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ETHICAL ORIENTATIONS (COMPETENCIES) OF MEN AND WOMEN IN EARLY, MIDDLE AND LATE ADULTHOOD

Key words: ethical orientations, moral development, moral education, adulthood, men, women

Abstract: The article is concerned with the change of ethical orientations in the cycles of human adulthood. Theoretically, our analysis centres around two conceptual categories: C. Gilligan's ethics of care and L. Kohlberg's ethics of justice. The empirical studies will be aimed at finding differences in the ethical orientations of care and justice between men and women in the three cycles of adulthood. The data will be evaluated by a two factor ANOVA.

Hypothesis

Ethical orientations will be understood as the dominant system of criteria standing behind a person's moral choices, their attitude towards social issues and other people. An interesting discussion regarding definition of the said criteria was undertaken by C. Gilligan (1979, 1998) and L. Kohlberg (1984). It showed differences between men and women, locating each sex within a different ethical orientation. The discussion activated research on the orientation of care as an alternative set of criteria for taking moral choices in relation to the ethics of justice, a theory widely applied to the social sciences of the time. Although Kohlberg (1984) maintained that the ethics of justice was universal with regard to sex, Gilligan (1979, 2013) remained in opposition to this opinion, stating that the social experiences of females had them equipped with ethical competences closer to the orientation of care rather than justice. The followers of Kohlberg's theory argued that the development of orientation of justice also encompassed certain development of orientation of care, as the aspects of care, interpersonal relationships and trust are represented at each stage of moral development, as it was evaluated with the use of *Moral Judgment Interview*, i.e. the original tool applied by Kohlberg (Juujarvi, Myyry, Pessa 2010). On the other hand, some claimed that Kohlberg's theory did not

concentrate sufficiently on interpersonal aspects of moral conflicts, but was rather concerned with the macro-social issues and thus – in qualitative sense – could not explain those problems which were so well discussed in Gilligan's micro-social theory (Rest and others 1999). Leaving the details of theoretical grounds for both orientations aside, we must admit that Gilligan in fact initiated a long debate on the relationship between sex and ethical orientations. In its course various research results were provided to confirm gender connotations of both orientations but also to strengthen the thesis that sex itself did not constitute a strong factor in the explanation of the variability of ethical orientations (Czyżowska 2012). Gradually different variables were defined, which seemed to serve as stronger orientation predicators than sex. They included empathy, affinity, results within post-conventional thinking, age, assuming of a perspective (comp. Juujarvi, Myyry, Pessa 2010). Our approach to the research on persons representing three periods of adulthood focused on two of the above variables, namely sex and age. What was our reasoning? First of all, each of the three cycles of adulthood presents different cultural expectations regarding the fulfilment of social roles. Early adulthood, due to the biological pressure, means involvement in having children, raising them, taking care of an intimate relationship, but also, for economic reasons, involvement in ensuring oneself a stable professional position. Middle adulthood, on the other hand, means supporting the young, deepening interpersonal relationships with one's parents, construing new relationships with one's children as adults, and maintaining of the achieved professional position. Finally, the last phase of life – late adulthood consists in activities aimed at one's adjustment to physical weakness, acceptance of the prospect of one's own death and the death of the close ones, flexible accommodation to the social roles and norms established by younger generations (cf. Havighurst 1981; Levinson 1986). Secondly, with regard to the above, the age aspect was not tackled in a demographic but rather in a developmental sense, i.e. in relation to cultural expectations of the representatives of early, middle and late adulthood. Thirdly, while relating the ethical orientations and the developmental periods of adulthood to sex we conducted an analysis of the results of studies on the functionality of roles as parents, employees, friends, etc. Based on such initial assumptions, resulting from theoretical and empirical findings, we have developed the hypothesis of transition from the orientation of justice to the orientation of care, occurring with the age of the respondents (developmental period) with sex not being linked to this process, nor to ethical orientations in general. Using the language of the statistical analysis which was applied in the said studies, we may conclude that between the two fixed variables: age and sex, it is age that constitutes the factor underlying the variability of results in the ethical orientation test, thus there will also be no interaction between age and sex. It appears that the content profiles of the developmental tasks assigned within the various stages of adulthood, moving from social macro-scale (early adulthood)

to the micro-scale (middle and late adulthood) will explain the initial inclination of the respondents towards the ethics of justice and its later abandonment in favour of the ethics of care.

Method

The study was quantitative, within a comparative scheme. Research type can be classified as a theoretical-verificational study. Data were collected with a test method based on Ethical Orientation Test (EOT) construed by the Authors, consisting of five stories presenting situations where their characters are faced with various ethical conflicts. Respondents were asked to choose among several solutions including indicators of the ethics of care and justice as the criteria for their decisions. The situations had been structured in such a manner that the respondents' decisions would have an immediate impact on the characters' fate. The stories were not abstract, as is the case with the Defining Issues Test (DIT) by Rest, but rather typical with regard to the experiences of those researched. The applied tool has not yet been completely verified, although a part of its psychometric parameters have already been defined. Discrimination power indexes (four – point scale) for each story have been specified. They ranged from 0.57 to 0.81, thus providing good differentiation within the standard sample (N=370). Internal consistency was also satisfactory, as it oscillated between 0.82 – 0.93 (Cronbach's alpha). The least may be said about construct validity which was evaluated by competent experts' opinions achieving satisfactory indexes. However, as we know, such a criterion for test parameter evaluation constitutes the weakest of possible options. For the purpose of the described study it was also decided to determine, tentatively, an empirical range of results showing the presence of orientation of care and justice in the solutions generated by the subjects (cf. Rubacha, Chomczyńska-Rubacha 2013).

The remaining variables were fixed variables: age and sex. Their values have been defined randomly, selecting from a large pool of EOT responses, the responses of 35 people at the age corresponding to early adulthood, 34 to middle, and 35 to late adulthood. For each of those groups, the proportion of the responses of men and women reached approx. 50%. So prepared data were entered in a two-factor Anova analysis model with the intention of testing main effects of both fixed variables on EOT results, the possible interaction effect, and also, if the latter proved to be statistically significant, simple effects in all possible variants.

Results

The first two tables present descriptive statistics related to the main effects. In the case of age, the authors observed changes in mean EOT results, with

expected changes, i.e. in the period of early adulthood the dominant orientation was that of justice, gradually turning into the orientation of care. Standard deviations indicated small internal diversity among the age groups, with the least diversity noted in the early adulthood group, as this age group provided the greatest number of indications towards the orientation of justice.

Tab. 1. Descriptive statistics for the effect of age * EOT results

Age	Mean	N	Standard deviation
	2.0000	1	.
L	1.4286	35	.50210
M	1.6765	34	.47486
E	1.9143	35	.28403
Total	1.6762	105	.47017

Source: own studies (marking: L – late adulthood, M – middle adulthood, E – early adulthood)

Mean EOT results, on the other hand, were not distinctly diversified with regard to sex. The mean values of men's and women's responses were close to each other. A similar situation concerns standard deviations, which in both cases tended to be rather small, this being an expression of relative homogeneity of both researched groups.

Tab. 2. Descriptive statistics for the effect of sex * EOT results

Sex	Mean	N	Standard deviation
W	1.6481	54	.48203
M	1.7059	51	.46018
Total	1.6762	105	.47017

Source: own studies (marking: w – women, m – men)

Tab. 3. Between-subjects effect tests for the specified variables, EOT results

Source	Sum of square	df	Mean square	F	Significance
Adjusted model	4.833 ^a	6	.806	4.348	.001
Constant	70.596	1	70.596	381.030	.000
Age	3.927	3	1.309	7.065	.000
Sex	.018	1	.018	.097	.756
age * sex	.579	2	.290	1.563	.215
Error	18.157	98	.185		
Total	318.000	105			
Total adjusted	22.990	104			

a. R square = .210 adjusted R square = .162); Source: own studies

ANOVA test results confirmed the predictions outlined in the first part of the article. A statistically significant main effect of age had been observed, whose direction is described above. However, no main effect of sex had been

noted, hence the other effects were also absent. Such a situation requires several comments. Firstly, the sex variable did not explain the variation of EOT results, which is in concord with numerous studies devoted to the same topic (cf. e.g. Juujärvia, Myry, Pessa 2010; Czyżowska 2012).

Yet, following the sex-related stereotypes rather than the theoretical and empirical analyses we were able to formulate an opposite hypothesis, i.e. the one based on an expectation that the sex factor would produce the main effect. Such a temptation is particularly strong when research involves cultural expectations towards adult persons. Giving birth and raising children seems to constitute a critical area concerned with stereotypical anticipations regarding a mother's role, which – though not necessarily correctly – is manifested in public debates on this subject in Poland. In that period of life in particular, women's attitude to children and the previously received socializing messages concerning the role of a good mother move them towards the ethics of care, as predicted by Gilligan (2003). Still, it is worth realizing that the ethics of care to a large degree involves sensitivity to the needs of others, emphasis on the dynamics of relationships with others, where what is moral is associated with empathy and assuming responsibility in relations with others. This is the primacy of 'affect' over Kantian 'rationality'. However, doesn't the contemporary social world, almost 40 years after the criticism voiced by Gilligan against Kohlberg, present itself differently than at the beginning of the 1970s? The engagement of young women in their professional roles, their greater than ever distance towards parenting manifesting itself with an increased age of women giving birth to their children, may be responsible for a lack of differences in the ethical orientations of men and women. Still, we may not say that the tendency among young fathers to show greater involvement in their role as a parent cause men to move towards the orientation of care. Our data do not confirm that. It occurs that in the period of early adulthood both sexes identify themselves with the ethics of justice to a similar degree. At this point it is worth asking ourselves a question whether the role of a parent is necessarily, as it is commonly believed, connected with their departure from the ethics of justice. Perhaps this is not that obvious, especially since raising children needs to be an activity based on rules that may frequently fall into conflict with the affects, yet are still expected to dominate. Furthermore, our results do not indicate the so-called clean states, thus when we speak of dominance of a given ethical orientation we do not stipulate that the other orientation is not represented within that group at all. Of course it is, and even in a certain characteristic manner. Looking at the results of the respondents and considering their attitude to particular stories included in the Ethical Orientation Test we see that the stories that placed them in the role of parents tended to activate indicators of the orientation of care rather than justice. This happened even when the analysis concerned persons with the general test result pointing them towards the orientation of justice. It might be that this unsystematic observation will provide

an argument in favour of the thesis saying that the kind of a moral problem presented to the examinees constitutes an important criterion in the activation of a given ethical orientation (cf. Haviv, Leman 2002). We cannot be completely certain of that just yet; however, we are absolutely sure that the factor differentiating the ethical orientations was not the respondents' sex.

Nonetheless, this was the case with the age aspect. The authors' anticipation related to this effect proved to be accurate. As we did not treat age as a demographic variable but rather as an indicator of a person's involvement in fulfilling particular cultural expectations, this result may be interpreted in a more general context where we will find people revealing a particular ethical orientation. The requirements of particular social roles activate ethical orientations, cause people to be placed in situations of such conflicts which – in the period of early adulthood – demand solutions based on rational choices. The wellbeing of others and responsibility for them recede into the background in favour of the need to determine and observe those social norms that regulate everyday existence not only at work, but also at home during the process of bringing up children. The ethics of justice seems to correspond to a greater extent to the institutionalized public life, whereas the ethics of care is characteristic of the affective tribal existence with attention to the personal good of the closest ones. If it was possible to find justification to such reasoning, how could we explain the decreasing tendency of EOT results (towards the orientation of care) visible in the respondents representing further stages of adulthood? Indeed, it is a fact that the respondents from the middle adulthood group are still able to exist in the macro-world. Perhaps they begin to understand it enough to become cynical? Or maybe this is a question of proportion? This matter still requires further investigation. Nonetheless, although the ethics of care becomes dominant as a person "retreats from life", i.e. moves towards further stages of adulthood, the ethics of justice refuses to yield to it completely. We may rather say that what is observed is a stronger combination of affectivity and rationality. All of this, however, leads to the assumption that the kind of an ethical problem plays a key role in the activation of both orientations. Nevertheless, this statement does not constitute a direct conclusion driven on the basis of analysed data, thus it may be treated merely as a hypothesis.

Translation: Anna Węgrzyn

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Etyczne orientacje (kompetencje) mężczyzn i kobiet we wczesnej, średniej i późnej dorosłości

Słowa kluczowe: orientacje etyczne, rozwój moralny, edukacja moralna, dorosłości, mężczyźni, kobiety

Streszczenie: Artykuł dotyczy zmian orientacji etycznych w cyklach ludzkiej dorosłości. Teoretycznie, zaprezentowane w nim analizy koncentrują się wokół dwóch kategorii pojęciowych: etyki opieki C. Gilligana i etyki sprawiedliwości L. Kohlberga. Badania empiryczne miały na celu znalezienie różnic w orientacjach etycznych opieki i sprawiedliwości między mężczyznami i kobietami w trzech cyklach dorosłości. Zgromadzone dane zostały poddane weryfikacji poprzez dwuczynnikową analizę wariancji ANOVA.

Ethische Orientierungen (Kompetenzen) von Frauen und Männern im frühen, mittleren und späten Erwachsenenalter

Schlüsselwörter: ethischen Orientierungen, moralische Entwicklung, moralische Bildung, Fürsorgeethik, Gerechtigkeitsethik, Erwachsenenesein, Frauen, Männer

Zusammenfassung: Der vorliegende Artikel betrifft die Veränderungen der ethischen Orientierungen in verschiedenen Zyklen des Erwachsenenalters.

Theoretisch beziehen sich die darin dargestellten Analysen auf zwei Begriffskategorien: „Fürsorgeethik“ von C. Gilligan und „Gerechtigkeitsethik“ von L. Kohlberg. Mit empirischen Forschungen setzte man sich zum Ziel, die Unterschiede in den ethischen Orientierungen der Fürsorge und Gerechtigkeit zwischen Männern und Frauen in drei Zyklen des Erwachsenenalters zu finden. Die gesammelten Daten wurden einer Überprüfung mittels der zweifaktoriellen Varianzanalyse (ANOVA) unterzogen.

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