

One of the greatest resistances to Jungian theory within psychoanalysis centered on the concept of archetypes, which are genetically inherited from the ancestors of a civilization, ethnic group, or people. Rather than being cohesive and *tangible* memories in the classic context or definition of memory, archetypes are a set of unconscious information that motivates human beings to believe in or give credence to certain types of behavior. They correspond to the set of basic behavioral beliefs and values of human beings. Thus, archetypes can manifest in religious or mythological beliefs or in an individual's unconscious behavior (Jung, 2016).

After breaking with Freud, Jung (2017) focused on the concepts of *anima* and *animus*, in which he explains the relationship between the feminine and masculine aspects that exist in each human being: the *anima* (Latin, soul), which is the unconscious feminine side of a man's personality; and the *animus* (Latin, spirit), the unconscious masculine side of a woman's personality.

Becoming aware of this, Jung (2017) discovered that everyone carries a sexual *counterpart* in their psyche, the *anima* (if male) or the *animus* (if female). Jung also realized that, according to the psychological traits of each individual, the tendencies of the opposite gender are repressed and accumulate in the unconscious.

Every man carries within himself the image of a woman, not the image of this or that particular woman, but a feminine image [...] fundamentally unconscious, a hereditary factor [...], an impression or *archetype* of all the ancestral experiences of women; an inherited system of psychic adaptation. The same applies to women: they, too, have their innate image of a man. I called this anima and animus (Jung, 2017, p. 198, our translation, emphasis added)¹².

However, considering the feminist emancipation project on which the most current strands of feminism are based, McKenzie (2006, p. 407, our translation)¹³ points out that "[...] it would be easy to dismiss Jung's contribution to contemporary gender thought by focusing on his culturally biased writing about gender that claims inherent gender characteristics linked to biological sex." Thus, an interpretation of gender differences in moral development based on Jungian theory, as the author himself elaborated, would lead to the same problems as Gilligan's interpretation, which is emancipatory and feminist to a certain extent, due to the essentialism in the uncritical and ahistorical assumption of binary identities and exclusion of diversity.

According to Brabo (2015, p. 111), feminism can be characterized as both "[...] a social movement, with an ideology of women's liberation, and as a critical theory of sexism (sex discrimination based on the ideology of women's inferiority), the androcentric worldview, and male domination." Since its emergence, several feminist theories have been formulated, which can be grouped into *strands* considering their ideas and epistemological foundations, resulting in Feminisms, in the plural.

Among these strands is the Difference Feminism, which incorrectly appropriated Gilligan's theory (1982), and some more recent ones, such as post-structuralist and queer feminisms, both of which have post-structuralism as a common epistemological foundation. These perspectives reject the essentialist interpretation made from Gilligan's 1982 work and the Difference Feminism itself, for

¹² "Every man carries within him the eternal image of woman, not the image of this or that particular woman, but a definite feminine image [...] fundamentally unconscious, an hereditary factor [...], an imprint or 'archetype' of all the ancestral experiences of the female, a deposit, as it were, of all the impressions ever made by woman – in short, an inherited system of psychic adaptation. The same applies to woman: she too has her innate image of man. I have called this anima and animus".

¹³ "It would be easy to dismiss Jung's contribution to contemporary gender thinking by focusing on his culturally biased gender writing that claims inherent gender characteristics linked to biological sex".

two main reasons: 1) they present conflicting positions; and, emerging later in time, 2) they overlap in terms of adherence and social demand¹⁴.

In Difference Feminism, the feminist emancipation project lies in recognizing the *right to difference* and acknowledging the inherent differences in women, such as the propensity for care advocated by Gilligan, which should be respected and valued. Post-structuralist and queer feminisms reiterate the constructed nature of difference. In these feminisms, emancipation lies in recognizing that gender identities are constructed and fluid, “[...] they are always being constituted, they are unstable and therefore subject to transformation” (Louro, 1997, p. 27), as are sexual identities, but which are not relevant to this article.

The overlap between these feminisms occurs because, having emerged and consolidated after the first, they now have greater adherence in feminist theorizations and studies, in quantitative terms, and due to current demands, influenced by the LGBT movement¹⁵, which expands the understanding of identity by recognizing gender diversity and dissenting from the male-female binary as a possible identity. Due to these two factors, one could argue that these feminisms represent contemporary feminist thought on gender.

Thus, given this contemporary emancipation project, it is worth highlighting that Jung’s concepts of *anima* and *animus* “[...] lead us into a trap of linear order, of fixed identities, androgynous symmetries and archetypes inherited in a differentiated way based on sexual anatomy, a breach in the universality of the collective unconscious” (McKenzie, 2006, p. 407).

In fact, there is a more progressive shift from Gilligan’s (1982) initial interpretation, based on psychoanalysis – in which any dissent from the masculine and feminine models is labeled as a developmental problem in the Oedipus complex – to Jung’s understanding of gender differences, since his theory “[...] allows both genders to reside in an individual” (McKenzie, 2006, p. 407). However, according to McKenzie (2006, p. 407), the problem arises because the theory “[...] postulates the appropriation of the contrasexual gender for the unconscious. Jung’s *Anima/Animus* concepts cannot explain the transgender experience, with its reversal of starting points and the fluidity of sexual attraction.”

Thus, it is assumed that people of the male biological sex have masculinity as their (conscious) starting point, while their femininity resides in the unconscious archetype *Anima*, whereas people of the female biological sex start from femininity and have their masculinity in the unconscious archetype *Animus*, and never the other way around. Transgender people, for example, identify, some from a very young age, with the gender reference opposite to that assigned to their biological sex, which cannot be contemplated in this *anima/animus* theorization. Therefore, McKenzie (2006, p. 407) considers it “[...] terrible for our time. We live in an era of emerging, not fixed, realities, and we are beginning to value the open display of masculinity and femininity in both genders.”

In agreement with McKenzie (2006), Moraes (2017) asserts that although Jung perceived that the psyche aims for balanced integration of the masculine and feminine, which is already a revolutionary theorization and far ahead of its time, the concepts of *anima* and *animus* were developed within the patriarchal context in which he himself was immersed, where, at the time, other identity possibilities were unthinkable. And the problem with the theory is that it presupposes that in the consciousness of men,

[...] the collective values of masculinity are fully developed and adapted, just as in women, all the values of the feminine are fully developed and adapted. The fact is that in practice, this has not been proven. This conception derives from a macho and sexist culture (Moraes, 2017, p. 7).

¹⁴ There is no consensus on whether these strands have superseded the previous one, since feminisms coexist (Nogueira, 2017), but their emerging position is undeniable.

¹⁵ The most common acronym to represent sexual and gender diversity, a population referred to in its entirety by the acronym LGBTQIAPN+, which includes lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transsexuals, transvestites, transgender people, queers, intersex people, asexuals, pansexuals, non-binary people, etc.

Therefore, Aufranc (2018, p. 20) reiterates the need to strip the “[...] concepts of *Anima* and *Animus* of their cultural bias and rigid patterns. Only then can we understand that the archetypal expresses itself in different polarities: the feminine and the masculine, the soul and the body, and the inside and outside of us.”

Thus, the *partial essentialism* committed by Jung – partial, since it allows for a certain plurality of gender, but which still falls back into essentialist binarism – and which runs through the concepts of *anima* and *animus*, does not invalidate them, it only demands a revision and adaptation to contemporaneity, as McKenzie (2006), Moraes (2017), and Aufranc (2018) point out: “[...] it is the responsibility of contemporary Jungians to engage in a revision of Jung’s gender theory, freeing us from the restrictive thinking of *anima/animus* and enabling us a Jungian contribution to gender thought” (McKenzie, 2006, p. 417, our translation)¹⁶. This is similar to what happened with Gilligan (1982), who needed to refine her initial ideas and expand them (Gilligan, 2023) – without necessarily making concessions, but rather complementing them – in order to escape the essentialist trap in which her theory had become entangled.

Indeed, there are psychic configurations of *anima* and *animus* as Jung posits, but other possibilities, so apparent today, cannot be disregarded. Revising the theory implies considering two things: first, that the *anima* and *animus* can be present in both men and women, allowing the unconscious to manifest differently, and second, that the ego (conscious) can expand beyond just masculine or feminine (Moraes, 2017).

In other words, it can be said that this change is not only in the collective unconscious, in the *anima* and *animus* archetypes, but also in the ego, with the integration of the masculine and feminine into the conscious. For example, a man can adopt the gender traditionally attributed to women and have masculinity in the *animus* archetype. He would also have both the *anima* and *animus* archetypes in his unconscious.

McKenzie (2006) also references pioneering North American authors who revised this point of Jungian analytical psychology: in the 1970s, James Hillman, who made the theory more flexible regarding the multiplicity and simultaneity of archetypes in the psyche of both genders; and June Singer, who, in greater contact with the feminist theorizations of that period, updated the theory regarding gender diversity, inserting the concept of *androgyny*. However, the revision made here is closer to the work of Christopher Hauke (McKenzie, 2006), from 1990 onwards, who opened the discussion of the theory with post-structuralism.

Therefore, the problem of the partial essentialism of Jungian theory can be solved by revising it to align with the goals of contemporary feminist thought on gender, particularly post-structuralist and queer feminisms. Consequently, one can now argue why men and women exhibit different performances in moral development, as noted by Gilligan (1982) in a new interpretation of this phenomenon.

According to the review presented here, *anima* and *animus* are archetypes common to all individuals. Masculinity and femininity can be unconsciously distributed, regardless of biological sex or the gender identity a person assumes, in the same way as consciously. Therefore, *anima/animus* aligns with the post-structuralist understanding of gender, since the theory has been revised for this purpose, in which identities flow freely, possessing personality traits without any kind of impediment or restriction. This Jungian understanding, and this since the author’s original formulation, breaks with the need for coherence between sex/gender (Silva & Brabo, 2016; Nogueira, 2017).

If women exhibit different performance from men in moral development, and if this is due to adherence to a moral reasoning structure that values care, as Gilligan (1982) argues, then, from the perspective of Jungian analytical psychology, men could also adhere to this structure, consequently performing similarly to women, and vice versa. This replaces Gilligan’s 1982 interpretation of the cause of gender differences in moral development, based on psychoanalysis—where the female psychic apparatus differs from the male in terms of sense of justice—with a Jungian interpretation, in which both men and women can use the moral structures of care and justice, without gender

¹⁶ “it is the responsibility of contemporary Jungians to engage in a revision of Jungian gender theory [...] would unburden us of the confining A/A thinking and allow us to offer a Jungian contribution to gender thinking”.

distinction, through the simultaneous sharing of multiple archetypes in the collective unconscious and the non-binary ego (conscious).

Nevertheless, this Jungian interpretation presented here can still be supported by research developed in the field of psychology of moral development, which has made similar assertions from theoretical and empirical perspectives.

Crossing the historical context of the 1980s and 1990s, in which Gilligan's ideas had worldwide repercussions, since then some research (Derry, 1989; Sengupta et al., 1994; Kuhnen, 2015) has begun to demonstrate that both men and women can reason morally based on structures of justice and care: the Ethics of Justice, as defended by Kohlberg (2017), and the Ethics of Care, as defended by Gilligan (1982), without distinction or predominance according to gender.

In the case of empirical studies, one can cite Derry (1989), who examined the types of moral reasoning used by managers of an industrial company in the United States in work-related conflicts through an investigation with a sample of 20 men and 20 women. Regarding the results, which were collected through interviews, the author highlights that:

The data presented here do not support Gilligan's thesis (1982) that the two modes of moral reasoning, justice and care, are gender-related. In this corporate setting, those differences were not in evidence. While Gilligan suggests that the socialization process of infants and children results in these differing moral orientations, it appears that the different modes of reasoning are learnable later in life in response to environmental stimuli (Derry, 1989, p. 861).

In other cultural contexts, such as in India, Sengupta et al. (1994) sought to investigate gender differences in moral development by evaluating moral orientation toward justice, care, and responsibility. However, their hypothesis that an orientation toward care is more prevalent in India than in Western countries was not confirmed. Both genders presented moral orientations of both natures, justice and care, but women showed a predominance of care, while men showed a combination of justice and care.

In theoretical studies and more recent research, Kuhnen (2015) explores the complementarity between the ethics of care and notions of justice, rights, and principles (the ethics of justice). Based on Gilligan, the author argues that the search for space for the so-called *female voice* in society does not mean that an ethics of care should be implemented to the detriment of an ethics of principles and rights, defending the complementarity that must exist between the reasoning structures for the moral formation of people.

Moreover, the fact that women perform better in the ethics of care, performing care almost exclusively, as Gilligan (1982) initially postulated based on her sample, can be explained by dominant cultural influences that reiterate the maintenance of identities in which women are educated to be passive, sentimental, and delicate and men are socialized to be virile and aggressive with heightened sexuality. This is consistent with what Gilligan (2023) highlights when she addresses the issue of patriarchy and dissociation of parts of the human voice in her work with girls.

Men, therefore, would have few opportunities to develop or explore such characteristics considered feminine, as inferred by this group of research represented by the aforementioned investigations, as Gilligan (2023) now infers (the human voice is common to men and women, but is divided and organized into two antagonistic genders), and as Jungian theory must also consider this in the review presented here. Consequently, men have few opportunities to inherit archetypes related to femininity. Therefore, even if a relationship of predominance between genders in adherence to structures of justice and care is found, these studies generally resort to culture as an explanation.

Final considerations

Focusing on Gilligan's Ethics of Care, as we have attempted to do here, it becomes evident that an essentialist interpretation is possible (and has been made by many) based on the author's initial work regarding gender identities, which are in fact culturally and historically constructed, as contemporary feminist thought on the subject denounces. Nevertheless, if we revisit her thesis that *a problem in the theory*, the implicit assumption of male experience as the rule, *became a problem*

in the development of women, we recognize her significant and unprecedented contribution to research in psychology at the time. Gilligan (2023), however, would explain in subsequent works that the essentialist interpretation was a misinterpretation of her original proposal. She demonstrated this by incorporating patriarchy into her reflections, showing that the voice of care, “[...] although it has been heard as a female voice, is, in fact, a human voice” (Silva, 2025, p. 3).

This article contributes to the national and international literature criticizing this misguided essentialist interpretation by celebrating and recognizing the merit of her work in the field of psychology, particularly in the area of moral development, for psychology itself, and extending to other areas of knowledge.

More specifically, the interpretation and, nevertheless, its initial basis in psychoanalysis regarding the cause of gender differences are criticized. Gilligan did not consider the possible implications of her ideas on her own findings and took a questionable stance by basing her work on psychoanalysis, as she herself acknowledges “[...] that, in part, she was partly responsible for the confusion and misunderstanding surrounding her ideas when she combined the words ‘different’ and ‘woman’ in the title of her 1982 book” (Silva, 2025, p. 3, emphasis added) in the title of her 1982 book. Both her interpretation and the school of thought she came to represent – the Difference Feminism – have been criticized by more recent feminists, drawing attention to the danger that *essentialist theories* can pose to the reiteration of inequities experienced by women, such as the care of children as *destiny*, since they allow one to infer that care is a natural and exclusive task for women.

By consciously reflecting on these processes, we can observe how society, at least Western society, has modified behavioral patterns in a short period of time. Women not only care for children; today, they are also entering the labor market and often do not assume the role of primary caregiver. Similarly, men’s paternal role is evolving in a historical paradigm shift that challenges the interpretation underlying Difference Feminism. It is no coincidence that the authors of this feminist movement ignore Gilligan’s subsequent work (2023) because it clarifies that the essentialist interpretation of her work is mistaken in light of this paradigm shift. Furthermore, analytical psychology contributes to this idea by demonstrating that morality and concepts are not limited to gender contexts but rather to the historical and conscious development of our society.

Just as Gilligan revised and expanded her contribution to psychoanalysis, Jungian analytical psychology, especially when revised (post-Jungian), in turn, aligns with what is currently theorized in the field of feminist and gender studies, regarding multiple, non-essentialist, plural identities, in addition to endorsing a group of research indicating that the Ethics of Justice and the Ethics of Care can comprise the moral heritage of men and women, without distinction or relationship of predominance according to gender. The focus now shifts to precisely diagnosing how analytical psychology could support research in the field of the psychology of moral development and considering whether and to what extent this would be possible, given their distinct epistemological natures.

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