

Gender roles, norms and stereotypes

Gender roles

Gender role is a social role. It is "a set of expectations associated with the perception of masculinity and femininity." (Vláčil, 1996).

Although Gender role is one of a number of other social roles, it often leads to the perception of gender roles as natural (biologically derived, or historically confirmed – and therefore valid). Such an (unconscious) approach contributes to the formation and fixation of another structure - Gender stereotypes.

Just like we do not speak about racial roles or class roles, we should not think about Gender roles as "given" or as "fair" or "natural". Just as racism is a barrier to democracy, so is sexism. In societies that seek Gender equality, the content of strict gender roles stops being socially defined. What Gender role is varies depending on the situation, in which the "feminine" or the "masculine" role is expected - daughter, mother, lover, father, boss ... Gender role is thus intertwined with other social roles.

Social role is always closely related to the value system of the society which forms it. The role is thus a sort of "prescribed" behavior and actions (we talk about "transcription of role" or "ideal" role). Its concrete "output" ("performance") is subject to the current holder of social position to which social (as well as Gender) role is referring. J. Filadelfiová and L. Kobová ([s.a]) emphasize that "actual performance of roles by individuals may be different due to the ideal role: required behavior (holder of the role behaves as he/she must,) desirable behavior (holder of the role behaves as he/she should), acceptable behavior (holder of the role behaves as he/she can) and unacceptable behavior (holder of the role behaves as he/she may not). The performance of social roles is therefore flexible, but is subject to social control and sometimes social sanctions".

The "external" (clothes, hair, makeup, posture etc.) and "internal" (attitudes, beliefs, thinking, emotional inner life, etc.) characteristics do not have to be in accordance with the prescribed role, just like actions often are not.

Gender role that limits individuals in their ambitions and life (oppressive - meaning oppression) is derived, is a stereotypical masculinity and femininity concept, containing prejudices. Therefore, at the symbolic level of Gender, the crucial role is played by Gender stereotypes (manifested in language).

Gender norms

Gender norms can be identified as the prescriptions of Gender roles. It is a type of socio-cultural regulation (to encourage socially desirable behavior). This is a "pattern" of what individuals - as members of a group, or representing a particular social position should do, what is required of them under given circumstances. For the norm to fulfill this purpose, it represents a certain social control mechanism, characterized by generality (it can be applied in different contexts - it is not a set of specific partial "instructions" but rather "principles") and consciousness (individuals are aware of the general rules which control the activity of individuals – for the norm to fulfill the regulatory role, it must be "known") and if the norm is perceived as a regulation, sanctions are always associated (Stepanek, 1996, p. 695).

Zuzana Kiczková ([s.a]) defines Gender norms as "more or less hidden structural elements which by their power organize and direct our spiritual, social, symbolic world as well as our communication area. Gender as a social structure is associated with certain norm making which in relation to concrete men and women is often performed in terms of expectations and symbols. Thus, not only activities and experience are Gender specifically structured; Gender norms influence the formation of skills and interests and affect deep dimensions of (subconscious) mental structures."

Gender stereotype

Gender stereotype is a very stable element in consciousness, i.e. psychological and social mechanisms regulating perception and evaluation of certain phenomena, influencing opinions, judgment, attitudes and behavior. For the stereotype, undifferentiated overall attribution of certain characteristics to all members of the group is typical. It is characterized by emotionality and irrationality, as well as simplistic interpretations of events – as such it is often abused in propaganda.

Gender stereotypes have considerable inertia and change only very slowly. They have a significant, but little apparent effect on consciousness "(Tomek, 1996).

Throughout history, the content of Gender stereotypes has changed in relation to historical changes in the relationship between men and women. Yet, still they fulfill the function of maintaining a hierarchical - unequal relationship between the Genders. This reality may offer a partial explanation of the persistence of Gender discrimination, despite changing Gender roles.

Masculinity and Femininity are not perceived equally in western society. Disparagement of one sex (more often women) or rejection of any other than stereotypical perceptions of masculinity and femininity is called sexism. Just as with racism, sexism is the manifestation of intolerance. However, while racism means the disparaging of people because of their race or ethnicity, sexism means the disparaging of people because of their sex.

Strictly defined and restrictive expectations and norms in relation to Gender form the basis of Gender discrimination, but the stereotypes themselves also contain it - assume and necessarily require it. They bind men and women within the boundaries, restricting the choice of freedom of self-realization, development of individual interests and abilities. Without the loosening up of these boundaries, the emphasis on individual projections is not possible.