

**GENDER-ROLE IDENTITY AND MORAL JUDGMENT; A COMPARISON  
OF WOMEN IN TRADITIONAL AND NON-TRADITIONAL OCCUPATIONS**

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GENDER-ROLE IDENTITY AND MORAL JUDGMENT; A COMPARISON  
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An Abstract

Presented to the  
Graduate and Research Council of  
Austin Peay State University

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

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by  
Karissa Kelly Thacker  
August 1989



## ABSTRACT

The relationship between gender role identity as measured by Bem Sex Role Inventory and moral development as measured by Defining Issues Test was investigated using a sample of 30 women involved in traditional occupations and 30 women involved in non-traditional occupations. The groups were compared. Results indicated a significant difference in levels of principled thinking among the two groups with the non-traditional group giving more consideration to principled moral issues. There was no differentiation of moral judgment between the four gender role types in the non-traditional or traditional group. It is concluded that more research with women pursuing various specific occupations would be beneficial. Future research should control for educational level.

GENDER-ROLE IDENTITY AND MORAL JUDGMENT: A COMPARISON  
OF WOMEN IN TRADITIONAL AND NON-TRADITIONAL OCCUPATIONS

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To the Graduate and Research Council:

I am submitting herewith a Thesis written by Karissa Kelly Thacker entitled "Gender-Role Identity and Moral Judgment: A Comparison of Women in Traditional and Non-Traditional Occupations". I have examined the final copy of this paper for form and content, and I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts, with a major in Psychology.

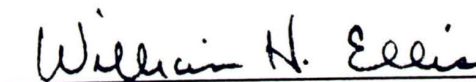
  
Major Professor

We have read this thesis and  
recommend its acceptance:

  
Second Committee Member

  
Third Committee Member

Accepted for the Graduate and  
Research Council:

  
Dean of the Graduate School

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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

Historically, women have not fit the theories of human development as described in the psychological literature. Their differences often have been regarded as deficiencies (Gilligan, 1982). Traditionally, developmental researchers studied men only, adapted theories to fit women, and emphasized differences between them (Williams, 1987). In the last 20 years, the psychology of women has emerged as a discipline dedicated to the description and explanation of women's behavior. As a result, prominent developmental theories, such as those addressing moral development, have been re-examined.

Piaget (1932) was the first to investigate the development of morality. Lawrence Kohlberg adopted many of Piaget's basic tenets and elaborated on his work, outlining stages of moral development. He developed the Moral Judgment Scale to quantify levels of moral development (Skolnick, 1986). Kohlberg was challenged in 1977 by Carol Gilligan. Gilligan pointed out that all of Kohlberg's research was done exclusively with males. Her thesis was that moral development follows a unique pattern in women.

The research to date has been inconclusive concerning the question of whether there are gender differences in Kohlberg's stages of moral development. Several

researchers (Rest, 1983; Walker, 1984; Gibbs, Arnold, & Burkhart, 1984) provided conflicting results which substantiated or refuted claims of gender bias in Kohlberg's theory. James Rest (1979) developed the Defining Issues Test which is based on his hypothesis that people at varying levels of moral development interpret moral dilemmas differently and define the important issues differently.

Personality variables, such as those related to traditional femininity and masculinity, have been determined to be significant in regard to moral development (Lifton, 1985). Also, certain occupations have been defined traditionally as feminine and certain occupations as masculine. Such occupations as teaching, nursing, and clerical work are classified as traditional occupations for women. Such occupations as doctor, lawyer, and military officer are classified as non-traditional occupations for women.

For the purpose of the proposed study, gender identity is defined as the aspect of identity that determines what one views as appropriate behavior for one's biological sex. Sandra Bem (1981) described four classes of gender role identification, based on the Bem Sex Role Inventory which classifies individuals as masculine, feminine, androgynous, or undifferentiated. Joseph Pleck (1975) proposed a three



stage model of gender role development which parallels the stages of moral development.

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between gender role identity as measured by the Bem Sex Role Inventory and moral development as measured by the Defining Issues Test in a population of women involved in traditional occupations as compared to a population of women involved in non-traditional occupations.

## CHAPTER 2

### Review of the Literature

There are three broad topics relevant to the proposed study: gender-role identification, moral development theory, and gender differences in moral judgment.

#### Gender Role Identity

By the age of three, an individual has a concept of his/her biological sex. However, the research indicates that gender identification is an ongoing and complex interaction of cognitive maturational factors and social learning (Skolnick, 1986). Femininity and masculinity are generally thought to be on opposite ends of a psychological continuum. On one end is the feminine, expressive orientation and on the other end is the masculine, instrumental orientation.

Sandra Bem (1981) proposed the concept of psychological androgyny. Androgyny is not related to biological sex and is defined as the possibility for a person to be both feminine and masculine or expressive and instrumental, depending on the situation. Bem hypothesized that androgyny was linked to higher levels of adjustment than either of the traditional roles. The psychologically androgynous person is able to express the full range of his/her humanity. The traditional feminine female or

masculine male is someone who is sensitive to societal expectations for his/her sex and tries to fit the mold.

The Bem Sex Role Inventory was designed as a measure of androgyny. Subjects score as feminine, masculine, androgynous (high on femininity and masculinity), or undifferentiated (low on femininity and masculinity). Items were selected as feminine or masculine on the basis of cultural definitions of those behaviors. The inventory contains sixty personality characteristics; twenty of which are traditionally feminine, twenty of which are traditionally masculine, and twenty filler items. The subject is asked to indicate on a seven point scale ranging from never to always true the degree to which the items describe him/her (Bem, 1981).

The literature (Pedhazur & Tetenbaum, 1979; Myers & Gonda, 1982; Yonge, 1978) clearly indicates psychometric limitations in regard to the validity of the Bem Sex Role Inventory. The majority of research (Whetton & Swindells, 1977; Lunneborg & Lunneborg, 1970) indicates that the Bem Sex Role Inventory is a measure of many other factors besides masculinity and femininity. Larson and Seidman (1986) found that among sex-typed individuals, people who scored highly on masculine or feminine scales of the Bem Sex Role Inventory, bipolar factors were evident. Biological sex of the subject loaded highly on almost every



factor determined to be a primary factor on the inventory (Larson & Seidman). Despite many obvious shortcomings of the Bem Sex Role Inventory, it is the most widely researched and valid measure of gender role identification available at the present time.

Kohlberg (1966), using a cognitive-developmental approach, explored gender role identification. By the age of five or six, children realize that biological sex is a permanent feature. Then, children begin to value their sex and behave appropriately. There are natural invariant trends in sex or gender role attitudes. Therefore, trends in gender-role attitudes are determined by cognitive growth. The nature of children's thinking causes them to define social roles in terms of physical characteristics and differences. Therefore, gender-role identification is defined as the comprehension and acceptance of physical reality (Kohlberg).

Joseph Pleck (1975) proposed a three stage model of gender role identification which parallels Kohlberg's stages of moral development. In the first stage, a child's conception of gender is not organized. A child in this stage is marked by a lack of knowledge that his biological sex is irreversible. The second stage of gender role development is the conventional stage and individuals are motivated to conform to society's ideas of gender behavior.

The conventional stage is most evident in adolescence. In the third stage, individuals rise above society's rules of gender behavior and behave in response to their own individual needs and desires. This stage is called psychological androgyny and corresponds to Kohlberg's post-conventional stage of moral development. If androgyny is an advanced stage of development; then, some people do not reach this stage in adult life. It also follows that children must go through a stage of gender role restrictiveness before they can progress to stage three (Hyde, 1985).

Kohlberg, Pleck, and Bem conceptualized gender-role identification as following a basic developmental trend. Bem's androgyny is a post-conventional mode of thinking. The individual functioning in Kohlberg's post-conventional stage transcends conventionality and strives for the ultimate rights of human beings. The androgynous individual transcends culture and strives for his/her right to fully express his/her humanity. Pleck's theory represents a merge of Kohlberg's and Bem's perspectives.

### Moral Judgment

Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development is a stage theory derived from Piaget. Kohlberg (1983) defined moral development as the learning and internalization of cultural expectations. Kohlberg (1984) proposed three

levels of moral development with two stages at each level. The first level is the preconventional level; the individual behaves morally because he/she fears consequences. Rewards and punishments are the key elements in making decisions.

The second level is called the conventional level. Here, the individual makes decisions based upon the expectations of his social group. The individual at this stage conforms to the expectations of his social group to avoid disapproval (Kohlberg, 1984).

Level three is referred to as the postconventional or principled thinking level. The individual seeks to differentiate himself/herself from the group and actively seeks to discover and define his/her own moral values. The individual develops his own principals carefully considering the elements of consistency and universality and exercises moral judgment autonomously (Kohlberg, 1984).

Kohlberg assessed the level of moral development of his subjects using the Moral Judgment Interview in which subjects are presented stories in which a moral dilemma faces the central character. The Moral Judgment Interview is difficult to score and the method is highly subjective (Cortese, 1984).

James Rest (1986) approached the question of morality in the following manner. When an individual behaves



morally, what has happened psychologically to precede his behavior? Four psychological processes must have happened. The four processes are called the Four-Component Model of Morality and are outlined below.

1. The individual interprets the situation in regard to what actions are possible, who would be affected, and how they will react.
2. The individual labels one decision as what he/she ought to do.
3. A decision is made to intend to do what is morally right regardless of other factors.
4. The individual must have sufficient psychological sophistication and ability to follow through on his/her intention.

Therefore, moral development is not viewed as a single unitary process. The four processes have separate functions. As a result, a person who is proficient at one process may be inadequate in one of the other processes (Rest, 1986).

Rest (1974) developed the Defining Issues Test which is based on the premise that people at varying levels of development interpret moral dilemmas on the test differently and define the critical issues differently. Differences in interpretation are indicative of the individual's underlying methods of organizing



cognitive-affective experience. The test items were derived from interview material. All items were written with comparable syntax and vocabulary. The items were written in the form of questions to encourage subjects to focus on form of the argument. When taking the Defining Issues Test, a subject is presented with a list of issues and asked to indicate which issues are important (Rest, 1986).

Research (Rest et. al., 1974) indicates that the Defining Issues Test is psychometrically sound. Froming and McColgan (1979) found a .60 correlation between the Defining Issues Test and Kohlberg's Moral Judgment Interview. Age, socioeconomic status, and intelligence have been determined to be key factors on the Defining Issues Test (Rest, 1986).

### Gender Differences in Moral Judgment

Kohlberg was challenged by Carol Gilligan (1977) who pointed out that all of Kohlberg's research was done exclusively with males. Her thesis is that moral development and all other psychological development follows a unique pattern in women. Just as men and women differ biologically, they differ psychologically. The historical, philosophical, and psychological view of development is a progression from total dependence to total independence. The infant is totally dependent on other people, while the

healthy adult is viewed as autonomous. Developmental philosophers and psychologists have been perplexed by women. Women tend to be more intensely involved in personal relationships and make the majority of decisions based on the particular circumstance. As a result, women have been viewed as deviant or developmentally deficient (Gilligan, 1977). Gilligan cited studies by Broverman, Vogel, Clark, and Rosencrantz (1972) which reported that healthy adult qualities, such as responsibility, independent thinking, and clear decision making, are not socially desirable qualities for women (Gilligan, 1977).

Piaget noticed distinct differences among male and female children playing the same games. Boys tended to focus on the legalistic; whereas, girls tended to focus on the interpersonal. Kohlberg stated that women suffered from a strong interpersonal bias and often functioned at level two of his scheme, making decisions on what pleases and helps other people. Gilligan asserted that the "inferiority" may stem from the instrument and standards instead of the subjects (Gilligan, 1977).

Gilligan's original research involved women contemplating abortion. From the research with these women, Gilligan presented a novel moral developmental sequence for women. The sequence consists of three levels. Level one is called Orientation to Individual Survival and

the focus is on the needs of the self. Goodness as Self-Sacrifice is level two; goodness is caring for others more than self. At level three, morality is based on a universal principle against using and hurting people. Morality at level three supersedes individual needs and struggles in favor of the universal good.

Gilligan's research generated a considerable amount of further study on the question of gender differences in moral development. However, the literature is conflicting and inconclusive. Gibbs, Arnold, and Burkhart (1984) stated that sex differences primarily related to content of response as opposed to stage level. In other words, the decision was the same as that of the male subjects, but their reasons were different.

Lifton (1985) using the California Psychological Inventory and Kohlberg's Moral Judgment Interview, concluded gender role identity as it manifests itself in overt personality characteristics is a significant factor and should be considered. Subjects with a masculine gender-role orientation scored higher on the Moral Judgment Scale than the more feminine subjects.

Johnson (1987) hypothesized that moral development was influenced more by the various gender roles that individuals choose than by biological sex. Using the Bem Sex Role Inventory and the Defining Issues Test with a



population of university faculty members and administrators, a significant relationship between moral development orientation and gender role identity was found. It was recommended that future research explore the relationships between moral development and other characteristics that develop through socialization, such as occupational choice (Johnson, 1987).

Traditional occupations are defined as occupations in which there are more women than men. Non-traditional occupations are defined as occupations in which there are fewer women than men. Despite many women moving into non-traditional occupations in recent years, a clear delineation still exists. According to the recent report of the U.S. Bureau of the Census, 99% of all secretaries are women. Ninety-seven percent of receptionists are women. Ninety-four percent of registered nurses and 85% of elementary teachers are women. Only 36% of college and university teachers are women. Eighteen percent of lawyers, 6% of engineers, and 18% of physicians are women.

Baker (1987) with a sample of 177 female and 179 male high school students using the Bem Sex Role Inventory determined that females preferring non-traditional careers had a masculine perception of themselves. Females preferring traditional careers had a more feminine gender role identification (Baker, 1987). Martin and Light (1984)



found a significant relationship between years of education and Bem Sex Role Inventory gender role classifications. As educational level increased, the percentage of students classified as masculine increased and the percentage classified as feminine decreased.

Wolfe and Betz (1981), using the Bem Sex Role Inventory and the Self Directed Search with a sample of college females, found that masculine-typed subjects were most likely to make non-traditional career choices that were in harmony with their self-reported abilities and personal attributes. The majority of androgynous and feminine subjects reported preference for traditional fields (Wolfe & Betz, 1981).

### Purpose of the Present Study

The present study, using samples of women in traditional occupations and non-traditional occupations, will explore the relationship between gender role identification, as measured by the Bem Sex Role Inventory, and moral development, using the Defining Issues Test. The primary hypotheses are stated below.

1. Women in traditional occupations will be gender-role typed on the Bem Sex Role Inventory as feminine and will have lower P scores than non-traditional subjects on the Defining Issues Test.

2. Women in non-traditional occupations will be gender-role typed as masculine or androgynous on the Bem Sex Role Inventory and will have higher P scores than traditional subjects on the Defining Issues Test.

3. In the group composed of women in traditional occupations, there will be a significant relationship between gender-role type and level of principled thinking.

Subjects

Subjects for this study were asked to participate by means of a letter (See Appendix). The letter was sent to 138 subjects from Hopkinsville, Kentucky and Clarksville, Tennessee. Thirty of the subjects used in the study were women pursuing non-traditional occupations or positions (administrator, university faculty, professional etc.). Thirty of the subjects used in the study were women pursuing traditional occupations (elementary teacher, secretary etc.). Ages ranged from 23 to 65. The total return rate was 43%, the return rate among the non-traditional subjects was 32%, and the return rate among the traditional subjects was 66%.

Instruments

James Rest (1979) designed the Defining Issues Test which is easily administered and scored. The Defining Issues Test is composed of six moral dilemmas. The subject reads the dilemmas; and is asked to rate twelve issue statements. The issue statements correspond to each stage of Kohlberg's theory. The subject rates the statements from one to five. Five represents the lowest agreement. Then, the subject ranks four of the issues from one to four

in regard to which is most important in making a personal decision. The P score was calculated by hand. This score is defined as the relative importance a subject gives to principled moral considerations in making a decision.

The Bem Sex Role Inventory is made up of sixty items, such as "ambitious" and "gentle", which are general personality characteristics. Twenty items are stereotypically feminine personality characteristics and twenty items are stereotypically masculine personality characteristics. The remaining twenty items are filler characteristics such as "truthful" and "happy". The examinee is asked to indicate on a seven point scale how well each of the sixty items describes himself/herself. The scale ranges from "Never or almost never" to "true" (Bem, 1981). Forms were scored and subjects were classified as masculine, feminine, androgynous, or undifferentiated.

### Procedure

The subjects completed the tests alone. They read an agreement for participation form, were instructed that their answers were confidential, and not to sign their tests. They were instructed to be as honest as possible in choosing answers on the Bem Sex Role Inventory and to choose the statements on the Defining Issues Test that most accurately correspond to their thoughts and actions.



The study consisted of three primary variables: gender-role identification type as measured by the Bem Sex Role Inventory, level of principled thinking as measured by the Defining Issues Test, and whether the subject is pursuing a traditional career or a non-traditional career or position. Gender role types and moral development indices were computed and compared in each group. Analyses of variance were performed to check for significant differences in gender-role identification and moral development between and within the two groups.

## CHAPTER 4

### Results

The Bem Sex Role Inventory yielded the following results. In the total sample, 26.6% were gender role typed as feminine, 35% as masculine, 18% as androgynous, and 20% as undifferentiated. Of the women pursuing non-traditional occupations or positions, 16.6% were gender role typed as feminine, 40% as masculine, 23% as androgynous and 20% as undifferentiated. Of the women pursuing traditional occupations, 36.6% were gender role typed as feminine, 30% as masculine, 13% as androgynous, and 20% as undifferentiated.

On the Defining Issues Test, the mean overall P score for the entire sample was 36.1%. This is near the mean for the standardization sample (34.77%) (Rest, 1983). The mean P score for the traditional group was 28.1% and for the non-traditional group was 44.1%. For the purposes of analysis, P scores were grouped into thirds. In the total sample: 35% of subjects were in the low third, 33% of subjects were in the middle third, and 31.6% of subjects were in the high third. In the non-traditional group: 20% of subjects were in the low third, 20% in the middle third, and 60% in the high third. In the traditional group: 50% of subjects were in the low third, 46% were in the middle

third, and 30% were in the high third. ANOVA yielded a significant difference  $F(1, 58) = 17.185, p < .0001$  in P values between the traditional and non-traditional groups.

Subjects were grouped into gender role identity sub-groups in order to relate moral judgment to gender role identity by means of ANOVA. A significant difference between gender role identity and moral judgment was not found in the total sample  $F(2, 45) = .018, p > .05$ , in the traditional group  $F(3, 26) = .103, p > .05$ , or in the non-traditional group  $F(3, 26) = .462, p > .05$

## CHAPTER 5

### Discussion

Underlying this study was the question of how women employed in traditional and non-traditional occupations differ in gender role concepts and level of moral reasoning. Traditional and non-traditional occupations are broad categories; however, traditional occupations are more clearly defined than non-traditional. Non-traditional occupations range from mechanic to medical doctor. Other variables such as educational level are obvious when considering this broad range. As previously described, subjects in the non-traditional group were pursuing professional occupations (business, academics, mental health professionals, etc.); therefore, the hypotheses presented are applicable only to women in professional non-traditional occupations.

Women in traditional roles were hypothesized to be gender role typed as feminine. Although 36% of the non-traditional subjects were classified as feminine, 30% were classified as masculine. Women in non-traditional occupations were hypothesized to be gender role typed as masculine or androgynous. 63% were masculine or androgynous; whereas, only 16.6% were feminine. Educational level may have influenced these results. As



previously noted, Martin and Light (1984) found a significant relationship between years of education and Bem Sex Role Inventory gender role classifications. As educational level increased, the percentage of students classified as masculine increased and the percentage classified as feminine decreased. Considering the presence of university faculty in the non-traditional group, (approximately 30%), educational level may account for the presence of more masculine gender role typed subjects.

Women in traditional occupations were hypothesized to have lower percentages of principled thinking than the non-traditional group. The data indicate that women in traditional occupations tended to give more consideration to stage 2 issues as evidenced by lower P values. Previous research (Rest, 1983) indicated that level of moral reasoning is highly correlated with educational level. The educational process exposes the individual to various theoretical and factual information which challenges established cognitive patterns and may result in higher levels of moral reasoning. Educational levels in the traditional group were lower than in the non-traditional group; however, 40% of the traditional subjects had college degrees. Taking educational level into account, the data support the hypothesis that women in non-traditional

occupations would give more consideration to principled moral issues.

A significant relationship between gender role type and level of principled thinking was not found in the non-traditional group, traditional group, or the entire sample. Johnson (1984) did not find a significant relationship between gender role identity and values on the Defining Issues Test; however, she found a significant relationship between moral development orientation as defined by Carol Gilligan (1977). The data are in agreement with Johnson's findings using the Defining Issues Test.

The validity of the Bem Sex Role Inventory to effectively discriminate gender role types is called into question again. As previously noted, the literature mentions several limitations of the Bem Sex Role Inventory including the self-report format and social acceptability of responses. Social desirability is also a problem on the Defining Issues Test. It would be easy to simply endorse the socially acceptable response due to the way the material is presented.

Future research is recommended comparing traditional and non-traditional occupations with equal educational levels. For example, B.S. nurses could be compared to B.S. engineers. Further refining of instruments quantifying

gender role identity and moral judgment is also recommended. An interview format may be a better method of accessing which issues are important. In that format, a subject would spontaneously present his/her own issues. Another area would be to compare traditional and non-traditional subjects in moral development orientation as defined by Gilligan and gender role identity.



## APPENDIX A

## Informed Consent Statement

The purpose of this investigation is to research women's ethical development and gender role identification. Your responses are confidential. At no time will you be identified nor will anyone other than the investigators have access to your responses. The potential hazards which may occur from participation are not significant based on previous research of this nature. The demographic information collected will be used only for the purposes of analysis. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you are free to terminate your participation at any time without penalty.

If you would like information regarding the results, please contact the investigator. Thank you for your cooperation. I hope this exercise will be interesting.

If you are willing to participate, please return the questionnaires by June 20. An addressed and stamped envelope has been included. The present study is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Susan Kupisch, Chair of the Department of Psychology at Austin Peay State University. Ms. Kris Thacker is the principal investigator.

## APPENDIX B

TABLE B-1

Distribution of Gender Role Classifications  
and P Scores on Defining Issues Test

Total Sample ( <u>n</u> =60)	Instruments	
	BSRI	DIT
Feminine	26.6%	36.0%
Masculine	35.0%	36.6%
Androgynous	18.0%	35.2%
Undifferentiated	20.0%	36.2%
Non-Traditional Group ( <u>n</u> =30)		
Feminine	16.6%	53.3%
Masculine	40.0%	42.7%
Androgynous	23.0%	38.7%
Undifferentiated	20.0%	45.5%
Traditional Group ( <u>n</u> =30)		
Feminine	36.6%	28.1%
Masculine	30.0%	28.4%
Androgynous	13.0%	29.1%
Undifferentiated	20.0%	26.9%



TABLE B-2

Additional Results From DIT

	Low Third	Mid Third	High Third
Total Sample $\bar{X}_p=36.1\%$	35.0%	33.0%	31.6%
Traditional $\bar{X}_p=28.1\%$	50.0%	46.0%	3.9%
Non-Traditional $\bar{X}_p=44.1\%$	20.0%	20.0%	60.0%

TABLE B-3

Analysis of Variance for Defining Issues Test  
by Sex Role Identity in Non-Traditional Subjects

Source	SS	df	MS	F
Total	19.20	29	.66	
Between Groups	.97	3	.32	.46
Error	18.22	26	.70	

TABLE B-4

Analysis of Variance for Defining Issues Test  
by Sex Role Inventory in Traditional Subjects

Source	SS	df	MS	F
Total	13.20	29	.45	
Between Groups	.15	3	.05	.10
Error	13.04	26	.50	

TABLE B-5

Analysis of Variance for Defining Issues Test  
by Sex Role Inventory in the Total Sample

Source	SS	df	MS	F
Total	42.00	59	.71	
Between Groups	.13	3	.04	.98
Error	41.86	56	.74	

TABLE B-6

Analysis of Variance for Defining Issues Test  
by Traditional or Non-Traditional Occupation

Source	SS	df	MS	F
Total	42.00	59	.70	
Between Groups	9.60	1	9.60	17.18*
Within Groups	32.40	58	.55	

\*denotes  $p < .0001$

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