

# Are Women Morally Superior to Men?

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## ABSTRACT

Gender differences in moral reactions arise less from biology and more from culturally enforced norms of masculinity and femininity. In this research paper, the main question that has been had –Are women morally superior to men?- was transformed into a more scientific way to analyze the subject. My paper explores gendered patterns of moral reasoning and self-regulation among Turkish adolescents, taking into consideration sociocultural expectations. However, this paper does not determine which sex is superior, it points out the patterns in the field of morality between genders. In my research, I have found that many studies investigate why Turkish adolescents choose extreme/controlled responses in moral dilemmas. Very few studies integrate moral, philosophical, psychological, and neuroscientific approaches in a non-Western setting, and take a descriptive approach to moral vignettes and thematic to understand their reasoning. To address this gap, twenty-nine Turkish adolescents aged 14 to 18 completed a survey measuring self-control and responses to everyday moral scenarios. The research question will be “How do male and female adolescents in Turkey differ in their responses to everyday moral dilemmas, and how might sociocultural gender expectations shape these differences?”. These findings are consistent with the gender similarities hypothesis and suggest that the perception of women as morally superior may reflect cultural expectation rather than a measurable difference in adolescents' moral behavior. Boys and girls did not differ significantly on either measure (all  $p > .05$ ); boys scored slightly higher on self-control and girls slightly higher on the scenarios, but both effects were small. As it was mentioned, women are not morally superior; it has just been tried to examine the difference between genders.

**Keywords:** morality, gender differences, feminism, adolescents, Turkish adolescents

## INTRODUCTION

In 1994, Alice Eagly and Antonio Mladinic questioned a hypothesis, and they pointed out a paradox: even though women seem to face disadvantages in society, people tend to hold more favourable opinions of

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them- a phenomenon they referred to as the “women-are-wonderful effect” (Williams & Best, 1990). According to this theory, societies have generally coded women as caregivers, maternal figures, and emotionally guiding individuals (Williams & Best, 1990). Men, on the other hand, are more often associated with values such as power, achievement, and competition- qualities considered more strategic than moral. When women make mistakes, it is perceived as more shocking by society because they are expected to be “better.” Since women are viewed as bearers of moral responsibility, their betrayal or involvement in crime is seen as a greater threat to social norms. Although women are perceived as more moral, compassionate, and virtuous, they remain underrepresented in leadership positions, academia, and politics. This seemingly positive perception places women into a fixed mold, ultimately limiting them. In fact, it may not be that women are inherently more moral, but rather that society pressures them to act in more moral ways.

Asking the not-overlapping-places between genders when the study investigates to find differences, it must have looked at the theorem of feminism, because the idea of introducing women rights asks the rights of feminism too. Feminism was born as a response to gender discrimination towards women (Ikechukwu, 2022). In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, feminists, such as Mary Astell and Damaris Masham, defended that women were at the same level of rationality with men (Ikechukwu, 2022). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Harriet Taylor Mill and John Stuart Mill argued that double standards harm both men and women (Ikechukwu, 2022). In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Emma Goldman and Simone de Beauvoir emphasized how being in the disparate sexes was limiting subjectivity (Ikechukwu, 2022). In the storial age, after countless roles deemed unpromising for the future, a female poet did emerge: Sappho. Sappho, the first known female poet, was one of the earliest voices to challenge the male-dominated structure of Ancient Greece and to advocate, in her own way, for women's expression (Johnston, 2017). She is best known for her poetry that explores the world of women, their desires, sensuality, and love. Often associated with the origin of the word “lesbian,” Sappho’s final surviving poem was discovered by archaeologists on a papyrus wrapped around a mummy (Johnston, 2017). Even though she had created new rhymes, such as Sapphic meter, the poems couldn’t be passed into modern age; the last poems were on fragmented papyruses. In such a scenario, the emergence of a female poet was nearly impossible -not because of a lack of talent, but because a woman did not even have a room of her own. And only when she has a room of her own, an education, a dream, economic freedom, free time, and a purpose can she truly creates art, contribute to science, and leave a mark on history. Virginia Woolf is right: *“Women are hard on women. Women dislike women. Women -but are you not sick to death of the word?”* (Woolf, 1929). History and nature have tried to erase both her and her poetry, yet like someone who has managed to climb out of a well, she has carried her voice into the modern age. Sappho is an example of how even women with great talents get treated with a grudge due to patriarchal society, therefore, this questions: Why females lack stamina in the culture; should it be this way, because they are less prestigious; why do women show much more effort to get somewhere, moreover, over time, do they get morally educated? However, these question will stay remain for future implications as this paper does not focus on the sociocultural part.

In asking whether women are morally superior to men, we find ourselves not confronting a matter of biological essence but rather a deeply ingrained sociocultural construct -one that has been shaped, reinforced, and selectively remembered by patriarchal frameworks. Women have long been burdened with the role of moral custodians, not because of an innate virtue, but because society has consistently

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demanded it of them. From ancient *damnatio memoriae* to modern cancel culture, the public treatment of women -especially those who rise to prominence- reveals the persistent need to control, label, and narrate female existence within predefined moral binaries. Yet many figures, separated by millennia, demonstrate that resilience, creation, and reinvention can transcend social erasure. Thus, perhaps the question is not whether women are morally superior, but why society insists on framing morality through the lens of womanhood at all.

As this question touches the phenomenon of feminism, my research questions accounts for the deeply misogynistic culture in Turkey. In Turkey, women face bullying, harassment, objectification, microaggressions, double standards, misogyny in everyday life. To be able to scientifically analyze this question, we must look at the definition of morality, and we must also trace the development of morality from the beginning of adolescence.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK & LITERATURE REVIEW**

Adolescence is the era of the life cycle where young people gain an independent social role in community (Blakemore & Robbins, 2012). Also, it is the era of life when young people undergo hormonal, biological, cognitive changes, and experience emotional upheavals (Cooley, Elenbaas, & Killen, 2012). According to Erikson's stage of "Identity vs. Role Confusion", adolescents explore the "Who am I?" question at this time (Allen, 2025). They characterize their moral judgments, such as fairness, justice, and equality; the decision-making process happens independently from parents.

Empirical research has consistently identified adolescence as a critical period for moral reasoning development, and, also, defining gender topics. Using experimental and survey-based methods, Cooley, Elenbaas, and Killen (2012) examined adolescents' moral judgments in contexts of social exclusion and found that evaluations increasingly integrated emotional concern with principles of fairness as age increased. Similarly, longitudinal and cross-sectional studies indicate that adolescents' moral reasoning becomes more flexible and context-sensitive over time, particularly in peer-related dilemmas. These findings suggest that moral judgment during adolescence is not static but shaped by social experience and emotional maturity.

Moral development occurs when emotions and reasoning work together (Cooley et al., 2014). To be able to understand complex social situations, adolescents rely on emotional reactions and cognitive judgments (Cooley et al., 2014). Gender, which is a part of intergroup exclusion, sometimes creates negative consequences, including moral dilemmas (Cooley, Elenbaas, & Killen, 2012). (In societies experiencing a conflict, the intergroup exclusion states the challenges of understanding and managing intergroup relations (Syna, 2020). Therefore, this concept touches, and is close to the aim of this paper. Moreover, it makes it easier to understand why examining the sex roles in the environment is difficult.) According to the social reasoning developmental model, adolescents evaluate exclusion through three lenses: the moral domain, societal domain and psychological domain (Cooley et al., 2014). Research shows that adolescents get older by accepting gender-based exclusion as morally wrong (Cooley et al., 2014).

As Turkey is one of the places where women face patriarchal rules, like any other place, women tend to act more carefully in moral dilemmas. Therefore, the question arises: Are women morally superior to men? Tappin' and McKay's study investigates why some people think that they are more moral than the average person, and this phenomenon is called the illusion of moral superiority (Tappin, 2017). Even some violent criminals call themselves more moral than average citizens (Tappin, 2017). If it is wanted to examine this question, adolescence is the beginning point to be studied.

### **a. Philosophical Roots of Moral Behavior**

Thinkers such as Michael Tomasello and Frans de Wall morality showed itself in early humans (Villiers, 2023). Things like sympathy turned into norms in societies (Villiers, 2023). Although religion did not create morality, it helped it to be shaped (Villiers, 2023). Greek philosophers such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle also helped it to be shaped. Later in life, Kant gave rational justifications for principles (Villiers, 2023). De Villiers' article studies the history of morality (Villiers, 2023). He states that morality is a normative social institution whose main purpose is to cooperate fairly around collectives (Villiers, 2023).

To Aristotle's way of thinking, moral behavior has long been conceptualized as the result of habituated action rather than innate disposition. Aristotle's virtue ethics emphasizes that moral character develops through repeated practice within a social environment (Aristotle, trans. 350 BCE/1998). According to him, virtue has two kinds -intellectuality and morality (Aristotle, 350 B.C.E). Intellectuality requires time and experience, whereas morality requires habitation (Aristotle, 350 B.C.E). As it is known, the word "ethike" comes from the name of "ethos", which means habit (Aristotle, 350 B.C.E). In this sense, habit is central to ethics (Aristotle, 350 B.C.E). However, nothing in nature is composed of ethics; therefore, ethics are not composed of nature (Aristotle, 350 B.C.E). You cannot train a snowfall to train to move upward, because they cannot get adapted due to gravity (Aristotle, 350 B.C.E). Even though in some cases there are things that come from nature, such as senses, over time we learn to adapt and train new habits, such as morality (Aristotle, 350 B.C.E). Moreover, as people train, they internalise habits.

Aristoteles states that we do not look for what virtue is, we look to become good (Aristotle, 350 B.C.E). For ethics, theoretical knowledge is not enough, we must see them turn into actions (Aristotle, 350 B.C.E). However, the lessons that are taught in a case are neither sharp nor clear because they depend on humans and events (Aristotle, 350 B.C.E). Therefore, for each situation, we must find "the right rule", which means the mean of extremes, minimum or maximum, good or bad (Aristotle, 350 B.C.E). Excess and deficiency kill the right rule, and we cannot talk about morality in those cases (Aristotle, 350 B.C.E). For instance, having too much gratification can lead to self-indulgence, while having no gratification can result in insensibility (Aristotle, 350 B.C.E). Moral excellence should be the return of having the right feedback to good pleasures and wrong pain. (Aristotle, 350 B.C.E). The scale that measures morality is the consequence of pleasure and pain (Aristotle, 350 B.C.E). And in each case, we get far away from being in the right rule (Aristotle, 350 B.C.E). Then does a person become judicial by doing right acts, or is he already a judicial person who behaves with right acts? Aristoteles states that an act is not enough, to become moral, it should have knowledge (Aristotle, 350 B.C.E). It is not like an art; an art may become good naturally, but a right act cannot become good by nature, it should have good will (Aristotle, 350 B.C.E).

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According to Aristoteles, to define what is a virtue, we must look at the soul (Aristotle, 350 B.C.E). The soul has three categories: passions, faculties, and states of character (Aristotle, 350 B.C.E). Also feminists defend that both emotion and rationality are both valuable. Ethics of care include attentiveness, responsibility, competence, and responsiveness as the principles of morality. They also link feminist ethics to Aristotelian virtue theory. For ethics, it is suitable for states of character because it is not what makes a moral moral, it is the act of using right action (Aristotle, 350 B.C.E). Virtue is not passion nor faculties because feeling sad does not make a person bad, or having talent does not make a person good neither (Aristotle, 350 B.C.E). The thing that creates virtue is how we react to emotions or how we use the talents (Aristotle, 350 B.C.E). Virtue involves choice; it requires being mindful and phronesis (Aristotle, 350 B.C.E). Aristotle's mean, emotional equilibrium, is a mean between two vices -one of excess, one of deficiency- that is what makes a person good (Aristotle, 350 B.C.E). Anyone can get on their nerves, but to do this to the right person, to the right extent, at the right time, with the right motive, and in the right way- it is not for everyone (Aristotle, 350 B.C.E). Except, in some acts -such as jealousy, shamelessness, hatred, theft, adultery, murder- there is not the doctrine of the mean because Aristoteles sets a boundary to ethical relativism (Aristotle, 350 B.C.E).

In contrast to habit-based accounts of morality, deontological theories emphasize self-regulation and moral restraint. Kant argues that an action has morality when it is only done with "duty" (Kant, 1785). Something can be done for respect of moral law, not because of personal gain (Kant, 1785). He argued that moral action arises not from emotion or inclination but from the capacity to act according to duty and rational principle (Kant, 1785/1996). Kant thinks that morality depends on duty rather than feelings, desires, and habits. Emotions are far away from being reliable and unsubjective (Kant, 1785). They change from person to person and time (Kant, 1785). If a person helps others because of a feeling, it is not truly moral because a feeling is temporary, therefore, habits are not considered (Kant, 1785).

Kant's perspective of acting from duty overlaps with the psychology of "self-control" (Kant, 1785). Self-control is the ability to regulate impulses, emotions, or habits (Kant, 1785). If someone wants to lie, but self-control -or "acting from duty"- helps you tell the truth, because it's the right thing to do (Kant, 1785). On the neuroscientific side, this refers to "higher-order cognitive processes" which means decision-making or planning.

Together, Aristotle and Kant offer two ways to think about moral maturity: habit and rational duty. Therefore, with the help of these philosophers' knowledge, I will measure via survey Turkish adolescents' morality on habit, duty, and self-control. Because of gendered expectations in Turkey may influence who is seen as more "dutiful", "close-to-mean", or self-restrained, Turkish girls are expected to be self-sacrificing especially in family and caregiving roles. Boys, meanwhile, may be culturally encouraged to act assertively, sometimes excusing impulsivity as "masculine." Social interpretations in Turkey may make "duty" seem more feminine.

## **b. Psychological Foundations of Self-control and Emotional Maturity**

There is an important self-control experiment called “Marshmallow Test”, which was created by psychologist Walter Mischel (Mischel, 2014). The experiment tests the ability to procrastinate momentary satisfaction in the aim of controlling the self (Mischel, 2014). As the study explores psychological and neuroscientific sides, it shows that volition is learnable.

In the 1960 Stanford Marshmallow experiment, kids were given two choices: one marshmallow or two marshmallows if they waited a little longer (Mischel, 2014). This simple example was metaphorical of big choices, such as higher SAT scores, saying instinct arguments included in relationships, and higher healthy diets (Mischel, 2014). However, it is important to add that the environment also plays a significant role side to self-control (Mischel, 2014).

Psychologists also introduce us into two brain systems: hot and cool systems (Mischel, 2014). While the hot system directs emotional and immediate reward as it symbolizes amygdala, the cool system directs rational and future aims as it symbolizes prefrontal cortex (Mischel, 2014). However, self-control depends on cooling the hot system (Mischel, 2014).

As some children looked away, and imagined it as a picture, turning it a marshmallow became a symbol for cognitive reframing (Mischel, 2014). Furthermore, fMRI studies show that when they wait a bit longer, amygdala activity decreases while prefrontal cortex increases (Mischel, 2014). Self-control can be studied as it is similar to muscle sport as the prefrontal cortex helps decision-making, thinking, mindfulness, working memory and emotional awareness increase prefrontal cortex regulation (Mischel, 2014). Moreover, trust in the environment also shapes self-control (Mischel, 2014). Kids who have untrusted environments are more likely not to wait; kids who have stable environments are more likely to wait (Mischel, 2014). However, self-control does not come from the birth, anyone can train their delaying gratification (Mischel, 2014). In the end, the prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for planning should overrule amygdala, which is responsible for emotion (Mischel, 2014).

In the longitudinal study, the original kids examined 40 years later in their adolescents (Casey et al., 2011). In the main cohort, 500 and more children participated from Stanford’s Bing Nursery School in 1960 and 70s (Casey et al., 2011). In the follow-up experiment, 60 adults participated in their 40s (Casey et al., 2011). They were divided into two groups: high delayers and low delayers (Casey et al., 2011). High delayers were the children who waited longer, and showed higher self-control again (Casey et al., 2011). Low delayers were the children who waited less, and showed lower self-control again (Casey et al., 2011). In experiment 1, participants showed “cool”, which were neutral faces, and “hot” versions, which were emotional faces (Casey et al., 2011). They were given tasks of press the button for “go”, and not for “no-go”s (Casey et al., 2011). In experiment 2, same task was conducted in an fMRI (Casey et al., 2011). Again, self-control was represented with prefrontal cortex and right inferior frontal gyrus; reward processing was represented with ventral striatum (Casey et al., 2011). In the results, there was no difference for the cool task, but there was a significant difference for the hot task (Casey et al., 2011). Low delayers made more errors, such as wrong alarms (Casey et al., 2011). In experiment 2, fMRI, high delayers showed stronger activity in the right inferior frontal gyrus (Casey et al., 2011). They used more top-down control. Low delayers showed more activation in the ventral striatum (Casey et al., 2011). They used more sensitivity of emotion to rewards (Casey et al., 2011). The frontostriatal imbalance, which

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means not strong control and strong response, is the reason why adults still struggle with the same issue 40 years later (Casey et al., 2011).

Moreover, in the paper “Decision-making in the adolescent brain”, Blakemore and Robbins investigates the decision-making progress in the time of adolescence (Blakemore & Robbins, 2012). Risk-taking and impulsivity movements increase, and brain development for top-down /cognitive control and the prefrontal cortex slow down (Blakemore & Robbins, 2012). Also, in the PFC, grey-matter takes the steps of an inverted U-shaped trajectory, however, it declines when adolescents come into the beginning stage of adulthood (Blakemore & Robbins, 2012). There have been controversial and conflicting ideas when they study PFC activation with fMRI whether it is higher during early adulthood or late adulthood (Blakemore & Robbins, 2012). Therefore, we cannot generalize the PFC to all cases (Blakemore & Robbins, 2012).

When it comes to choosing immediate or delayed rewards, adolescents would choose a small award rather than a large award. In adulthood, the ventral striatum and ventromedial prefrontal cortex (vmPFC) get activation with immediate monetary awards (Blakemore & Robbins, 2012). Between the years of 6-17, monetary reward gets inactivated as years go by (Blakemore & Robbins, 2012). Furthermore, adults can choose a large award rather than a small award in comparison with the adolescents -due to increasement in the left vmPFC and decreasement in ventral striatum activity (Blakemore & Robbins, 2012).

Another significant part of the decision-making process, past experiences matter (Blakemore & Robbins, 2012). When the real outcome conflicts with the expectation, prediction error occurs. This reinforces frameworks of learning (Blakemore & Robbins, 2012). Prediction error also is related to dopamine neurotransmitter (Blakemore & Robbins, 2012). When there was a study that participants were between 8-30 aged years, participants aged between 14-19 had responded faster than others to award stimuli (with increasement in ventral striatum) even though all the rest of them experienced improvement with the speed too (Blakemore & Robbins, 2012).

In summary, the first study showed that environmental trust and stability strongly influence self-control, meaning that children from unreliable environments are less likely to delay gratification. The second study shows that self-control, which is one of the fundamental structures of morality, is related to the prefrontal cortex. People who have strong self-control are hypothesized that they have higher activity in their prefrontal cortex, and people who have weak competence in self-control also have lower activity in their prefrontal cortex, in theory. With the results for the survey I organized for Turkish adolescents’ morality, I hypothesize that it can be linked to the prefrontal cortex, however, in this paper, it is not measured brain-activity with the experiment.

### **c. Gender and Moral Cognition of Turkey**

According to Tekin and Dejirmenci’s paper, it is stated that sex is biological whereas gender is socially learned (Tekin et al., 2022). Gender norms start within the family (Han, 2023). Türkan Beyza Han’s article analyzes how society builds the concept of womanhood and talks about the campaign “A Woman is a Woman” (Kadın Kadındır) (Han, 2023). The campaign used a qualitative method with the

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18-25-year-old students (Han, 2023). It included posters, ads, social media visuals and promotional materials on t-shirts, notebooks, tote bags (Han, 2023). The slogan was “A woman is a woman without being confined to any mold” (Kadın Kadındır - Hiçbir Kalıba Sıkıştırılmadan) (Han, 2023). Its goal was to raise awareness about gender, and it suggested that a woman is not defined by beauty or motherhood; diversity should be reinforced (Han, 2023). The writer asserts that gender roles are assigned to us from birth according to their biological sex (Han, 2023). Culturally, girls learn softness whereas boys learn strength (Tekin et al., 2022). People use everything, such as toys and language, to enforce gender roles (Tekin et al., 2022). Eylem Kaya’s “An Overview of Turkish Women’s Status in Turkey” studies the status of Turkish women (Kaya, 2009). Even though Atatürk gave significant reforms and rights to women in Turkey, the paper touches on the gap that did not enter into force: Patriarchy still rules despite modernization (Kaya, 2009).

In the era of Ottoman, women started to have jobs in areas such as teaching (Kaya, 2009). In 1926, Atatürk gave legal equality with the Civil Code, and in 1934, women got full suffrage (Kaya, 2009). Compared to Western countries, Turkey ranked third in the world in the area of women in academia (Kaya, 2009). In 1980, women in Turkey began identifying as feminist (Kaya, 2009). “Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women” in 1986 started legal gender equality reforms (Kaya, 2009). In the 1990s, they had a new focus on professionalizing at NGOs (Kaya, 2009).

Despite these reforms, representation of women in parliament remained low (Kaya, 2009), and patriarchy had continued its reign (Tekin et al., 2022). Even religion was used as a tool for patriarchy (Tekin et al., 2022). Restriction on women’s sexuality, such as virginity and adoption, also were major issues, and still are (Tekin et al., 2022). Violence and killings were major problems (Kaya, 2009). Inequality between East and West was another (Kaya, 2009). Women were facing three discriminations: hiring, promotion and firing (Kaya, 2009). Women stayed in low-paying and labor-intensive jobs (Kaya, 2009). Moreover, Savaş and Çakır’s paper studied the perspective of women’s “Non-Governmental Organizations” members in Türkiye in the field of gender inequality (Savaş, 2024). Even though some of them work for women’s rights, the survey found that 735 NGO members in Istanbul and Ankara have patriarchal thoughts (Savaş, 2024). “Gender Perception towards Women in Rural Areas in Turkey” study investigates how women and men in rural areas of Turkey accept gender roles (Kızılaslan et al., 2024). With the help of chi-square analysis, they concluded that rural women continue to have progressive beliefs while rural men continue to have patriarchal values (Kızılaslan et al., 2024).

Janet Hyde supports the gender similarities hypothesis, which states that females and males are psychologically different (Hyde, 2005). Furthermore, John Gray’s (1992) *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus* also defended the differences; Deborah Tannen’s (1991) *You Just Don’t Understand: Women and Men in Conversation* stated the *different cultures hypothesis*, which argued that women and men have different scientific styles of speaking (Hyde, 2005). When 46 meta-analyses of psychological research had been analyzed, which reviews cognitive performance, social behavior, with the help of the gender similarities hypothesis, the paper finds that the effect of gender differences is close to zero in the measured behaviors (Hyde, 2005). Of course, age, domain, social role, and measurement method may influence the result of gender differences. However, exceptions happen when larger differences exist.

In Judith Butler's "*Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory*" (1988) paper, they talk and argue about feminist sides and differentiation of sex and gender as sex means biological heredity and gender refers to cultural interpretation (Butler, 1988). Butler starts the paper by questioning what the meaning and ideology of identifying with a gender is (Butler, 1988). Although feminist theory is sometimes accepted with sex being biological and gender being cultural, they put forward this acceptance is not correct due to our acceptance of understanding of male and female. Our idea of accepting gender is already constructed by cultural ideologies. Gender is not innate; it is a summary of actions and behaviors. They follow the pathway of phenomenology, which is the philosophical movement that studies *how humans experience the world through their body and consciousness* (Butler, 1988). Butler also argues that gender is formalised by repetitive actions over time (Butler, 1988). They liken this to a theater: an actor that makes the roleplay more real as he/she gets used to the role (Butler, 1988). If gender is something that can be performed, then it may also be re-performed with different aspects.

To sum up, sex and gender are not the same thing. Sex is biological; gender is learned, and culturally shaped. In this paper, the differences between two genders in Turkey is examined. Even though Atatürk was one of the first executives who gave rights to females in Turkey, societal beliefs remained the same in Turkey. Therefore, in this paper, when we collect data from people, we are not measuring the differences in sexes, we are measuring cultural differences between genders in Turkey.

## **METHODS**

### ***Participants***

Participants were 29 adolescents living in Turkey, aged 14 to 18 years ( $M = 16.6$ ,  $SD = 1.4$ ). Of these, 17 identified as female and 12 as male. Participants were recruited through convenience sampling using schools and personal networks. Three additional responses were excluded from analysis: two from adults (aged 39 and 59) who fell outside the target age range, and one that did not report age or gender. The final sample therefore, consisted of 29 adolescent respondents.

### ***Materials***

The survey contained two sections. The first was a 10-item self-control scale. Each item described a self-regulatory moral behavior, such as "I stop myself from spreading rumors," "I avoid copying homework even when it's easy," and "I choose fairness even if it means losing a benefit." Participants rated how well each statement described them on a five-point scale, where higher scores indicated greater self-control. In the present sample, the scale showed good internal consistency (McDonald's  $\omega = .84$ ).

The second section presented five short everyday moral scenarios, covering cheating, gossip, online anger, fairness, and honesty. Each scenario described a realistic situation an adolescent might face and offered five response options ordered from the least to the most ethical choice. Participants selected the option that best matched what they would most likely do. Responses were scored on a five-point scale,

where 1 indicated the least ethical option and 5 the most ethical option. Because the five scenarios described distinct situations rather than a single underlying construct, they were analyzed individually rather than combined into a composite score.

### ***Procedure***

The survey was administered online using a digital form. Form was distributed in only English. Before beginning, participants were informed that responses were anonymous, and that no identifying information would be collected. Participation was voluntary, and participants could withdraw at any time. For participants under 18, parental consent was obtained in addition to participant assent.

### ***Analysis***

Responses were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. For the self-control scale, a mean score was calculated for each participant across the 10 items, after confirming that the items formed a reliable composite (McDonald's  $\omega = .84$ ). Where a participant left an individual item blank or gave a non-numeric response, that item was omitted, and the participant's mean was computed from the remaining items. The five moral scenarios were analyzed separately, with each scenario treated as an individual item.

Female and male participants were then compared on the self-control composite and on each scenario. Because the sample was small and the response data were ordinal, two tests were used for each comparison: an independent-samples t-test with Welch's correction for unequal variances, and a Mann-Whitney U test. Reporting both a parametric and a non-parametric test allowed the robustness of each result to be assessed. Effect sizes for the self-control comparison were calculated using Cohen's d. An alpha level of 0.05 was used for all tests.

## **RESULTS**

### **Sample**

The analytic sample comprised 29 adolescents (17 female and 12 male) between the ages of 14 and 18. Three additional responses were excluded prior to analysis: two from adult respondents and one from a respondent who provided neither age nor gender.

### **Self-Control Scale**

The 10 self-control items were averaged into a single composite score, which showed good internal consistency (McDonald's  $\omega = .84$ ). Female adolescents had a mean composite score of 3.75 (SD = 0.73), and male adolescents had a mean of 3.90 (SD = 0.55), indicating that boys scored slightly higher than girls. This difference was not statistically significant, Welch's  $t = -0.61$ ,  $p = .55$ , and the same comparison conducted with a Mann-Whitney U test was likewise non-significant,  $p = .69$ . The associated effect size was small, Cohen's  $d = -0.22$ . Full descriptive and inferential statistics for the self-control composite are presented in Table 1.

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**Table 1. Self-Control Scale Scores by Gender**

Measure	Female M (SD)	Male M (SD)	Welch T	T-test (p-value)	Mann–Whitney p	Cohen's d
Self-control scale	3.75 (0.73)	3.90 (0.55)	-0.61	0.55	0.69	-0.22

**Notes:**  
 N = 29 (17 female, 12 male)  
 Scale reliability: McDonald's  $\omega = .84$

**Moral Scenarios**

Because the five moral scenarios described distinct situations rather than indicators of a single underlying construct, each scenario was analyzed individually. No scenario showed a statistically significant gender difference under either the parametric or the non-parametric test (all  $p > .05$ ). These results are reported in Table 2.

**Table 2. Mean Scores on Each Moral scenario by Gender (1–5 scale, higher = more ethical)**

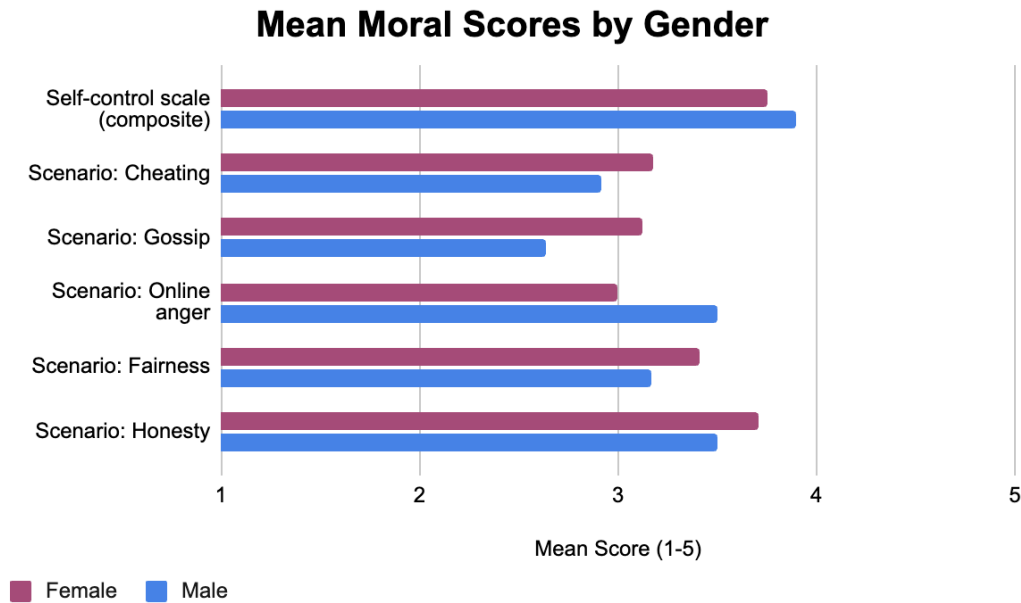
Scenario	Female M (SD)	Male M (SD)	Welch T	T-test p	Mann–Whitney p
Cheating	3.18 (1.01)	2.92 (0.67)	0.83	0.41	0.57
Gossip	3.12 (1.17)	2.64 (1.36)	0.97	0.35	0.29
Online anger	3.00 (1.37)	3.50 (1.09)	-1.09	0.28	0.35
Fairness	3.41 (1.46)	3.17 (1.27)	0.48	0.63	0.55
Honesty	3.71 (0.99)	3.50 (1.17)	0.5	0.62	0.65

Note. N = 29 (17 female; 12 male, except Gossip where n = 11 male due to one missing response). No scenario showed a statistically significant gender difference under either test.

The direction of the small, non-significant differences varied across scenarios: girls scored slightly higher than boys on four scenarios (cheating, gossip, fairness, and honesty), and boys scored slightly higher on one (online anger). None of these differences reached significance. A visual comparison of male and female responses across the five scenarios is provided in Figure 1.

**Figure 1:**

Measure	Female	Male
Self-control scale (composite)	3.75	3.9
Scenario: Cheating	3.18	2.92
Scenario: Gossip	3.12	2.64
Scenario: Online anger	3	3.5
Scenario: Fairness	3.41	3.17
Scenario: Honesty	3.71	3.5



Taken together, across both the self-control scale and the five moral scenarios, male and female adolescents did not differ significantly.

## DISCUSSION

Even though being morally superior or not being do not come from birth, social norms get shaped by society. Sex does not matter if we want to measure morality, but gender matters if we want to measure the degree of morality, because gender is also shaped by family, school, friends, environment, and, of course, society.

The pattern is consistent with the gender similarities hypothesis advanced by Hyde (2005), which holds that males and females are far more alike than different across most psychological variables, and that observed gender differences tend to be small or close to zero. Even though girls in Turkey conducted higher scores in such moral cases, there was not a significant difference. A non-significant difference is not a failure; it is itself the finding. As I have mentioned, girls are not morally superior; it just tries to examine the difference between genders.

This finding allows the paper to make its central argument: If adolescent girls are widely perceived as more moral than boys, yet do not actually score higher on measures of moral reasoning and self-control, then that perception may reflect a sociocultural expectation rather than a real difference in moral behavior. In other words, the “women-are-wonderful effect” described in the introduction -the tendency to view women as more virtuous, caring, and morally responsible- appears, on the evidence of this study, to be a cultural narrative rather than a measurable trait. However, this study did not directly measure

socialization, cultural pressure, or the mechanisms by which gendered expectations are transmitted; it measured only self-reported moral reasoning and self-control. The claim is therefore offered as a reading that the results support, not as a demonstrated causal relationship.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the sample was small ( $n = 29$ ), which limits the statistical power to detect small effects. The effect sizes observed here were small (Cohen's  $d$  of roughly 0.2 for the self-control comparison). Second, participants were recruited through convenience sampling using schools and personal networks, so the sample is not representative of Turkish adolescents in general. Third, the study relied on self-report measures, which capture how participants describe themselves rather than how they actually behave; social desirability may have inflated scores, particularly on items concerning honesty and fairness. Fourth, the self-control items were assembled for the purposes of this study, and although the composite showed good internal consistency (McDonald's  $\omega = .84$ ), the five moral scenarios were single items and showed wide variation in responses, which makes them less stable as measures. Finally, gender was collected as open-text responses and then recoded, and the sample was unbalanced, with more girls (17) than boys (12), which further limits the precision of the comparisons.

For future work, this can be covered up with larger and more representative samples; behavioral or observational measures rather than self-report; comparison across cultural settings; longitudinal designs to see whether any differences emerge later in adolescence.

## CONCLUSION

In asking whether female adolescents are morally superior to men, we find ourselves not confronting a matter of biological essence but rather a sociocultural construct: one that has been shaped, reinforced, and selectively remembered by patriarchal frameworks. Women have long been burdened with the role of moral norms, not because of an innate virtue, but because society has consistently demanded it of them. The public treatment of women, especially those who rise to prominence, reveals the persistent need to control, label, and narrate female existence within predefined moral binaries. The story of Sappho is a testament to this cycle: women who dared to express, to resist, and to redefine themselves have often been silenced, vilified, or reduced to the men around them. Thus, perhaps the question is not whether women are morally superior, but why society insists on framing morality through the lens of womanhood at all.

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