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## **Ethical orientations of young women in Poland and Serbia. Comparative studies**

Orientacje etyczne młodych kobiet w Polsce i Serbii.  
Badania porównawcze

**Streszczenie.** Artykuł jest raportem z badań porównawczych nad orientacjami etycznymi kobiet w Polsce i Serbii. Wyróżniamy dwie orientacje etyczne: na sprawiedliwość i troskę. Kontekstem społecznym do porównania jest sytuacja kobiet, ich praw w Polsce i w Serbii. Stawiamy pytanie o różnice w orientacjach etycznych badanych z Polski i Serbii. Wyniki badań pokazują, że kobiety z Polski uzyskają wyższe średnie orientacji na sprawiedliwość niż badane z Serbii. Jednak ta relacja nie prosta.

**Słowa kluczowe:** orientacje etyczne, prawa kobiet, sprawiedliwość, troska.

**Summary.** The article is a report of a comparative study of the ethical orientations of women in Poland and Serbia. We have two ethical orientations in the theoretical sense: focused on justice and care. Social context to compare is a situation of women and their rights in Poland and Serbia. We ask about the differences in ethical orientations of women in Poland and Serbia. Our results shows, that women from Poland has higher indication justice ethical orientation, then Serbian women. However this relation isn't simple.

**Keywords:** ethical orientations, women's rights, justice, care.

### **The problem**

Moral principles are categories directing not only the lives of individuals, but also of large communities. These communities are at different stages of development and differ in the organization of their lives, also individual or centred around smaller groups such as families. For decades now, we have observed in Europe the parallel operation of two types of social or-

ganizations, guided by different principles and resulting from, among other things, conditions of everyday life, dominant patterns of social relations, and political systems. One of those groups of social organization, known as the Eastern European one, includes collectivist societies, relatively ethnically homogeneous, with poorly operating public organizations, where people can largely depend on themselves, or on the small groups to which they belong. The central reference bond and criterion in the moral sphere is the will of the people, the good of the family. Belonging to these groups, people provide each other with services, and by making themselves dependent on each other they begin gradually to produce bonds of responsibility and care. It is in this way that an orientation towards care as a strategy of conduct in the ethical sphere, and often of survival in the economic sphere, is developed. The limits of this care are established by the values of everyday life defined as community, national, family, and thus in the language of sociobiology, tribal ones. For historical reasons, the so-called Western European societies, which base their organization on the values of individualism, have developed in a different way. They have built public institutions, relatively isolated from ideological and political pressures, which were to defend the individual and their individual choices from the dominance of collectivist narratives, e.g. national ones. The ethics of care are present here to a lesser extent, whereas the ethics of justice to a greater extent, than in the societies discussed above. This focus on justice means taking care of the balance between the efforts made by individuals for the common good and the goods received in exchange, developing criteria for the fair distribution of wealth and, most important in our context, believing that people have fundamental rights that impartially guarantee them what they could elsewhere only receive under the care of others, if others recognized that it was appropriate (cf. Hoffman, 2006, p. 203). Public institutions established by law to defend the major moral principles connected with justice, i.e. equality, reciprocity, and impartiality, operate in such societies. Both ethical orientations are present in all societies. We speak here rather about a dominant orientation, 'dominant' referring to ways of organizing and evaluating social processes, and launched socialization pressures. In this sense, one of those moral orientations defines the practice of social life and is shared by community members to a greater extent than the other. Cultural, social and political conditions are conducive to this.

Ethical orientations are defined as the dominant criteria of the moral choices made, the evaluation and solving of social problems, as well as the attitude towards other people. L. Kohlberg (1984) believed that justice

is a universal value and is the main criterion for making mature moral decisions. When constructing his tests for evaluating the level of moral development, he assumed that only those solutions based on the principle of justice may be indicators of attaining the post-conventional phase, an equivalent of Piagetian moral autonomy. Justice was an imperative for him (Rest et al. 1999). However, C. Gilligan (1998) questioned this theoretical position, pointing out that half of society, namely women, use care when solving moral dilemmas as effectively as Kohlberg's subjects use justice. It soon turned out that Kohlberg had hardly studied women, and the men surveyed by him predominantly chose solutions based on the standard of justice. And it was Gilligan who developed a rival to Kohlberg's theory of moral development, showing that the ethics of justice is typical for men, and the ethics of care for women. She based her substantiation of these claims on the analysis of socialisation pressures which, basing themselves on stereotypes related to gender, associate little girls with family relationships, and prepare them to care for others, while boys are prepared to exercise power (Gilligan, 2003). This did not mean that girls and women are not able to solve moral dilemmas on the basis of the ethics of justice. They were able, however, if they had such an opportunity, to choose a solution spontaneously, and they chose the one based on care and responsibility for others.

Attempting to combine both of the threads analysed above, we are going to refer to the situation of women as a social group in Polish and Serbian societies, which will directly lead us to the problematisation of the studies discussed. Poland and Serbia (formerly a part of Yugoslavia) functioned in the camp of socialist countries, where the situation of women was at least difficult, until the 1990s. Apart from the community of the "socialist" lot, different historical and contemporary experiences were responsible for this state of affairs. Balkan androcentrism and misogyny decisively negatively valued femininity, depreciating all its manifestations both on the legal and customary levels (Ugrešić, 2006). Beginning with the language, through film, theatre, fiction, to the everyday practice of social life, saturated with violence against women, women were invariably ousted from the centre of cultural life as inferior beings (Ugrešić, 1998). Additionally, Serbia's complicated fate after the breakup of Yugoslavia and its war history reinforced these negative trends. It was only in 2013, when Serbia launched large-scale efforts for its admission to the European Union, that at the 55th meeting of the UN Committee it was recognized that the process of improving the situation of women had begun in Belgrade. This happened as part of the de-

velopment of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (Szmurlik, 2013).

Poland, however, having joined the European Union as early as in 2004, gradually implemented subsequent conventions to prevent discrimination against women. In addition, very active feminist circles conducted intensive activities so as to raise the awareness of the public with regard to the historical situation and the current position of women, e.g. by organizing congresses of women's organizations. Creating more and more favourable conditions for the functioning of women in the public and political spheres, e.g. winning parity in the distribution of positions on electoral lists, strengthened the processes of emancipation. As a result, Polish society is already in a different place from the Serbian one, although the history of the negative estimation of womanhood in Polish society is equally long and similar to the Serbian one, and, as well, it is still valid in some social circles. Even the recent attempts to prevent the signing by the Polish government of the convention on the prevention of violence were unable to stop the already strong processes of emancipation.

We can say that Poland, as regards the situation of women, is further forward than Serbia on the road to a civil society, with a clear public sphere, in which problems are solved more often based on the standard of justice, than that of care. On the other hand, in Serbia we are now facing a moment when similar processes of emancipation, showing directions of this society's development towards the recovery of rights by women, have already been initiated. Relating these observations to the theoretical grounds of the ethics of justice and care in Kohlberg's and Gilligan's works, we are now wondering whether, when studying the ethical orientations of women in Serbia and Poland, we will find any differences reflecting the current ethical condition of both societies. Will Polish women display the ethics of justice in their moral choices more often than Serbian women?

## The method

The study was conducted in Poland and Serbia as theoretical exploratory research, following a quasi-experimental design. Data were collected using an ethical orientation test to measure the ethical orientations developed by the authors of this article (EOT) (cf. Rubacha, Chomczyńska-Rubacha,

2013). In Serbia, we used an adapted earlier version of the same tool\*. The original Polish version consists of five descriptions of situations and stories containing ethical conflicts. After making themselves familiar with the predicament of the characters in those stories, the respondents chose solutions that included indicators of justice orientation or care orientation. There were no other solutions to choose from. The Ethical Orientation Test contains real situations that could possibly happen to anyone. The tool is largely standardized. Indexes of discriminatory power for each story (0.57 to 0.81) are known. Story reliability is also satisfactory, since it varies between 0.82–0.93 (Cronbach's alpha). Diagnostic accuracy was determined with the help of competent judges (Chomczyńska-Rubacha, Rubacha, 2014). The Serbian version, however, after its translation and cultural adjustment, was verified taking into account the degree to which it diverges from the test sample. Three items had adequate indexes of discriminatory power (0.56; 0.61; 0.68). The other two, however, failed to meet this statistical criterion. That is why we included only three items in the experiment version. The story reliability indexes calculated for them (Cronbach's alpha=0.81–0.83) and their diagnostic accuracy (evaluation by competent judges) allowed us to use the three-item test in the studies discussed. The Polish version was in this situation adjusted to the Serbian version, and it also consisted of the same three items. The study included 205 women aged 20–25, 103 from Poland and 102 from Serbia. The selection of the sample was not random. Our studies do not allow the estimation of parameters.

## The results and discussion

Let us begin with the description of the variables examined. In the Serbian sample we are dealing with a weak asymmetry towards the results indicating the predominance of care orientation. The mean, which could be in the range of 3–6, amounts to 4.22. The median, in turn, is low, since 50% of the results are lower than 4.00, just like those exceeding this value. If we also notice that the standard deviation is not big, we will understand that the majority of the respondents are centred around the mean. There are very few extreme results. In turn, the most recurring result is the value cor-

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\* The empirical studies in Serbia and the translation of the Ethical Orientation Test were made by prof. Zoroslav Spěvák from the University of Novi Sad. We hereby kindly thank him for his assistance.

responding to care orientation. All in all, this is a situation locating the Serbian sample almost between the two orientations, with just a delicate concentration on care orientation. The situation is different in the case of the Polish sample.

Table 1. Estimators. Serbian sample

N	Valid	102
	Missing data	0
Mean		4.2255
Median		4.0000
Dominant		4.00
Standard deviation		.78232
Skewness		-.168
The standard error of skewness		.239

Source: own study

Table 2 shows a higher mean than in the Serbian sample.

N	Valid	103
	Missing data	0
Mean		4.5980
Median		5.0000
Dominant		4.00
Standard deviation		.88172
Skewness		.093
The standard error of skewness		.239

Source: own study

If we subtracted from the mean of 4.59 the value of one standard deviation, and added to it also one deviation, we could obtain a range of 3.71–5.47. This is a fairly wide range of the average result which, however, occupies a larger space of justice orientation, rather than that of care. This confirms the skewness, revealing a tendency toward justice orientation. The median is high, definitely in the range of justice orientation. The low value of the dominant, the same as in the Serbian sample, somewhat interferes with this

image, which means that most of the respondents obtained a result attesting to their care orientation.

Aiming to verify our research question, we proceeded to compare the means in both samples. Verifying the data quality, we identified heterogeneous variances (cf. Table 3), which eliminated the possibility of using the Anova univariate analysis. Therefore, we used the **t**-test.

Table 3. The test for homogeneity of variances

Levene's test	df1	df2	Significance
2.829	1	203	.094

Source: own study

This helped us to analyse the data assuming the absence of homogeneous variances. Tables 4 and 5 show the results of a comparison of the means. The difference between them proved statistically significant.

Table 4. A comparison of the means

	N	Mean	Standard deviation	Standard error of mean (SEM)
Polish sample	103	4.5922	.87936	.08665
Serbian sample	102	4.2255	.78232	.07746

Source: own study

Table 5. The t-test results for independent tests

	t	df	Significance (two-sided)	The difference between means	The standard error of the difference
The equality of variance was assumed	3.154	203	.002	.36674	.11629
The equality of variance was not assumed	3.156	200.716	.002	.36674	.11622

Source: own study

The sample of Polish women is more oriented in their choices and moral decisions on the ethics of justice, than the sample of Serbian women. However, as can be seen from the data analysed previously, the sample of Serbian women does not lie too heavily in the ethics of care, rather oscillating on the border of both orientations. Despite this, the mean of its ethical orientations is lower than in the Polish sample. As a result, this outcome is consistent with the theoretical expectations. We reported earlier that the ethical orientation dominant in a given society as a criterion for decision-making and for the implementation of public rights becomes a component of socialization pressures, which makes it consolidate in subsequent generations. As can be judged, the fact that the research covered, indeed intentionally, young women is not without significance. In both countries, more in Poland than in Serbia, they experienced the principles of social life based on the standard of justice. The respondents were born between 1990 and 1995. Their adult life falls during the last 7 years. In Poland, it has been a time of advanced development of civil society, yet in Serbia these are just the beginnings of the process. This explains both the differences in the ethical orientations of the respondents, and the means of both samples. Serbian society, still as described by V. Rudan (2004), had to be based on care, since justice was a value absent from the public sphere. If it had not been for the internal, domestic, ethnic, and mutual care and responsibility for others, society could not have survived, because it could not count on law. Although for only a shorter period of time, Polish society also functioned in a similar way, not only because of the rights of women, but also because of the rights of all citizens. In a sense, launching the ethics of justice, assuming that people have inalienable rights, is an object of concern for social organization. It is

then that individual care ceases to be of key importance, because people are primarily protected by law. Besides, it is worth remembering that there are no pure types of societies with regard to ethical orientation, or pure types of individuals in this respect, and that both orientations involve opportunities and threats. They are also a result of historical social macro-processes, and a dominant feature of culture. That is why there is a presumption that a study of older women, especially in Serbia, would yield results indicative of the dominance of the ethics of care. On the other hand, it is worth referring to Gilligan's findings (1998), in which she wrote that women are in general more than men guided by the ethics of care. This is mainly because of the socialization pressures requiring girls to practise caring and educational competences. For it is in these areas of life that the asymmetry of responsibility between adults and children is distinct. And (interestingly, although not visible in our tables) the respondents confirmed this principle in their ethical choices, though in general they displayed tendencies toward justice orientation (especially the Polish respondents). In fact, one item in the Ethical Orientation Test referred to the moral conflict encoded in the relationship between parents and children. Common sense, experience, and educational balance decisively ordered in this case the solution of conflict based on the criterion of justice. The respondents, however, decisively used in this case the ethics of care, although the so-called "good" of the children occurring in this story did not require it. In the Polish sample, 80% of the respondents acted in this way, whereas in the Serbian sample as many as 96%. It can be assumed that the ethics of care becomes comfortable in relationships based on kinship (tribal ones) and in intimate relationships, whereas the ethics of justice becomes comfortable in social, public, or civic relationships. And also, possibly, the very research tool itself affects the test results. If we included in such a test more situations describing family relationships rather than macro-social relationships, or those with a greater distance than the family one, we could provoke a strong frequency of occurrence of care orientation. Therefore, we need to control the quality of research tools so as not to create artefacts, which, as can be seen, is quite likely in the case of ethical orientations.

*Tłumaczenie  
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