

Study on the Causes and Countermeasures of Ethical Misconduct among College Teachers

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, incidents of ethical misconduct by college teachers have occurred frequently. In cyberspace, reports on such misconduct as "academic fraud", "pursuing fame and profit", "undermining teacher ethics", "making erroneous remarks" and "harassing female students" are common. In the era of highly developed media, such incidents have evolved from occasional individual crises to a widespread phenomenon of ethical misconduct among college teachers. The hidden and unexposed problems behind this phenomenon are even more alarming. This paper takes two incidents of ethical misconduct by college teachers that made headlines on Weibo in July 2022 as the research objects. Through reviewing and analyzing these incidents, it deeply explores the media image of college teachers, and the social impact of the misconduct incidents, identifies the internal causes of ethical misconduct among college teachers, and proposes targeted countermeasures accordingly.

KEYWORDS

College teachers; Ethical misconduct; Cases; Causes; Countermeasures

1 The Image of college teachers in media events

Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz constructed a systematic theory in the field of communication research on event studies in their book *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History*. The theory points out that the core purpose of media events is to consolidate social consensus and arouse the public's loyalty to and maintenance of legitimate social authority^[1]. In this process, mass media, with their strong authority and appeal, integrate the event itself, the media, and the public into the "meaning" framework that the communicator intends to convey. Among them, the event itself, as the origin of the narrative, constitutes the original information for the coverage of media events; the media, as the organizer of information, gatekeeps and edits the information before disseminating it; the public, as the audience, express their opinions through comments, likes, reposts, views, etc. These three interact to form a specific communication effect and online public opinion.

To review and compare the two incidents mentioned above, the following table extracts the main communication elements and impact factors of Incident 1 and Incident 2.

Table 1 Review of Media Events of Ethical Misconduct by College Teachers

Media Event	Time	Publishing Media	Media Affiliation	Original Public Attention	Topic Popularity Triggered
A professor from the medical department of a university was reported for molesting female students	July 11, 2022	Beijing Headlines (27.274 million followers)	Official Weibo platform of Beijing Headlines	186,000 likes, 7,955 comments, 3,375 reposts, 4.91 million video views	Reposted by 72 media outlets, 300 million reads, 14,000 discussions, 3,349 original posters
A university counselor was reported for sexually harassing female students	July 25, 2022	Boiling Point Video (8.079 million followers)	Official account of "Boiling Point Video" under Yidian Zixun	103,000 likes, 3,485 comments, 1,377 reposts, 3.65 million video views	Reposted by 52 media outlets, 160 million reads, 7,706 discussions, 2,191 original posters
Notes	Original public attention: generally refers to the popularity of likes, comments, reposts, and video views by the public on the original news from the media;				
	Topic popularity triggered: refers to the popularity of continuous attention and discussion on the topic by the public and media after the news coverage of the media event.				

In the Internet era, online news, with its characteristics of instant release and multi-channel diffusion, has far surpassed traditional media such as newspapers and television in terms of timeliness and social influence. From the media communication process of the two incidents of ethical misconduct by college teachers, it can be seen that news media and the public have shown a high degree of focus on the incidents.

The comment section, as an important field for public opinion expression, contains sharp comments from netizens, which represent the collective questioning and rational reflection of the public on the ethical misconduct of college teachers. These comments include condemnation of the individual behaviors of the involved teachers, questioning of the

university management mechanism and the teacher ethics supervision system, and even reflect the public's adherence to the traditional ethics of "teachers educating people" and their urgent demand for the purification of the educational ecology, forming a public opinion field with public discussion value.

Table 2 Netizens' Comments on Media Events of Ethical Misconduct by College Teachers in July 2022

Media Event	Netizen Name	Likes Received	Specific Comment Content
Incident of a professor from the medical department of a university being reported for molesting students	Nvquan	41,000	"Education and schools have given tutors more and more power. Can students protect themselves? This is a real-name report that made it to the hot search. Those that didn't make it to the hot search seem to have never happened."
	Wukk b	35,000	"Judging from the recent exposed incidents, this should no longer be regarded as a problem of individuals. The entire education sector should be rectified."
	Qidaihaoyunchong	12,000	"When no one paid attention, the college tried to hide, cover up, and settle the matter quietly. Now that everyone knows, there's no need to hide anymore."
	Liangpiban Kafei	3,587	"How to regulate teachers who use students to get labor fees?"
	Gulingjingguai	1,433	"It is strongly suggested to take back the power in the hands of tutors in various colleges and universities. It's time to regulate this."
	Jocially	896	"It feels like there are many such teachers in colleges and universities who molest students."
	Nishi you butong	279	"It just depends on the evidence. Let's wait for the investigation results."
	Youmeng de xianyu	827	"Higher education should be rectified."
	Xingfu bing kuaile	647	"Wait for the official announcement. Don't believe or spread rumors."
	Shaonvmen	22,000	"Can these words be said by a normal counselor?"
Incident of a university counselor being reported for sexually harassing students	Princeling	15,000	"How is this taking out of context? Do you dare to take it out and account for it?"
	Niunaijun	10,000	"How is this taking out of context? Do you dare to take out the records and account for them?"
	Liaoda kaichu He-lile ma	7,871	"No matter how much it's taken out of context, a teacher shouldn't say these things to students, right?"
	Qiqi	3,386	"The best admission brochure is the school's attitude and solution when negative reports emerge."
	Solitude	2,076	"It's been a day, and this is the result?"
	Yang you zoudui le	1,032	"Such obvious chat records... How can this be called taking out of context?"
	Wo hao fan	567	"Not ashamed at all."
	WyKysbd	495	"Why doesn't the man release the records to let everyone see if it's taken out of context?"

The above netizens' comments focus on questioning and accusing the teachers who committed ethical misconduct, expressing concerns about such incidents, and showing expectations for the governance of ethical misconduct. Overall, the language expresses anger and negative emotions.

The image of college teachers in media events is the image presented by the objects reported by the media. After mass media report on events, they place the public and the reported subjects in a common public opinion field and establish the image of the reported subjects through the attributes of the event and public opinion. As a social profession, college teachers are supported by society on the one hand and supervised by society on the other. As "social watchdogs", the media naturally pay attention to the issue of ethical misconduct among college teachers. Therefore, the media's representation of the image of college teachers is an important reference for the public to understand college teachers. The repeated presentation of incidents of ethical misconduct by college teachers has intensified the public's recognition of the impression that "the problem of teacher ethics in colleges and universities is serious" and increased the public's concern about the construction of teacher ethics in colleges and universities.

2 Analysis of the causes of ethical misconduct among college teachers

From the analysis of the above media events and public comments, the direct cause of college teachers' ethical misconduct that crosses the teacher-student relationship is that college teachers have too much power without sufficient constraints. It is not difficult to find that in these two incidents, one is a professor and tutor who guides students in scientific research and thesis writing, and the other is a counselor who gets along with students day and night and is involved in students' evaluation and scholarship selection. In the eyes of students, these two roles are of vital importance. For young students, refusing misconduct means resisting power, which involves certain risks; reporting to relevant departments of the university is a test of the management system, and the effect is unknown; while the simplest and most effective way is to collect evidence and make it public. To understand why this result occurs, we need to analyze the underlying causes from the following three aspects.

2.1 Weak awareness of teacher ethics drives ethical misconduct

The ethical misconduct of college teachers has three characteristics: externality, initiative, and maliciousness^[2]. Externality means that the ethical misconduct of college teachers is a specific behavior, an externalization of the internal consciousness of the offender, which can be perceived, characterized, and quantified; initiative means that ethical misconduct is a subjectively motivated behavior, a purposeful and active behavior of the offender, and a voluntary and conscious behavior of teachers who are aware of the stakes; maliciousness means that ethical behavior always has a certain impact on oneself, students, schools and society, either beneficial or harmful. Behind these characteristics of ethical behavior lies the weak awareness of teacher ethics of the offenders, and some even consciously abandon teacher ethics.

2.2 Imperfect management systems induce ethical misconduct

University management systems include professional ethics codes, professional title evaluation systems, salary systems, funding investment systems, etc. Unscientific, unreasonable, and imperfect management systems may induce ethical misconduct. For example, teachers' harassment of female students is related to the establishment, learning, and punishment systems of professional ethics codes; teachers' plagiarism and fraud in papers are related to the "publication-oriented" professional title evaluation system.

2.3 Weak awareness of law abiding and lax spirit of rule of law

College teachers are an elite group with higher education and possess certain legal knowledge, but ethical misconduct still occurs. On the one hand, some teachers have a weak awareness of abiding by the law, harboring a fluke mentality and arrogance, constantly trying to find ways to evade, circumvent, and breakthrough laws and regulations, thus driving the occurrence of misconduct; on the other hand, although the country has gradually established the basic strategy of governing the country according to law and the policy of governing education and universities according to law, in reality, the supreme status and authority of law have not been fully observed and implemented. Especially when connecting law with personal behavior, many teachers verbally acknowledge the rule of law but violate it in action. In the second incident of the counselor sexually harassing female students, when the incident was reported and spread, the counselor did not promptly realize the legal nature and consequences of his behavior, but instead issued a statement saying it was "taken out of context", which is a manifestation of lax spirit of rule of law. He did not take legal norms as his code of conduct.

3 Suggestions for countermeasures against ethical misconduct among college teachers

3.1 Strengthen the cultivation of professional ethics and improve the personal moral character of college teachers

The Book of Rites-Wenwang Shizi states, "A teacher teaches matters and elucidates virtues." College teachers should not only teach knowledge but also impart "the virtues of living in the world" to students. This "virtue" requires college teachers to have both professional ethics and good personal moral character. In terms of professional ethics, educational administrative departments, teacher associations, and other organizations can increase the frequency and improve the quality of training and education to impart theoretical methods for improving professional ethics; spread role models and exemplary deeds around to externalize abstract learning methods into specific actions, so that college teachers have role models to learn from and follow; strengthen leading cadres at all levels to set an example, as "example is better than precept". Only when an atmosphere of "virtue" is truly formed from top to bottom and from outside to inside can the "teacher ethics" of college teachers be truly internalized.

3.2 Improve the management system of teacher ethics and strengthen the supervision mechanism for teacher ethics

The management system of teacher ethics for college teachers covers a wide range. On the one hand, it needs to consider scientific management, and on the other hand, it should integrate ethical principles. It should focus on the current issues plaguing college teachers such as salary, professional titles and teacher ethics systems, find the combination of science and ethics, improve the existing management systems, and consolidate existing achievements. At the same time, it is necessary to strengthen the supervision system for teacher ethics college teachers, including the internal democratic supervision mechanism and the external supervision mechanism by the media and the public. The internal democratic supervision mechanism focuses on two aspects: first, the reward and punishment mechanism for college teachers. The reward mechanism can stimulate college teachers' determination to abide by teacher ethics and motivation to practice teacher ethics, such as awarding honors, promoting professional titles, promoting positions, and issuing bonuses; the punishment mechanism is a powerful deterrent for college teachers, and those who cross the "red line" of teacher ethics must pay the corresponding price. Second, establish a democratic supervision mechanism involving both teachers and students, incorporating both college teachers and students into the supervision system, which helps avoid certain interest connections in the supervision process and gives full play to the effectiveness of democratic supervision. External supervision by media and the public are two forms of public supervision, which play a powerful role in the Internet era. One very important point is that when media and public supervision occurs, colleges and universities should actively respond and cooperate, adhere to the principle of "dredging rather than blocking", and face up to crises and negative impacts to effectively solve problems. Therefore, only by combining internal and external supervision can we effectively reduce and minimize ethical misconduct among college teachers.

3.3 Enhance the awareness of the rule of law in teacher ethics and promote the legal construction of teacher ethics

The rule of law emphasizes the concept of strictly abiding by the law; the legal system is the institutional basis of "having laws to abide by, enforcing laws strictly, and punishing violations of laws". At present, China has initially formed a legal system involving the construction of teacher ethics for college teachers, including the Education Law, Teacher Law, Higher Education Law, Code of Professional Ethics for College Teachers, and the Charter of various colleges and universities. On this basis, we should continue to refine the implementation rules for the construction of teacher ethics in colleges and universities and the punishment measures for illegal and irregular behaviors, enhance the operability and pertinence of educational laws and regulations, avoid the law becoming a mere formality in practice, and turn the laws and regulations related to the construction of teacher ethics into a real "living law in action" [3]. More importantly, it is necessary to enhance and cultivate the awareness of the rule of law among college teachers and foster their belief in the law. We should avoid empty and ineffective preaching and deepen the awareness of the rule of law through more practices, such as regularly inviting disciplinary inspection and supervision personnel to share cases, organizing teachers to participate in legal publicity activities, and arranging teachers to attend court trials.

4 Conclusion

In today's era of highly developed media, incidents of ethical misconduct by college teachers have evolved into a phenomenon. This phenomenon has gone through a long development process before gradually emerging, and the unknown problems hidden under this "iceberg" are alarming. Only by thoroughly implementing the important spirit of teacher ethics construction, ensuring that educational administrative departments and colleges and universities take teacher ethics construction seriously, effectively addressing the reasonable demands of college teachers, guiding college teachers to continuously cultivate "ideal and belief, moral sentiment, solid knowledge, and benevolent heart", and joining hands with social media and the public for supervision, can we truly enhance the appeal of teacher ethics construction in colleges and universities.

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