

TEACHERS IN THE PRIVATE AND PUBLIC SPHERES: ETHICAL ORIENTATIONS IN EDUCATIONAL INTERACTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Aim. The main aim of the article is a presentation of a comparative study of differences in ethical orientations used by teachers in educational practice in two settings: in private life as parents and in the public sphere, working as teachers.

Methods. First, a hypothesis was proposed to test the observations by Lawrence Kohlberg (1984) and Carol Gilligan (1993) regarding the relative stability of ethical



orientations in terms of the ethics of care and justice. To this end, an assumption was made that teachers prefer the former in contacts with their own children (private sphere) while favouring the latter in relationships with students (public sphere). The paired samples t-test confirmed this hypothesis.

Results. Based on the analysis, gender was found not to influence teachers' ethical orientations in the private sphere; however, it seems to play a part in the public sphere. This ambivalence was revealed in male teachers. Contrary to gender stereotype, in contacts with their own children, they tend to lean towards the "feminine" ethics of care, but when acting in their public capacity they perpetuate the "masculine" stereotype by following the ethics of justice in their school interactions.

Conclusion. It is worth emphasising the ambiguity of the results obtained and the instability of their interpretations. The actions of the teachers studied do not confirm the thesis about the stability of ethical orientations in educational work and are, therefore, indicative of ambivalence towards the role of gender in this process.

Keywords: ethical orientations, educational interactions, private sphere of teachers, public sphere of teachers, gender stereotypes, parental role, care

INTRODUCTION

Hypothesis

Teachers who are also parents engage in educational interactions in two spheres: in their own family and at school. For this study, it may reasonably be assumed that the former generally belong within the private sphere, while the latter fall within the public sphere. Each of them creates a different setting for learning interactions. First, this is because the private sphere is generally founded on parental feelings and the need to protect one's offspring and satisfy their need for affiliation. Second, interactions in both spheres are determined by the different degrees and scopes of knowledge about children's mental life and needs, values, attitudes, abilities, and expectations. Moreover, educational interactions with one's own children are always shaped by the previous effects of everyday socialisation within the family (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). This means that children, to a certain extent, are a reflection of their parents, particularly before they enter adolescence (Kroger et al., 2010). Finally, it is worth highlighting the intimate character of educational interactions in the family; naturally, it is a quality that is largely absent from the public sphere.

This conceptualisation of the empirical field, i.e., the practice of bringing up a child at home and in school as realised by the same people (teachers who are also parents), serves as a convenient starting point for the verification of the proposed hypotheses regarding educational interactions. For this study, we focus specifically on the conceptualisation derived from ethical orientations, whereby educational interactions are considered from the point of view of the ethics that generate them and are likely to be responsible for their effectiveness. In our context, these are the ethics of care and justice developed by Kohlberg (1984) and Gilligan (1993). In their works, they refer to the concept of ethical orientation which they define as

a relatively stable (consistent) tendency to apply a specific type of ethics – the ethics of care in the case of women and the ethics of justice in the case of men. The former are oriented towards satisfying the needs of a partner in interaction; they are driven by a tendency to help solve problems and everyday conflicts to prevent decompensation in a partner (Gilligan, 2003). At its early stages, the ethics of care require a one-sided and complete concentration on what our partner (in upbringing/education a child or a student) expects from the interaction – frequently at the expense of the self or the satisfaction of our own needs. However, partners' acceptance is crucial; they should be careful not to compromise their personal resources. This leads to a more mature version of the ethics of care when one is ready to help others and satisfy their needs while not ignoring one's own preferences. Such an approach is governed by the principle of shared responsibility and reciprocity, including respect for the rights of all parties involved (Gilligan, 1993, 2003). Nevertheless, although it seeks to take all partners' needs into account, this type of interaction will always place care for others above anything else.

In contrast, the ethics of justice offer different definitions of the same parameters. The principle of justice is a criterion of moral reasoning that remains insensitive to the subject's personal situation, needs, values, and expectations. Interactions governed by this ethical paradigm are oriented towards solving a problem in compliance with the principle of justice (Kohlberg, 1984). This approach is not interested in possible violations of partners' personal resources; instead, it focuses on finding a fair solution to what is recognised as an abstract problem. As such, it permeates educational interactions which tend to use distance, disregard the context and eliminate emotional reasons; focused on the value of justice, the interactions are organised by the terms of social contract where parties are expected to learn from the consequences of their actions and decisions (Thoma, 1994).

Gilligan (2003) argues that the ethics of care are recognised as being typically feminine while the ethics of justice are seen as typically masculine, with both resulting from gender socialisation experienced by both sexes. However, is this claim still valid in the Euro-American world which, unsystematically but consistently, is becoming increasingly egalitarian? Even more so, considering that this gender-specific differentiation of ethical orientations is largely based on emotionality that, according to meta-analyses, can also be perceived as a space of difference between what is feminine and masculine (Else-Quest et al., 2012). Consequently, it seems that, apart from gender, there might be another "demarcation line" between the two types of ethics that can be drawn in the emotional relationship towards the object of educational interaction.

In light of the above, studying teachers who raise their own children might allow us to verify the hypothesis that the object of educational interaction can also effect change in ethical orientations represented by teachers. Perhaps the latter have nothing to do with teachers' gender at all. Study-

ing the nature of the ethics of justice and care, one can expect that, given the presence of different orientations in both spheres (private and public), school interactions are more likely to be based on the ethics of justice than care. In contrast, this situation will be reversed in a family setting where the same teachers will probably be guided mostly by the ethics of care. Such a correlation would not be consistent with the findings of Kohlberg (1984) and Gilligan (1993) and could indicate that the 'relative stability of ethical orientations' may not be that stable after all.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Methodology and Research Sample

The study was conducted in the winter of 2020 on a randomly selected sample (N = 224) of primary school teachers in the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodeship in Poland. A total of 117 females and 107 males were included in this comparative study verifying the ethical approach used by respondents in their exercise of two roles: as parents (private sphere) and as teachers (public sphere). In both spheres, teachers were confronted with educational dilemmas pertaining to justice and care. Data was collected using the Ethical Orientation Test (EOT) developed as the operationalisation of Kohlberg's and Gilligan's theories. The test consists of short descriptions of situations used as indicators to measure participants' ethical orientation towards justice and care. The discriminant power of the test items ranged between 0.57 and 0.81. The Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient ranged between 0.82 and 0.96. The phi coefficient equalled 0.76, with $p < 0.05$. The raw scores were comparable to the sten scores for the adult population (Chomczyńska-Rubacha & Rubacha 2015).

Three null hypotheses were tested. The first, about the lack of differences between the EOT means in the public and private spheres, was verified using the parametric Students T-test. The second, about the lack of differences between ethical orientations in the private sphere in terms of gender, was studied with Independent-Sample T Test. In the case of the third null hypothesis, about the lack of differences between ethical orientations in the public sphere in terms of gender, the non-parametric U Mann-Whitney Test was applied as the obtained data violated the assumption of homogeneity of variance (Levene's test was statistically significant).

Results

The first of the tested hypotheses focused on differences between the measurements of ethical orientations in two versions of teachers' functioning: in the public sphere (relationships with their own children) and the private sphere (relationships with students). The conclusion emerging from the theoretical analyses by Kohlberg (1984) and Gilligan (1993), according to which the nature of ethical orientations is relatively stable (consistent),

was not supported statistically. Table 1 shows the prevalence of the ethics of justice in the public sphere and the ethics of care in the private domain.

Table 1
The sample statistics

	<i>Private sphere</i>	<i>Public sphere</i>	χ^2/df	RMSEA	GFI	AGFI	CFI
Mean	.2813	.8080	3.33	.066	.94	.90	.94
N	224	224	4.41	.079	.91	.87	.91
Std. Deviation	.45062	.39473	15.72	.165	.65	.51	.61
Std. Error Mean	.03011	.02627					

Source. Own research.

Table 2 confirms with 95% probability that this difference is not a result of a measurement error but the applied procedure. The same people were studied who responded to the questionnaire items by referring to their respective educational experiences: in school and the family home. In the first case (interactions with students), the scores were found to be higher for the ethics of justice than the ethics of care. However, when the same teachers addressed their own children, the scores were found to be higher for the ethics of care. This finding constitutes a counterpoint for the theoretical concepts suggesting relative stability in both ethical approaches. Their context-dependent variability can be explained by a link between the ethics of care and the parental – and therefore emotional – relationship between teachers and their children. Parents' openness to children's needs, willingness to make sacrifices, care for their health, development, well-being, and accomplishments are also the kinds of quality that are characteristic of interactions governed by the ethics of care.

Table 2
Paired samples t-test

private sphere public sphere	Pair	
Paired Differences	Mean	-.52679
	Std. Deviation	.59835
	Std. Error Mean	.03998
	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	Lower -.60557 Upper -.44800
t		-13.177
df		223
Sig. (2-tailed)		.000

Source. Own research.

This similarity can be observed in both developmental versions of the ethics of care. The one-sided care paradigm based on the unconditional acceptance of the interaction partner, at times provided even at the expense of one's own mental resources, resembles parental inclinations to satisfy all needs of their children and eliminate any barriers from their life. However, these tendencies may be counterbalanced with reciprocity, teaching deceleration, mindfulness, and developing responsibility in children (Dweck, 2017). Such educational interactions are similar to the ethics of balanced care where attention is paid to all parties involved. It corresponds to Gilligan's concept of mature care defined as finding a balance between selfishness and responsibility (2003). To achieve this state, one has to be an autonomous person aware of their rights and the limits of their freedom which de facto ends where other people's freedom starts. The presence of these values in educational initiatives is reserved for people who are mature in their parental role. Interestingly, the qualities characteristic of the ethics of justice, such as respecting the social contract, reciprocity, equality, and respect, do not necessarily have to activate this approach in interactions initiated by parents towards their own children. One can get the impression that some of these parents tend to avoid it because, according to them, this approach does not focus on the interest of the child but the observance of the well-established rules. To most parents, teaching respect for the rules and taking responsibility for one's actions seem to be too radical an educational programme for their own children, but not for the children of others. This is because the educational work performed by teachers at school is more often governed by the ethics of justice than the ethics of care.

While the reason behind this ethical duality cannot be inferred based solely on this analysis, it can be hypothetically assumed to be of a more affective than rational nature. Assuming that children's well-being is the ultimate goal of parental aspirations (Buss, 2005), one must wonder why they would protect them from learning to take responsibility for their actions. As this state of affairs can hardly be explained by the "rational account of profits and losses", perhaps affective factors are at play here. Future research could try to explore this direction.

Table 3

Results of the Independent-Samples T-test (gender vs. private sphere)

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
WOMAN	117	.2564	.43853	.04054
MAN	107	.3084	.46401	.4486
Deg. of freedom	222			
T		-.862		
Sig.		.195		

Source. Own research.

In the case of the second and third hypotheses, teachers' gender was approached as a factor differentiating ethical orientations in both analysed spheres. Table 3 shows that the null hypothesis regarding the gender vs. private sphere remains valid. It cannot be rejected, which means theoretically that both women and men are oriented towards the ethics of care when raising their own children. Kohlberg (1984) argues that women are socialised into being incapable of solving moral dilemmas based on the ethics of justice. Gilligan (1993, 2003) believes they have such an ability but prefer the ethics of care that corresponds better to their socialisation experiences. While women may score worse than men in the Kohlberg tests (ethics of justice), they are in no way less able to solve moral dilemmas. According to Gilligan, they just do it differently – by relying on care as a criterion (1993). Nevertheless, our study did not reveal any differences between genders.

This is probably not the first time that gender differences have turned out to be smaller than individual differences (Else-Quest, 2012), or more specifically – as in this case – than other factors determined by definitions of parental roles. Perhaps it is worth reconsidering the importance of the gradual egalitarianisation of the social life of women and men, the growing commitment of fathers to raising children, and parents raising children together on equal terms. This strategy carries the potential to let us move beyond gender stereotypes. Is the neutral category of parenthood gradually replacing the traditional concepts of motherhood and fatherhood, which remain strongly affected by gender stereotypes? Interestingly though, what we observe here is a change of direction on one side only, i.e. in men, given that the orientation towards care is already typical of women. This observation seems to be in line with the growing functionality of the male role in parenting, where the “gender rigidity” of the ethics of justice can, in certain settings, give way to the affective elements of the parental role of men.

In contrast, this tendency does not seem to find confirmation in the public sphere. As shown in Tables 4 and 5, statistically significant differences were found between the genders in terms of respondents' ethical orientations used in the public sphere. The orientation towards justice was more strongly represented by men than women. This finding is hardly surprising when analysed through the prism of gender stereotypes. However, if considered in terms of the previous interpretation, it may leave one slightly perplexed. While in the private sphere men tend to shift towards the ethics of care, in the public sphere (at school) they continue to follow the ethics of justice.

Table 4*The sample statistics*

	sex x public sphere		Total
	Woman	Men	
N	117	107	224
Mean Rank	121.56	102.60	
Sum of Ranks	14222.00	10978.00	

Source. Own research.**Table 5.***U-Mann Whitney test**Grouping variable: sex*

	Public sphere
U-Man Whitney	5200.000
W Wilcoxon	10978.000
Z	-3.206
Asymp. Sig.	.001

Source. Own research.

Shame emerges as a component of the masculine stereotype – an individual may be perceived as not masculine enough. If this is indeed a mechanism at play in this case, it could mean that we are currently in the transition stage towards the egalitarianisation of men – an intermediate phase when they are only just learning to see their gender role in a new way, gradually releasing themselves from guilt. Perhaps this is why they are beginning to evolve within the private sphere that guarantees some invisibility. Nevertheless, the egalitarianisation is happening. However, if the said mechanism is only a result of the applied interpretation procedure, a certain duality arises here that can perhaps be motivated by the two-reward mechanism: one from the family for the ethics of care and the other from school for the ethics of justice.

CONCLUSION

In the end, it is worth emphasising the ambiguity of the results obtained and the instability of their interpretations. These effects, if not caused by formal research weaknesses, can be a harbinger of social change in gender roles. The actions of the teachers studied do not confirm the thesis about the stability of ethical orientations in educational work and are, therefore, indicative of ambivalence towards the role of gender in this process.

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