Dominant and recessive social behavior: female and male role-models in the classroom

Norbert E. Ligterink
University Twente
P.O. Box 217, 7500 AE Enschede, The Netherlands

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Abstract

The taxonomy of gender differences in the role-model in the classroom has, especially for the male role-model, many cultural variations, which obscure the constancy in the gender distinction. In some biological functions, we try to describe the constancy in the gender differences, noting that the resulting characteristics are exhibited by both men and women. Globally, we distinguish care behavior, as female, and structuring behavior outside the care relations, as male.

1   Introduction

A mother who cares only for a child and ignores other individuals in her surroundings still exhibits acceptable social behavior. If the child is replaced with an inanimate object, the situation is very much different. The human instinct to care for helpless beings, like babies or puppies, is very strong and overrules social behavior at large. Most people will respond positively to a cry of help from anyone who seems helpless. This care chain of responding to a demand of help may, however, upset the social order. Some conflicts arise from the perception of the urgency and priority of the care chain over the greater social structure.

The care chain and the social structure at large are two aspects of interdependent communities, which represent opposite ends of the spectrum, and not only in the time and space scales at which they occur. A social structure will not function without interdependency and care. The balance and constancy of a social structure is much more complex. The mother-child relation is a typical example of the maintenance of the care chain; female social behavior. The opposite, male social behavior, for the larger social structure, is shifting in function and character. However, the social coherence of a group cannot exist solely of pair-wise one-to-one care-chain relations. The group as a whole requires a balance outside the temporal, and changing care-chain relations.

The old cry "women and children first!" at abandoning a sinking ship appears natural, but who is going to row a boat with only women and children on board? Who will take the initiative and grab the oars, who will determine the direction? The underlying principles are often hidden. Reason dictates a different set of rules than would arise from individuals just asking and giving help. The constancy of behavior of individuals arises from the group structure and rules. Among many groups of animals (de Waal 1989) social standing, or hierarchy, is the most apparent social structure. Western society has come to see social hierarchy as abject, except in a business environment. Words like, "order", "status", and "hierarchy" have nowadays negative connotations, although they are also associated with the social structure, constancy, and balance.

A classroom is the setting of a very active social group. Pupils defining themselves do so in relation to others, and much time is spend on nurturing personalities of pupils into being. Not recognizing the social fabric of the classroom environment will leave the personal development to chance. The difficulty

is to define a larger social structure within the modern culture which focusses mainly on the care aspect with words like "empathy" and "collaborative". The task is not to appear moralistic, adult, and imposing, which would yield instant rejection by the rules of the care chain, underpinning instances of social interaction. The adjectives of a social structure should in the modern cultural setting be: "sensible" and "positive". The teacher could say to a pupil, "I would like your help to make others feel part of the group", to bridge the gap between the care chain and the social structure.

Our purpose is to classify (Francis 2006) behavior in typical care routines, which we call female, and the rather complex task of structuring the social relations within the group including the teacher, as a whole, i.e., the male, original paternalistic task. The complexity of defining and generating social structure lies mainly in that it has little outwardly characteristics; it lives in the minds of the members of a group(Marshall & Young 2006). Both in education research, as in teachers' observations, the motivations of a pupil based on the mere existence of others and ideas is difficult to gauge. Therefore, the attitude toward attitudes is recessive social behavior. Teachers have become responsive rather than proactive as it comes to social aspects.

The gender of the teacher as social role-model is a token one(Carrington, Tymms & Merrell 2005). Boys recognize males, girls recognize females, etc.. Only the teachers' awareness of the social structure, and his or her role in it, can form a basis to utilize the role-model aspect to fulfillment(Evans 1992). The teacher has to qualify behavior, rather than just question it.

The, for some derogatory, biological references to female and male in role-models are meant to assign structure in the different roles a teacher can take in a classroom. In the Dutch media the feminization of education has been signalled, not necessarily positive, and without underpinning any of its characteristics. Such trends exist mondial(Skelton 2006).

The Dutch Christian-Democratic government of the last four years has tried to start a discussion about "morals and values" in education (de Beer & Schuyt 2003). Already from its title the attempt has been rather pedant. Associations with a methodist, or Presbyterian, minister in his pulpit spring to mind. It seems to be very difficult to avoid such impressions in these discussions. In this paper we attempt to do so.

2   Care chain

The mother-child relation is the archetypical care relation. However, others might be invited to participate in this relation. For example, the male as breadwinner, to take care of the mother and child. This is a care chain; the appeal of the helpless mother taking care of the helpless child. However, also direct participating may be demanded by a teacher asking one pupil to help the other. The teacher points out the helplessness of one pupil to another, inducing so a care reaction. The teacher asks for a simple response. The existing social structure between the two pupils is overruled by the care chain, or not, if the

interpersonal relation between the pupils have settled in such a way that the helplessness of the pupil cannot be recognized by the other. In that respect, the dominant reaction of care is overruled by the recessive social structure; typically associated with "male" behavior.

The here-and-now will dominate social behavior. The proximity both in place and time is associated with interpersonal relations, between two individuals outside a social context. This can be recognized as the dominant social behavior. Furthermore, the care chain can be ritualistic where two people define a relation by playing, in turns, the part of the helpless. Partners who exchange nicknames like "little pumpkin", "my princess", etc. take turns in being the child within the relation, without being serious about their helplessness. Such relations do not seem to develop; they are a warm bath of content.

3   Social structure

Humor has, for example, no place in the care chain, but is an important part of social coherence in a group, and in the classroom. It seems to be the lubricant of more complex social behavior, involving several members of a group. It is used to shift or divert the attention. Most teachers will acknowledge that humor plays an important role in the classroom.

Anger, and aggression, can have the same function as humor(de Waal 1989). The social structure is to arrive at a situation where pupils are not simply discouraged to use anger, or incited by the withdrawal of care to refrain from the use of anger, but recognize that the use of anger or aggression will, in the greater scheme of things, fail to improve the situation. Utilitarians and behaviorists may not recognize the third option as a separate one, but for the teacher the third view represents the possibility of intrinsic development of the pupil and, possibly, the social structure at large based on the collective perception.

In the Dutch language, to lecture a pupil about his of her behavior as a form of correction, is referred to, appropriately, as "to preach" (preken). Exhortation is seen as masculine behavior, the feminine counterpart would be to appeal to the pupil's good nature or the bond between teacher and pupil. Especially boys may respond very poorly to the latter form, which they sometimes perceive as intrusive, because they cannot respond argumentative as a defense against being placed into an instance of an interdependent position; a care chain. The discrepancy between form and function would enhance the discomfort(Connell 2006). Exhortation allows for a degree of detachment and intellectual challenge. It is not surprising that exhortation has a religious connotation. It is meant to stem the pupil to reflection and contemplation, to see his or her role in the greater scheme of things. What greater scheme is there than the ones that extend beyond the boundaries of the universe and death?

However, a teacher placing history and the social mechanisms in the classroom both in the same Marxist setting, or a science teacher pointing out cause and effect; the seeming determinism of the pupils' social relations to another, might be just as successful to bring about a contemplative mood in the student.

Likewise, a language teacher may point out the similarities between a pupil's behavior and that of a Shakespearean character, to invoke reflection.

The social structure is a form of relativism. The pupil is not really taken seriously as a unique individual with a unique grievance, or problem, which is a care-chain view. It can be seen as an aloofness of the teacher. Humor of teachers often exhibits this relativism. It is the clash between the care role, and the structuring role of the teacher. Nowadays it difficult to defend this relativism, as we have no skill to measure possible invocations of contemplative behavior in pupils, and, moreover, may not appreciate the immediate consequences of this contemplation, such as, being socially less active.

4   Dominant and recessive behavior

Only fifty years ago, the interactions in the classroom were described in moral terms. (Perquin 1961, Idenburg 1964) In The Netherlands typically the priest, the minister, and the mayor were on the school boards, and defined a structure for education down to the classroom, in terms of morals and ideals. The pupil was hardly recognized a part of a group, at least not in the literature. There has been a shift toward the relations of the pupil. However, not the relation within the class, but the relation with the teacher, and with the parents.

Recently, another shift occurred where the dominant position of the parents in the social development of the pupil is replaced by that of the peers. Again, this is seen as an interdependent relation; the pupil seeking recognition by the peers. Interdependence is easier to recognize in observational studies than the resulting social structure, which is mainly a matter of a common denominator in the perceptions of the members of a social group.

If no longer a social structure, for example in terms of morals or hierarchy, is implanted on the social interaction, the members will use the only gauge left to them to measure social interaction. This gauge is the amount of attention they receive. The type of attention is not really distinguished in a care chain. Outsiders typically observe that "obnoxious" children thrive on any kind of attention.

Attention is often seen as care, which makes punishment less effective. Furthermore, teachers are not to condemn the behavior of pupils publicly. Therefore punishment is to be placed outside the social structure of the classroom. The moral guidance by the teacher is recessive social behavior within a world view defined by behaviorists and utilitarians. We no longer have an acceptable jargon to talk about morals or welfare.

In The Netherlands, among non-religious, young teachers, many seek employment at the schools on religious basis, which are abundant due to the Dutch school-financing laws. The teachers recognize the stability and order in these schools, which generate better conditions for both teachers and pupils for fulfillment than schools with no denomination. The precise workings of this difference is very complex, and can be viewed from many different angles. But the accepted order within the school must have a basis in the social structure, also in

the classroom.

Teachers and pupils join a particular framework, with its values and morals. Although cultural aspects of order and social interaction are acknowledged, it has been very difficult to discuss this framework without placing it inside the social context. The social context and the morals and values should be treated on equal footing, in order to retain the positive aspects of the "rules to live by." Rules are the outward manifestations of a social structure of a group or society. Within the social context rules are to be questioned, i.e., they are recessive.

5 Classroom order

A teacher cannot function anymore in a classroom without binding the pupils to him or her in some way. By sanctioning alone the bond between teacher and pupils will not induce the pupils to develop, only to build resistance, active or passive. Pupils may acquire knowledge, but not the social skills and understanding necessary to function in the modern, services society, with its excess in communication.

The tendency exists to treat the acquirement of social skills as a generic problem in education, devoid from the subjectivity, or setting, of the particular course. The task of the teacher is twofold: to teach a course and to teach social skills. The schism can never be closed without acknowledging that the two can be one, based on the, or some, ideals underlying the course matter. These ideals generate a framework which may bring the social structure to light.

Furthermore, teaching social skills in its own right, has led to an identification of social skills of the pupil with the social interaction between pupil and teacher. This does not necessarily signal the social skills of the pupil, but more the social commitment of the pupil; the bond with the teacher.

6 Conclusions

The purpose of this paper has been to point out consequences of the current view on education; on the role of the teacher in the classroom in a broader context, commonly associated with the role-model(Speizer 1981). The line of argumentation has been vaguely biological, joining form and function of the reasoning. The gender differences, and the teacher as role-model, are perfunctory to arrive at the different aspects of social interaction in a classroom setting.

Society demands of its members to be thoughtful individuals with some form of loyalty toward others. In education it is therefore important to instill some social structure in which the others have a place. Binding individuals to another leaves no room for apparent strangers, which still are part of the same society. It is therefore not important to instill the common denominator of society into pupils. Instead one should relieve them of a sense of urgency and invoke a relativism toward personal need. All of the course subjects deemed relevant for pupils are underpinned by principles of that sort. It is a shame

not to use them to bind form and function in education. The danger that the pupil considers herself of himself not taken serious is overcome by placing the classroom situation in the subject context, a form of contemplative empathy; evidence of social awareness of the teacher.

Education theory has placed the pupil central. Modern education theory is for a great part about the care for the pupil. It might have been meant to enhance the awareness of the teacher, but its unwanted side-effect is a conflict between course matter and the educational goals on a social level. The domain of this conflict is the classroom.

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