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Professional Challenges to Women as Educators and as Mothers

This article explores the dynamic between the professional roles of women working in early childhood education and their maternal skills and identities. This dynamic reveals a blurring of the boundaries between motherhood and career, which have similar requirements to provide protection, care, and concern. This study sheds light on the perspectives of mothers working in early childhood education regarding their personal and professional lives. It highlights not only the conflicts raised and prices paid by the women and their children but also the extent to which female educators bring their profession home with them, including their theoretical and practical knowledge. These women continue to act as educators at home, but the demands on them are multiplied in the private sphere, where they are also mothers. Moreover, the demands they place on their children can also be influenced by the private domain, making this relationship complex and conflictual. Oftentimes, the private life and children of a female educator are seen as significant aspects of the “business card” she is expected to present to the world in order to gain respect in her professional life. Specifically, this article explores how female educators who are also mothers experience the relationships existing between the professional and personal realms.

Introduction

Private and Public Spheres

Hannah Herzog claims that the idea of two separate spheres of life—public and private—existing in isolation from each other is based on cultural assumptions. Each sphere has its own set of principles, social functions, and goals. According to this understanding, the public sphere is intended to meet

economic and political needs; it is based on the principles of rationality, practicality, competitiveness, and utilitarian connections. Relations are primarily contractual, formal, and identified with masculine qualities. In contrast, the private sphere is perceived as intimate and conducted according to the principles of reciprocity, compromise, concern, and emotions. It is identified with feminine traits. The private sphere is associated with traditional rules of behaviour, whereas the public sphere is identified with modern codes of conduct and enjoys greater power and prestige. This distinction reflects a gender-based dichotomy in which the private sphere is perceived as the realm of women and the public sphere is seen the realm of men. There is a prevailing social assumption that women's development both within and outside the family unit is contradictory and requires sacrificing one or the other. Thus, the entry of women into the labour market conflicted with the social expectations of their domestic role (Herzog; Pasta-Schubert). The literature on academic motherhood discusses the dilemma of choosing the best time to start a family, since both an academic career and motherhood require a large time investment (Dickson).

According to Luce Irigaray, women need a social existence separate from their role as mothers. However, Venitha Pillay claims that the distinction between these two life spheres is fundamentally incorrect because it reinforces the designation of intellectual work to the masculine realm, and Anat Pasta-Schubert suggests women investigate how the knowledge to which they are exposed in the public sphere colours their private world. Through surveying a group of female educators, the current study describes their perceptions of these two spheres as well as their relationship to them. Hence, this study aims to investigate how the public sphere influences the private lives of these women and how the private sphere shapes their public, professional ones.

The Private Sphere: Motherhood

Donald Winnicott promotes the concept of a "good enough mother," who adapts to her children's active lifestyle and their needs, and gives them a solid emotional basis that enables them to interact with the world. Moreover, he asserts that maternal care in infancy and early childhood is a necessary condition for mental health. In other words, the good enough mother helps her children develop and fulfill their potential. According to Edna Katzenelson, a good enough mother controls feelings of frustration about her children's demands without turning those feelings against them. She further instructs mothers not to impose their own needs or agenda on their children but to focus on their needs. Thus, these psychologists place the children as the central subject in the family relationship and see the mother as an object bestowing love and care (Pelgi-Hecker).

Blaming the Mother

Our perceptions of so-called good mothers are not the result of experience or in-depth examination, and there is little connection between them and real life. Rather, our views are a matter of faith and religion; they have their own life and internal logic (Warner). In modern culture, the mother figure is responsible for her children's proper development and their ability to love and cope with the world. According to this view, many mental disorders stem from not having good enough mothers (Peronni). Linking children's developmental difficulties to deficient maternal care can cause educated and intelligent women to see themselves as inadequate mothers who carry the blame for their children's imperfect behaviour (Ladd-Taylor and Umansky); researchers define this as "working mothers' guilt" (McCutcheon and Morrison). Thus, many mothers who have been influenced by psychoanalytic theory blame themselves for failing, in their own view, to meet the challenges of motherhood (Birns and Hay), despite their awareness that ideal motherhood requires unreasonable self-sacrifice (Stone).

Ayelet Waldman criticizes the myth of the good mother and calls herself a "bad mother," but she admits that if women had not internalized this image of the good mother, they would not write so many articles, books, memoirs, and blogs on the subject. For example, Adrienne Rich in her book *Of Woman Born* describes a period in her life in which she was haunted by the stereotype of the "unconditionally" loving mother and by the visual and literary images of motherhood as the highest form of identity.

The Good Mother–Bad Mother Dichotomy

In the prevalent societal image, a good mother is altruistic, patient, loving, devoted, well groomed, and cheerful; she puts her children's needs before her own. Even if she works outside the home, her children, not her career, are the center of her life (Coll, Surrey, and Weingarten; Katznelson; O'Reilly). According to Shiran, a mother who feels this mythical image of the good mother hovering over her silences her self-awareness. The impossibility of the attempt to realize the ideal of the good mother causes women to feel they are missing out on life, and when they realize at mid-life that the ideal is impossible to achieve, they do not have the tools or means to change it. May Friedman finds that daughters consistently portray their mothers in either in very positive terms—such as loving, supportive, and strong—or in very negative ones, such as they never provide the warmth and care that the daughter expects and needs.

Molly Ladd-Taylor and Lauri Umansky argue that in modern society, ordinary women are held up against the images of the perfect or the bad mother, and this comparison leads to blaming mothers who do not live meet the standards of the ideal mother. The authors compare mothers' guilt to air

pollution and argue that women who distance themselves from this guilt can breathe more freely. To avoid such guilt, Cynthia Garcia Coll, Janet L. Surrey, and Kathy Weingarten suggest that women should not accept the cultural marginalization of motherhood. They argue that a more varied image of a good mother should be created. Rich asserts that when a woman achieves maternal power, the patriarchal institution labels her as evil, but a bold and courageous mother who gives her daughter a legacy of creating her own destiny and having faith in herself is actually a good mother. Martina Dickson's study of academic mothers finds that children who see their mother succeed at multiple tasks are more likely to perceive her as a role model. Tova Hartman Halbertal's study of mother-daughter relationships in orthodox religious cultures notes the challenge mothers face in preparing their daughters for life. Becoming a so-called good girl in more orthodox environments necessitates suppressing her individuality, as it may jeopardize her place in their culture. Fiona Green finds that mothers debating how to raise their children must be able to negotiate between the institution of motherhood and their experiences as mothers. Some oppose living according to the patriarchal image of a good mother, whereas others use their respected social role to raise their children's awareness and criticism of various forms of oppression and challenges. . defines good mothers as those trying to find internal balance.

The Connection between Motherhood and Early Childhood Education

The concept of “kindergarten” developed in parallel to social perceptions of women’s place in society. In particular, the feminist-ideological approach of “spiritual motherhood”—which saw women as possessing special, feminine abilities in raising children—claimed that women can best contribute to society and realize themselves as caretakers and educators for young children. The teachings of pedagogue Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi and Friedrich Fröbel, founder of kindergarten, contributed to the concept of spiritual motherhood. Their theories were based on the perception that alongside therapeutic physical activity, it is important to emphasize children’s social and moral education. Therefore, children need educated women to provide them with institutionalized education. Women who worked as preschool teachers in Fröbel kindergartens were part of an educational revolution that affected women’s education as well as children’s education. The teachers received pedagogical training according to Fröbel’s teachings, alongside a comprehensive curriculum including science and philosophy studies. This cultural revolution was fuelled by women’s aspirations to acquire higher education, a profession, and the means to support themselves in a field in which their status was equal to that of men (Seaton). However, in modern Western society and in Israeli society (the site of the current study), early education has become an almost exclusively feminine profession, as educators earn low prestige and meagre wages

(Fishbein; Herzog). Nevertheless, female educators' desire for respect, recognition, and pride in their work has prompted them to establish professional organizations that contribute to their sense of professional pride and self-determination (Seaton).

The Public's Perception of the Teaching Profession

Many people view teaching as a profession most appropriate for women (Herzog). There are two common reasons for this. One is that the hours are convenient for women trying to balance their roles as wives and mothers with their roles as workers in the labour market. The second is that teaching is seen as an extension of the home into the public domain, and the skills required of teachers, especially establishing relationships with the children, are feminine skills. However, the widespread perception that education is a nondemanding profession and that teachers have a lot of free time—enabling women to easily fulfill their roles as wives and mothers without conflict—is not supported by the facts (Fishbein).

According to Herzog, the view that early education is related to the private sphere damages its status. Teaching is often treated as a job rather than a profession (Walden). It is not uncommon for teachers to be referred to as babysitters. As shown by Ditzia Maskit and Naomi Dickman, novice teachers' descriptions of the paths characterizing their entry stage into the teaching profession indicate there is a need for them to receive recognition from the "clients"—that is, parents and the wider community—of education. Similarly, Tsvia Walden states that these clients of education are not aware of the professional side of education, and this leads to professional and personal difficulties affecting those entering the field of education.

Research Aims

This study aims to explore the experiences of women in the teaching profession. It will provide a stage for the voices of women who, until now, have been the objects of research but not active participants in it. It considers the relationships between the roles of mother and educator, as reflected in their professional experiences—a subject which has not yet been examined in depth.

Methodology

Study Population

The study population included twenty-two mothers who teach in kindergarten or in an elementary school. The interviewees are in heterosexual marriages. They range in age between thirty and sixty. All of the interviewees have two to four children between the ages of three and twenty. All of them live in the

central regions of Israel and hold teaching certificates and bachelor degrees in education from a recognized college of education in Israel. Half of the interviewees also hold a master's degree. Their years of teaching range from seven to twenty-two years. At the time of the study, seventeen of the interviewees worked in kindergartens. Of these, six taught children between ages three and four; five taught children between ages five and six; four were special education teachers; and two were substitute teachers. The other five taught first or second grade in elementary schools.

Research Tool: Semistructured Interviews

Semistructured interviews were selected as the data collection tool due to their suitability as a basis for interpreting the field of study, as outlined in the research aims. Furthermore, semistructured interviews are appropriate for collecting data in feminism-based research, since they allow for an examination of ideas, thoughts, perceptions, memories, and experiences using the words of the interviewed women and not the researcher's terms (Reinharz and Davidman). At the end of each interview, I asked the interviewee whether there were other issues she wanted to raise. This enabled those who wished to expand the discussion to issues that had not yet been raised. I also asked each interviewee to sign an informed consent form, giving permission to use the content of the conversation in this research.

Data Analysis

This study combines a thematic-analytic approach with analytic reading, according to the listening guide method developed by feminist researcher Carol Gilligan. Gilligan's listening guide involves four readings of the text of an interview. Each reading deepens understanding in a different way and leads to the next reading. The first reading focuses on the interviewee and the context from which she is speaking. The second reading focuses on relationships that arise in the content of the interview. In the third reading, the researcher examines her own sensory memories from the interview, based on notes taken during the interview and afterwards. In the fourth reading, analysis focuses on the language of the interview, especially metaphors and repeated words and phrases.

The insights raised in the subsequent, attentive readings for each interview were analyzed by dividing them according to the themes raised repeatedly in each interview and across all of the interviews. From these themes, the researcher can deduce the meanings that various topics have in the world of the interviewees and the ways that they construct their world. The advantage of this method of thematic analysis is the creation of general, overarching meanings that arise naturally during the analytic process instead of being predetermined by the researcher (Strauss and Corbin).

In the process of selection, the categories were narrowed, and a “category tree” was designed (Shkedi), which schematically represents the final categories and the relationships between them, as discussed in the results section.

Results and Discussion

In this article, various relationships were noted between the interviewed women’s identities as mothers and as educators. The interplay and reciprocal relationships between maternal and educational roles are strongly present in the lives of the interviewees. This is expressed by one interviewee, Revital¹: “These two worlds are really mixed up... Sometimes I catch myself asking, ‘Wait a minute; from which one am I talking right now?’”

The findings reveal the mutual influences and complex relationships between the role of mother and that of early childhood educator as well as their impacts on the identity of women working in education. Below are the categories identified, whose meanings will be discussed in detail:

1. The impact of female teachers’ educational training on their maternal identities and functioning;
2. The implications of working in the education system on coping with the maternal role;
3. The need for disengagement as a mechanism to help female educators connect to their maternal role.
4. Variation in the intensity and management of emotions regarding the women’s own children as compared with their students; and
5. Role duality as a symbol of the maternal and professional roles.

The Impact of Female Teachers’ Educational Training on Their Maternal Identities and Functioning

Female educators acquire knowledge and professional tools during their training in colleges of education and throughout their years on the job, including in ongoing training courses, staff meetings, and more. The findings of this study indicate that the impact of this education extends beyond the professional sphere. The acquisition of theoretical and applied tools in the field of education and child development affects female educators’ perceptions regarding their maternal role and their functioning in the private sphere. In Revital’s words: “All the teachers at the training course said, ‘We leave here with pangs of conscience, with feelings of guilt... At home, you’re checking all the research you’ve been exposed to.’”

Most interviewees said that the knowledge they acquired in their professional training is often applied in their roles as mothers in the private sphere. This knowledge serves as a basis for examining their maternal functioning, even

before it becomes a basis for examining their professional work—the purpose for which it was originally acquired. Revital's quote indicates mother educators point an accusing finger inward, leading to guilt and frustration. Acquisition of knowledge on subjects related to early childhood becomes intertwined with the mother's sole (or almost sole) responsibility for her children's education. It also reflects the myth of mothers' magical control over their children's development and functioning.

Theoretical knowledge, tools, and content meant to be integrated into their work are often first and foremost used with their own children, as expressed by Sivan: "Whenever I was exposed to some theory, or some kind of way to work, ... I would try it out first with my own children before I used it with the kids in the kindergarten." Female educators are involved in an internal dialogue about the relationship between their professional knowledge and their functioning as mothers.

It is interesting to note that this internal dialogue even goes on among women who oppose mixing the professional and the personal, and try to create a boundary between them. They, too, assess themselves and their children in light of their professional experience and knowledge. As Betty explained, "If I learned about problems ... I looked at my children to see if they had these problems.... If they talked about giftedness among children, yes, I tried to see this in my children. It affects me, even if it doesn't always cause me to change my actions."

Opposition to using professional knowledge and tools with their own children may prevent these mother educators from taking action, but they still think about it. This indissoluble interface between the roles of mother and educator sets the stage for a powerful inner struggle about when to bring professional knowledge into the home and when not to. This struggle is ongoing and evolves over time. Kokhi explained that over the years, her internal dialogue has become more relaxed and transformed from a conflict to an informed position: "Today, at school, I bring in what I think is appropriate, but at home I am more liberated. I used to be a nag.... Today I know how to brush things off." Professional and maternal experience contribute to Kochi's confidence and enable her to examine critically the knowledge she acquires and to decide what she will use in her professional life and what, if anything, will make its way into her private life. Thus, as women gain experience and maturity, they feel more secure in their own knowledge and in their ability to adjust the use of their professional and theoretical knowledge. This represents an ability to filter what is perceived by the women as positive, enriching, and liberating.

The Implications of Working in the Education System on Coping with the Maternal Role

Fishbein discusses teachers' frustration at the lack of recognition and payment for the work they must do after school hours. However, this research finds that lack of payment for these hours is not the most significant problem. More problematic is the intrusion of the public sphere into the private sphere. In the participants' assessment, this harms their relationship with their own children. Their free time becomes an illusion, and the emotional burden harms their functioning in the private sphere. Contrary to the popular myth, early childhood educator do not work limited hours.

When Shilat, a kindergarten teacher, discussed doing work-related tasks after school hours, she did not even mention that she does them without pay. The main difficulty she raised is emotional and relates to her own children: "If I have to write an assessment or evaluation ... organize the room, prepare a lesson, I come to the kindergarten in the afternoons and do it. This is at my own children's expense." She expressed doubts regarding her choices and called the overflow of work into the private sphere "unrealistic," but she did not indicate any intention to change her habits.

Although teaching is widely perceived as an undemanding profession that does not conflict with the roles of mother and wife (Fishbein), the interviewees asserted that the fact that their career is an extension of their maternal role creates difficulties in their ability to function as mothers after school hours. In the words of Ilanit: "It comes at the expense of my children ... It's frustrating ... to get home and not be able to tell a story to a child ... You do it all day at the kindergarten, but at night have to make an effort to do it with your own child." Ilanit's frustration is clarified by Irit, who explained that not only are the teaching skills and nurturing abilities of female educators and mothers similar but so are the energetic resources required for the two roles: "A mother who works in an office comes home and she is not a secretary anymore; she is a mother.... From the second I get up in the morning until ... nine-thirty at night, I am a mother.... At some point it becomes exhausting.... Some days, at the end of the evening, I think, 'I did not say one nice word to the children today.'"

Irit felt exhausted by the requirement that she is a mother all the time; she thought her children suffer because she is not emotionally free to function at home in the same way as a mother who works in an office. Female educators carry a burden of frustration and guilt about their functioning as mothers. This begins with physically bringing tasks home from work and continually affects their lives and their children, which exposes the myth that teachers have especially convenient work hours.

The Need for Disengagement as a Mechanism to Help Female Educators Connect to Their Maternal Role

Female educators searching for a practical way to better integrate their two roles find that they need ways to disengage from their work. Dana noted that an afternoon nap has a significant impact on her ability to function as a mother and does wonders for the home atmosphere: “The whole schedule of songs and stories, science and math, acting and drama ... It’s a storm.... So, I come home and rest ... I stop ... You could say that I take a few deep breaths, then I am the mother of this house.” Dana compared her afternoon nap to breathing air that allows her to continue functioning at home.

Betty said that she also needs a few minutes to herself after work, but her partner expects her to start caring for their children as soon as comes home. To illustrate her difficulty when entering the messy living room where their three children are, she used a metaphor from his partner’s work as a pilot: “It’s like if you come in after you’ve worked on a plane all day, found the problems, made repairs, then you come home, open the door, and whoop! You’ve got a plane in the living room.” Betty had to explain to her partner what she goes through emotionally by making a parallel to his life in order to highlight what often remains invisible to him and others.

It is interesting that the women did not note the opposite effect: they do not feel their level of professionalism is impaired or affected by the fact it requires similar skills or energies as motherhood.

Variation in the Intensity and Management of Emotions Regarding the Women’s Own Children as Compared with Their Students

In this section, I present the significantly different ways female educators manage their emotions in the private and public spheres. Deganit explained that despite her unshakable love for her kindergarten students, her conduct with them is professional and not motivated by maternal feelings: “In the kindergarten, you do things professionally.... Of course I do love the children.... But there are no maternal feelings there. Being a mother makes me a completely different person at home.” Emotions can be a positive part of relational systems, as long as people are able to manage them and separate them as necessary. Thus, the use of maternal skills in kindergarten or school does not interfere with teaching in the education system, whereas the use of professional tools in the home often goes awry due to the intensity of feelings associated with the private sphere.

Deganit’s sentiments are reinforced by Dana, who claims that kindergarten teachers require professional skills not used in the home: “If a kindergarten teacher comes to kindergarten convinced that her maternal instinct is a major

part of her work, then she is a bad kindergarten teacher. Education is a profession. You have to know how to educate children!" Dana's opposes the comparison between the roles of teacher and mother because, in her view, this undermines the professional value of the teacher.

Parallel to the discourse on the appropriate and professional regulation of emotions in the education system is the inability to properly channel them at home. Erit said that when facing a crisis with her own children, she forgets her professional tools. Emotions overcome her, preventing her from applying the knowledge she utilizes in the public sphere when advising parents of her students: "When there is some problem with my children, I'm not moved by theories. I do not think about them. I do not remember them.... I feel like a shoemaker walking barefoot." It seems that in routine situations, the professional skills of female educators cross the boundary and can be integrated into the private sphere, but in times of crisis, the intensity of emotions overwhelms their professionalism. When dealing with students, they can make rational decisions regarding when to express affection. When necessary, they can separate their feelings from the situation, and manage in a professional manner. Therefore, the term "maternal feelings" in relation to a female educator's work is imprecise language. I propose we should instead use the term "tender feelings" when interacting with children who are not part of a woman's past, present, and future life as a mother.

Role Duality as a Symbol of the Maternal and Professional Roles

Women who accept Emilia Peronni's perception that mothers are responsible for all their children's actions would likely agree that in reference to mothers who work as educators, the term "good enough mother" should be upgraded to "good mother who is a role model." Women who object to Peronni's conceptualization are aware of this social perception but refuse to be held captive by it.

Betty shared a story about successfully advising the mother of one of her students. Following this, she felt she had to explain to her young son how the child of a kindergarten teacher should behave: "When I finished the conversation, I told him: 'I just spoke with a mother from the kindergarten.' Then he said to me, 'I don't give a shit about the mother from that kindergarten.' While I still felt I was wearing the 'crown and mantle' of being an educator, my son, who is supposed to be my 'diploma' talks this way?" Betty felt her son's behaviour could confirm or negate the aura hovering over her. His words were so troubling and threatening to her that she imagined they could pass through the closed telephone line and undo her accomplishment: "If a parent from kindergarten hears this, he will say that I cannot educate my own children" and will not resist his own children for her kindergarten class.

Betty's story again illustrates the crossing of public and private spheres. It is important for her son to understand that his behaviour reflects both her ability to educate her children and her ability to educate the students in her classroom. The parents who register their children for her kindergarten are looking for a good teacher to educate them properly. If they find that her children are not well educated, they will think she will not be able to educate their children. Therefore, I suggest that the perception of the equation good children = good mother needs another factor: good children = good mother = good educator. If a woman's children deviate from the accepted norm, she feels that she has failed twice: first as a mother and then as an educator.

Some women undergo an internal process so that in some situations they succeed in making a separation and in other situations they apply means to cope with personal difficulties as part of their professional responsibility to assist their students' parents. Shilat's story shows that today, when she is more secure in her motherhood and her reputation as a kindergarten teacher, she is freed from the need to present her children as perfect: "I give this message to the parents that not everything is because of us. There are also traits children are born with. This is something that I did not do in the past.... My children had to be perfect."

The complexity and difficulty of upholding both roles and connecting the public and private spheres reveals a reality that is far more varied and multifaceted than what has been presented in previous literature on teacher-mother relationships.

Summary, Insights, and Conclusions

The study examines the relationships between the professional (public) and the personal (private) spheres among mothers working in early childhood education in order to hear the voices of these women and to understand the complex feelings and prejudices associated with the ostensibly natural connection between these two roles. The current study confirms some of the findings from previous studies, disputes some of their conclusions, and contributes original results.

The female educators interviewed in this study discussed the difficulties they have in separating their identities as mothers from their identities as educators. The separation between their personal and public spheres became blurred. This finding is consistent with and enriches Herzog's claim that the public views the teaching profession as an extension of the private sphere because of its requirement for so-called feminine skills. One primary contribution of this research lies in its assertion that female educators create an inverted space by applying their professional skills at home.

Judith Warren explains that identities in postmodern times are complex,

multiple, dynamic, and not easily defined or recognized, since postmodern identities are negotiated through social interactions. In light of this, it seems that the women I interviewed have not succeeded in defining their separate identities. However, despite this complexity, their identities as mothers and educators have a special relationship that contains both pride and conflict.

The participants also raised the issue of the invisible work they do after school hours. Female educators do return home relatively early, but they bring home tasks that they must complete during their supposed leisure time in the private sphere (Fishbein; Herzog; Walden). According to the participants in this study, applying the same skills in the public and private spheres can lead to mental exhaustion that harms their ability to function as mothers, even when they are at home and have completed all the tasks from the public sphere. They struggle with feelings of guilt for not being able to use what Herzog defines as “feminine” skills with their own children. These guilty feelings stem from the perception that a good mother portrayed is always loving, patient, nurturing, and dedicated; she places her children’s needs before her own (Coll, Surrey, and Weingarten; O’Reilly). The interviewees explained they can often express these traits almost naturally with their students, but sometimes their energy reserves are so depleted that they cannot do so with their own children. The times that these female educators are with their children but are mentally and psychologically unavailable to them are conceptualized in the present study as the “myth of convenient hours.” The findings of this research disprove the prevailing, yet factually incorrect societal perception (see Fishbein) that elementary school and kindergarten teachers have a lot of free time and can easily fulfill the roles of educator and mother. The quotes from the interviewees express their feelings that the shadow of their kindergarten work follows them home, undermining their mental stability. The difficulty begins with physically bringing tasks from the public space into the private one, which leads to dual mental coping needs. First, interviewees are unable to continue to act as they did previously with their children in the public sphere, and second, they experience pangs of guilt at being unable to use their skills optimally.

Some interviewees said that resting in the afternoon helps them to separate their role as a kindergarten teacher from their role as a mother, as it positively influences their mental wellbeing. This physical and mental timeout enables them to successfully deal with the vicious circle of performing these two roles.

The participants also emphasized that the love they feel for their students is not the same as the love they feel for their own children. The interviewees clearly differentiated between their maternal feelings towards their own children and their affectionate feelings towards their students. I propose separating this dual identity according to intensity of the emotions experienced and suggest that use of the term “maternal feelings” in the public is imprecise

and should be replaced with the term “tender feelings.” Separating profession and maternal feelings may lead to significant changes in perception, to a reexamination of the nature of the role, and, hence, to several changes. The first change is dismantling the natural link between teaching and raising children (Fishbein; Herzog). If it is more widely understood that female educators do not behave the same way at home and at school, because the intensity of emotions at home is qualitatively different, it is possible to break down this apparently natural link. A second change pertains to the assumption that the inferior status attributed to the teaching profession stems from the belief that it is the same as motherhood and does not require special skills or knowledge (Fishbein; Herzog). Once we differentiate between maternal feelings and affection, and raise awareness that the profession of early education is not a direct or natural continuation of motherhood, it becomes obvious that even if some of same skills are required, considerable professional training is needed to become an educator in a given field.

Even this separation between the roles of motherhood and education is based on their duality. Therefore, the need to use maternal skills with students and to use professional tools with one’s own children is not questioned in most previous research but is seen as self-evident. Given this duality of the maternal and professional role, the interviewees felt they are supposed to portray to the world the abilities of a good mother, who is, therefore, worthy of educating students in the school system. Gilligan notes that society does not see a mother as a real person, only through the image of the ideal mother. According to Peronni, this is the image of someone who guides and shapes her children’s lives, and provides hope and security; she is responsible for all of her children’s actions. By connecting the works of Gilligan with those of Peronni, the current research offers a new contribution: it shows that the motherhood of female educators takes yet another step towards impossible realization. As with Gilligan, who says the image of the good mother is an illusion, this research shows that female educators feel they need to be seen as ideal educators and worthy of teaching students. Additionally, the female educators in this study expanded upon Peronni’s description of a mother as responsible for all or her children’s actions, in that these mothers see the behavior of their own children in the private sphere as proof that they are worthy of educating children in the public sphere. On this issue, too, a price is paid by their children, who are given the message, directly or indirectly, that they must behave as representatives of their mother as an educator.

It should be noted that some of the female educators, with maturity and increasing confidence, succeeded in freeing themselves from this burden of proof. Even then, they acted as educators and explained their insights to their students’ parents in order to relieve them of the responsibility for their children’s behaviour or skills. The professional challenges facing a woman who

is both an educator and a mother are at the junction where her two life spheres intersect and separate. At this intersection are the points of friction, suitability, and conflict that a mother who works as an early childhood educator continually experiences.

Endnotes

1. Pseudonyms are used to protect the anonymity of study participants. Hebrew translations were provided by academic language experts.

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